I thank God for the modest years of history, for the programs we have registered, and for the large and boundless opportunities of usefulness that lie beckoningly ahead.
— Carrie Obendorfer Simon, 1919

On Tuesday morning, 21 January 1913, Rabbi David Philipson (1862–1949) of Cincinnati’s K.K. Bene Israel Congregation walked into the Convention Hall of the ornate Sinton Hotel and delivered a keynote address at the founding meeting of National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS). Speaking to a large convention of delegates attending the biennial assembly of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), Philipson opened his oration by forecasting a promising future for the newborn NFTS: “I have been asked to speak the opening words at this meeting,” the rabbi began, “[an event] which will prove of momentous significance in the organized religious life of American Jewry, if the hopes of its projectors are realized.”

Barbara D. Metcalf, professor emerita of history at the University of California and past president of the American Historical Association, has written that “anniversaries are good not only for gifts or speeches of remembrance, but also for reviving and revisiting historical memories.” More than a century has passed since Philipson addressed the organizational meeting of NFTS (which changed its name to Women of Reform Judaism [WRJ] in 1993), and the centennial anniversary has inspired WRJ to revive memories and revisit its own history to better understand its contributions to the American Jewish experience as well as to the religious heritage of the American nation. This volume is an expression of this scholarly aspiration.
In reflecting over the first century of the organization’s existence, there can be little doubt that many of the expectations of those who founded NFTS—“its projectors,” as Philipson put it—have indeed been realized. After all, in 1913 52 individual sisterhoods banded together to create this new national federation, and 160 sisterhood delegates were credentialed and “entitled to seats at the [organizational] meeting.” One hundred years later, WRJ has evolved into a large and complex organization boasting eight district offices, nearly 500 sisterhood affiliates, and a membership of approximately 65,000 women. Above and beyond WRJ’s demographic growth, the association’s programmatic achievements over the past century have unquestionably “realized the hopes of its projectors.”

In its totality, this book reconstructs the story of how the “first gathering of delegates of [a] Jewish women’s congregational organization” evolved over the past century into a vibrant international women’s organization—the oldest federation of women’s synagogue auxiliaries in the world.

In commemorating the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America in 2005, President George W. Bush noted that “the story of the Jewish people in America is a story of America itself.” In other words, by reconstructing the story of the Jew in America, we concomitantly enrich our understanding of the American past. It is similarly true that by studying the history of the Jewish woman in America—examining the role that gender has played in the social, cultural, political, and religious life of the nation—we contribute to the interdisciplinary field of gender studies. By exploring the history of WRJ, one of the most prominent and influential Jewish women’s organizations in American history, this volume also hopes to advance our knowledge of the American Jewish woman who, as historians Pamela S. Nadell and Jonathan D. Sarna noted, “form[s] a critical part of history, a part that has, for far too long, been obscured.”

Analyzing the nature of women’s contributions to religious life in America, historian Ann D. Braude noted that “women have made religious institutions possible by providing audiences for preaching, participants for ritual, the material and financial support for religious buildings, and perhaps most important, by inculcating faith in their children to provide the next generation of participants.” The history of Jewish women and their contributions to the development of the American synagogue reinforce Braude’s argument. From the early national period until the present, Jewish women have acted collectively on the conviction that they were uniquely responsible for preserving and enlarging Jewish life in America and, in doing so, they “fashioned distinctive places for themselves, as women, within their religious community.”
studies that examine previously overlooked source materials that document the contributions of Jewish women to their temples and synagogues—like many of the essays in this volume—greatly enrich our understanding of Jewish women’s distinctive contribution to religious life in America.7

The beginnings of American Jewish women’s benevolent work are often traced to 1819, when Rebecca Gratz and a number of female compatriots established the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society in Philadelphia. The women who founded this group—the oldest such Jewish women’s organization in America—all belonged to Philadelphia’s Mickve Israel Congregation. These women were religiously motivated to be charitably “useful to their indigent sisters of the House of Israel.” Later, this same philanthropic and spiritual instinct would lead many of the same Philadelphia women to establish a Hebrew Sunday school and a foster home and orphanage for Jewish children.8

