

# THE JEWS OF WORCESTER

## **A Population Study**

Worcester Jewish Federation, Worcester 8, Massachusetts

*Dedicated*

*to*

*Jacob Hiatt*

*President of the Worcester Jewish Federation, 1954-57,  
whose vision and support made this Study possible.*

# JEWISH POPULATION STUDY

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# Foreword . . .

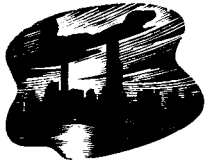
The advent of Hitler, the creation of the Jewish state, the growing diversification of organizational and institutional life — plus the accelerated pace of changing needs on the American-Jewish scene have made planning a vital necessity in our lives. Without it all our efforts to sustain Jewish life at home and abroad stand to be dissipated by programs and structures free of any communal yardstick on the primacy of needs. But planning without knowledge is a pious dream. It is this which prompted the Worcester Jewish Federation to initiate a demographic study of the Jewish community in the autumn of 1957. This booklet is a condensation of the voluminous material which came out of that project.

I know of no previous communal action which has enlisted the help of so many of our people. The Population Study Committee, which determined the information that was wanted, was the largest, most representative group of Jewish leaders ever to serve on one committee. The Technical Committee had the benefit of every local professional person's experience in the fields of religion, education, and social work. Public commendation should go to these men and women, and to the 183 volunteer phone and home interviewers, coders, and clerical assistants. Mel Cohen, Executive Director of the Federation, was a steady and sure source of guidance. Dr. Morris H. Cohen of Clark University, who served as Committee Consultant, deserves our appreciation for his overall contribution, and for his interpretive skill in reducing the mountains of statistics into succinct and intelligible summaries. Mrs. Gerald M. Freed, Study Coordinator, impressed us with her competence, resourcefulness, and enthusiasm. Our thanks to her, and to Mrs. Abraham Ponty of the Federation office, who carried off her clerical and other Study tasks with dispatch. The Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds provided the services of its Regional Director, Martin Greenberg, who was most helpful.

With the completion of this Study, the Federation shows itself as more than a mere vehicle for the raising and distribution of funds. It has matured into an organization with a well-defined philosophy of its own — a dedication to the maintenance of a homogeneous and ordered Jewish life in the totality of its expression. Let us now make intelligent use of this information for a better, richer communal life in the days ahead.

George Kangisser, Chairman  
Population Study Committee  
Worcester Jewish Federation

December 1958



## Size and Geographic Distribution of Our Community

There have been a lot of guesses about the number of Jews in Worcester. Before the Population Study was made some "guesstimates" ranged as high as 12,000. As the result of this Study we now know that in the autumn of 1957 the total number of Jews in the community was 9,333 individuals living in 2,978 households\*. Apparently our numbers have remained stable over the last several decades, and, in this respect, we resemble the general Worcester population. Neither has there been the great exodus to the suburbs which has occurred in so many urban communities in recent years. A search reveals only some 54 households consisting of 197 Jewish people in the towns adjacent to Worcester\*\*. Half of these families live in Shrewsbury, and the rest are scattered fairly widely in some seven other surrounding towns.

As to where the Jews of the city of Worcester itself live—we have all known for some time that most Jews now live on the west side and that the old east side Jewish community, which used to be the Jewish center, has been steadily dwindling. This Study gives us for the first time some up-to-date information on just how many Jews live in each section of the city and, perhaps more importantly, what the differences are between the major Jewish sections of the community. Here, some striking contrasts have appeared. For the purpose of this analysis, the data has been organized by the thirty-one census tracts into which the city has been divided by professional students of Worcester's population. These tracts have been grouped into five areas — North, South, East, West, and Central, corresponding to the way in which local people commonly refer to the sections of our town. (See Map, page 8). The table which follows shows the geographic distribution of our Jewish community.

