

Secrets of Jewish Society in New Orleans

SUZANNE Ormond belongs to a number of the best Jewish families in New Orleans. From her family tree, she can read their names along with the names of "so many Christians it's unreal."

Her mother was Helen Adler, a noted amateur golfer and a member of the jewelry store family. Her father was Captain Neville Levy, a businessman and contributor to many civic causes. A big house on St. Charles where The Wohl is now was one of the family's addresses.

Of these old Jewish families, Ms. Ormond says, "It has been a policy that they were very low-key in posture. They did their best to be quietly rich. I guess that is the nicest way I can say it. They lived marvelous, genteel lives."

Harkening back to the days of marvelous, genteel lives is a photograph displayed on the book shelf in the Ormond den. It shows New Orleans Jew Beulah Gumbel and her husband Elie Joseph, a wealthy Cincinnati man, wintering at a resort he owned at Aix-les-Bains. Gathered with them are deposed royalty, and the scene is a vignette from the past of a woman, who, as wealthy Jewish ladies are wont to do, passed her widowhood at the Pontchartrain.

Suzanne Ormond and her husband John represent the kind of families who compose the Our Crowd of local Jewry and, as Suzanne Ormond says of that group of the past, "They all knew each other." The same holds today, and in the libraries of contemporary members of Our Crowd there is the inevitable copy of Stephen Birmingham's *Our Crowd*, the bestseller about the old Jewish banking families of New York. The members of *that* Our Crowd, like most of the Southern crowd, belong to that wave of immigration which was heaviest in 1849 and which hailed mainly from Germany.

Some members of Our Crowd are thrilled whenever they unearth any liaisons with the New York potentates, and there are some connections. The Stern family's cotton brokerage, for example, was known as Lehman, Stern, and Company until it was liquidated in 1936 (although Maurice Stern believes that the Lehmans of New York banking fame were only silent partners.) One of the New York Lehmans did found cotton brokerages here and in Montgomery, Alabama, before heading north to share in the heady wheeling and dealing of New York that his brothers were engaging in.



Suzanne Ormond with her 40-foot family tree.

Just as Wall Street was the foundation of power for the New York Jews in Birmingham's book, the Cotton Exchange, retail, and planting created the economic power of the leaders of New Orleans Jewish social circles.

Today, the leaders locally are said to be the Benjamins, the Sterns, the Lemanns, the Israels, the Kohlmeyers, and the Godchauxs—along with descendants of magnates like Isidore Newman, banker, railroad owner, founder of Maison Blanche, and the philanthropist who created Newman School. Included are gentlemen like Mr. Billy Burkenroad, whose family settled first in Mississippi and then came to New Orleans to become wealthy coffee importers.

Being in the mandarin crowd of New Orleans Jews absolutely requires ancestors from Germany or, in a few cases, France. A World War II officer from New Orleans, a Jew, once made an inspection of Rhineland cemeteries and reported home, "The tombs read like the New Orleans telephone book."

These Jews emigrated between 1800 and 1880 while "America fever" was sweeping the ghettos of Europe. Later, there would be another migration of Jews, and it would pose some sticky

social problems for the assimilated Jews who were already settled along St. Charles Avenue and in the Garden District.

By the arrival of this other migration, the German Jews would inhabit a world that stood for industriousness, mercantile acumen, educating your sons at the best Eastern schools and, stemming from all this, a certain kind of snobbery. "The Godchauxs spoke only to the Newmans and the Newmans spoke only to God," said Rena Godchaux, laughingly recalling the famous aphorism that the Lowells spoke only to the Cabots. "Oh, they spoke to other people, too," she amended, "I'm absolutely positive that they spoke to the Friedlers and the Beers." (The Friedlers and the Beers are families from Natchez.)

The statement that the Godchauxs spoke only to the Newmans is an old one; it is said to have originated with a Newmans.

