A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN VENTURA COUNTY

by Diane Mautner

cover design after a Victorian pattern
A HISTORY OF THE JEWS IN VENTURA COUNTY

By Diane Mautner

Acknowledgements
Ventura County Museum of History and Art
Museum of Ventura County – Agricultural Museum of Santa Paula, Oxnard Library and Camarillo Library
Heritage Square staff and docents, and The City of Oxnard
The Jewish families, who arrived from Europe and across the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries who established thriving Jewish communities in Ventura County

Dedication
This story is dedicated to our grandchildren, who always ask, “Tell us a story about our family”. My husband, Ray, and I continue to enjoy the blessings that Ventura County and the Jewish community have to offer. Special appreciation goes to Samuel Kohn, Sarelle Rive, and Kandy Riave Hutman, who shared their stories with me.

About the Author
Diane Mautner is an educator and the author of two published books. A picture book will be published the end of 2016. She has recently completed a young adult biography about Justice Louis D. Brandeis. She has written curriculum for the Disney English Language Program in Shanghai, China, and the Los Angeles Unified School District. She has also written workbooks for the Cartoon Network and Vox Box, a nonprofit organization promoting literacy. Diane is a docent at Heritage Square and a member of Temple Beth Torah. She is also a member of BCNN (Beach Cities Neighbors and Newcomers) and BNC (Brandeis National Committee) of Conejo Valley.
INTRODUCTION

The first Jewish settlers in Ventura County arrived about 150 years ago. They initially came from Germany, France, Poland and Russia seeking opportunities unparalleled in Jewish history. To commemorate their contribution to local communities, the Ventura County Museum of History and Art presented an exhibit of old photographs, religious objects and other mementos in 2002. The goal of this book is to present highlights of Jewish history in Ventura County as recounted in books, periodicals and interviews recorded by the author.

The book is divided into three parts: 19th century settlers, settlers who arrived in the 1920s through the 40s and those who arrived in the 1960s and beyond. Since the Jewish settlers in those three general time periods not only established close relationships with each other, but with the communities at large, mention will be made of their civic, commercial and philanthropic activities as well.
Ventura "rapid transit" From about 1891 to 1906 horse-drawn trolleys traveled down Main St. to the mission and other nearby locations. A free trolley in Ventura, minus the horses, stops at locations from the harbor to downtown.

Port Hueneme "rapid transit" of the 1900s

Photos courtesy of the Camarillo Library - Genealogical Society section courtesy of Matrix Printing

Main Street and Palm. The mission is visible as well as the Hill St. School, the building, of course, on the hill.
19TH CENTURY SETTLERS

ACHILLE LEVY AND FAMILY

Achille (Abraham) Levy was born in France in 1853. When Germany annexed Alsace in 1871 imposing restrictions on the French language and culture, Achille decided to join his uncle in the San Francisco area. He arrived in San Francisco in 1871 and was advised by his uncle, Isidore Weill, who had a store in Dixon, to attend a business college. Achille had studied business in France. Nevertheless he spent two years in commercial studies, meanwhile acquiring fluency in English.

In 1874 he left Solano County, where his uncle lived, for Hueneme, the only deep water port between Los Angeles (San Pedro) and San Francisco. In 1875 Achille was appointed postmaster. Jewish merchants were often appointed postmaster, as they had fairly permanent businesses in the emerging towns. Achille became a U.S. citizen in 1876 and also established a partnership with Moise Wolff. They sold a variety of products including dry goods, groceries, and paints. They also acted as agents for agricultural implements. In 1881 Achille sailed for Europe in search of a wife. By that time he had earned a tidy sum of $50,000. Through a marriage broker (shadchan) in Paris Achille met and married a distant cousin, Lucy Meinette Levy. The newlyweds sailed to New York, traveled by train to Los Angeles, and then boarded a stagecoach for the trip to Hueneme. The Conejo grade was so muddy that the passengers had to walk down the trail. Lucy’s beautiful Parisian dress and gray felt boots got very muddy.
Achille became a broker, buying grain, hay, nuts, fruits, honey and other products. The farmers entrusted him with part of the money not required at the time. Achille provided farmers with seed, farm animals, equipment and general merchandise, debiting the accounts. Thus he drifted into the banking business. Thomas Bard suggested that Achille and other merchants incorporate a local bank. The Bank of Hueneme was established to serve farmers and merchants. Achille was a vice-president. In 1895 he established The bank of A. Levy, which eventually had ten branches, including the original Oxnard branch and one in Camarillo. Achille helped many people and was a good judge of character. He had a “reputation for fair dealing”. Some of the bank’s customers included the following: Adolfo Camarillo, the Petits, Hobson, Arneill, Saviers, Donlon, Lehmann, Hill, Borchard, Rice, Simon Cohn (El Rio), and Maulhardt. (Many are familiar street names).