\*A household consists in general of the people living as a unit under one head. An adult roomer or boarder would be counted as a separate household. The same applies to each individual living at the Jewish Home for the Aged.

\*\*The adjacent towns include Auburn, Leicester, Paxton, Holden, West Boylston, Shrewsbury, Millbury, and Grafton.

Table I  
Geographic Distribution of Jewish People and Households,  
Worcester, 1957

Area	Number of People	Percent	Number of Households	Percent
North	173	1.8	59	2.0
South	146	1.5	62	2.1
East	1596	17.0	559	18.8
West	6888	73.8	2044	68.6
Central	530	6.0	254	8.5
Worcester	9333	100.0	2978	100.0

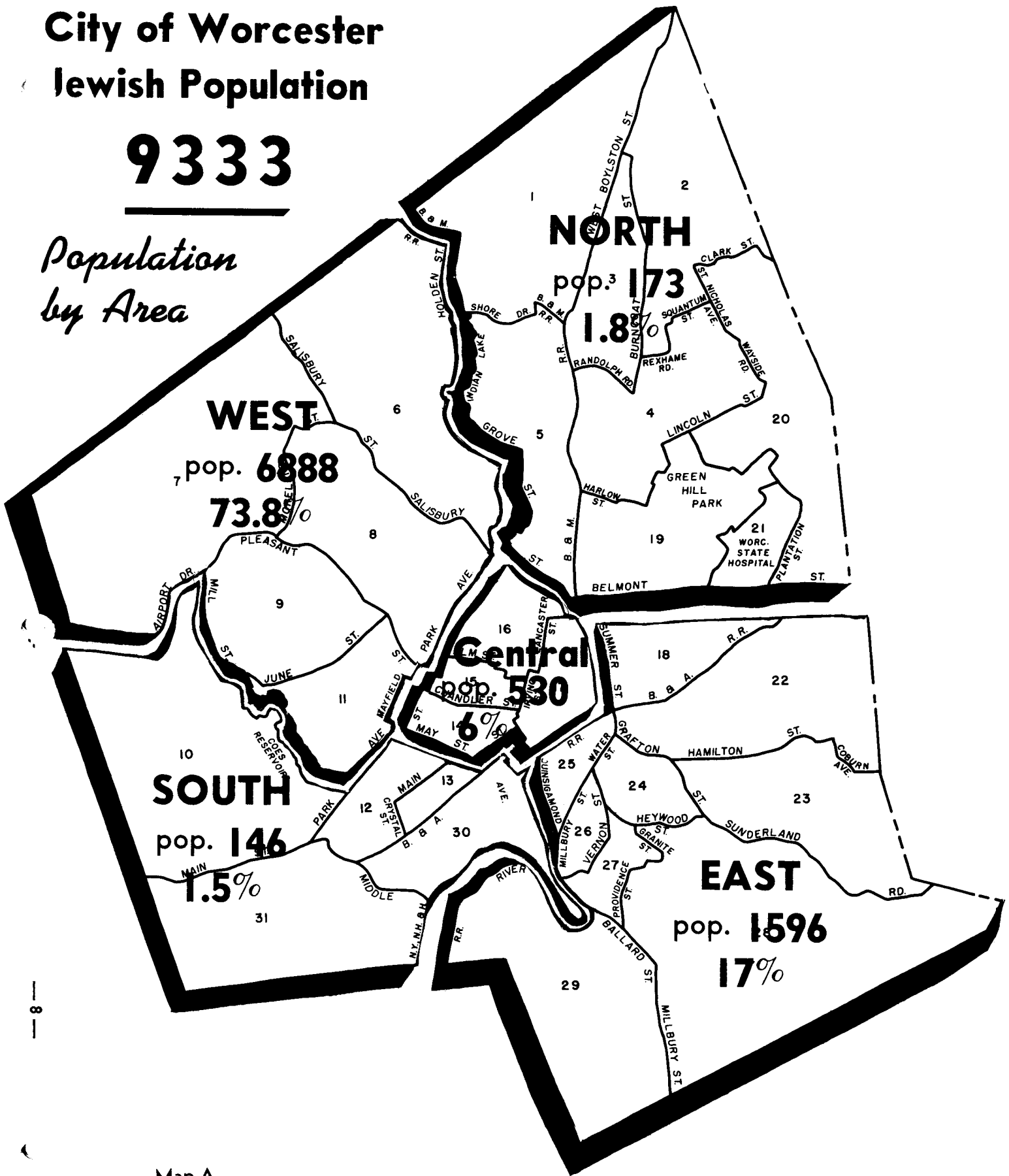
Worcester Jews often refer to themselves as "Eastsiders" or "Westsideers," and, as Table I indicates, this is a common-sense designation since nine out of every ten Jews do live in these two areas. Actually, we are clumped in only a few tracts within these areas. The parts of town where over half the general population of Worcester lives contain less than 5% of Worcester's Jewry. On the other hand, in Tract 9 of the west side (See Map, page 9 for its boundaries) almost every other person (41% to be exact) is a Jew, and in neighboring Tract 8 a Saturday stroller could say "Gut Shabbos" to every third person he met. These two tracts alone contain over half of all the Jews of Worcester. In fact, three out of every four Worcester Jews live somewhere on the west side, although as recently as fifteen years ago most of our population was on the east side. The rapidity of our movement is indicated by the fact that 75% of the Jewish families have changed their residence since World War II, and 60% have moved into their present homes since 1950, mostly on the west side. This east to west movement is still in progress, and the same is true to a lesser extent from other areas of Worcester to the west side.

