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# “Catering To The Local Trade”: Jewish-Owned Grocery Stores In Columbia, South Carolina

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“CATERING TO THE LOCAL TRADE”:  
JEWISH-OWNED GROCERY STORES IN COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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Bachelor of Arts  
University of Virginia, 2015

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Accepted by:

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## DEDICATION

To my mother, Linda Sue Wever, her mother, Beverly Yanoff, and the other Jewish women who have paved my way and taught me what it means to be a proud member of the Jewish American community.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research and writing of this thesis could not have been completed without a number of individuals. I would like to sincerely thank the staff of Historic Columbia for allowing me to comb through their resources, providing me with equipment to record oral history interviews, and teaching me even a small part of what they know about Columbia's Jewish Heritage. Additionally, a very special thank you goes out to Katharine Allen for her endless support of this project and for the numerous texts, phone calls, and meetings she entertained while I excitedly researched the Rivkin and Baker families. I would be remiss if I did not extend my gratitude toward my advisor Dr. Lauren Sklaroff for her critical reading of my work and her direction as I wrestled with my ideas about Jewishness, food, and business, and to Dr. Jessica Elfenbein for serving as second reader on my committee. I also would like to thank my friends and fellow graduate students whose endless energy and support saw me through the completion of this project. Charlotte Adams, Melissa DeVelvis, and Jennifer Melton all took time to read and comment on my drafts, which I could not possibly appreciate more. Finally, a huge thank you to my parents and family, who have always believed in me, supported me, and fostered in me a love of learning (and food!).

## ABSTRACT

In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe fled persecution, anti-Semitism, and violence in search of the “American dream.” Both the Rivkin family and the Kligman/Baker family found their way to Columbia, South Carolina, rather than staying in urban centers like New York and Philadelphia. While both families eventually operated grocery stores in Columbia, their respective roles within their communities were very different.

Jacob Rivkin, and later his son Caba, originally ran a grocery in the heart of the Jewish community that sold kosher products unavailable elsewhere in the city. The popularity of Rivkin’s Grocery led to the opening of multiple branches, and ultimately, to two delicatessens in Columbia; Rivkin’s Delicatessen was one of the first Jewish delis in the South. Clara Kligman Baker, on the other hand, only ever had one location of Baker’s Grocery and sold Southern, non-kosher meats and produce to her predominately African American neighbors in Columbia’s Ward One community.

*Catering to the Local Trade* follows these two families from the Old Country in the Russian Empire to the new in central South Carolina, examining how their identities and experiences changed through ownership of local grocery stores. The Rivkins—Jews selling Jewish food to other Jews—and the Bakers—Jews selling Southern food to African Americans—illustrate two very different paths of acculturation and integration not only into the larger Columbia community, but also into American culture as a whole.

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## PROLOGUE

Every year on Rosh Hashanah, my mother and her siblings would eat sweet potato pie. As Jews living in Philadelphia, it was a strange dish to be served on one of Judaism's most sacred holidays—sweet potato pie was neither a northern food from the area in which they lived, nor was it a traditional food brought to America by my Russian ancestors. My grandmother, Beverly Yanoff, who was born in 1933 in south Philadelphia, was raised by an African American woman named Louise McFadden. Louise came from North Carolina where she had lived on a sharecropper property; her parents and grandparents before her had been enslaved. When Louise ventured north to find work, she was hired by Jacob and Lillian Yanoff to help care for their two children, my grandmother Beverly and my great-uncle Myron. As Jacob was a full-time doctor and Lillian was extremely involved in synagogue volunteering with Hadassah (of which she was president) and B'Nai B'Rith, Louise essentially raised the children and cooked for the family.

Coming from rural North Carolina and being raised on Southern food, however, Louise brought recipes with her to Philadelphia that were not suited to the traditional Jewish family for whom she worked. Sweet potato pie was best when made with butter and cream, meaning it could not be eaten in the same meal as any meat dishes, as the Yanoff family kept a *kashrut* (kosher) household. Lillian Yanoff and Louise McFadden worked together to alter a Southern, African American-inspired dish to the family's

needs, thus creating a tradition that would continue into my mother's childhood and be passed onto mine. *Pareve* (neither meat nor dairy) ingredients were substituted into the pie so it could be served no matter the occasion or other dishes available. Louise used margarine instead of butter, and coffee rich (non-dairy coffee creamer) instead of cream or milk, combining the food traditions of her Southern, African American culture with that of a northern, eastern European, Jewish family. After Louise returned to the South, Lillian continued to make her sweet potato pie recipe on important holidays, and Beverly brought the recipe to her family after that. In 2017, I felt the food traditions of my family surround me as my mother and I made Louise's sweet potato pie.

It is because of my own family history—that of eastern European Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution and hatred—that I came to this project. How is it that Conservative Jews in Philadelphia ate a Southern favorite at ritual meals? What were Jews in the South eating if they were surrounded by traditional meals of pork, cream, butter, and shellfish? My own family history is only part of a much larger Jewish American story—one of shifting cultural and geographical meanings of foodways and the importance of food to Jewish immigrants to the United States. Rather than staying in the Philadelphia or the highly Jewish-populated northeast, this exploration of Jewish foodways instead moves to the American South.

## INTRODUCTION

Living in the heart of South Carolina, the Jews of Columbia were faced with questions of cultural integration, Americanization, and societal marginalization.<sup>1</sup> As they sought opportunity as new immigrants to the United States, many of the Jews living in Columbia negotiated a space between embracing their culture, or *Yiddishkeit* (Jewishness), and being part of a religious and ethnic minority in the South. By 1880, the Jewish community in Columbia, South Carolina was growing and establishing its roots in the capital city. Although often overshadowed by their larger and more stable community counterparts in Charleston, Columbia's Jews had the resources and motivation to build two operating synagogues by the early-twentieth century that fostered a thriving and passionate Jewish community and accommodated the population increase from the recent wave of immigration.