In 1884, Henry Levy, Achille’s brother-in-law arrived from Paris and joined him in the brokerage business. Both men built houses in downtown Oxnard. Farmers asked Achille’s advice as to the best cash crops. One of the crops he suggested was lima beans. The railroad enabled the beans to be shipped to the East faster. Achille Levy was called “The Lima Bean King”. The farmers’ lima beans marketing association hired Adolfo Camarillo as vice president. When the price of Lima beans declined, farmers switched to sugar beets. The Oxnard brothers built a factory to process the sugar beets in 1898. The factory required many employees, who in turn needed housing and stores. By 1903 the town of Oxnard was incorporated.
Molly Bard, a friend of Lucy Levy
courtesy of Jeffrey W. Maulhardt

A. Levy's brokerage
Lucy Levy is in the horse-drawn cart

Port Hueneme in the 1920s
courtesy of Matrix Printing

A. Levy (second from right) in front of brokerage about 1895
Achille was active in community and civic affairs: postmaster, member of the school board, delegate from Hueneme to the County Board of Supervisors, member of the board of trustees of the Hueneme Public Library, active in Republican Party affairs, member of the Hueneme Club, and member of the Masons. Lucy was a fine homemaker - wife and mother of four children, three daughters and a son: Anna, Palmyre, Julia and Joseph. The children attended preparatory schools in Los Angeles. Son Joseph attended Stanford University. By 1912 he was working in his father's bank. He also managed his father's properties in Ventura County and eventually became president of the bank. Lucy was also involved in community activities, including the Ventura County Fair and social clubs. Attendance in the late 19th century was high at the fair, i.e. 5,100 people in three days, since in 1890 Ventura County had only 9,000 citizens. Young people met at the plaza, now the site of a multiplex movie theater, restaurants, and a Thursday farmer's market. Joe Levy played tennis at the newly built courts. The Carnegie library, which opened in 1907 and now an art museum, is nearby. Achille helped finance the furnishings and furnace of the library.

In 1908, the Ventura County Game Preserve was founded, establishing an environment for birds on 1,200 acres.

During the lifetime of the Levys, Jewish families got together for holidays and lifecycle events, since there was no synagogue. A rabbi traveled from Los Angeles to officiate. Jews also connected with their heritage through charities. Achille and Lucy were involved with the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum and Home Society of San Francisco.
Surveying the Santa Susana grade 1917, (now the 118 freeway)
courtesy of Matrix Printing

Blanchard's Packing House, Santa Paula, CA 1915
courtesy of Matrix Printing

Palm Ave., Santa Paula 1916
Bob Singer and family lived in Santa Paula
Oxnard in the 1920s at the corner of 7th and Oxnard. The Asahi Market is still in business. courtesy of Matrix Printing

Mr. Goldstein, a merchant, sold clothes for men and boy's. He especially featured hats at a reduced price.

William McKinley was president from 1897-1902. He visited Oxnard shortly before his assassination. Pres. McKinley's wife, Ida, was friends with Emma Perkins. The Perkins house is now located in Heritage Square.
Interior of the Bank of A. Levy about 1910. The bank was built in 1902.