Jewish society parallels and at the top interlocks with genteel society in New Orleans. The leaders of Jewish social circles tend to have as their intimate friends members of other acceptable Jewish families, and they also tend to have an outer circle of genteel friends—

Being in the mandarin crowd of local Jewry absolutely requires ancestors from Germany.

"But not Christians from the Ninth Ward," said a member of one of the old families.

DOWN a book-lined corridor and in the reception room of the law firm of Monroe & Lemann are old leather sofas that squish when sat upon, oriental rugs over linoleum-tiled floors, and a photograph from Judge Learned Hand with an inscription from Homer in Greek to Monte M. Lemann, the lawyer.

The late senior partners of the firm were J. Blanc Monroe, a leader of Christian society, and Monte M. Lemann, his counterpart in Jewish society. The Lemanns epitomize the good German Jewish families of New Orleans.

"Our first establishment was in 1836," said Mr. Lemann. "Or at least Jacob Lemann had a pack on his back by then." Members of the Lemann family are proud to refer to Jacob Lemann as "the peddler." Jacob Lemann was born in 1809 in the provincial German town of Essenheim, and his rise is chronicled in the privately printed book *The Lemann Family of Louisiana* by Dr. Bernard Lemann. The cover shows the edifice of B. Lemann and Bros., Inc., a Donaldsonville drygoods store, as it appeared in about 1880.

"The great two-level vault of the store in Donaldsonville has yielded a bewildering accumulation of family and business papers," begins the book, which was based on that cache and on other sources. And it continues:

"The family tradition has been that Jacob Lemann began his fortunes in the New World as a roving trader who peddled his wares to the sugar plantations of lower Louisiana. The story is further detailed, perhaps through fanciful elaboration, but with much likelihood, to the effect that he carried his merchandise on his back."

Jacob Lemann recorded his memoranda in a strange language—one he adapted out of Hebrew characters and English and German sounds—which was comprehensible only to himself. This, however, did not hinder him from acquiring huge land and mercantile interests in Donaldsonville and ceasing his peregrinations by the mid-1850s.

He had a second house in Newport, R.I., and educated his sons in the East,

where he himself might have settled, had the Civil War not forced him to come back South to watch over his property.

One of the most delightful pictures in the Lemann history depicts two children acting the parts of Cassius and Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. It was 1887, and the children were very decidedly plantation children by then and were very perfectly dressed.

Maurice Stern, the present one, is married to a lawyer named Lynne Rothschild. It is a family joke that only after the wedding did Mr. Stern learn she was not one of the Rothschilds and she discover that he was not one of the Sterns. But being a non-*the* Stern isn't so bad, and it carries with it membership in the New Orleans Country Club, which has a limited Jewish membership.

A branch of the Stern family became the Sterns when Edgar B. Stern married Sears Heiress Edith Stern, whose civic works have already been cited. She lives in Longue Vue Gardens and her house is close to a number of families along Garden Lane and the vicinity who have in one way or another been connected with the Sterns. For some children of these families, growing up meant gliding to Country Day in limousines and children's parties in Mrs. Stern's Finzi-Contini garden.

LET us return to Suzanne Ormond, whom we left in her den with a 40 foot long family tree on the floor spread for our benefit. Ms. Ormond is, incidentally, a potter who puts in regular hours in her studio.

A few blocks away from her Calhoun Street house is Temple Sinai, the fanciest temple in town. In its vestibule are oil portraits of Suzanne Ormond's parents, benefactors of the temple. Suzanne and John Ormond count among their combined heritage enough Jewish worthies that a friend with lesser Jewish credentials often tells John Ormond to "come off it."

On her side there's the likes of Michael Pokorny, a cobbler from Trieste, who came to America in 1849 and made a fortuitous meeting with Ben Butler. "And Ben Butler needed boots," said Suzanne Ormond. Suzanne Ormond objects to the notion that hordes of immigrant Jews came in steerage, and believes that the original American member of the Levy family left Europe "probably because he was the second or third child and wasn't going to get anything."