Two of Columbia's Jewish families, the Rivkins and the Bakers, are examples of how Jewish and Southern food cultures melded together to create a distinct culture for the Jews of the South. The foundational information on the Rivkin family, the Baker family, and Columbia's Jewish community come primarily from family memories, oral histories, newspaper articles and advertisements, and city documents, though secondary literature

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<sup>1</sup> Americanization, in this context, can be defined as the efforts immigrants took to become more "American." These efforts to Americanize responded to both internal and external factors, coming from their actions within their own homes, but also the ways they acted in public and portrayed themselves to others around them.

on immigration, anti-Semitism, and food culture is used as a supplement to build a picture of the world in which they lived.<sup>2</sup> Rivkin's Grocery and Delicatessen on Lady Street, and Baker's Grocery on Gates Street (now Park Street) were two Jewish-owned food establishments, which illustrate two very different experiences of Jewish acculturation and ways in which Americanization developed over time.

Though both families hailed from the Russian Empire and immigrated for similar reasons, religious devotion, urban geography, and generational differences all factored in to the ways in which their businesses developed. For the Rivkins, Jacob, the family's patriarch, chose where to open his grocery store in the city mostly due to its proximity to the Orthodox synagogue. In turn, his choice to stay near the center of Jewish life in Columbia would not prove so strong an influence for his son, Caba, who later grew the grocery and delicatessen business, opened store locations in different neighborhoods, and stopped adhering so closely to Jewish dietary and religious law. The Bakers, however, did not settle particularly close to the synagogue or Jewish part of Columbia; instead, they joined the Reform congregation, opened a grocery store in Columbia's largest

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<sup>2</sup> While family oral histories provide a resource of rich memories, many can be factually inaccurate to no fault of the narrator's own. In this paper, oral histories provided by family members of the Rivkins and Bakers are used as primary source material. Though some of the information provided may not be fully true or accurate, the lack of other source material and short time allowed for this project prevented significant factchecking. The following is a statement from the Oral History Association's guidelines for best practices and has been adhered to as closely as possible in the use of oral histories here: "All those who use oral history interviews should strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline. They should avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, and manipulations of the narrator's words. This includes foremost striving to retain the integrity of the narrator's perspective, recognizing the subjectivity of the interview, and interpreting and contextualizing the narrative according to the professional standards of the applicable scholarly disciplines."

African American neighborhood, and did not allow Jewish dietary restrictions to dictate their business practices.

Jews frequently expressed their identity and affirmed their place in society through food—what food they cooked, what food they bought, and where and when they ate. While Louise McFadden brought African American Southern foodways north and influenced her Jewish employers, so too did Jewish immigrants find themselves acculturating in the cultural and culinary realms of the South. The era of mass immigration from the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth century—known as the Age of Migration—was extremely important in the history of Jews in America; the Jews of Columbia act as a microcosm for Southern Jews, and illustrate how larger trends of immigration, acculturation, and Jewish distinctiveness in the South can be expressed through the economy of food.

Both Jewish and Southern foodways provided a platform upon which immigrants constructed their new identities. The importance of food to Jewish culture dates to the founding of the religion and the required adherence by observant Jews to the rules of *kashrut*. Dietary restrictions on what Jews eat, the way food is prepared, the way animals are slaughtered, and the customs surrounding traditional meals and holiday feasts all function as ways that Jews can assert their culture through food. This shared food culture among Jews tied them together and incorporated food of the Old Country with people and communities of the new. As eastern European immigrants worked to understand the customs and society of their new home in the United States, they retained their cultural distinctiveness through buying, selling, and eating Jewish food. Certain trends, like the Reform religious movement, compromised religious ideals and the rules of *kashrut* to

reconcile religion and modernity.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the terms *kashrut* and kosher will be used in a very specific way. In the stories of the Rivkin and Baker families, and likely many other Jews in Columbia and the South, living a kosher life meant adhering as closely *as possible* to the strict religious rules. Rivkin's Grocery was not a fully kosher establishment, as they sold milk and meat products in the same facility, but it did sell kosher meats and other kosher products for Jews in the area, thus making it "kosher-style." In Columbia, however, Rivkin's was considered a kosher market as it was selling kosher products and was not originally selling *treyf* (non-kosher) food, such as pork products or shellfish; thus, the term "kosher" used to describe Rivkin's will refer to this attempted kosher-style often used in the South.

Jewish immigrants fit into the postbellum South by affirming their religious and cultural identities not only within their own community, but also outside of it. This paper will contribute to the rich historiography on the movement of eastern European immigrants to the United States at the turn of the twentieth century by specifically focusing on how the Jews of Columbia lived and worked in smaller communities.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the Rivkin and Baker family histories show how Jewish and Southern food traditions worked together to enhance a relatively small Jewish community in a bustling city center. Unlike the work of historian Marcie Cohen Ferris, which only investigates the

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<sup>3</sup> Roger Horowitz, *Kosher USA: How Coke Became Kosher and Other Tales of Modern Food*, Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives in Culinary History (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on eastern European Jewish immigration, see the following volumes: Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*, The Jewish People in America, v. 3 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Bernard D. Weinryb, "East European Immigration to the United States," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 45, no. 4 (1955): 497–528; and Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776-1985*, vol. IV, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.

larger city of Charleston, the research presented here includes a smaller but equally as vital locale. A study of Columbia shows how Jewish proprietors of food businesses were affected by social circles even smaller in size.<sup>5</sup> This research builds on Ferris's *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*, as it further explores Columbia's Jewish food culture and the ways in which Jews used business and food to construct and grow their distinct identities.