The Bank of A. Levy on "B" Street and Fithth

Achille (Abraham) Levy

Lucy Levy

The train carrying Lima beans to market
Achille Levy was known as "The Lima Bean King".
courtesy of the Ventura County Agricultural Museum, Santa Paula
The house of Henry Levy built in 1914
currently a private residence

The house of Achille Levy built in 1912
currently a private residence

Both photos courtesy of the author
They were founding members of the Jewish Orphans Home of Southern California (now the Vista Del Mar Child Care Agency) in Los Angeles. After World War I Lucy joined the county board of directors of the Red Cross to assist veterans. The Levys also contributed to the City of Hope in Duarte, the National Jewish Hospital in Denver, and the Federation of Jewish Charities of Los Angeles. Meanwhile Oxnard developed around the sugar beet factory established by the Oxnard brothers in 1898. The plant was located by Wooley and Saviers on 100 acres of land. By 1903, Oxnard had many new businesses including a blacksmith, cigar, and bicycle shop, restaurants, and hotels.

The Levys originally had a small house in Port Hueneme. In 1912 they moved to “D” and “2nd” streets. The large house is still located in the historic district, downtown Oxnard. Henry Levy’s house is also located there. When Achille Levy died in 1922, Rabbi Hecht traveled from Los Angeles to officiate. Achille Levy and other family members are buried in Ivy Lawn cemetery.

SIMON COHN

Simon Cohn and Achille Levy undoubtedly socialized at Jewish community events and definitely at the bris of baby Herbert, son of David Cohn, Simon’s brother. Rabbi Abraham Blum of Congregation B’nai B’rith (now Wilshire Blvd. Temple) officiated. The event took place in New Jerusalem (El Rio), founded by Simon Cohn. The first settlers were “three Hebrews” who were involved with grains, cattle and fruit.
Simon Cohn and his store – courtesy of Jeffrey W. Maulhardt

Simon Cohn and his family. The youngest child is Mildred Cohn Berkowitz, who was a member of TBT. Courtesy of the Ventura Museum of History and Art.
Simon arrived from Germany in 1873 with $300. He was a businessman, pioneer, and general merchant. He learned the mercantile business in his father’s store. Simon built the first building in town and eventually owned several other buildings as well. In 1885 he married Minnie Cohn (no relation). All three of their children, Dora, Helen, and Jacob, were born in New Jerusalem (El Rio). Simon was also a postmaster and belonged to the Democratic Party. In 1895 the post office changed the name to El Rio after the Santa Clara River.
The Union Bank building in Oxnard where the Financial Plaza meets the 101 at Vineyard was the heart of El Rio. Later Simon Cohn became a wealthy landowner. He built the Catholic church in El Rio and a sports arena for boxing and wrestling. Cohn’s brothers Morris and Leopold as well as his brother-in-law Kujawski opened stores in El Rio. His brother, Dave, built a saloon. Another store owner, a Mr. Herbst, married a sister of Simon’s. Simon carried the debts of farmers in the Santa Clara Valley in bad times. He was also involved in the activities of the Jewish community.

THE LEHMANN BROTHERS
The Lehmann brothers, Leon, Paul and Edmond, came to Hueneme in the 1880s. They had a large retail and produce commission business. Leon was influential in creating the Oxnard Harbor District in the late 1930s.