In the most recent years, much of the population movement has been from one west side tract to another. An analysis of the direction of this trend reveals a pattern of movement from Tract 11 to 9 to 8 to 7 (See Map, page 9). In other words, the population flow is toward the northwest within the city limits.

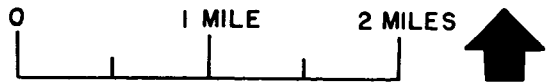
# City of Worcester Jewish Population

# 9333

*Population  
by Area*



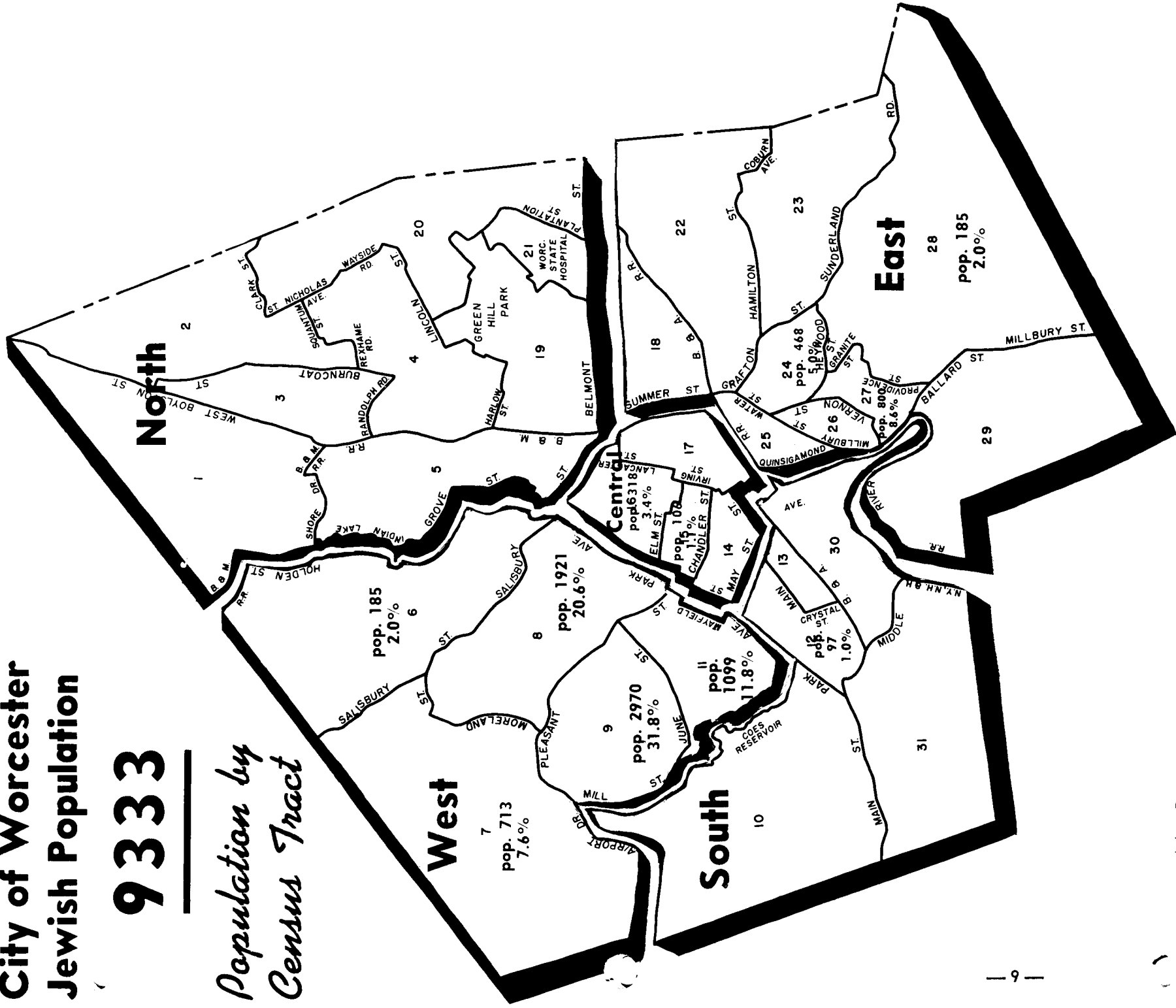
Map A.



# City of Worcester Jewish Population

## 9333

*Population by  
Census Tract*



Map B.



Population of Tracts under 1% not noted.

## AGE DIFFERENCES

About half of our community's Jewish population is under 35 years of age, and about one third of our population (3,158 individuals) is under 20. But these general figures hide great differences between the east side and the west. There are, in the city, a total of 746 children below kindergarten age; 80% of them live on the west side, while only 12% live on the east side. In the 5 to 15-year group, there are 1,780 children, almost 85% of whom live on the west side; only 13% are east siders. And, of the 632 older Jewish teenagers in Worcester between the ages of 15 and 20, about 80% are west siders and 15% live in the older community.

At the other end of the age scale, the differences are even greater. Almost 20% of all east siders are 65 years of age or older, while on the west side, even including the Jewish Home for the Aged, only 8% of the population is in this older age group. In the entire community, one fifth of Worcester Jews is over 55 and one in ten is 65 or over. Clearly, we are becoming an older community just as are all other Jewish and general communities in this country.

## MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND FAMILY SIZE

The Jews of Worcester tend to marry quite a bit later than do the non-Jews; two thirds of the young adults 20 to 25 years of age are single, and the same is true of about one fifth of those in the late twenties. However, the number of single people drops to only 10% of the age group of the early thirties, and only 6% are unmarried in the group of 35 to 40-year-olds. Looking at the Worcester Jewish population as a whole, about four out of five adults are married, 11% are single, 9% are widowed, and 0.8% are divorced. The percentage of broken homes is low when compared with the general population. The 53 divorced people, most of whom are women, are predominantly in the 40 to 60 year age group. Even if the group of separated individuals is added to the divorced group, only ten more people need be counted in this category of broken homes. Obviously, family ties are still strong among Worcester Jewry.