Although the founders of these various women’s organizations belonged to Mickve Israel, and in spite of the religious spirit that unquestionably motivated their initiatives, these organizations were not auxiliaries of their synagogue. The Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, the Hebrew Sunday school, and the foster home were not housed at Mickve Israel. Yet, as one of Gratz’s biographers observed, it is vitally important to bear in mind that none of these “organizations served solely charitable purposes but advanced Judaism as well.” For these women, benevolent work and Judaism went hand-in-hand, and this prompted a number of ladies’ sewing groups and fuel societies that were affiliated with local synagogues to work collaboratively with the independent Female Hebrew Benevolent Society—a relationship that Gratz evidently encouraged.9

A similar development unfolded in New York City during this era. In 1846, women belonging to Congregation Emanu-El organized a women’s society called United Order True Sisters (Unabhängiger Orden Treue Schwestern). This new order aspired “to unite its members in sisterly affection and esteem” while providing them with an opportunity to do benevolent work. As was the case with the founders of the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society in Philadelphia, the founders of the United Order True Sisters all belonged to Congregation Emanu-El. Nevertheless, they wanted the association they established to be more than a synagogue auxiliary.10

After the Civil War, the number and variety of women’s clubs, women’s church auxiliaries, mission societies, ladies’ sewing societies, women’s fellowship associations, and similar initiatives steadily increased.11 These church-based women’s auxiliaries cultivated the same benevolent instincts that had influenced the activities of the pre-Civil-War women’s religious societies, such as the Sisters of Charity, affiliated with the Catholic Church, and the Women’s
Relief Society, an auxiliary of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Just as local women’s auxiliaries evolved in many Protestant denominations, including the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Woman’s Board of Missions of the United Church of Christ, so too did these same organizing trends begin to appear in the context of the American synagogue.

In the late 1870s, for instance, Rabbi David Levy (1854–1930) of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, supported the establishment of a married women’s committee at his synagogue, which dedicated itself to addressing the needs of the Jewish poor. In due time the congregation’s single women wanted to participate in the ladies’ auxiliary, so it became necessary to establish a ladies’ auxiliary that would serve the needs of both married and single women. These circumstances ultimately led to the establishment of Beth Elohim’s “Happy Workers” club in 1889, a synagogue auxiliary that dedicated its efforts to aiding poor Jewish children and caring for the Jewish sick. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, synagogues in every sizable American Jewish community boasted some sort of ladies’ auxiliary—groups with an array of names such as “The Temple’s Sewing Club,” “The Ladies’ Aid Society,” “The Temple’s Women’s Social Club,” “The “Temple’s Willing Workers,” and so forth.

During this same period, many American women were influenced by the rhetoric of what was called the “women’s emancipation movement.” Although the suffragist movement may be the best-known component of the overall women’s emancipation movement, there were many facets to this broad enterprise. Women engaged openly in political debate on current issues, women fought for better working conditions and equal pay for equal labor, and women assumed leadership roles in an array of important social betterment causes.

The new ideas that energized supporters of the “women’s emancipation movement” simultaneously influenced many American Jewish women—some of whom were actively involved in their synagogue’s ladies’ auxiliary. By the dawn of the twentieth century, a growing number of middle-class Jewish women were associated with a ladies’ auxiliary that was affiliated with a Reform synagogue. Many of these women were enthused by the universalistic teachings of Reform Judaism, and they assumed responsibility for a range of social service activities that took root in the Reform synagogue itself. This modern activism was naturally allied with the aspirations of many American women in the early years of the twentieth century.

Soon, a growing recognition arose that the ladies’ auxiliary could become an effective tool for carving out a new leadership role for women in the Reform synagogue and in Reform Judaism itself. These auxiliaries could enable Jewish women to achieve new levels of social activism, communal involvement,
and political influence. Many women were first introduced to these appealing ideas by their own rabbis—reformers like Hyman G. Enelow (1877‒1934) in Louisville and New York, Emil G. Hirsch (1851‒1923) in Chicago, J. Leonard Levy (1865‒1917) in Pittsburgh, Max Heller (1860‒1929) in New Orleans, and many others. These were the rabbis who believed deeply in the universalist tenets of American Reform Judaism as expressed in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. In particular, these rabbis urged their congregants to be socially involved because, as the Pittsburgh Platform noted, it was the Jew’s “duty to participate in the great task of modern times [and] to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society.”