MORE JEWISH SETTLERS ARRIVE
In the 1870s Morris Einstein and Abraham Bernheim established a large mercantile store. Both men were born in Konigsberg, Germany. Henry Guggenheim was affiliated with Einstein and Bernheim. Morris was from San Francisco and was able to order merchandise from there.
Austrian born Joseph Roth opened a shoe store in Ventura. Isaac Roth (no relation) opened a saloon. Simon Meyerstein, a member of a San Bernardino family, opened a clothing store as did J.A. Kallman. Abraham Silver was a tailor. Max Enderlein was a university graduate in Berlin, a teacher of music in the Ventura public schools in 1874. He had a school of languages on Main Street in 1873 and a book and stationery store. Max was married to “famed horticulturalist” Theodosia Burr Shepherd’s sister, Ella Lee. Emmanuel Franz moved to Ventura in 1869, opening a variety store. His house was on Oak Street in Ventura. Samuel Epstein and Isidor Feder had a tailor shop in Ventura. In 1872 Joseph Wolfson sold farm produce, wool and hides. The Boukofsky brothers had a general merchandise store. Emanuel Hirschfelder opened a shoe store in Ventura in 1887. Later his son, Edward, joined him. Solomon Cohn opened a store in Santa Paula in 1882. In the 1890s Simon Wineman had a store in Ventura. During that same period P. Liberman established a store in Oxnard, L. Cohn had a saloon in Oxnard, Solomon Mack established a store in Hueneme, H. Lippman had a dry goods store in Oxnard, and E. Marks opened a clothing and general merchandise store in Ventura. There was one doctor in town – Dr. Joshua L. Marks, M.D. of Ventura, born in Virginia. He was a veteran of the Mexican-American War. Joseph Wolfson married Francesca Camarillo and managed the Ventura wharf in 1875. Samuel Weill was born in Memphis, Tennessee. His parents were from France. In 1900 he was a partner of C.S. Murphy in a men’s wear and fancy grocery store. Samuel Weill married Palmyre, daughter of Achille Levy. Samuel was very active in civic affairs.
First store in Santa Susana (Simi Valley) 1909 courtesy of Lou Wright

courtesy of Matrix Printing

Simi Valley Hotel built in 1887. The knoll occupied by the hotel was removed when Simi Valley High School was built

courtesy of Matrix Printing

Grammar School, Ojai, CA, 1911 courtesy of Matrix Printing

First school bus in Ventura County Bertie Dunlap, driver 1916, Simi Valley courtesy of Matrix Printing
NEW GENERATIONS IN BANKING – JOE LEVY 
AND ARTHUR ACHILLE MILLIGAN

By 1916 one million bags of sugar beets were processed in the Oxnard Brothers factory. Employees received an extra month’s salary that year. However, in 1929, sugar beet prices fell due to the depression. Nevertheless, the Bank of A. Levy remained in business. A new bank building was built in 1927 when Joe Levy was president. Joe ranched in the Somis area growing lemons and walnuts. Orchards had replaced sugar beets. He also managed the Tierra Rejada Ranch. The Bank of A. Levy was involved with many county ranchers in Somis, Moorpark and Simi. There was also a marked interest in soil conservation. A lesson was to be learned from the “dust bowl” disasters of the 1930s. (See Ken Burns’ documentary and the book/movie “Grapes of Wrath”, a John Steinbeck novel.) In 1934 Lucy Levy died. By that time Oxnard had a population of about 8,000. Joe Levy died in 1955. He had been a successful businessman and a generous donor to many charitable organizations. In 1940, “Bud” Milligan, a favorite grandson of Achille Levy, and third son of Julia and Jack Milligan, attended Stanford University like his Uncle Joe. There he met his future wife, Jeanne Welch of Sacramento. Bud was in the Navy during WWII. Following the war he joined the Bank of A. Levy. Many of the Seabees who trained in Port Hueneme returned to the area and needed housing and stores for themselves and their families. Thus the “beach cities” continued to grow. The Seabees are still an active presence in the area and have a museum on the base.
A.A. "Bud" Milligan died on November 3, 2011, age 94, in Santa Barbara where he and his wife had retired.

JEWISH LIFE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

As mentioned above, Jews united for holidays, life cycle events and charitable activities. The nearest Jewish organization was in Los Angeles. Many important ceremonies were held there or a rabbi would travel to Ventura County. In 1885 there were sufficient Jewish men (ten) to create a "minyan". A Sunday school was established by Mrs. Simon Wineman in Ventura during the 1890s, so that children could have a Jewish education. Achille's daughter, Anne, said the local Episcopal minister would tell Achille when sermons were based on the "Old Testament" (Hebrew Bible), and she would then attend services. Adele Weill received lessons by mail from a synagogue in the East. In the fall of 1872, the first high holiday services of record were held in a private home in Ventura County. Stores closed for the holidays.