Additionally, the stories of the Rivkin and Baker families add to the fields of immigration and assimilation history. Each family's history and grocery business speak not only to the lived experience of specific Jews in Columbia, South Carolina, but also to how they transitioned from immigrants to Americans and how their Jewish heritage influenced this change. Foundational works on Jewish immigration such as Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* and John Higham's *Send These to Me* offer bountiful information on life in the Old Country, the immigration process, assimilation once immigrants arrived in America, and the prejudices of nativism they encountered. What this scholarship does not address, however, are smaller Jewish communities, like that of Columbia, and the ways in which food, culture, and business interact with one another. The individualized focus of this research on Columbia sheds light on a Jewish community that was neither well-known nor particularly large, yet was still vibrant, devoted, and tightly-knit.

Lastly, visible in the differences between the Rivkin and Baker trajectories are the many ways in which urban geography shaped peoples' lives, and, in turn, how peoples' lives shaped urban geography. Though relatively close in proximity, these two families

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<sup>5</sup> Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

lived in very different neighborhoods of Columbia—one diverse with Jews, other immigrants, and racial minorities, and the other known as one of the largest African American neighborhoods in the city. How the city of Columbia developed around the turn of the twentieth century changed food businesses like Rivkin’s and Baker’s Groceries and how they changed over time. This research not only adds to the discussion about urban cultural mapping, but also offers a perspective on Urban Renewal and the missed opportunities in preserving the spatial location of Jewish immigration history in Columbia.

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The world into which the Rivkins and Bakers immigrated was a complex one—Jews had been in the United States even before its independence from Great Britain, and there had already been two major waves of Jewish immigration to America. The influx of eastern European Jews that started around 1880 was the beginning of a new moment in Jewish immigration history. In the South, many Sephardic Jews (Jews of Spanish or Portuguese descent) settled in Charleston in search of religious freedom and became an engrained part of colonial society. Jewish settlers were even among those who purchased plots of land when Columbia was founded in 1786.<sup>6</sup> The Sephardim spent generations building the foundation of South Carolina’s Jewish community by integrating into the social circles of elite Southern society. Rather than distinguish themselves as an ethnic “other,” or alienate themselves from their wealthy white counterparts, many members of

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Eleanor Fischer, *The Tree of Life Temple, 1896-1971* (Columbia, SC: Tree of Life Congregation, 1972).

Charleston's Jewish community sought acceptance into the genteel (and Gentile) realms of society. By 1830, 83 percent of Charleston's Jews owned slaves, only 4 percent less than their non-Jewish counterparts.<sup>7</sup> Whereas later Jews would come to form a kinship with African Americans, early Jewish Americans instead played a role in their enslavement and subjugation.

Beginning in the 1820s, but reaching its peak in the 1840s, the second phase of Jewish immigration brought central European Jews, mostly German and Polish, to the United States and the South. Many German Jews with previous professional backgrounds as tradesmen or peddlers saw the United States as an opportunity to escape anti-Semitism and growing discrimination back in Germany. Most German or Polish immigrants during this era, "agreed that America offered them greater opportunity to make a living, build homes without restriction, shape communities as they chose, and jump into the political fray without stimulating anti-Semitism than any other spot on the globe."<sup>8</sup> It was during this sixty-year period that German Jews worked to Americanize the Jewish community by internalizing much of their Jewish culture and externalizing actions that associated them with American values and traditions.

Columbia's Jewish community was a thriving one before the Civil War, with 130 men, women, and children listed in the 1850 census, 2.1 percent of the city's total population and far higher than the total Jewish population in the United States, which

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<sup>7</sup> Theodore Rosengarten, Dale Rosengarten, and McKissick Museum, eds., *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press in association with McKissick Museum, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*, *The Jewish People in America*, v. 2 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 229.

represented less than 1 percent of Americans.<sup>9</sup> Organized Jewish life in Columbia began consolidating in the early-nineteenth century. One telling sign that a group of Jews intended to stay in one location was the establishment of a Jewish cemetery or burial ground.<sup>10</sup> Columbia's Jews—many of whom were Sephardic—founded the Hebrew Burial Society in 1822, as the Jewish population in the city began to rise. Built in 1846, Columbia's first synagogue, Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel), used the upper floor of the Hebrew Benevolent Society's building to offer religious services and prayer.<sup>11</sup> As the Civil War ravaged the South, its impact was strongly felt in Columbia and by its Jewish community. The Hebrew Benevolent Society, Sunday School, and Shearith Israel building burned down alongside one-third of Columbia's downtown following the surrender of the city to General William T. Sherman's troops; today, this event is known as the Burning of Columbia. In the wake of this, members of the Jewish community considered rebuilding and keeping their businesses open, but ultimately, the population declined as many of the city's German and Polish Jews—most of whom had arrived in the previous forty years—moved to be with relatives or friends in Charleston.<sup>12</sup>

It was into this environment that the third, and largest, wave of immigrants—including the Rivkins and Bakers—arrived in American ports. While the German era of immigration caused a population increase of 150,000 Jews from 1820 to 1880, over 2.5

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<sup>9</sup> Belinda Gergel and Richard Gergel, *Beth Shalom: Keeping Columbia's Jewish Traditions Alive*, (Columbia, SC: October 2007), 8.

<sup>10</sup> BackStory, *Judaism in America*, n.d.

<sup>11</sup> Lyssa Kligman Harvey, "A Year of Celebration Lost Forever," *The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina* X, no. 2 (2005): 7–8.