Simon Gumbel would be a plus for the genealogical charts of any member of Our Crowd, and he figures among the notables in John Ormond's background. Gumbel left Basel, Switzerland in 1835 when he was 13 or 14. He first worked in a general store and then as a cotton factor in Lakeland, La. By 1860, he was a full-fledged cotton broker in New Or-

leans, a respected citizen; and when he died in 1919, his estate was around \$10 million, according to Ms. Ormond.

Suzanne Ormond says that the local crowd probably knew the New York crowd. "If you were a cotton broker in New Orleans, you're bound to have had communication with your counterpart in New York."

In another of the Ormonds' photographs, Simon Gumbel's daughters are shown. One of them, the handwriting on the back informs us, is named Ophelia Gumbel Godchaux, thus forming a bridge to another main Jewish family, the Godchauxs of merchandising and sugar plantation businesses. (Recently they left the sugar business, but the stores are still in the Godchaux family.)

THE first Leon Godchaux to live in America was the son of a butcher in Lorraine, France. He started peddling from New Orleans to Donaldsonville, along the Old River Road, in 1840. Such tramping about the countryside ended by 1844 when the first Godchaux retail establishment was opened at 213 Old Levee Street (now Decatur).

He later built The Godchaux Building. On the top floor he manufactured men's summer suits in linen, silks, and seersucker, and retailed these wares on the bottom floor. The earnings from the enterprise were invested in sugar plantations, so that Leon Godchaux became the largest sugar planter in Louisiana. He was the largest payer of real estate tax in the state, according to a family history by Paul L. Godchaux, Jr.

Before the turn of the century, the Lemanns shared a box at the French Opera with another family, and several Lemanns lived in the Garden District. One residence, the Lemann-Polack house, was built at 6317 St. Charles before that street was paved.

Jacob Lemann's story is typical of the successful German Jews who came to New Orleans.

JULIUS Weis described his own success in pure American Dream terms at the end of his long life (1826-1909). Writing his autobiography, he concluded, "I am now 82 years of age, and at the end of so long a career, I may look back upon it with much contentment and supreme satisfaction. Beginning as a poor boy, in the midst of an overpopulated European community, I emigrated, while yet in my early teens, to the American Eldorado, and here by my own efforts, have succeeded in establishing not only a comfortable fortune, but also a reputation beyond reproach for fair dealing and a name scarcely second to any for worthy charity." J. Weis and Co. was a cotton company, and Weis is a forefather of the current Godchaux family.

From Julius Weis's summary of his

"The Godchauxs spoke only to the Newmans, and the Newmans spoke only to God," said Rena Godchaux.

life, it is clear that giving to charity is incumbent upon the successful Jew. The family currently at the bottom of the heap in esteem in Jewish circles is there because it drives purple Cadillacs and does not give to charity. Similarly embarrassing to respectable people was a slum landlord, not of German Jewish origins, but before his recent death very visible nonetheless.

MRS. Edgar B. Stern, Sr., at the apex of local Jewish society, is probably the best known philanthropist in New Orleans today. She was Edith Rosenwald, the Chicago-born Sears and Roebuck heiress. She has a decidedly liberal bent in giving, having helped nearly every reform movement to come down the local political pike in recent years.

Country Day School and the Newcomb Nursery School were Stern projects. The Sterns often achieve a certain elan in their donations as they did when Mrs. Stern's children celebrated her birthday by giving to the New Orleans Museum of Art the Rockne Krebs laser beam sculpture that shoots its ray from City Park clear to the Mississippi River. The Stern Fund based in New York backs a multiplicity of activities.

New Orleans' first Stern was Maurice Stern, who came here from Germany in the 1870s while still in his teens. Says his grandson, the present Maurice Stern, "America the land of opportunity sounds corny, but there was no deeper reason behind my grandfather's coming to America." Maurice Stern arrived with little money but by the time he died in 1919, he had a seat on the Cotton Exchange, a flourishing cotton business, the aforementioned Lehman, Stern and Co., and two Harvard educated sons, of course. He had, naturally, a big house, and it was on the corner of St. Charles and Soniat.