THE OPERA HOUSE

There actually was an opera house in Oxnard. Unfortunately it burned down about 1922. Traveling groups and local residents performed there. Famous entertainers would perform in Los Angeles and then stop in Oxnard on their way to San Francisco. Therefore, they had an opportunity to make good use of their time and earn extra money. Two celebrities in particular deserve mention: Harry Houdini and Sarah Bernhardt. Houdini's real name was Erik Weisz. He was born in Budapest, Hungary on March 24, 1874. Houdini was a stunt performer, illusionist and magician.
Oxnard Opera House – In 1922 damaged by fire and demolished. courtesy of Jeffrey W. Maulhardt

Oxnard fire station and truck 1920s. courtesy of Oxnard FD


Oxnard sugar beet factory built by the Oxnard Brothers in 1898 at Wooley and Oxnard Boulevards.
Sarah Bernhardt was born Rosine Bernardt on October 22, 1844 in Paris. She was an actress on the French stage and in early films. Bernhardt toured the United States in 1915. Other events included a hypnotist, operas, and vaudeville.

SETTLERS OF THE 1920s THROUGH THE 1940s

In the 1930s the population statistics were as follows: Oxnard, 8,000, Camarillo, 1,500, Ventura, 10,000. The Jews who came west from out of state or out of the country established themselves in Ventura County in a variety of occupations, especially store owners. Many of these new residents already had relatives living in the county, who helped them get settled. Fortunately, their children, many of whom were born in Ventura County and are now in their eighties, gladly agreed to be interviewed. Their stories comprise a large part of this chapter.

MAX AND RUTH RIAVE

Max Riave could be described as a real “mensch”. His daughters, Sarelle and Kandy, told the author many stories testifying to the high esteem in which he was held in the Jewish community and in business, personal and civic life. Kandy noted, however, that the Jewish community was close knit, and that other members contributed as well. Max was born in Belarus, Russia. He moved to Indianapolis first, because the family thought it had an American sounding name. According to Sarelle Rive (her desired spelling), Max’s daughter, Uncle Louis Riave had tuberculosis, so he moved to Santa Susana (now Simi Valley), ostensibly to die there. Happily he improved with the better weather. The rest of the family followed.
The Conejo Grade about 1914
Before it was paved, decades earlier, Lucy Levy and other stagecoach passengers had to walk down the grade.

courtesy of Matrix Printing

In 1932 the state of California purchased 1,780 acres as the site of Camarillo State Hospital. The hospital closed in 1997.
In 2007, the site was redeveloped to establish California State University, Channel Islands.

The Camarillo Ranch House Museum was once the residence of Don Adolfo Camarillo and his family.
Max and Ruth Riave
1959 courtesy of Kandy Riave Hutman

Don Adolfo Camarillo on his horse “Sultan”, wearing the suit he willed to Max Riave, who in turn willed it to the museum.

Yolanda and Henry Kohn, blacksmith, ornamental iron worker, friends with the Riaves and the Moses family

Dr. Ralph Moses, optometrist and cantor

Bob Singer, artist and animator who grew up in Santa Paula
Pleasant Valley School, Camarillo
Samuel and Blanche Kohn and
Sarelle and Kandy Riave attended PV School.
courtesy of Matrix Printing

A street scene in "Old Town Camarillo"
Max Riave's store was nearby.
courtesy of the author

Mr. A. Norman and Sons Blacksmith: The building is still in existence on 204 South Dawson, Camarillo. Henry Kohn was the last blacksmith hired by the state of California.
courtesy of the Lewis Building
Sarelle noted that her uncle had a grocery store and was the postmaster. Uncle Lou helped each of the siblings start a store with an adjoining post office. Uncle Lou Hantover, married to Aunt Dora Riave, had the store in Somis and Sarelle’s parents got the store in Camarillo in about 1921 or 1922. Another brother, Sam Riave and his wife, Ray, also moved to Camarillo for a while and then moved on to Long Beach where he and his sons grew avocados.

