The Jewish Merchants of Lewiston's Lisbon Street

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Synopsis: For decades, Lewiston's Lisbon Street was a thriving center of commerce that attracted shoppers from throughout central Maine. Lisbon Street businessmen included among their ranks a sizable number of Jewish merchants who, in addition to ably serving their clientele, formed a tight social circle. This commentary includes significant parts of an essay researched and written by 2008 Bates graduate Tim McCall, and also is based on several oral histories videotaped by Lewiston High School student Cassandra Jensen. All materials gathered were supported by a 2006-07 community history project funded by the Bates College Harward Center for Community Partnerships.

Just as University of Louisville Professor of History Lee Shai Weissbach suddenly found himself in Lewiston, Maine, more than 30 years ago, Abraham Plavin also arrived in Lewiston without advance planning.

Born in Russia just before the 1917 revolution, Abraham came to this country at age 16, worked as a peddler, and eventually bought a dry goods business in Island Falls, Maine, near the Canadian border. "He did well enough to get ready to leave Island Falls, and took the train from Bangor, on an overnight trip to Portland — he was on his way to buy a clothing store in Portland — when some of the people he was playing cards with on the train told him that there was a good furniture store for sale in Lewiston," remembers Abraham's son, Manuel Plavin of Auburn.

Twenty-nine years old at the time, Abraham got off the train at Lewiston, went to the L.L. Blake Company, located at 155 Lisbon Street in Lewiston, and bought the store. "He didn’t know anything about the furniture business, anymore than he knew anything about the clothing business or whatever other businesses he was in," remembers Manny. His philosophy, says his son, who with his younger brother, Leonard, eventually took over the company known as New England Furniture, was that "he figured that you didn’t have to know everything about anything …as long as your worked hard enough at it, it would be successful, effort being the key ingredient to success, rather than book knowledge... Although he was strongly devoted to education so that all of our family received all the education we wanted."
I arrived in Lewiston in 1992, far to late to experience the magic of Lisbon Street's heyday. But Lisbon Street was still thriving in 1968 when Chicago-born Judy Williams visited her future in-laws Ben and Natalie Abromson in Auburn, Maine, for the first time. Upon arriving, she mentioned to her fiancée Michael Abromson that she wanted to buy his mother a gift. Naturally, he suggested a visit to downtown Lewiston's Lisbon Street, a thriving shopping district that that was the commercial center for southern central Maine. That evening the young couple made their way to Ward Brothers, owned by Jewish cousins Larry Ward and David Merson and known as Maine's premiere women's apparel store. Because it was dark outside, Judy saw very little of the surrounding area. It wasn't until the next day she realized that Lisbon Street was Lewiston's ONLY downtown commercial street, not one of many she had imagined. "It was quite a shock," remembers the big-city native.
But if you had to have one big and busy street, Lisbon Street satisfied everyone's needs.

Timothy McCall, Bates Class of 2008 and a 2010-11 Fulbright scholar in Germany, provides historical context in an essay he researched and wrote about Lewiston-Auburn's Jewish merchants in 2006:

"Industrialization in Maine has provided the most tangible force in influencing the development of the Jewish community within the state. That trend is particularly evident in the twin cities of Lewiston and Auburn, where textile and shoe manufacturers were the life-blood of the city. As the mills prospered and developed, so too did the Jewish merchants, who operated small stores that catered to the needs of all levels of the mill town’s society. The Jews were very much dependent on the mills for their livelihood and the solvency of their businesses. The first Jewish settlers arrived in the late 1870’s, just as the mills were beginning to shape the economies of many riverside towns and cities of northern New England. The Jewish settlement happened in two distinct waves over a period of 30 years. As these communities developed, they built two separate synagogues and established a Jewish cemetery along with a Jewish Community Center. As the industrial strength of Lewiston changed, the Jews adapted by fostering new industries or they entered professional careers. In its current context, the Jewish community is at a crossroads similar to that of Lewiston and Auburn; while currently the outlook is not optimistic, by looking into the future the hope remains that all the communities in the area undergo a transformation and regeneration."