There are 550 widows and widowers in the community, most of whom, as is expected, are in the upper age groups. 25% of the adults 65 to 69 and 43% of those in their seventies are in this category. Since women tend to live longer than men in the United States, the large proportion of Jewish widows in Worcester is not too surprising. There are four times as many widows as widowers in this city.

Many of the older citizens of Worcester live alone; in fact, four fifths of the people living in single-member households are 65 or older. Twice as large a proportion of these "living-alones" reside on the east side as on the west side, and the west side count includes the residents of the Jewish Home for the Aged. Even in the younger age groups, this comparison holds true. For example, in the age group of 30 to 35, 22% of east siders live alone as compared to only 7% of west siders, and the same pattern exists in other younger age categories.

Among our married couples, families are not nearly as large as those of a generation or so ago. Only 1% of our households consists of more than six members. Even the largest household contains only nine people. West side families are larger on the average than east side families. One half of the west side households consists of four people or more (usually a family containing two children) while only one third of the east side families has four or more members. Our average household size, 3.1 individuals, is at least equal to that of most American Jewish communities which have been studied in the last three years.

## CONGREGATIONAL AFFILIATION AND PREFERENCES

We are a congregationally affiliated community. Only 13.5% of our heads of households are unaffiliated with some congregation. The table which follows indicates the congregational membership of Worcester's synagogues and temples.



Table II

## Congregational Membership of Heads of Households

	Households	Percent of Total
Temple Emanuel (Reform)	1298	43.6
Beth Israel (Conservative)	490	16.5
Both Temple and Beth Israel	42	1.4
Orthodox Synagogues*	878	29.5
Unaffiliated	401	13.5
Total	3109**	104.5% **

Again, geography and age make a difference. On the east side, where most of the orthodox synagogues are located, 84% of the area's households belong to orthodox congregations and only 6% belong to Beth Israel or Temple Emanuel. On the west side, slightly over half of all households are affiliated with Temple, and another quarter are with Beth Israel; only 14% are members of orthodox synagogues. As far as age is concerned, the reform congregation has thus far attracted the largest proportion of young people. The orthodox synagogues draw almost half their membership from the 60 and over age group. Beth Israel appears to fall somewhere between these two in its appeal to the different age groups.

When the 401 heads of households who are not members of congregations were asked what their preferences were among the three major branches of Judaism, their answers were as follows:

\*Orthodox synagogues identified in the Study questionnaire were: Shaarai Torah-Sons of Abraham, Sons of Israel, Sons of Jacob, Young Israel—Anshe Sefard, Sons of Zion, Beth Judah, Kadimah, Tifereth Israel, and the Jewish Home for the Aged.

\*\*There are 2978 Jewish households in Worcester. These figures contain a duplication of 131 households which are members of either Beth Israel or Temple as well as of an orthodox synagogue, or have membership in several orthodox synagogues. Probably a little more than 25% are members of orthodox synagogues only.

Table III

## Congregational Preferences of Unaffiliated Household Heads

	Number	Percent
Reform	158	39.4
Conservative	106	26.4
Orthodox	71	17.7
Other*	43	10.7
No Data	23	5.8
Total	401	100.0%

The largest proportion of these unaffiliated people is in the younger age group. As people become mature, established family heads, they tend to join a congregation. The same pattern of age differences in congregational preferences appears among these unaffiliated as has already been observed among congregation members. For instance, of the 100 heads of households in their thirties who are not yet members of congregations, 9 prefer orthodoxy, 32 conservative, and 44 reform. It is among the older non-members that there is a sizable preference for orthodoxy and a lesser orientation toward the reform group.

## JEWISH ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION

A word is appropriate here concerning the other Jewish activities to which adult members of our community belong. The group is divided between "joiners" and "non-joiners." Of those who belong to any Jewish organization (and most people do), about half are members of only one or two groups, including a congregation. On the other hand, one out of four of these "joiners" is affiliated with at least five Jewish organizations. Women tend to join many more groups than do men; approximately one fourth of all affiliated women belong to at least six organizations, while the corresponding figure for men is only 8%. The mothers in Israel are at least nominally taking part in a wide variety of Jewish-oriented activities.