And his son, the late S. Walter Stern, Sr., was also a respected cotton broker who lunched regularly at his reserved table at Kolb's with Monte Lemann, Moise Goldstein, Victor Elsas, and Edgar B. Stern, Sr.

The Donaldsonville *Chief*, obviously a fan of rugged capitalist adventures, cheered from the sidelines in an 1882 story:

The boast of Mr. Godchaux is that he began life by carrying bundles on his

back. This is a feather in his cap. In his young days he was what is known here as a *marchand de paquets*, and he may now brag that in his later days he has caused more than one planter to depart from his home to make room for the *ex-colporteur*. *Chacun son tour*, is nothing but fair play, and if one now-a-days can hold his own, and his neighbor's too, *tant pis*....

His son, Paul L. Godchaux, Sr., entered the retail business at the age of 16. From then until his death, this meticulous and methodical man was seen about the store in one of his solid blue bow ties. In what sounds like a strange bit of whimsy, after each of his five children was born, he dipped his finger in claret and water—his usual drink—and inserted it into the baby's mouth, saying, "You should get used to this." The Godchaux family had governesses for the children and made Phillips Exeter their favorite prep school.



Sidney Wiener at the site of his father Abe's first establishment, the Cinderella Shoe Store on Dryades Street.

OUR Crowd social life (including Jewish debutante balls) centered around the Harmony Club, an exclusive organization housed in a marble edifice on the corner of St. Charles and Jackson, until the club ceased to function in the 1930s. Captain Neville Levy and his bride Helen Adler had the last wedding reception ever held there. The ghost of the Harmony Club, it seems, hovers about its erstwhile premises. The Carol Apartments, the present occupant of the space, is a standard abode for wealthy Jewish ladies, as is The Pontchartrain across the Avenue.

Here in New Orleans, the old Jewish families began to take on the trappings of planters and, in many cases, the Christian religion. Some of the best Jews are Episcopalians today, and the Trinity Church is popular. There is also a number of Presbyterians.

Asked if any of her circle belonged to more salt of the earth denominations, a wealthy Jew shuddered.

Both intermarriage and conversion

have been important factors. One of Simon Gumbel's descendants, a lady who lives in the kind of house that has delicate papier mache tables and other lovely objects, praised the Christlike character of her minister. An interesting thing, that, from a lady being interviewed about her Jewishness. She had converted, as had her husband.

If there are any traumas of assimilations, they seem to have left few scars on the local Jews. They seem to have made the transition without pain. Julius Weis, for example, mentions the problems of obeying the strict Jewish dietary laws only once, and that while still in Europe; he seems never to have struggled with the problem again.

For many Jews there are two major trips to worship formally—Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah—and those young Jews who attended Touro can still share the memory together of the rabbi's famous harangue of "revolving-door Jews." The tribulations of Israel are, however, said to have stimulated an interest in their religion among Jews after the Six Day War.

Consider the attitude of Paul L. Godchaux, Jr., a man of imagination and many diversions, despite his being in his 80s. Men like Mr. Godchaux, who paints and does carpentry as hobbies, are good advertisements for the kind of education received at schools like Phillips Exeter and Yale, where he went to school.

He plays cello, and on the wall of his Lowerline house is a parody he painted of his musical evenings. One of his mother's avocations was teaching Old Testament to her "pink tea" friends. Asked about his own religious beliefs, he replies, "Gee willikens, how can anybody be religious with all the sorrow in the world?"

As for social assimilation, there is even today among Jews in their 30s or older a definable group of mostly German Jews who see mostly each other and some socially acceptable gentiles. Morton Gaba of the Jewish Welfare Federation, however, argues that this is a thing of the past, the property of "a few people who live in the past and aren't concerned with reality."

"Younger people see the chasm between German Jews and the others as outmoded as the Mardi Gras balls their parents want."