Tim studied business directories at the Androscoggin Historical Society and found the following:

"The Jewish communities in Lewiston and Auburn were influenced by two immigration movements. The first movement occurred in the 1870’s and it brought a small number of German Jews into the area. This was typical for most urban Jewish communities in the Northeast, the first settlers typically were German Jews, who possessed some marketable skill, arrived with some money, and were often anxious to become accepted members of the middle-class. In Lewiston, the most recognized member of the German Jewish migration was George Ehrenfried.1 Beginning with Lewiston and Auburn’s first directory in 1872, Ehrenfried is listed as the owner of a “dry and fancy goods” store on Lisbon Street, in Lewiston. In these early directories, there is evidence of other German Jews, such as the Friedman family, who operated J. Friedman &

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1 Lewiston and Auburn Directory, (Boston: Greenough and Jones & Co, 1872), Androscoggin County Historical Society, Androscoggin County Building, Auburn, ME, pg. 44.
Company, a “dry and fancy goods” store on Lisbon Street. Of these families, the Ehrenfried family’s enterprise seems to have lasted the longest. As of 1909, twenty-seven years after their first appearance, the Ehrenfried family still appears in the Lewiston and Auburn city directory.

The German Jews followed two noticeable trends in their community building. Due to poor documentation of the early history of the German Jews in Lewiston, I have used the settlement patterns of German Jews in Bangor, Maine, as an example of these two trends. One trend noticeable among German Jews was a strict adherence to religious orthodoxy. In this trend, the German Jews formed their own community within the greater Gentile community in Bangor; however, they did not intermingle much with other communities. They kept to themselves and when economic conditions declined and they left the city, they left no permanent imprints, aside from physical building structures.

A second trend noticeable among German Jews is the desire to rapidly climb to the middle and upper classes. In this pursuit, they often cast aside the ritualistic, orthodox faith of their ancestors. Often, they shed the “Orthodox insignia of skull caps worn by men and wigs worn by women.” Those Jews that maintained their faith often practiced the less rigorous and less dogmatic Reformed style of Judaism and many others left the faith completely through conversion. The Ehrenfried family in Lewiston, as Paul Gottlieb notes in his history of Lewiston and Auburn’s Jewish population, eventually followed that track, and while they still remain in Lewiston, they are not Jewish.

The second wave of Jewish immigration began in the 1880’s and 1890’s. This migration brought a large number of Jews from Russia and Central and Eastern Europe into cities on the east coast of the United States. Eventually, some left the crowded tenements of the big cities and searched for a smaller place where they could settle their family. In some instances they were self-motivated; in other instances the established German Jews, who were fearful that these new-comers would cause a rekindling of the “ever present” fires of “anti-Semitism” and that the new immigrants would also threaten the German Jews “hard won status” in the community, worked with the Industrial Removal Board and the United Hebrew Charities to settle the new Jews in small towns away from cities.
These circumstances caused some of the more recently arrived Jews to leave the big cities and head for the small cities and mill towns of northern New England.

It is in the late 1880’s that the second wave of Jewish immigrants started to make an impact on the cities of Lewiston and Auburn. For a decade or so, the main Jewish merchants or businessmen in the cities consisted mainly of the Ehrenfried family, the Friedman family, the Greenberg brothers, Joseph Greenburg, the Jacobs family, Isaac Greenberg, and Nathan Greenberg. In 1887, this began to change as new families open new businesses. They also entered occupations which were not previously held by Jews. In 1887, Jacob Kabatchnik opened a new “dry and fancy goods” store at 28 and 34 Chestnut Street. Joseph Goodkowsky established a “dry goods” store at 171 Lisbon Street. The Epstein and Goodkowsky family opened a “Boots and Shoes” store, as did Arthur S. Melcher, who operated a “Boots and Shoes” store and “Boot and Shoemakers and Repairers” Company at 81 Lisbon Street. Mr. S. A. Isaacson opened a clothing store at 152 Lisbon Street. This list continued to grow in Lewiston, with a great many stores and businesses located on Lisbon Street, and soon encompassed department stores; junk peddlers; candy, confectionary, and fruit stores; clothing stores; ladies furnishing goods; haberdasheries; and restaurants, among other things.