<sup>12</sup> Gergel and Gergel, *Beth Shalom*, 8.

million Jewish immigrants came to the United States from 1880 to 1925.<sup>13</sup> This massive influx of eastern European Jews was rooted in the anti-Semitism of the Russian Empire: Jews faced extreme inequality, denial of basic human rights, and discriminatory laws and restrictions on where they could live and what occupations they could hold, which often led to economic destitution. Starting in 1881, strict conscription laws with quotas for Jewish villages led to young teenage sons being drafted in the Czar's army. In extreme cases, the sons of poor Jewish families faced the risk of being kidnapped or sold into conscription by elite Jewish families who could buy their own sons' freedom from the draft in exchange. Many towns and villages in the Pale of Settlement were subject to the campaigns of roving Cossack pogroms, inspiring fear and terror in many Jewish homes. This area was the large tract of western territory in the Russian Empire where Jews were legally permitted to settle; it covered over 386,000 square miles from the Baltic to Black Sea. By the end of the twentieth century, nearly five million Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement, roughly 94 percent of the Jewish population of the Russian Empire.<sup>14</sup> Gerald Sorin notes that after 1881—considered a turning point in Jewish history—“Jews faced anti-Semitism not simply as a permanent inconvenience but as a threat to their very existence.”<sup>15</sup> Anti-Semitism was apparent in the prejudicial and discriminatory policies prevalent in eastern Europe, but Jews also faced the fear and terror of mob violence. One of the most frequently cited reasons for eastern European Jewish immigration to the United States in the late-nineteenth century is that Jews looked to escape the violent

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<sup>13</sup> Diner, *A Time for Gathering*.

<sup>14</sup> Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, *World of Our Fathers* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Sorin, *A Time for Building*, 35–36.

tactics of the Cossacks that wreaked havoc on *shtetlach* in the Russian countryside and the laws enacted against them by the Russian Czar. The anti-Jewish pogroms raided *shtetlach*, burning Jewish businesses, attacking, raping, and killing Jews in the small towns, and stealing money and valuables. The pogroms provoked millions of Jews to leave the Pale in an attempt to live a safer existence, free of violent persecution. Sorin describes this “powerful combination of physical despair and spiritual hope” that led eastern European Jews to set sail for America.<sup>16</sup>

When eastern European Jews arrived in droves at the end of the nineteenth century to America’s ports, many stayed in major urban centers like New York or Philadelphia, but others migrated around the country. Many young men started out as peddlers in the rural parts of the country, traveling and selling goods during the week and—for those with families—returning on the Sabbath to spend it with their loved ones.<sup>17</sup> Organizations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) helped new immigrants as they arrived in Ellis Island by providing language translation, kosher meals, and other services. Amid the explosion of Jewish immigrants to the United States, the HIAS settled an estimated 500 people to South Carolina, including the Rivkin family.<sup>18</sup> The Jewish community in Columbia, South Carolina, witnessed a major population increase like many other cities, which resulted not only in demographic and urban change, but also a revival of traditional Jewish culture and cuisine.

All parts of the United States felt the effects of the Age of Migration, including

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>17</sup> Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

the South. South Carolina was known mostly for its flourishing Jewish community in Charleston; thus, its capital city of Columbia has gone largely unnoticed by scholars when analyzing the lives and experiences of Jews in the South.<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Barnett A. Elzas, known in the early twentieth century as the primary historian of South Carolina’s Jews, afforded Columbia’s Jewish community slightly more than one page in his book’s chapter “Smaller Communities,” which is the only chapter to address Jewish communities outside of Charleston.<sup>20</sup> His study of South Carolina’s Jews, published originally in 1905, conflated the Jewish population of the state with that of Charleston. These “smaller communities,” like Columbia, were often dismissed because their numbers were not substantial enough to challenge the large and established Jewish population of Charleston. Yet these cities, including Columbia, were seeing exponential growth in their Jewish populations with the large-scale migration of eastern European Jews. Elzas acknowledged the growing importance of Columbia’s Jewish community, writing, “The Jewish community to-day [1905] is small but prosperous,” and continued to say it was “second only to Charleston.”<sup>21</sup> When Elzas wrote his book, Columbia was home to roughly one hundred Jews; by 1948, this number had grown to over five hundred, a significant proportional increase that seen around the country.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> America Jewish Committee Archives, *American Jewish Yearbook, 1900-1948*, accessed February 13, 2017, <http://www.ajcarchives.org/main.php?GroupingId=40>. In the 1880s, South Carolina’s Jewish population was an estimated 1,400—mostly living in Charleston—but by 1927, 6,851 Jews are recorded in the state, nearly a 500% increase.

<sup>20</sup> Barnett A. Elzas, *The Jews of South Carolina: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Spartanburg, SC: Reprint Co, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 27

<sup>22</sup> America Jewish Committee Archives, *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 1927. These figures also indicate how drastically the population declined after the Civil War—the 130 Jews who lived in Columbia in 1850 dropped significantly, especially considering that

By the late-nineteenth century, economic and cultural recovery was underway in Columbia with both the Civil War and Reconstruction in the past. As Jewish immigrants established roots around the country, those who settled in Columbia became part of recreating the city's Jewish culture and community. As prosperity flowed back into the city, thoughts of a new synagogue and religious school came closer to reality.<sup>23</sup> In 1896, eighteen Jews in the community organized a religious congregation called Tree of Life; they did not have the money for their own building so religious services were held in members' homes and later in a fire station on Assembly Street. After raising the \$1,000 needed to purchase a lot on Lady Street, the congregation laid the cornerstone of their new synagogue building in 1904 (Figure 1.1).<sup>24</sup>

It did not take long for the new synagogue and its congregation to succumb to the debates and arguments occupying Jews all over the country. Tree of Life aligned itself primarily with the Reform tradition that had been gaining ground in the United States since earlier in the nineteenth century. Prior to the arrival of 2.5 million eastern European immigrants, many American Jews had started to accept the new ideas of Reform Judaism; thus, when the demographics shifted so suddenly, disputes between central European Reform Jews and eastern European Orthodox Jews became more frequent and more heated.<sup>25</sup> The opposition by central European Jewish immigrants had its roots in cultural

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the community has only barely reached one hundred by the time Elzas writes his book in 1905.

<sup>23</sup> Gergel and Gergel, *Beth Shalom*.