These Jewish reformers delivered impassioned orations from their pulpits, and they enjoined their congregational listeners, many of whom were women, to become involved in contemporary social causes.

In 1887, Gustav Gottheil, rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in New York City, delivered a powerfully inspiring sermon that urged women in his congregation to engage more actively in lives of “personal service.” Gottheil exhorted his listeners to dedicate themselves to overcoming the estrangement of well-to-do Jews from those who were poor. This undertaking, Gottheil told them, would never be achieved if the relationship between these two groups was thought of in terms of “patron and dependent.” This work needed to be carried out in the spirit of “friend to friend,” the rabbi preached. The women of Emanu-El responded enthusiastically to their rabbi’s appeal by establishing what came to be called a “sisterhood of personal service” in their congregation that funded a settlement house for the Jewish underprivileged on 318‒320 East Eighty-second Street. Emanu-El’s “sisterhood” also sponsored a wide range of charitable projects at their settlement house, including a religious school, a cooking school, a day nursery, a kindergarten, vocational training, and many other social service endeavors. The project’s reputation spread rapidly, and many congregations in Manhattan subsequently established their own sisterhood of personal service. By the end of the nineteenth century almost every Reform temple in uptown New York City had organized a sisterhood of personal service that endeavored to combine settlement work with organized relief in the home. Through their various activities, the individual members of these sisterhoods of personal service came into contact with one another and, in 1896, many of these groups banded together to form the “Federation of Sisterhoods” under the banner of the United Hebrew Charities, which served as a coordinating body for the association. As historian Paula E. Hyman aptly noted, “Sisterhoods were seen as the most acceptable mode for middle-class Jewish women to express their religious commitments, for in the United States the public expression of piety was increasingly linked with the female gender.”
In Chicago’s Congregation Sinai, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch’s sermons similarly inspired many of the temple’s young women. In 1890, Sinai’s “clubwomen” established a Jewish training school to provide vocational skills for immigrants’ children. Hirsch’s teachings inspired women who would eventually become nationally prominent figures, women such as Hannah Greenebaum Solomon (1858–1942), founder of the National Council of Jewish Women, and Jennie Franklin Purvin (1973–1958), a prominent social activist in Chicago’s Jewish and general communities. Solomon, Purvin, and other Sinai women worked together in the last decades of the nineteenth century to establish a range of organizations that sought to furnish immigrants with the basic services they needed to improve their lives.20

It is interesting to note that many of the women’s auxiliaries of Reform synagogues embraced the name “sisterhood” from the moment their auxiliary was established. Other groups jettisoned original names such as the “sewing club” and “social club” and began using “sisterhood” as their preferred designation even prior to the creation of NFTS.20 By 1913 when NFTS began, approximately 40 percent of its affiliates had already adopted the name “sisterhood.” Other ladies’ auxiliaries eventually changed their names during the first decade of NFTS’s existence.21 The term “sisterhood” conveyed an entirely different message than “sewing club,” “ladies’ auxiliary,” or “The Temple’s Happy Workers.” It was a modern term that resonated simultaneously with the political themes of the women’s emancipation movement and the spirit of social activism that characterized the Progressive Era. An NFTS founder, Mrs. Israel Cowen, gave voice to these sentiments in no uncertain terms:

> If it be our share simply to be auxiliaries to our so-called stronger sex—in the Armageddon warfare against viciousness and vice and in behalf of virtue and truth, let it not be ours to lag in the fray. And so if this great U.A.H.C. has need of our powers, and if our Judaism calls us to hold up the hands of our fathers, husbands, and brothers, let us as one sisterhood march forward in solid phalanx and do our duty as women in Israel (emphasis added).22