For reasons I am not aware of, commercial development in the Auburn Jewish community seemed to lag ten years behind the Lewiston community. It was not until the mid-1890s that Jewish businesses began to appear in the city directories in Auburn. In 1896, the Shapiro family, which would later be one of the more prominent families in the Auburn community, appeared for the first time in the Auburn city directory. The Shapiro family operated a department store under the title “Shapiro Brothers” at 63 Broad Street. This enterprise later occupied buildings from 63 to 69 Broad Street in Auburn. As the mills began to develop and prosper into the early twentieth century, the Jewish merchants began to see their investments in Lewiston and Auburn mature and benefit them.

Soon several landmarks appeared which helped create a sense of permanency in the Jewish community. There was a Jewish baker in Auburn and kosher butchers in both Lewiston and Auburn. Also, in the 1898 to 1899 Directory, in the “Churches” section, a “Hebruex Synagogue” is referred to at 70 Second Street in Auburn, with Mr. I.B. Isaacson serving as president. In Lewiston, there is a “Jewish Synagogue” listed at 36 Chestnut Street, with Mr. Simon Segal listed as “rabbi.” The two oldest synagogues in Lewiston and Auburn both appear for the first time, under their current or recognized names in the 1912 to 1913 Directory. Beth Jacob, the Lewiston synagogue and predecessor to Temple Shalom Synagogue Center, currently the largest synagogue in the two cities,

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9 1880 Lewiston Auburn Directory, 173, 174, and 175.
10 1895-96 Androscoggin County Directory, 793.
11 Turner’s Androscoggin Directory 1898-1899, 968-969.
appears as “Bath Jacob Congregation” with a “Rev. Simon Segal” listed as “pastor” and Beth Abraham, the Auburn synagogue, is listed as “Brith Abraham Congregation” with a “Rev. Miah Levinson” listed as “pastor.” In addition, the two synagogues established a cemetery in 1933, currently known as Beth Jacob Cemetery, which is first noted as the “Jewish Cemetery” on Old Danville Road in Auburn. With the development of these institutions, in particular the synagogues, the Jewish communities in Lewiston and Auburn became more established.

The prosperity of the mills and the economic advantages they brought to Lewiston greatly influenced the development of the Jewish community. The four mills which dominated the industrial landscape of Lewiston and Auburn were the Bates Mill, the Hill Mill, the Continental Mills, and the Androscoggin Mills. The Jews had limited direct interaction with the mills. In general, the mills were seen as a stepping-stone for the Jewish community: a source of temporary work until enough money could be saved to purchase or start a small business. Jews were eager to become self-employed because it offered them a chance to escape from the demanding and often dangerous work in the mills, but more importantly

13 Manning’s Lewiston and Auburn Turner and Webster Directory For Year Beginning May 1933, Auburn, ME., pg. 824.
self-employment allowed them to take Saturday, the Sabbath day, off from work, which was a requirement of the Orthodox Judaism practiced by many of the early settlers. However, the thousands of workers in the mills served as customers at the businesses operated by the Jews, so it was very much in the interests of the Jewish shop owners to make sure the mills remained profitable and productive, so that they continued to have paying consumers.

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"The two large events which did have a profound affect on the Jewish community in the twentieth century were economic issues. In the 1940’s, a new business took hold along the Androscoggin River. In addition to the textile mills, shoe factories opened up in Lewiston and Auburn. These factories, however, were not owned by local families. While the owners were primarily Jewish, they came from Boston, Lawrence, Lowell, and Haverhill, Massachusetts. Maine had an abundance of Franco-Americans who would work cheaply. These industrialists built up another profitable and successful industry in Lewiston and Auburn. Among the most successful of the factory owners was Philip Lown, who operated Philip Lown Shoe Factory on the corner of Washington and Court Streets in Auburn. These wealthy factory owners, coupled with the established and financially secure class of merchants and professionals, who composed a bulk of the areas Jewish population, created a Jewish community which was very active in both religious and social affairs."