<sup>24</sup> "Columbia, South Carolina Encyclopedia," Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, accessed February 4, 2018, <http://www.isjl.org/south-carolina-columbia-encyclopedia.html>; Fischer, *Tree of Life*.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 206–7.

disparities and social anxieties of the past half-century. While many of them had focused their energy on integrating Jewish and American cultures, this new wave of Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States loudly speaking Yiddish, flocking to urban centers, and upholding traditions from the Old Country, including their Orthodox religious practices.<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Sarna characterized the two views as, “one focused on Judaism and faith, the other on Jewishness and peoplehood.”<sup>27</sup> Columbia felt the effects of these issues pervading American Judaism and families like the Rivkins and Bakers emphasized different religious values in their own homes as well.

Reflecting the national trends, tensions heightened between Tree of Life’s Reform congregants—primarily those of German and Polish descent—and the new, more traditional congregants who had recently arrived on America’s shores. As Belinda and Richard Gergel wrote,

The new immigrants were also challenged by the internal divisions within the Jewish community, which included cultural differences between German and Eastern European Jews, philosophical differences between the Reform and Orthodox movements, and class differences between better established native Jews and the less affluent new arrivals.<sup>28</sup>

The rising discontent among the group even led to a lawsuit in 1907 (*Epstin v. Berman*) over Reform and Orthodox traditions within the synagogue.<sup>29</sup> Later that year, a group of the more traditional congregants, finding it impossible to reconcile with the new religious

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<sup>26</sup> America Jewish Committee Archives, *American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 1913. The statistics from the *American Jewish Yearbook* cite 25,365 “white persons born in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, giving Yiddish and Hebrew as mother tongue” in the South; of these, 24,498 were born in Russia. This figure would continue to grow through the following decade.

<sup>27</sup> Sarna, *American Judaism*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Gergel and Gergel, *Beth Shalom*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, “A Year of Celebration Lost Forever.”

practices of the reformers, broke away from Tree of Life to form the House of Peace Synagogue (Figure 1.2), known today as Beth Shalom. Led by Philip Epstein, a former Tree of Life Congregation president, the new House of Peace congregants set out to organize and create a house of worship all their own; its general purpose would be to adhere to the traditional principles of their eastern European background.

A *minyan* gathered in a house at the corner of Gates and Lady Streets to worship for the first time in 1908, and Beth Shalom received its official state charter in 1912.<sup>30</sup> Among its charter members was Jacob Rivkin—who had settled in Columbia with his family in 1906—and other well-known men in Columbia’s Jewish community, including Max Citron, Barnett Berry, and Barrett Visanska.<sup>31</sup> The original site of House of Peace, a building at 1318 Gates Street, opened in 1909, but burned down in 1915, forcing the congregants to erect a new synagogue. This location of House of Peace became extremely important in the growth of Columbia’s Jewish community in the early-twentieth century. More and more eastern European immigrants were coming to the United States, and consequently to Columbia as well. Orthodox Jews typically settled within close walking distance to the *shul* (synagogue) so as to not travel far for daily services or Sabbath observance on Fridays and Saturdays. Thus, the growing Jewish community in Columbia developed around the location of the Gates Street temple.

The surrounding areas of Gates, Lady, and Hampton Streets became a hub of Jewish life and culture as immigrants settled around those of a similar ethnic and

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<sup>30</sup> A *minyan* is a quorum of ten men over the age of thirteen years old, which is required for traditional Jewish religious worship.

<sup>31</sup> Beth Shalom Synagogue, “Golden Anniversary: House of Peace Synagogue and Beth Shalom Congregation, 1908-1958,” 1958.

religious background. Jews in Columbia, much like others across the United States, often functioned in what Sarna termed a “sub-economy.” Due to their exclusion from other parts of society, Jews often bought from, sold to, and employed other members of the Jewish community—they took it upon themselves to sustain Jewish businesses around them.<sup>32</sup> As the Jewish population in Columbia continued to grow, so too did the number of congregants at House of Peace, necessitating the construction of a larger building at 1719 Marion Street, which was dedicated in 1935.<sup>33</sup> Though not far from the previous House of Peace location, the new Marion Street building was in a different part of the downtown area—one which had not previously been home to many Jewish families.<sup>34</sup> Following the move, many of House of Peace’s congregants ventured further out into the city.<sup>35</sup> As time passed and the Jewish community expanded, it also became more established within the larger Columbia community as a whole. Many Jews perhaps felt more comfortable with moving away from the Jewish neighborhood and integrating into the rest of the city.

These important transformations within Columbia’s Jewish community provide a context into which the Rivkin and Baker families found themselves. Where they settled, how they arranged their lives, and with whom they associated were all important factors in seeing how the lives of these families either affirmed or diverged from ideas of

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<sup>32</sup> Sarna, *American Judaism*, 220–21.

<sup>33</sup> “Columbia Jewish Heritage Digital Tour,” Historic Columbia, accessed February 4, 2018, <https://www.historiccolumbia.org/tour-locations?neighborhood=Columbia%27s+Jewish+Heritage#31521>.

<sup>34</sup> *Columbia City Directory* (Columbia, SC, 1888-1948).

<sup>35</sup> Robert M. Zalkin and Harriett Rivkin Zalkin, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, interview by Matthew Reid Zweig, October 27, 1998, College of Charleston, <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:86556>.

Jewishness in the South. The food businesses established by both the Rivkins and Bakers offer a unique perspective as to how two families, arriving in a similar timeframe from a similar area of the world to the same city, established lives in different neighborhoods, with different clientele, and practice different religious traditions.