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the label “sisterhood” connoted a sororal solidarity on behalf of women’s activism in the synagogue as well as in the community at large. At the same time, “sisterhood” was a term that betokened a commitment to the advancement of women in general. As one historian explained, “Though most of [the women active in synagogue sisterhoods] were not feminists in the current sense of the word, some of them saw in their social and charitable work an opportunity to reach out for equality for women.”23
Writing in 1991, Hyman was among the first historians to assert that “the religious functions of women's philanthropic societies and sisterhoods . . . deserve sustained attention [from scholars].”24 The historical landscape has blossomed over the past quarter century, and a number of important studies on women's philanthropic organizations have appeared.25 Yet aside from an assortment of anniversary reflections and a handful of scholarly essays, few historians have focused intently on the history of women's contributions to the evolution of the American synagogue.26 Despite Hyman's call for “sustained attention,” the field has paid scant attention to women's synagogal associations.27 This volume—composed of fourteen new scholarly essays, each of which examines a different chapter in the history of NFTS/WRJ—constitutes a first attempt to fill this void.

In assembling this collection, the editors identified a range of topics in the context of NFTS/WRJ's history that deserved attention. Scholars in the field were invited to contribute entirely new articles on the pre-identified topics developed by the editors. The writers were required to base their essays on primary source materials, the majority of which were drawn from the rich holdings in the WRJ collection preserved at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. By using this methodology, the editors aspired to produce a compendium of essays that would offer readers a new and useful overview of WRJ's history.

The articles in this collection have been organized along four broad subthemes: WRJ's religious activities, WRJ's contributions to American Jewish culture, WRJ's programs and projects, and WRJ's role as an agent of change. Part I begins with Pamela S. Nadell's focused analysis on the beginnings of NFTS and the preeminent role that the organization's founding president, Carrie Obendorfer Simon (1872–1961), played in those early years. Nadell challenges prevailing assumptions that NFTS was the brainchild of the Reform movement's male leadership. In fact, we discover that it was actually a coterie of dynamic women—some of whom were wives of Reform rabbis (e.g., Carrie [Mrs. Abram] Simon, Sybil [Mrs. Joseph] Krauskopf, Henrietta [Mrs. J. Leonard] Levy, Eleanor [Mrs. David] Marx, and Ella [Mrs. David] Philipson)—who were determined to create “a national organization of Jewish women along religious lines.” Contextualizing the founding of NFTS in relationship to the early history of the National Council of Jewish Women, Nadell's essay persuasively argues that “NFTS stood at the threshold of [the] first wave of American feminism, and under President Carrie Simon, its agenda, interests, and innovations show it riding that wave in its early years.”

Jonathan D. Sarna takes note of NFTS's pioneering interest in strengthening Jewish religious life through its National Committee on Religion. By introducing
readers to a little-known sisterhood leader, Barbara Goodman of Louisville, Kentucky, Sarna demonstrates how the NFTS’s National Committee on Religion hoped to strengthen Jewish religious life by promoting activities such as the building of sukkot, the sending of Purim baskets (mishloakh manot), the recitation of grace (ha-motzi) before meals, the dissemination of liturgical calendars, and attendance at synagogue worship services. We learn how the women of NFTS dedicated themselves to revitalizing “the religious consciousness of Israel” during the first four decades of the organization’s existence.

Part I also contains two essays that bring NFTS’s role as formidable builder of Reform Jewish institutions into bold relief. David Ellenson and Jane Karlin focus on WRJ’s longstanding interest in Jewish education in general and, specifically, in fortifying the Hebrew Union College (HUC) by supplying students with scholarships, by building a monumental dormitory building on the Cincinnati campus, and, particularly, by funding a significant portion of the school’s operating budget during the worst of the Great Depression. HUC president Julian Morgenstern emphasized this point in 1935 when he declared, “If the Sisterhoods were to desert us I do not know where we would be.” NFTS sustained the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) just as it did HUC, as Rebecca Kobrin’s article demonstrates. In reconstructing the history of NFTS’s role in building the UAHC’s first headquarters in New York, “the House of Living Judaism,” Kobrin introduces readers to one of the most influential and dynamic figures in the history of NFTS: Jane Evans (1907‒2004). Evans, who served as the first full-time executive director of NFTS from 1933‒1976, was asked to coordinate the UAHC’s move from Cincinnati to New York. Kobrin describes how Evans evolved into “Reform Judaism’s ‘traveling saleswoman,’” influencing the growth of NFTS and the Reform movement in general.