A well-to-do Jew from another city with a larger Jewish population describes New Orleans Jews as "docile and assimilated." Another well-to-do lawyer, a gentile, with one of the big firms, asserts that "Snubbing Jews is a New Orleans tradition."

Yet, except for Mardi Gras, which is admittedly a big "except" in this Carnival-oriented town, German Jews here are so accepted that they might be on the way to extinction by assimilation—the fate that befell the small Sephardic

(Spanish and Portuguese) Jewish community that was here before them.

Let Rabbi Julian Feibleman tell about that in his 1941 thesis on New Orleans Jews: "The Sephardic element has practically disappeared in New Orleans. Its significance, however, is carved on the tombstones in the old Sephardic Cemetery, where many illustrious names of unmistakable Spanish origin wage the quiet struggle for survival against the elements. The names have been preserved far more successfully in the marble than with the descendants who bore them."

The German Jews had been here no time at all when assimilation began working on them. Then something happened to make the Jews conspicuous once more, though its effect on the by-now-patrician Germans is open to debate, depending on who you are. What happened was that around the 1880s, there began the second wave of Jewish migration. This time they were from Eastern Europe, and some were from Russian pogroms. Julian Feibleman describes what happened on the national level in the same study quoted above:

"Now 'foreigners' came with a strange language and stranger customs, and their numbers were appreciably large. To the outside world, despite religious diversity, national characteristics, and cultural differences, they were Jews. And so were the German Jews who were already here, and whose position might become delicate or embarrassed."

New Orleans has a small Jewish population (about 11,000) and this migration of strange people was smaller, and hence perhaps less an ordeal to the established Jews, who were Reform Jews as opposed to Orthodox like the East European Jews. These people, who were similar in the eyes of outsiders and ghastly in the eyes of German insiders, bred a strange schizophrenia in the New York Wall Street Jews, who had trouble deciding on a policy toward the aliens. The same thing, only less so, happened here.

Suzanne Ormond thinks that the new wave of strangers hardly bothered the old families. "The German Jews were too insulated by marriage and they had the Harmony Club, were established and had money—so I didn't think that the East European Jews bothered them. If there was any concern at all it was *noblesse oblige*."

When the German Jews came here, New Orleans was a boom town, the cotton capital of the rich growing areas of Louisiana and Mississippi. The time was ripe for "making it" economically even if you had to peddle for a few years. Things were somewhat altered when the second wave came, but they became, as many of the patricians had before them, peddlers. They lived in the teeming sec-

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Some of the best Jews are Episcopalians today.

tion of Dryades Street below the 1800 block, and the term Dryades Street Jew still lingers on in New Orleans usage. (The German Jews were dubbed the St. Charles Avenue Jews.) A little lower than a Dryades Street Jew on the social ladder was the Rampart Street Jew, who was pretty much like a denizen of Dryades, only poorer. And, almost beyond the social pale, were the "below Canal Street Jews." They were very, very poor.

Paul Godchaux said, "The Dryades Street Jew was a Jew who wasn't too successful, but he tried hard. But, I don't remember ever having seen a Jewish beggar in New Orleans. There were no indigent Jews. We've got a good, high class community of Jews in New Orleans."

IN New Orleans there are no Jewish ghettos, and no neighborhoods where one may hear Yiddish spoken on the streets. It's something of a feat to find a good deli sandwich. Even for the Dryades Street Jews the temptations of easy—or fairly easy—assimilation beckon.

New Orleans is not like Miami. Ironically, some of those most relieved about this are the Jews themselves. One woman, now Reform but whose background is said to be recently Orthodox, said, "Thank God I don't have to live in Miami. There's an ugly word for the kind of Jew they have there. The word is kike."

Says Martin Feldman, the lawyer who is married to Melanie Pulitzer, "I think there is a sort of patrician quality about many of the older Jewish families here that I don't find elsewhere. There's a quality of dignity among many people that is less noticeable elsewhere. I mean that in a good sense. That doesn't mean it does not exist elsewhere, but I'm more conscious of it here than in other places."