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According to Marilyn Isaacson Simonds of Auburn, an 82-year-old Jewish Lewiston native, when her parents married there were two basic Jewish families in Lewiston-Auburn: the Miller-Baker family and the Isaacson-Halpern family. Almost everybody in town was related to one branch or the other, says Marilyn. You didn't distinguish between cousins, she remembers, whether it was a first cousins or a fourth cousin. "A cousin is a cousin and they were equally important." So when at age 10 she was first allowed to walk down to Lisbon Street by herself, her mother provided Marilyn with clear instructions: "When you walk onto Lisbon and Main Streets, make sure you smile at everybody because you may be related." So she did.

Seventy years later, Marilyn plays a game. "I start at Peck's Department Store (corner Main and Lisbon) and in my mind I walk down Lisbon Street until I get to Pine Street, and I try to see if I can remember the names of the stores that were there when I was a little girl. And I do fairly well. It's fun." It was a teeming area, she recalls. Her father, Harris Isaacson, one the first Jewish lawyers in Androscoggin County, told her that the head of Lisbon Street was called Haymarket Square in the 1920s when farmers would come to sell their produce every Saturday. Quite a few of the street's merchants were Jewish, and the businesses included, shoes, dresses, men's haberdashery, dentists
and lawyers, hardware and jewelers, furniture and food.

Marilyn Isaacson, circa 1940, by Lewiston portrait photographer Dora Clark Tash

Newcomer Judy Abromson received similar advice, but it was tailored for an adult female who had married into the L-A Jewish community: "Never say anything about anyone you don't know. You don't know whom they're related to." When she finally moved to Lewiston, Judy remembered seeing an advertisement for a Lower-Lisbon Street store called "Style Clothing." From what she could see in the ad, it didn't look too stylish. But she internalized her lesson and said nothing derogatory. It turns out the clothing store was owned by her members of her husband's family, Maurice and Celia Supovtiz. In fact, more often than not, when Judy was out shopping on Lisbon Street, her mother-in-law received phone calls that so and so had seen Judy on the premises. And sure enough, Abromson family members owned other businesses nearby, such as the popular Gordon's Restaurant and Delicatessen, on Main Street, owned by Judy's father-in-law's sister and her husband.

In many ways, the Abromson family represents the successful Jewish merchants of Lisbon Street. Characterized by a local newspaper story in 1932 as a five-epoch
success story, Louis Abromson, a native of Poland who immigrated directly to Maine in 1898, opened his first store, The Cut Price Market, in 1911, with 360 square feet. He then progressed to a gleaming super modern specimen, "The Sanitary Market," the match of any supermarket in the country, with 2815 square feet in 1932. The Lisbon Street store offered freshly cut meats, seafood, canned and packaged foods" (Lewiston Sun Journal Back Page). Louis' sons Ben and John took over the business, opening a bigger and better operation known as "Food Town" on Auburn's Spring Street in 1957, where they prospered before Hannaford bought their stores in Auburn and Rumford in 1986.

Food Town's Grand opening, Spring Street, Auburn, with Michael Abromson, third from left, circa1957

Auburn native Michael Abromson grew up in the midst of his family's business "Sanitary Market" on Lisbon Street – right across from the Jewish-owned Ward's Department Store. Upon graduating from Boston University in the early 1960s, Michael worked as a ski instructor for a year in Canada's Laurentian Mountains before his father,
Ben, demanded he return home to work in the family grocery business, which he eventually took over from his father and his Uncle John. Michael was an innovator. When Maine passed a law in 1972 allowing the sale of wine of Sundays, he became very interested in the subject. His research led to sponsored wine tastings and lectures held in a downtown restaurant, Steckino's. The president of the company and unable to find the software he needed to modernize his business, Michael developed his own software and started to market the product to other supermarkets.