\*"Other" consists of all who did not fit into one of the three religious categories. In all cases these households did identify themselves in some way as members of the Jewish community.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN



There are 1780 youngsters from the age of 5 to 15 in Worcester, and 75% of them are receiving some form of Jewish education. Another 2% of this group are already graduates of some type of Jewish school. The table below presents the distribution of those 1,340 children who are at present receiving a Jewish education.

**Table IV**

### Enrollment for Jewish Education in Worcester, 1957

Beth Israel	Temple	Worcester Ivriah	Yeshiva Achei Tmimim	Private
20.8%	65.7%	9.7%	3.2%	.5%

As might be expected, the proximity of a particular school has much to do with the choice for the child. Thus, only 7% of the eastiders go to Temple or Beth Israel schools, 73% to the Ivriah, with another 18% to the Yeshiva. Both of the latter schools are on the east side, more readily accessible as well as perhaps closer in spirit to the religious orientation of the neighborhood. Of the children living on the west side, over 95% go to the two schools located there. Temple Emanuel has enrolled 73%, and Beth Israel has 24%.

We are in possession of neither a crystal ball nor the biblical powers of prophecy. However, we do now have a large detailed body of basic data about our community. This report is only a summary of the mass of information about the basic characteristics of Worcester's Jewish population now available for the use of all of our Jewish organizations and institutions. The report has indicated a good many areas in which careful planning for the future is either necessary or desirable. The dwindling size and special structure of the east side community, the numbers and character of our older population, the congregational affiliations and allegiances of our households are some

What of the one child in four who is not at present receiving a Jewish education? (There are 370 children in this unenrolled group.) The parents of 267 of these children have a definite intent to give their offspring some training in Judaism. If the present plans of these parents are carried through, Temple Emanuel School will receive over half, Beth Israel will receive roughly one third, and Ivriah will enroll one tenth of the children for whom some plan has been expressed by the parent. In the case of the 75 children for whom there are no plans at all, 27 are already 13 years of age, so that it is too late to start planning for their Jewish education, at least on a child's level. In general, then, it would appear that some sort of Jewish education is under way or in prospect for almost all of Worcester's Jewish children of religious school age, and well over half of these young people are or will be enrolled in a school with a reform orientation.

### CAMPING ACTIVITIES

In the summer of 1957, of the 1,297 children in Worcester between the ages of six and twelve, more than half had some form of camping experience. The Jewish Community Center served 22.5% of these children, while 13.8% went to some other day camp. 21.6% of the children in this age group enjoyed an overnight camp. A much larger proportion of east side children did not go to camp, as compared with those on the other side of town.



## WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

examples of types of information which are of immediate use in making such plans. Planning, if it is to be useful, can be based only on reasonable predictions of the future based on accurate knowledge of the present. That accurate information is what this survey has developed. It will be valuable only to the extent that it is used intelligently by our communal organizations and is kept up-to-date as conditions change. The material is here. The future will depend on the vigor and intelligence with which our community meets the challenge presented by the data. The future, in other words, is up to you, the leaders and members of Worcester Jewry today.

# *Community Planning - - A Federation Function*

To most people, the Worcester Jewish Federation is associated with the jobs of fund-raising, financing, and budgeting. Very few are aware that it has another fundamental responsibility — community planning. Essentially, planning is the process by which we prepare to meet, in the most realistic way, the needs and problems of the community. Just as every family must assess its current resources in the light of its hopes for the future, so must a community take stock of itself as a beginning step on the way to realization of its goals. Planning, of a stop-gap nature, which solves crises only momentarily, is to be avoided. To be preferred is the dynamic, continuous, regulated procedure for maintaining the well-being of a community.