Jason Kalman and Andrea L. Weiss, themselves biblical scholars, have reconstructed the history of *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, a 1,350-page volume that Kalman and Weiss describe as “the most substantial commentary by women produced to date.” This work, a project of WRJ, took nearly fifteen years to publish and, as Kalman and Weiss explain, this long gestation had both advantages and disadvantages. Though WRJ did not produce the first feminist Torah commentary, this landmark publication is distinctive in that it successfully presents feminist biblical scholarship in a format that is “accessible to lay people but also useful for clergy and scholars, women and men alike.”

In Part II, scholars examine the historical significance of material culture, with a focus on sisterhood cookbooks and WRJ’s role in the efflorescence of synagogue gift shops in the post-World-War-II era. Deborah Dash Moore and Noa Gutterman contend that the potent combination of foodways and
commentary found in the pages of sisterhood cookbooks help us to discern how Reform Judaism was constructed and expressed in the homes of constituents throughout North America. The sisterhood cookbooks, Moore and Gutterman stress, are documents that explicate “vernacular Reform Judaism”—that is, a mode of “communal self-creation” that demonstrates “how women transmitted a modern American Judaism, with all of its contradictions, from the kitchen to the public sphere.”

The exploration of this so-called “vernacular Reform Judaism” continues in Joellyn Wallen Zollman’s essay on the sisterhood gift shop. From its very inception, NFTS has taken a keen interest in preserving and promulgating Jewish cultural objects. The organization was actively involved in establishing and sustaining a Jewish museum on HUC’s campus in Cincinnati. Interestingly, NFTS also encouraged its members to patronize the artists at the Bezalel Academy for Jewish Arts founded in Jerusalem in 1906 by the artist Boris Schatz (1867‒1932). After World War II, NFTS took a leading role in the blossoming of the temple gift shop. From 1913 onward, as Zollman illustrates, NFTS urged its members to actively promote Jewish culture and fill their homes with beautiful ceremonial objects.

In 1955, NFTS established a new fund that would enable the organization to lend additional support to Reform Judaism’s youth activities, educational initiatives, and other special projects. The first letters of these three respective undertakings—youth, education, and special projects—gave rise to the fund’s familiar acronym, “YES.” The articles in Part III of this volume examine a number of NFTS’s most noteworthy undertakings in these areas.28

Carole B. Balin’s article on the Uniongram sheds light on what has arguably become WRJ’s best-known fundraising tool. From 1913 until the present, the Uniongram has been sisterhood’s eleemosynary emblem. As Balin cleverly notes, the Uniongram did for NFTS what, in many ways, the cookie did for the Girl Scouts of America. By generating, marketing, and selling Uniongrams, the women of NFTS enriched their organization’s coffers, which, in turn, enhanced the status of the national office. The Uniongram proved to be a highly successful fundraising tool that enabled NFTS to provide financial support to an array of vitally important programmatic initiatives that would greatly benefit the Reform movement. NFTS’s steadfast interest in youth activities and Reform Jewish camping constitutes one such example.

In his article on the role NFTS played in the establishment and early history of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), Jonathan Krasner demonstrates how temple sisterhoods across the nation doggedly organized and lovingly nurtured temple youth groups. Interestingly, in the 1920s and 1930s, most of the Jewish youth who participated in these temple youth groups
were not reared in a Reform synagogue. Yet the sisterhood women believed they were uniquely qualified to foster youth activities and, in doing so, safeguard Jewish continuity. In the 1940s, NFTS dedicated itself to nurturing the fledgling NFTY (established in 1939) and lending support to the movement’s youth and camping initiatives. As a dynamic Reform Jewish youth movement took shape in the 1940s and 1950s, NFTS and local sisterhoods were important participants in Reform Judaism’s effort to sustain NFTY’s vibrancy. Oftentimes young people tend to question conventional norms and embrace innovation, and many members of NFTY challenged the traditions of Reform Judaism even as they contributed to the movement’s revitalization in the 1960s and 1970s. “Through NFTY,” Krasner concludes, “NFTS inadvertently sowed the seeds of postwar rebellion and rejuvenation.”