**What kind of shops?**

According to those interviewed for this oral history project, Lisbon Street was one of the best commercial districts in the state of Maine. There was a very strong Jewish presence on the street, says Manny Plavin, co-owner with his brother Leonard, of New England Furniture, and he remembers that this group of business owners had a lot of fun. "We had a very cohesive group, and the Jewish community enjoyed a great deal of humor unto itself." Members of this informal tribe, he recalls, regularly drove to Boston for a baseball game, played cards, or played practical jokes on each other.

Morris Silverman describes the fraternity created by the merchants of Lisbon Street – both Jewish and some not – who gathered every morning like clockwork at 7 a.m. for 18 years from about 1940 to 1954 in his father's Lisbon Street store for an hour of coffee, teasing and trading business acumen. More often than not, they would pick out a member of the group to verbally harass – maybe a crooked necktie or a crushed hat would prompt the choice. But it was all in good fun and well tolerated because of their mutual respect. And at 8 a.m. they promptly dispersed for their respective stores. Not long after the elder Silverman died in 1954, the social hours came to a halt.

Morris remembers that when the shops on Lisbon Street stayed open until 9 p.m. on Monday nights, the bus that left from Lisbon and Pine Street would be filled with Jewish merchants who lived along the route that ran up to Sabbatus Street and beyond. Jewish businesses included Ward Brothers, Boston Shoe Store, Sanitary Market, Louie's, Five and Dime, New England Furniture and Style Clothing. Marilyn and Earl Isaacson
had a gift shop on Lisbon Street. Other Jewish establishments included Day's Jewelry and Appliance Store, Star Millinery (coats and hats) owned by Erica and Jerry Ross; Carroll Cutrate, a drugstore with a small lunch counter; Barnstone-Osgood Jewelry store, part of the Lempert family that donated money to establish Temple Shalom Synagogue-Center; Miller's, a jewelry store; Gordon's Hobby House, a games and craft supplies business; and Tar's Market, owned by William Levine and his partner, Joseph Goodman, at 18 Lisbon St. They operated the business from the late 20's until the mid-'50s when the Levines departed for Brookline, Mass, and their son Martin moved to California.

One Jewish-owned Lisbon Street establishment, Ward Brothers, received special accolades as "a lovely ladies shop. It was like a little Bloomingdales," remembered Auburn resident Shirley Goodman. "I remember the ladies saying that if they wanted a gown, and they didn’t have the time to go downtown to start trying things on, they would send over. They had a little delivery service, and they’d send over two or three gowns, saying see which ones you like, and call us up and we’ll pick up the ones you don’t want.

Jewish merchants maintained cordial relationships with non-Jewish businessmen and with the Lewiston-Auburn community at-large. For instance, Food Town proprietor Ben Abromson, a 1928 graduate of Bates College, was on the board of St. Mary's Hospital, conceived and spearheaded the annual Kiwanis pancake breakfast that continues to raise money for area charities, sponsored a Little League team, funded scholarships for graduating high school seniors and heavily donated merchandise to Hadassah bazaars, and to the Lake Street School in Auburn. A member of the Masons and Shriners as well as both area synagogues, he was a member of the Supermarket Institute and served as president of the Auburn Development Corp. in 1975.
Seventy-eight year-old Lewiston native Morris Silverman may well be the only Jewish merchant of Lisbon Street still in retail business today, although he has moved his business, Louie's, to a strip mall on Auburn's Center Street. His father Louis Silverman was born in Auburn and opened Louie's Clothing and Shoe Store in 1931 at 291 Lisbon Street. And in 1939, the elder Silverman moved to a new building at 281 Lisbon Street. "I helped move that store when I was about, I think, 8 or 9 years old," Morris remembers. "And I continued working in the store all the way through elementary school and high school and college." In 1954, his father died, and Morris left college to come home and run the family business. "So I have been in that store or really been in business since about 1954, but worked there, except for my hours in school, from about 1948."