The distinctions between Jews and gentiles are blurred—and awkward at times just because it is so blurred—and just because the situation is so fluid, it is a subject that cannot be brought up in polite society without a tinge of embarrassment. At a dinner party, if there are Jews there who know that you know that they are Jews, it is still a delicate subject, and there is some subtle taboo hanging over it.

The topic is less prohibited when among East European Jews, and the reason is that the barriers are more visible. They are more obviously Jewish.

Jews whose families came from East Europe tend to take a harder line on Israel than those whose families form the Our Crowd group of this story.

"I have never felt any close affiliation to Israel," says Suzanne Ormond, "and I think that is true of most Jews of my—if you want to say stratum—stratum. By the time I was born in the late 1920s, my family had been rich for years, so I'm not really interested in Israel as a homeland."

A militant on the subject of Israel, a woman whose father had been a peddler and who considers herself a Dryades Street Jew, recently berated another St. Charles Avenue Jew for taking an unenthusiastic view of Israel.

"Next time they start shoving us Jews in the oven," she said, "they aren't even going to look up your pedigree to let the St. Charles Avenue Jews off."

The lady being berated had voted to support the anti-Israel and pro-Arab stance of a large corporation in which she held stock. The lady retorted with a joke about her plantation background, and her belief that planters, Jewish or otherwise, were not subject to any up and coming diasporas.

The fount of pro-Israel feeling is the Jewish Welfare Federation, which is, in the words of its head, Morton Gaba, "concerned with helping people to find a homeland in Israel because they have no other place to go." Last year 77% of the \$3,000,000 it collected went to its overseas services, and most of that landed in Israel.

The Jewish Welfare Federation, spurned often by uptown Jews because it represented Israel, became more accepted by this segment after the Six Day War, a force that dampened the heated anti-Israel feelings that prevailed among the more prosperous Jews. At the height of the war, the Federation called a frenetic midday meeting and a rally that same night to raise money for Israel. "It was wonderful," someone remembers, "and the top people were there. People you would never have dreamed felt Jewish—people like Shep Latter—got up and made impassioned speeches. If you pledged any money, you had to be ready to write out the check then and there." Around \$1,500,000 was raised. "The finest hour of American Jewry," said my informant.

The Jewish Welfare Federation created the Lemann-Stern Young Leadership Group to train young Jews to lead on boards and to feel a Jewish identity. In 1973 it sent a delegation of trainees to Israel. "A number of young people were invited to go on this mission to enhance their involvement in Jewish affairs and to deepen their Jewish identity," said Arnold Saltzman, associate director of the Jewish Welfare Federation. He added, "Since 1967 things have improved in terms of re-awakening."

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"Next time they start shoving us Jews in the oven, they aren't going to look up your pedigree to let the St. Charles Ave. Jews off."

But it is still safe to say that many of the Jews of old German origin are tepid on Israel. "I remember what my mother used to say," says a pro-Israel woman, "It was the only mean thing she ever said in her life, and she said that those German Jews needed some knocking around. They're too haughty."

An early maverick on the issue of Israel, incidentally, is Mrs. Edgar B. Stern. She has always been pro-Israel, even though her brother is Lessing Rosenwald, one of the most famous anti-Zionists in America, founder of the American Council for Judaism, a group that opposed Zionism.

B EING a Dryades Street Jew is different from being a St. Charles Avenue Jew, even if you've made it up from Dryades Street. The difference lingers.

Sidney Wiener an affable young man, is a case in point. Abe Wiener, Sidney Wiener's father, began his business career with a shoe store named Cinderella Shoe Store on Dryades Street. Today Sidney Wiener is president of Wiener Corp., with its 35 shoe stores with names like Shoe Lodge, Shoe Town, etc.

"Here's some color for you," he says, as he begins one of his obviously favorite stories about how his father was, in addition to being a shoeman, a professional pool sharp. The sideline was occasioned by the financial pressures of his son's need for goat's milk, and Abe Wiener drew challengers from as far away as Kansas City.