In her essay on NFTS and Jewish education, Shuly Rubin Schwartz takes careful note that NFTS’s founders believed the “preservation of Jewish life” was a critically important facet of their federation’s raison d’être. Tracing the evolution of NFTS’s educational publications and resources over the past century, Rubin Schwartz shows the organization’s commitment to provide its constituency with the educational resources needed to enhance Jewish learning and modern Jewish practice.

Melissa Klapper recounts the historical development of peace work in NFTS alongside that of other Jewish women’s organizations. From its inception, NFTS supported the American peace movement because it was a foundational principle of Reform Judaism’s prophetic teachings. Yet, as Klapper points out, NFTS’s commitment to the peace movement was concomitantly an expression of the maternalist ideals that flourished during that era. In reconstructing this little-known chapter of WRJ’s history, Klapper pays special attention to the many ideological conflicts the organization faced as Hitler rose to power. In the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, peace activism faded from NFTS’s organizational agenda. Yet, as Klapper stresses, the history of sisterhood’s involvement in the peace movement “yields valuable lessons about the role Jewish women played in the broader American women’s movement in the early twentieth century.”

Dana Herman’s study on NFTS and the Jewish blind sheds light on yet another of sisterhood’s special projects. Sisterhood’s involvement with the Jewish blind began after World War I, when a young HUC student, Michael Aaronsohn (1896–1976), who was blinded while rescuing a fellow soldier during the Meuse-Argonne offensive of September 1918, became the first blind rabbi in the Reform movement. As Herman summarizes, “In much the same way that the nation rallied around Helen Keller, who was born blind and deaf, the Jewish community rallied around Aaronsohn.” What began as an effort to support
Aaronsohn quickly transformed into a broad national undertaking that included helping to establish and support the Jewish Braille Institute to serve the blind—both Jewish and non-Jewish—in North America and around the world.

The two essays in Part IV both point to the ways in which WRJ’s history provides us with a perspective on the Reform Jewish future. Sarah Bunin Benor examines a range of sisterhood’s primary source documents, such as NFTS resolutions, Uniongrams, program guides, and speeches, to gauge the increasing use and standardization of Hebrew words and phrases within the American Reform movement. Benor’s research on NFTS yields corroborating evidence for trends previously observed in Reform Jewish life during the last half of the twentieth century. First, NFTS’s primary source material demonstrates an increased use of Hebrew words (both traditional and Israeli), testifying to the movement’s increasing desire to reengage with Jewish tradition; and second, the transition from the Ashkenazi to an Israeli-influenced Hebrew in spelling and pronunciation reflects the growing significance of the State of Israel in overall context of Reform Jewish life.

In the volume’s concluding essay, Sylvia Barack Fishman compares documents generated by sisterhood and brotherhood during the first half of the twentieth century. She suggests that even though women did not occupy positions of official power in the general institutions of American Reform Judaism, sisterhood women were nevertheless capable of exerting great influence on the movement’s overall character and development. Men were able to fulfill their leadership ambitions by serving as rabbis and leaders of Reform Judaism’s institutions. Yet women who were equally committed to the movement and who wanted to contribute to its spiritual growth were not permitted to pursue these same leadership paths. NFTS benefited directly from this circumstance because so many of these women “brought their religious intellects, ambitions, and interests into leadership roles in sisterhood.” Fishman concludes her essay by suggesting that the future of WRJ and, in some respects, the Reform movement as a whole, will depend on the ways in which the institutions of American Reform Judaism respond to the extraordinary role transformations that have occurred over the past four decades. Fishman’s article reminds us that although there has been a dramatic increase in the number of women occupying official positions of leadership in North American Reform Judaism over the past four decades, men have simultaneously evinced a growing ambivalence toward leadership roles in the movement’s organizational and religious life. WRJ’s future work and activities will unquestionably influence the eventual outcome of these important issues.
In her 1919 presidential message, NFTS founding president Simon not only thanked God “for the modest years of history,” but she also looked confidently toward the new organization’s inscrutable future. “The time will come,” Simon declared, “when the children of tomorrow will speak of what their mothers of the earlier sisterhoods had done.”