Morris remembers returning home every weekend during his two and a half years at the University of Maine-Orono. "Every Friday morning I got in my business attire, drove to Lewiston, and arrived to help in the store dressed as businessman." His father worked day and night. Morris remembers that his bar mitzvah was on a Thursday morning in Beth Jacob Synagogue. "It didn't take very long because my father had to open his store. And it consisted of bagels and cream cheese and coffee and tea and that's
what my bar mitzvah was. My brother had a little bit more of a bar mitzvah than I did because he was more of a student than I was. I was a businessman from age 9 years old and on." At one time, Morris owned eight stores. Seven of them were on Lisbon Street, and one was on outer Main Street. Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah were the only days of the year the stores were closed. Today, he calls himself "semi-retired." I only have one store but work full time.

In an excerpt from a 2006 interview with Morris and his wife, Adele Brody Silverman, the couple presents a portrait in words of the street's vitality and appeal:

M: I still sell practically the same items we sold many, many years ago. I specialize today in work clothes and work boots for the construction worker and for the workingman.

M: Lisbon Street was very, very busy. We were at that time Central Maine's shopping center. They came from surrounding country and we weren't Maine's shopping center, but Central Maine's shopping center. And Lisbon Street was very, very busy. All the stores were filled. There were no empty stores, and the streets were crowded, and we were open until 9 o'clock on Saturday night and the street was filled with people.

A: Maybe you'd like to mention the different Jewish proprietors in the stores.

M: Yes, there were many, many different Jewish merchants on the street. Oscar Goldman had Brownstein's Clothing Store which was a direct competitor of mine. Hyman Bornstein had a clothing store diagonally across from my store; he was a competitor. There was Ira Goldman who had a small 10-cent store. There was Ernest Silverman, my uncle who had a ladies store. And Meyer Cantor who had a shoe store. And Benjamin Supovitz had a clothing store. Sol Supovitz had a clothing store. Samuel Wise had a pawn shop.

A: He's going up and down the street.

M: Then there was Carol Cutrate with Jack Spitzer and Cohen, but I don't know his first name. There was Abraham Plavin who had a furniture store, Samuel Minsky with a furniture store, and Meyer Fogelman with a furniture store. And...

A: And Jutka Isaacson's mother...

M: She had a gift shop — a well-known gift shop; then there was the Greens who had Lewiston Hardware. And there was Levine, Goodman and somebody else who had a grocery store, and two who had a grocery store. And that's about all I can remember.
P: That's quite a list of people. And who shopped at these businesses?

M: Well, first of all, Lewiston-Auburn ... was made up of mill workers and textile workers. And then of course in those days we had a lot of farmers in the area that came in from Turner and Norway and Green and Lisbon and so forth, so we had shoppers from out of town.

A: And Saturday was a big shopping day.

M: Oh, Saturday was a big shopping day, and coming to Lewiston was quite a trip. It was a day in the city. The people that we dealt with, our customers, were the working class of Lewiston and Auburn, and our store was very well respected among the working people. In fact, a couple of years ago, there was reunion of the textile workers that are still living, and I was there and spoke to the elderly people still around, spoke to them partially in French, and we had a wonderful time that Sunday afternoon.

P: So did you often speak French to your customers?

M: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We had to speak French. You wouldn't hire a clerk who couldn't speak French.

A: At one time, if you walked down Lisbon Street, you heard only French being spoken. And in the store windows, you'd see "Ici a parle Francais," And many, many people, especially before television could not speak English, because they were mostly French Canadian people that came down from Canada.

P: Would the French Canadians visit your store as well?

M: Yes. They came to visit their relatives here. Their relatives would bring them in to our store.

A: And they also settled here to work in the mills and shoe shops.

M: Well, they came here to leave the farms in Canada to have employment in the textile mills and the shoe shops.

P: Were there non-Jewish shop owners on that street as well? Or primarily Jews?