Max and Ruth Riave were married in 1923. The couple moved to Camarillo, as mentioned above. Max established a mercantile store in what is now “Old Town Camarillo” across from the Buckhorn Saloon. In the 1920s, “downtown” Camarillo consisted of a two block business section with a bank, library, two mercantile stores, a saloon, a harness maker, and a shoe store. Max became fast friends with Don Adolfo Camarillo, who had to give Max permission to buy the land where the store was built.

Don Adolfo willed the suit he wore riding his famous white horse at parades (Rose Bowl and Ventura County Fair). Max, in turn, willed the outfit to the museum. Don Adolfo’s dress suit and saddle are presently in the Camarillo Ranch House Museum, once his residence.

Max was a member of many civic organizations. In addition, Max was given a key to St. Mary Magdalen Catholic church, a short walk from his store. At that time the church, built in 1913, had an itinerant priest. St. Mary Magdalen is now a designated county historical landmark.
During the depression Max traded goods, e.g. chickens for clothes. Kandy recalled that when a kid stole food from his store, Max hired him and had him work off the amount he stole.

When Max went to Los Angeles to buy supplies for his store, he bought kosher meat. When he needed more, his wife kashered the meat herself.

Max and Ruth enjoyed square dancing on Friday nights. Kandy recalled that one night in 1948, the four year old was awakened to loud shouts. Family and friends were rejoicing at news of the establishment of the state of Israel.

HENRY AND YOLANDA KOHN

In 1945, Henry and Yolanda Kohn and their children, Blanche and Samuel, moved to Camarillo. Henry was born in Croatia and Yolanda in Hungary. They met and married in Los Angeles. Henry and Yolanda’s son, Sam, noted that Henry had a job as an ironworker-welder at the Camarillo State Hospital (now California State University Channel Islands). He was the last appointed blacksmith hired by the state of California. Henry also did ornamental ironwork and made the menorah that is affixed to the front of Temple Beth Torah in Ventura. The Kohns lived on Fulton Street, a block away from the Riaves. The Kohns and Riaves became good friends. Later on, the Riaves moved to Grandview Street. The Riave and Kohn children attended Pleasant Valley School in Camarillo.

Since there was no high school in Camarillo at that time, they were bussed to Oxnard High School. The bus driver was a math teacher who also picked up kids from the farms at a central location.
For fun the children had picnics in Santa Barbara or went to McGrath State Beach.

THE MOSES FAMILY

Martin and Rosel Moses and their two sons, James and Ralph, lived in Berlin before WWII. Martin owned a shoe and slipper store. The Nazi presence, however, prevented anyone from entering. As the situation became critical, there was no time to lose. Therefore, in 1938 George and Hortense “Hanche” (Cohn) Zander, Rosel’s brother, arranged the escape of the family - and just in time.

A few months later Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass) resulted in the murder of many Jews and the destruction of property.

Martin Moses initially worked as a tailor in George Zander’s store. Additionally the synagogue helped support the family until they were established. The Rivas and Kohns were friends of the Moses family. Ralph Moses one of Martin and Rosel’s sons was ten years old when he arrived in New Jerusalem (El Rio). He became an optometrist and was a cantor at Temple Beth Torah for many years. The author remembers Dr. Ralph Moses well as a much beloved member of the community.

OTHER LOCAL FAMILIES

Sam Kohn recalled other families: Bertha and Gene Orenstein and daughter, Sandra Orenstein, Irene, Hy Richman, and daughter, Judith Richman, and the Palanskys.
Sam Kohn’s sister, Blanche, married a relative of the Palanskys, Arthur Silberberg. The Palanskys had a restaurant, “Judy’s Sandwich Shop”, that served a popular recipe for Lima bean soup.