It was a knack with merchandising, however, and not pool balls, that made Wiener, an Orthodox Jew (whose most liberal act this year was allowing women to read at the Seder), a wealthy Jew able to indulge such fantasies as a pagoda house.

During his lean years, Abe Wiener scrimped to give \$1,000 a year to Israel, and his son obviously has nationalistic feelings for that country, and feelings about Jewishness in general.

"If you're Jewish," he says, "you'd better be able to run fast and able to handle yourself in grammar school."

What about the subtle ways New Orleans discriminates against Jews?

Says Wiener, a member of the Touro

and FNBC boards among others, "Any city needs a little discrimination to survive. It's a good thing for ambition and even some jealousy, it's a pretty dull city. A little discrimination creates that extra competitive drive and the will to outperform."

ANY discussion of "The Jewish Question" in New Orleans inevitably gets around to Mardi Gras and the anti-Semitism associated with it. Ironically enough, several of the families who "run Mardi Gras" have Jewish antecedents.

The Jewish issue was first brought out into the open in a 1968 piece in the *New Yorker* by Calvin Trillin. Trillin report-

ed that Jews are not allowed in the best clubs and that it is such a problem that they often left town during Carnival. (A practice, incidentally, which is said to be on the wane.)

Rex, a krewe with certain civic connotations, is the only one of the "good" krewes that takes Jews—but then only in its outer circle. An irony is that the first Rex in 1872 was a Jew named Louis Salomon.

In fact, most of the now all-gentile clubs took Jews in the past. In the Godchaux genealogy books, it notes that "believe it or not" Julius Weis was a Boston Club member. What happened

to cause the discrimination nobody knows, though it has been suggested that Jews became undesirable in the good clubs when the East European Jews arrived in New Orleans.

Some of the non-society clubs do take Jews, but, as Rena Godchaux said, "Most of these people are too proud to join lesser organizations."

When strangers come to town for Carnival, Orleanians dine out on tales of anti-Jewish atrocities committed during Carnival. One of the most outrageous stories—and it has a decidedly apocryphal ring—is the one about the 1920s Queen of Carnival of Jewish extraction being jeered with "Jew! Jew!" as she came onto the dance floor. It is a fact, however, and one still savored by society buffs, that her Jewish mother was not asked to witness her presentation inside the Auditorium.

Carnival and a few other organizations—most notably the Junior League—are the only formal mechanisms for snubbing Jews in New Orleans. One of the most prominent Jews in town, Sam Israel, a member of the prestigious Tulane Board, said in a recent interview with Tulane's student newspaper, the *Hullabaloo*, that there is no anti-Semitism in New Orleans at all.

One of the most prominent Jews in town does not agree. He thinks that Trillin's story made the situation look worse than it is—the story was "tripe"—but that Israel's statement veers in the other direction. "The truth is somewhere in between," he says.

There's no reliable barometer on this stormy issue, but, from time to time, the New Orleans rumor mill gets busy on the subject: Sam Israel is going to be the first—or is it the second?—Jewish Rex, we hear, and Martin Feldman is being asked to join the Boston Club, we hear, and so on.

"We've already started the rumor that Sam's going to be King of Carnival this year," said a man with good Carnival credentials. "Oh hell, we ought not to do it, but I swear it's fun." (I reflected that the merry trickster himself had some Jewish relations.)

Sam Israel may or may not make his way down St. Charles waving a scepter someday, but it is clear that, whatever glories do or do not await Mr. Israel, the Carnival front is not static. Atlanteans, one of the posh clubs, began inviting Jews about two years ago.

Atlanteans Captain George Montgomery is said by sources within Carnival circles to be behind the move. Does this herald a second turnabout on the Jews and Carnival issue? Time will tell.

Meanwhile, one of the Jews invited to Rex this year deftly sneaked into Comus, then taking place on the other side of the Municipal Auditorium. "Did any little old ladies die when you walked in?" he was asked. **+**

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