In many respects, Simon’s prediction comes to fruition in the pages of this centennial history. From the organization’s inception to the present, WRJ has given the women of the American Reform synagogue an organized voice as well as an effective institutional vehicle to influence the history of Reform Jewish life in North America and around the world. This volume not only demonstrates that Jewish women have been integrally involved in the history of the American synagogue as notable leaders and industrious organizers, it concomitantly documents the many ways that the sisterhood movement has left its own distinctive imprint on Jewish women’s lives and on the unique character of American Judaism as a whole.
Notes

1 President’s Message (1919), 34, MS-73, box A-1, vol. 1, AJA.
2 “Women and the Congregation,” 15, MS-73, box A-1, vol. 1, AJA.
4 For WRJ statistics, see “WRJ Structure,” on the website of Women of Reform Judaism http://www.wrj.org/About/Structure/default.aspx (accessed 18 August 2013). Today, WRJ describes itself as an organization “with a mission to ensure the future of Reform Judaism.” Its website contends that WRJ exists “to educate and train future sisterhood and congregational leadership about membership, fundraising, leadership skills, advocacy for social justice, and innovative and spiritual programming . . . [and it also] provides financial support to rabbinic and cantorial students at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, to the youth programs of the Reform Movement, and to programs benefiting women and children in Israel, the Former Soviet Union, and around the world.” See “About WRJ” on the website of Women of Reform Judaism http://www.wrj.org/About/default.aspx (accessed 18 August 2013).
5 Philipson referred to the association as the first gathering of delegates of Jewish women’s congregational organizations in the history of the world. See “Women and the Congregation,” 15.
8 On Gratz and her benevolent work, see Dianne Ashton, Rebecca Gratz: Women and Judaism in Antebellum America (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).
9 It has been noted that in 1801, when Gratz was just twenty years old, she helped establish the Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances in Philadelphia. This association provided charitable support to women whose families were suffering in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War. See Henry S. Morais, The Jews of Philadelphia: Their History from the Earliest Settlements to the Present Time; a Record of Events and Institutions, and of Leading Members of the Jewish Community in Every Sphere of Activity (Philadelphia: The Levytype Co., 1894), 128. See also, Kristine M. Haskett, “Rebecca Gratz” in Philanthropy in America: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia, ed. Dwight Burlingame (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 215–216. For quote, see Ashton, Rebecca Gratz, 20.


Solomon and Purvin were among those who established in 1883 a Jewish Home-Finding Society, a family support program that was a forerunner of state and federal mothers’ pensions. See Bernice A. Heilbrunn, “Faith as Motive for Reform: Emil G. Hirsch and Chicago Jewish Progressives,” doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 2012. For quotation, see Breibart, "The Status of Women," 84.

The ladies’ auxiliary of Beth Zion Congregation in Buffalo, New York, for example, was originally called "Daughters of the Star," but by 1899 it was already operating under the name “Sisterhood.” See *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 1 (1899): 188 as well as Brenda K. Shelton, *Reformers in Search of Yesterday: Buffalo in the 1890’s* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1976), 133.

Baltimore’s historic Reform temple, Har Sinai Congregation, established a woman’s auxiliary in 1894. In 1913, Har Sinai was one of the founding members of NFTS, changing its name to Har Sinai Congregation Sisterhood. See “Sisterhood,” Har Sinai Congregation website, http://www.harsinai-md.org/sisterhood.php (accessed 24 August 2013). There are many similar examples.


28 On the YES fund, see the WRJ’s website, http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=3118 (accessed 30 August 2013).