M: Primarily Jewish. In the days that I can remember. I mean prior to that there were perhaps more non-Jewish. In my times, when my memory is vivid, there were many more Jewish merchants.
Distinctive Lewiston

And consider Lisbon Street attorney's Phillip Isaacson's thesis about what distinguishes the Lewiston Jewish community from others in Maine. The 86-year-old Isaacson may well be the oldest lawyer practicing full-time in the state of Maine today:

"My own observation is this, that Lewiston is unique when compared to Bangor or Portland. Both Bangor and Portland are old communities. They had their entrenched social classes by the time the Jews began to come to Maine. They were well established; Portland’s history goes back to the 17th century. Bangor is certainly well established by the 18th century. And all of the indices of power, all of the organizations that lent social strength to people, were already in place. By that I mean trustees of the library, country clubs, preferable cemeteries and the like. Lewiston is unique. There was no community here in 1845; it was just a group of five farms. And twenty years later, by 1865, there were ten thousand people living here. Well, obviously, they were an immigrant group. When the local farms were unable to supply sufficient workers for the enormous mills that had been erected, they had to reach further afield and up into Canada. But my point is that the Jews were immigrants, the French Canadians were immigrants, and there was a very small local middle class, and really, no appreciable aristocracy. So what you have is a community of immigrants, and they’re all trying to establish a footing. And in that sense, there wasn’t a lot of time to begin to make strong social differentiations between immigrant groups. That came along in a subsequent generation, when people started to, as a matter of course, graduate from high school, when people often went to college and began to see the social distinctions.

But at the time my father grew up, there were no great problems between him and the other kids in town. And I would say the same thing is true of my own life. I mean, we are the product of an immigrant community, all of the people who are local are a product of immigrants, and the social institutions that kind of foster disharmony, really didn’t exist. That doesn’t mean they loved each other, but there wasn’t a sense of strife. Although I do have to say that annually there was a baseball game between the gentiles from New Auburn and the Jews from New Auburn, and that was an intensely played game. They were not nine innings of harmony."
As a sign of the respect accorded to the Jewish merchants, when Morris Silverman's father died, the Lewiston police department called him to see what they could do. "We're fine," Morris assured them. Yet, the police decided that they would place an officer on every corner between the Beth Abraham (at the corner of Shawmut and Sabbatus) and the Auburn line, where the Auburn police would take over, to hold traffic as the funeral procession drove to the cemetery.

**Why Lisbon Street Died**

In his essay about the Lewiston-Auburn Jewish community, Tim McCall concluded:

"The second economic event which impacted the Jewish communities in Lewiston and Auburn was the transformation of the mill industry. The transformation crippled the Jewish population in the same ways that it crippled the state. As the textile industry developed in the South and overseas, the owners of the mills in Lewiston, ownership had long past local control and as of 1970 most mills were controlled by corporations centered in New York City, saw an opportunity: new mills with non-unionized labor. This was double bonus: instead of paying for costly renovations to improve their existing mills in Maine and New England, the textile industry could just shift its base of operation into the south or overseas. In addition, the work force in both locations would work for less money then the
At the same time that the textile mills were shifting their bases of operation, the shoe factories in the area also began to move or close down. The absence of both these industries has left a noticeable dent in the Lewiston and Auburn area. For the Jewish merchants, the closures meant their loyal customers were without jobs and without disposable income.

Manny Plavin remembers Lisbon Street as a bustling commercial area. He believes that "part of what put an end to Lisbon Street was not unlike what happened in many downtown areas throughout rural America. The first thing that heralded its demise was when they made it one way, and in order to get onto Lisbon Street you had to go down to Canal Street or Park Street and turn to one of the connecting streets; you could no longer approach Lisbon Street from Main Street. That helped to lower the accessibility of the mercantile area. And subsequently when the reconstruction configured the sidewalks to be cumulatively wider together than the roadway in the street, to accommodate the non-existent crowds on the sidewalks and made almost no parking available, Lisbon Street proceeded at an ever-increasing rate into oblivion."

New England Furniture stayed on Lisbon Street until 1988, Manny says. "Our business on Lisbon Street was not as productive as it had been in years past, but we were survivors."

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Today, Lisbon Street faces an uncertain economic future as the Lewiston-Auburn community explores various ways to revive some of the street's vibrancy. Contributors to this effort include Somali business owners from L-A's newest immigrant community.