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Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work by Hollace Ava Weiner (review)

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Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work. By Hollace Ava Weiner. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999. Pp. xxi+289. Illustrations, foreword, preface, acknowledgments, notes, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-89096-900-0. \$24.95, cloth.)

In *Jewish Stars in Texas*, Hollace Ava Weiner uses a biographical approach to examine a century of "Texas history through the eyes of its rabbis" (p. xiv). She profiles eleven Jewish religious leaders who made an impact that extended far beyond their congregations. Chronologically they range from Heinrich Schwarz, Texas's first ordained rabbi (arriving in Hempstead in 1873), to civil rights activist Rabbi Levi Olan, who served Dallas's Temple Emanu-El from 1949 to 1970. Included is information on each rabbi's religious background, his personal life, the city involved, the temple served, and contributions made. A few prominent rebbitsins (rabbis' wives) are also given recognition.

Weiner explains that Texas with its small Jewish population was not particularly attractive to rabbis. Some accepted pulpits in the Bible Belt state only because they had no better offers or were rebelling against traditional religious practices. These eleven "mavericks"—not all of whom were ordained—helped to shape the Jewish experience in Texas. As "mixers" and "motivators," they not only became leaders in philanthropic and cultural endeavors but also took strong moral stances on issues such as the Ku Klux Klan (p. xiv).

While stressing the achievements of Texas's rabbis, the author also recognizes their human failings and their striking differences. For example, Galveston's Henry Cohen helped to resettle thousands of Jewish refugees, but Rabbi G. George Fox of Fort Worth was unsympathetic toward Jewish immigrants. Weiner also recounts conflicts within the Jewish community, particularly on the subject of Zionism.

Hollace Weiner's ten years as a journalist with the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* serve her well. She succeeds in her goal of writing for a broad audience. The author carefully defines Judaic terms and also places events within their historical contexts. Her prose particularly shines when she is recounting human-interest anecdotes, which are sprinkled throughout the narrative. *Jewish Stars in Texas* is both informative and entertaining, though coverage is at times sketchy. A weakness in Weiner's book is the occasional failure to provide citations where needed. The illustrations, on the other hand, enhance the volume.

The extensive bibliography reflects the six years that the author spent on this project. She utilized primary sources in repositories as varied as the Jewish Archives in Cincinnati and the Center for American Studies in Austin. Weiner also conducted numerous oral interviews.

Jewish Stars in Texas is a welcome addition to the limited published literature on the history of Jews in Texas, such as *Deep in the Heart*, by Ruthe Winegarten (1990), and Natalie Ornish's *Pioneer Jewish Texans* (1989). By presenting Texas history from a new perspective, Weiner's book "gives us insight that might otherwise be lost" (p. xii). It also points the way to the need for further study on the historical contributions of rabbis to Texas and other parts of the nation.