It is the Federation's hope that with the completion of the Population Study, an important first step has been taken in the initiation of an ongoing planning procedure to serve the best interests of the community. We now possess reliable information about principal areas of communal life which can be used as a springboard for further and more penetrating inquiry. The Study's purpose of ascertaining some of the primary trends and conditions of Jewish activity has been achieved. The statements, ideas, and suspicions of our community leaders, organization heads, and the man on the street have now been confirmed or denied. In general, the results have been notable in identifying not only the changes themselves, but also the degree of these changes.



Space limitations allow but a hint at how we might proceed. Consider first the radical redistribution of the population since our last census in 1942. The effect of this movement on selection of sites and location of communal buildings and other facilities is obvious. The rate of mobility, which was charted only generally in the Study, can be determined now with comparative ease through precise sampling. The question arises as to whether mobility becomes a factor in deciding for how many years new community buildings are intended to serve their original purpose. Building costs also may vary in relation to the anticipated life-span of the structure.

As we scan the Study data on the aging in our search to enrich the later years, we should pause to assess our total resources here. They are many. When all of them are assembled, so to speak, and used at peak strength — they include the Jewish Home for Aged, the Center, Jewish Family Service, Council of Jewish Women, to which should be added our more important general community services in housing, employment, public assistance, and social security—they present a formidable array. Where formerly only the method of cooperative effort might have been present, now this collective force has at its disposal knowledge about numbers of the aging, their whereabouts, some medical data, marital status, and living arrangements.

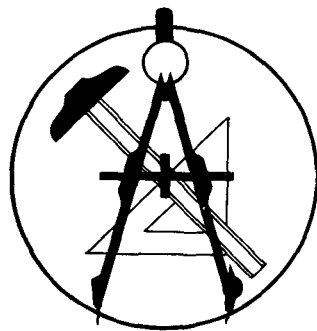
Similarly, the data on Jewish children and teen-agers— one out of every three Worcester Jews falls into the age group

under 20—beckons us to take a closer look at our community services for them. With the facts at hand on numbers, distribution, and participation, it is now possible to evaluate the many varied and interesting programs offered by the Center, synagogues, Temple Emanuel, Jewish schools, nurseries, camps, and others. In the area of Jewish education the Study has produced a composite picture of those receiving or in prospect of receiving instruction. Follow-up surveys to examine such matters as content, pupil attitudes, post Bar Mitzvah programs, challenge the imagination of the educator and those responsible for development of these programs.

In like manner, it would seem valid to build on the results emerging from the Study regarding congregational affiliation and preference, organizational membership, and military service. A veritable treasure house of related information awaits the community student's curiosity and desire to explore it.

It now becomes practicable to keep some of our present data current. Further, plans are under way for a major follow-up study on the Jewish Community Center under Federation-Center auspices.

In all, for having undertaken the Study, we find ourselves in a more fortunate position to persevere in endowing Jewish life with meaning and substance. There is a mutuality of interest here that bespeaks our total and unequivocal cooperation.



# *the whole of Jewish life*

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a Hebrew class celebrating a Siyum . . .  
    . . . a destitute Jew at the Wailing Wall

a Yemenite child in a Hadassah hospital . . .  
    . . . teenagers at a Center dance

a Jewish chaplain by the side of a G.I. . . .  
    . . . the Conference of Christians and Jews

defending Shechita before a Senate group . . .  
    . . . a city boy who wants to be a farmer

a department store that won't hire Jews . . .  
    . . . new Americans in our town

religion and the public schools . . .  
    . . . east European Jews with a passport to freedom

modern homes in ancient Beersheba . . .  
    . . . a synagogue bombing in the South

    a trade school in Tangiers . . .  
        . . . a Bar Mitzvah service in Braille

        a Polish yeshiva . . .  
            . . . Habima in New York

Malben . . .                      . . . Bezael . . .                      . . . Imbal

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*the essence of Federation*