Mr. Orenstein had a radio sales and repair shop, which later included televisions as well. Mr. Orenstein was active in civic affairs. Mr. and Mrs. Singer lived in Santa Paula with their three sons, Raymond, John, and Robert. “Bob” is an “animation artist, character designer, layout and background artist and storyboard director of animated television programs, most memorably of several Hanna Barbera productions”. He engages in many other artistic and literary endeavors as well.
The Pavin family lived in Oxnard, and their son, Corey, is a professional golfer. Arthur and Cynthia Goldenberg took over the Richman’s variety store in 1951. Sam Kohn recalled that Don Adolfo’s grandson, “Jimmy” Fitzgerald, was an artist.

“YOU’VE GOT A MINYAN!”

Kandy recalled that her grandmother, Anna, lived with them. One day Anna said, “You’ve got ten men (a minyan). Now you have a temple!”. In the beginning there were Friday night services. Kandy remembered her father, Max Riave, picking up kids in Santa Paula, Somis, and Carpenteria and taking them to Sunday School.
Sixteen year old Sarelle Riave was a volunteer teacher. At high holiday services itinerant rabbis officiated. Her mother, Ruth Riave, made the Rosh Hashanah dinner, where the members congregated after services. Her specialty was brisket. Now there was a real “sense of Jewish community.”
More and more families were moving to Camarillo, although Kandy recalled that she was the only Jewish child in her elementary school. Ventura County Jewish Council (VCJC) established a youth group, which met on a regular basis. It is now called NFTY (North American Federation of Temple Youth).

In 1938, the VCJC, Ventura County Jewish Council was established. Afterwards Temple Beth Torah was built on the same site. Sarelle Rive noted that the VCJC/TBT initially met in a dairy. She told the author, “Nobody is going to believe it!” Other meeting places on record included the Coca Cola bottling plant in Ventura on the corner of Seaward and Thompson (the members had a free use of the space) and the Odd Fellows Hall on E. Main Street. Ed Kraus was the first president and George Zander (uncle of Dr. Ralph Moses) was chairman of Jewish education. The Jewish community reached out to Jewish servicemen stationed at the base at Port Hueneme.

Kandy Riave Hutman recalled that many “important aspects of life” were celebrated at TBT, including her parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. Her grandson, Aaron Riave Hutman’s Pidyon Ha’ben, “redemption” ceremony, was held in the “old synagogue”. In the beginning Dr. Ralph Moses officiated at services, until a rabbi was hired. Kandy Riave was the first Bat Mitzvah at the temple. During the 1940s the Jewish community took over the USO on Christmas eve and Christmas day, so the volunteer workers could go home to their families. Both Sarelle and Kandy Riave were volunteer Torah school teachers, as the membership grew. Minnie Cohn’s piano was used with the choir.
Sukkot celebration of 1960 was the first service held at the new site at Foothill and Kimball in Ventura. The women of the sisterhood went to the Camarillo State Hospital to give religious services, food and gifts to the Jewish patients. Recall that Henry Kohn was an ironworker-blacksmith at the hospital until his retirement. The author’s fourth clinic as a speech pathologist was also at the hospital in the summer of 1980.

THE STRASSER FAMILY

Edward and Esther Strasser, the author’s parents, moved from New York City to “Ventura” in 1946 with their children, six year old Diane and three year old Nelson. Ed’s job took him to Los Angeles, so he commuted every weekday for several months. There was a postwar housing shortage, so the family lived in a two room motel during their stay in what was actually Thousand Oaks. Diane attended the two room Timber School, K-3rd grade in one room and 4-6th grade in the other. The two room school had replaced the one room school where farmers, Mr. and Mrs. Borchard, had sent their children decades earlier. (There is a Borchard exit on the 101 freeway and a Borchard street in Ventura). Sadly, the earlier schoolhouse was torn down, but a replica was constructed at the Stagecoach Inn Museum. The Timber School still exists as the Conejo Valley School and has been designated an historical landmark.

THE 1960s TO THE PRESENT

From the 1960s to the present the Jewish “presence” grew by leaps and bounds. Many Jewish families moved up the coast because of business opportunities, to enjoy the mild climate, or to retire. As the population increased, so did the need for local synagogues.
The second Timber school with two classrooms was built in the 1930s. An adjacent auditorium was built in 1948. It was given landmark status. It is now Conejo Valley High School. Diane Strasser attended the school in 1946.