Figure 1.1 Tree of Life Congregation (circa 1920) at its original location, 1320 Lady Street, *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



Figure 1.2 House of Peace Synagogue (circa 1915-1935) at its original location, 1318 Gates Street, *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

## CHAPTER I:

### PORTRAIT OF A SOUTHERN JEWISH DELI AND THE FAMILY WHO RAN IT

Jacob Rivkin and his wife, Tama, arrived in Columbia, South Carolina in 1906 with three children in tow—Raphael, Caba, and Sarah. The family’s trip to the United States mirrored that of millions of other eastern European Jewish immigrants; they fled persecution in the Old Country, boarded ships in steerage, and made the arduous trip to America looking for freedom and opportunity. Though the Rivkin family story is not unlike those of other Jewish immigrants around the turn of the twentieth century, their lived experience in South Carolina’s state capital offers a unique perspective on how some Jews forged a path for themselves in the American South. It was through his grocery business and devotion to his Jewish faith that Jacob Rivkin’s family became well-known and respected within Columbia’s Jewish community. At first, the story of Rivkin’s Grocery is one of Jewish proprietors selling Jewish food to other Jewish people, but eventually Rivkin’s Grocery would adapt to allow Jacob and his family to interact with the wider Columbia community while still retaining a sense of personal Jewishness and religious devotion through food.

#### THE OLD COUNTRY & JOURNEY TO THE NEW

Coming from the Yekaterinoslav region of the Russian Empire—in what is today

Ukraine—the Rivkins, like most of Russia’s Jewish population, lived in the Pale of Settlement. Jacob was a man of many trades while living in the Old Country; he owned an iron factory, made repairs on farmers’ wagons, and fixed carts for brewers and distillers in the area. He and Tama, the daughter of a miller, married and had their first three children while still living in Russia. The choice to journey from their home to a completely foreign nation was not an easy one to make. Taking a ship to the United States involved emigrants and their families crossing the border of the Russian Empire and traveling hundreds of miles in Europe while facing the realities of anti-Semitism, persecution, and potential violence. The Rivkins, with three young children accompanying them, eventually made it to a ship that took them across the Atlantic. The trip took 18 days, and the Rivkins, undoubtedly alongside many other Jewish immigrants trying to fulfill the same dreams, docked at Ellis Island, New York on April 16, 1906.<sup>36</sup>

Members of Jacob’s immediate family—his father, mother, and siblings—had preceded him in coming to America, and were living in New York, though Jacob chose not to stay in the overcrowded city. Harriett Rivkin Zalkin, Jacob Rivkin’s granddaughter, noted that her grandfather received money from HIAS to bring his family to the United States, which could have been in the form of the \$25 landing fee on Ellis

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<sup>36</sup> In this section I have been intentionally vague about the Rivkins’ journey to America because even though I believe I have found their immigration records through the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island database, the first names have been misspelled (as Ellis Island employees were notorious for doing). Other sources revealed conflicting stories as to how the Rivkins arrived in America and from where in Europe they departed. I have determined that neither of my sources can be proven to have the most accurate information, thus I have only stated what I know to be true.

Island or reduced-price railroad tickets provided by the HIAS.<sup>37</sup> HIAS, founded in 1881, was created in response to the mass immigration of eastern European Jewish immigrants fleeing violence and opened a bureau at Ellis Island by 1904. HIAS agents were assuredly a sight the Rivkins saw as they stepped off the ship after their nearly three-week voyage. Due to the high volume of Jewish immigrants arriving on the shores of America around the turn of the twentieth century, HIAS agents were encouraging families to move past the allure of large cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. Thus, the Rivkins went south.

#### ARRIVAL IN THE CAPITAL CITY

When Jacob, Tama, and their three children first came to the Columbia area, they were unsure as to where to grow their roots. At first, the family settled seven miles from downtown Columbia on Camden Road. They had a small, two-room home for the entire family. On their property, they kept a cow and many chickens; however, in order to abide by religious dietary restrictions, the family had to go into the city to either purchase kosher meat or have their chickens slaughtered and blessed by the Rabbi. While the family lived on Camden Road, Jacob worked as a peddler and sold items to those in rural South Carolina that were not close enough to travel into Columbia for every need. Prior to the large Jewish migration of the late-nineteenth century, the success of Jewish men as peddlers in the New World laid the economic foundation for many who migrated. Peddling helped young men integrate socially and culturally to the new country and often

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<sup>37</sup> Robert M. Zalkin and Harriett Rivkin Zalkin, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, interview by Matthew Reid Zweig, October 27, 1998, College of Charleston. “History,” Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, <https://www.hias.org/history>.

led men, and their families, to settle down and open shops or other businesses once they had the means.<sup>38</sup> With Jacob peddling in the countryside during the week, and the rest of the family living too far from Columbia to make trips often, the Rivkins decided this was not a sustainable life, nor the one they envisioned when coming to America. Jacob deduced that what he was saving in rent by living outside the city, he was losing in time traveled and spoiled groceries.<sup>39</sup>

The Rivkin family moved to downtown Columbia by 1907. Jacob and his family did not stay in their first home long, as they quickly realized it was too far of a walk to the synagogue. The Rivkins finally settled down at 1012 Lady Street, only one block from House of Peace Synagogue. Their home was a simple, one-story wood frame house, near Columbia's state capitol building and a bustling downtown. In the yard behind their home, the Rivkins kept six cows. Tama stayed at home with the children while Jacob continued his job as a peddler to rural areas. He would leave the city and be away from home Monday through Friday, then return for the Sabbath on Friday evening and stay with his family for the weekend. This type of work soon became exhausting, and after the birth of the Rivkins' fourth child, Lewis, Jacob chose to stay in the city and open his own business instead, following the trail blazed by many peddlers before him.

By 1912, he had opened a grocery store at his Lady Street property (Figure 2.5), moving the family to an apartment above the store. The Rivkins lived on less land and space in Columbia than they had on Camden Road, but Jacob was able to quickly open a store that was much needed by Jews in his area. It is likely that Jacob continued to sell

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<sup>38</sup> Diner, *Roads Taken*.

<sup>39</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

the items he had been peddling in the more rural areas of South Carolina's Midlands region, but he also recognized Columbia's need for a kosher market. As a traditional Jew, the lack of kosher market and food products was undeniably a struggle for Jacob and his family. Location within the city was particularly important as Jacob returned to Columbia with the intention of being closer to his family, but also to House of Peace Synagogue where they worshipped. Harriett Rivkin described the Gates–Hampton Street area as the “Jewish section in Columbia,” only a block or two from where the Rivkins lived. Though much of Columbia's Jewish community was centralized in this area, Rivkin's Grocery was open to others in the surrounding community, which included a diverse mixture of Jews, immigrants of other faiths and ethnicities, and African Americans who were more likely to visit Rivkin's later in its history as it began to sell *treyf* food as well, like pork products and shellfish.<sup>40</sup> Jacob's ability to open Rivkin's Grocery and grow it into a community staple with multiple locations speaks directly to the need of market selling kosher goods to Columbia's Jews.

As illustrated previously by the tensions between progressive and traditional Jews in Columbia, when the masses of Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States, they were not received warmly by the central European Jews who had spent the previous sixty years building economic stability and working toward acceptance by Gentiles. Jacob Rivkin was very much a part of the debates (turned arguments) occurring in Columbia. Relations within the Jewish community were extremely strained in the late-nineteenth century when there was only one synagogue in the city, and Caba Rivkin recalled that trying to get the two groups to agree was like “trying to get oil and water to mix in one

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<sup>40</sup> *Columbia City Directory*, vol. 1910; *Columbia City Directory*, vol. 1917.

container.”<sup>41</sup> As a charter member of House of Peace Synagogue, Jacob Rivkin clearly aligned his family’s religious beliefs with the Orthodox traditions and customs of the Old Country. Jacob would continue to be a devout member of House of Peace and volunteered his time as part of his involvement with the synagogue—he served on the Building Committee in 1935 overseeing the construction of the new Marion Street synagogue. Unsurprisingly when considering his religious affiliation, Jacob Rivkin established a strict observance of Traditional principles for his family—meals in his home and food sold in his store both followed the rules of *kashrut*.<sup>42</sup> While traditional Jews still placed a strong emphasis on following religious law, including the dietary restrictions of *kashrut*, Reform Jews instead focused more on Jewish sense of community and unification. While many Jews in Columbia likely ate kosher meals like the Rivkins, there is also a high probability that those embracing Reform changes strayed from following the dietary rules Judaism dictated.

#### THE ORIGINAL RIVKIN’S GROCERY: 1012 LADY STREET

The proximity of Rivkin’s Grocery to other Jewish immigrants might have been key to its success. As the community was growing in number, so too was the business—Jacob’s store catered to the “kosher trade” and served Jews from all over the state, especially those living in the Midlands region where Jacob had previously peddled goods.<sup>43</sup> Just as the Rivkins had done when living on Camden Road, Jewish families outside the city traveled downtown in search of kosher goods they could take home. It did

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<sup>41</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

<sup>42</sup> Zalkin and Zalkin, Oral History Interview.

<sup>43</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

not take long until Rivkin's Grocery became a prospering unit in the Jewish “sub-economy” of Columbia. Jewish businesses cropped up in Jewish neighborhoods and were mostly frequented by other members of the Jewish community, thus bolstering their specific sub-level of the city’s economy. The success of Jacob Rivkin’s business could have partly been due to the need for the kosher products he made available. It could have also partly been due to the Rivkin family’s central position within the Jewish community. Jacob’s involvement with House of Peace and its founding would have made the Rivkin family one of the more well-known families in the Jewish neighborhood. Additionally, the geographical choices Jacob Rivkin made again helped his business—as traditional Jews walked from their homes to synagogue on the Sabbath, many would pass Rivkin’s Grocery where it stood one block from House of Peace. The visibility of the store to its base clientele would have likely made it a staple in their everyday lives.

The success of the business, however, was not solely based on location. The story of Rivkin’s Grocery is also characterized by generational differences between Jacob and his children. Jewish immigrants were challenged with combining traditions from their home country, religious and cultural practices from their Jewish background, and new American customs into their daily lives. This integration with—or acculturation into—American culture occurred mostly with the second generation, the children of eastern European immigrants who hoped to construct a strong sense of Jewish American heritage. They lived what Peter S. Lemish termed a “hyphenated existence.” Conversely, the first generation of immigrants lived like other Irish, Italian, or Greek immigrants—as marginalized minorities, often considered racial or ethnic “others,” but also as a double-

marginalized minority: neither American nor Christian.<sup>44</sup>

Retaining traditions from the Old Country and preserving their Jewish heritage was a priority for first-generation Jewish immigrants like Jacob and Tama Rivkin. Coming from *shtetlach* (Jewish villages) that were almost entirely Jewish, many immigrants upheld their Traditional religious background and only spoke Yiddish. The largest concern for the new arrivals was “simply to survive” by achieving economic stability, but also cultural survival in American society.<sup>45</sup> As Jewish immigrants established their own communities and constructed their own houses of worship, the necessity for Jewish businesses selling kosher food emerged as well. Jewish immigrants were accustomed to exclusively buying from, selling to, and living with other Jews; thus, when they settled in Southern cities, like Columbia, members of the growing Jewish community began to open businesses of their own—clothing stores, dry goods stores, groceries, and restaurants.<sup>46</sup> Where a person lived, shopped, and ate became foundational to the construction of their identity as a Russian (or German, or Polish) Jewish immigrant in America. It was at this point that first-generation immigrants and their children began

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<sup>44</sup> Sarna, *American Judaism*; Peter S. Lemish, “Hanukah Bush: The Jewish Experience in America,” *Theory Into Practice* 20, no. 1 (1981): 26–34; Milton M. Gordon, “Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality,” *Daedalus* 90, no. 2 (1961): 263–85. The use of “acculturation” in this paper comes from Milton M. Gordon’s article entitled, “Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality” (see citation above). He refers to behavioral assimilation, which he terms acculturation, and structural assimilation. In the United States, acculturation has taken place extensively, but structural assimilation has not—immigrants tend to accept and absorb parts of the host country’s culture but are not fully brought into other types of social structure. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, the term acculturation or integration will be used to indicate the absorption and adaptation of American and Jewish cultures, though many Jewish immigrants, especially from eastern Europe who settle in the South, are not fully assimilated into society. Their social location as an ethnic minority remains visible to those around them.