The original one room Timber School built in 1877. A replica is at the Stagecoach Inn Museum.

Johnny was a star attraction at Jungleland, a private zoo created by Louis Goebel in 1926. It closed in 1969. Movies such as "Tarzan" and "Robin Hood" were filmed at the 170 acre zoo. The site is now the Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza. Diane Strasser with Johnny on a boat to Catalina Island. photo of Diane and Johnny courtesy of the author.
By the year 2,000, the Jewish community in Ventura County had increased to about 53,000. Recall that the entire population of Ventura County was about 9,000 in 1890.

The Jews in the Conejo Valley had carpooled to Ventura to attend the synagogue. Therefore in the 1960s they formed an informal group that held religious school classes in the waiting room of a local physician (presumably on Sundays). They even made use of a member’s garage. Afterwards services moved to a Methodist church. The temple, Etz Chaim, was incorporated in 1966, with members of both conservative and reform movements. Temple Etz Chaim voted to join the conservative movement, which resulted in members preferring a reform congregation starting another temple, Adat Elohim.

By 1967 Thousand Oaks had 20,000 people, a huge increase from 20 years earlier, when the author lived there and the population was about 2,000. In 1970 Temple Etz Chaim broke ground for their own classrooms and synagogue, the first in the Conejo Valley. A new sanctuary was built in 1985. In 1990 Temple Ner Tamid of Simi Valley merged with Etz Chaim. An additional facility was built in 2001 and 2002.

Temple Ner Ami in Camarillo, known as the “Temple on Temple (Avenue)” shares a facility with Camarillo Church of Christ. TNA prides itself in “Tikkun Olam”, repair the world.

In 1998, a group of conservative Jews met at different locations including a warehouse. They eventually established Congregation Am HaYam, meeting at the Monday Club in Oxnard. Their present location is in Ventura, 4839 Market St., Suite, “C”.
THE JEWISH COMMUNITY TODAY

As mentioned above, there are about 53,000 Jews (as per the Jewish Federation) in Ventura County. No longer are Jews in the county only merchants or bankers or land owners. They represent many professions and businesses. Murray Rosenbluth was mayor of Port Hueneme. Other Jews are lawyers, politicians, teachers, principals, speech pathologists, dentists, accountants, real estate agents, writers, actors, artists, musicians and more.

The sole doctor in the county, Dr. Joshua Marks, a Ventura County resident in the 19th century, has been succeeded by Jewish doctors too numerous to count. Today's Jews continue a history of involvement in the religious, interfaith, civic, business, and philanthropic interests of the county. Our rabbis and cantors live in Ventura County or the western part of the San Fernando Valley and communities like Agoura Hills and part of Westlake Village.

As Dr. Ralph Moses noted in an interview with the L.A. Times, April 1, 2002, 'A lot of (present-day) Jews didn't realize there were Jewish families living here in the 19th century...This new generation is more intensely Jewish. They are doctors and lawyers, and we were all merchants'.

SYNAGOGUES AND CHABADS IN VENTURA COUNTY
Ventura County Jewish Council/ Temple Beth Torah, Ventura
Congregation Am HaYam, Ventura
Temple Ner Ami, Camarillo
K'hilat Ha'Aloneem, Ojai
Temple Etz Chaim, Thousand Oaks – Temple Ner Tamid, Simi Valley
Temple Adat Elohim, Thousand Oaks
Chabads: Ventura, Oxnard, Camarillo, Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village and Simi Valley
BIBLIOGRAPHY


"A Pictorial History of Ventura County, CA", M and N Printing, Oxnard, CA, 1979, now Matrix Printing, 1656 Walter St., Ventura, 93003.


"Oxnard at 100", The Ventura County Historical Quarterly, published by the Ventura County Museum of History and Art and the City of Oxnard, Vol. 47, Numbers 2 and 3, 2003.

UC cooperative Extension, September 1, 2011, "History of Ventura and Oxnard, mid 1800-early 1960s. CE ventura.ucanr.edu/files, 76412.