<sup>45</sup> Lemish, “Hanukah Bush,” 27.

<sup>46</sup> Diner, *A Time for Gathering*.

to question the best way to live this hyphenated existence.

Jews who settled in the South at the turn of the century faced a dilemma in choosing how strictly they would adhere to their religious convictions over new American customs. While first-generation immigrants, like Jacob Rivkin, typically observed the rules of *kashrut* and prepared meals that reflected their Ashkenazi and eastern European background, their children—the second generation, like Caba Rivkin—would begin to fuse these two food cultures together into what Henry L. Feingold terms a “culture of acculturation.”<sup>47</sup> Marcie Cohen Ferris argues that food culture is a way to affirm certain aspects of one’s identity, and that Jews in the South are affirming Jewish ethnic and religious identity, southern identity, or a mixture of the two.<sup>48</sup> One of the biggest challenges Jews faced in the South, Columbia included, was the limited availability of *kashrut* products and the prevalence of *treyf* foods in Southern cooking. Southern food is often characterized by its use of pork, shrimp, and oysters—all foods strictly forbidden under the rules of *kashrut*.

As the family settled into their new lives and as they investigated the possibilities available to them, Jacob’s ambitions began to stretch far beyond his one-room grocery. Tama and her two older sons, Raphael and Caba, took charge of tending to the store as Jacob focused his efforts on buying small pieces of real estate around the city. Eventually, he would own a number of properties around town that he leased out as an extra source of income in which “most of his tenants at times were colored, weekly pay

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<sup>47</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945*, *The Jewish People in America*, v. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

“Ashkenazi” refers to Jews of central or eastern European descent.

<sup>48</sup> Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*.

tenants.”<sup>49</sup> With Jacob Rivkin’s time and energy wrapped up in his real estate endeavors, his sons were learning the grocery trade and became extremely involved in the family business on a daily basis. By 1914, Caba Rivkin was delivering groceries by bicycle to Jews around Columbia (Figure 2.3), and its neighboring towns and communities and helping his mother run what the family would later consider the “main store,” meaning the Lady Street location of Rivkin's Grocery.<sup>50</sup>

#### RIVKIN’S GROCERY EXPANDS: 1000 GATES STREET, 2201 CALHOUN STREET

Caba Rivkin indicated, “We don’t sell, we buy,” as his father’s refrain, one that “must have made a wealthy man of my father.”<sup>51</sup> As he was in the Old Country, Jacob Rivkin was a man of many trades; he did not stay solely in the grocery business for long, and neither did he relegate his success to one store. Jacob purchased land around Columbia and began buying up buildings that could serve as branches of Rivkin's Grocery. In 1919, he opened a second location at 1000 Gates Street (Figure 2.6), at the north end of one of Columbia’s largest African American neighborhoods, known as Ward One, and less than one block from where Baker’s Grocery would exist by 1926.<sup>52</sup> Jacob’s eldest son, Raphael Rivkin, married Rachel Winter in 1920, and the couple took over the business on Gates Street not long afterward. The opening of a second location of Rivkin's Grocery is further evidence that Jacob Rivkin’s entrepreneurial spirit was paying off. With enough success at the first location to warrant a second, and with a growing number

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<sup>49</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

<sup>50</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> *Columbia City Directory*, vol. 1919.

of Rivkin-owned properties around the city, the Rivkins began to advertise.

One of Jacob Rivkin's first advertisements in Columbia's *State* newspaper in 1921 indicated prices for fresh country eggs, flour, and sugar, and boasted, "We make a specialty of chickens. Give us a try and be convinced." This advertisement (Figure 2.10), though small in size and found on a crowded middle page of that day's newspaper, is significant in the story of Rivkin's Grocery. Jacob's business provided him with enough money to purchase advertising space in the city's most-read newspaper and the tagline he chose for the advertisement subtly addressed other Jews around town, as well as any non-Jewish customers who might be interested in his products. Naming chickens as the specialty of Rivkin's would have been very important to Jews, especially those who kept kosher. While it is not explicitly clear that Jacob was selling kosher chicken at his store, Rabbi David Karesh did serve as the community's *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) at this time and would have known the Rivkins through House of Peace Synagogue. The advertisement lists "J. Rivkin" and the 1012 Lady Street address, which would have indicated to other Jews its proximity to the temple and likely implied that the proprietor was Jewish as well.

By 1926, Rivkin's Grocery was operating at three locations: 1012 Lady Street, 1000 Gates Street, and a new location at 2201 Calhoun Street.<sup>53</sup> The Rivkins had been in the United States for two decades and their success as business owners was affirmed by the expansion of Rivkin's Grocery throughout the city. Again, the necessity in Columbia for a grocery store selling kosher goods contributed to the achievement of the original

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<sup>53</sup> "Rivkin's Grocery Advertisement," *State*, September 2, 1921; "Rivkin's Grocery Advertisement," *State*, July 31, 1926.

Rivkin's Grocery location on Lady Street, but the fact that Jacob had three grown sons by the time he built new branches of his store was indeed helpful in expanding outside the Jewish neighborhood. Caba Rivkin, in his early twenties by this time, took on more responsibility in running the multiple locations of his father's store; he would spend his time at Lady Street during the week, go out to Calhoun Street on Friday evenings when other Jews were observing the Sabbath, and return to the main store by Sunday afternoons.<sup>54</sup> In his unpublished memoir, Caba noted that because the Lady Street location "catered more to the Jewish trade [and Jews] were through buying Friday," he was able to work on Calhoun Street, where his clientele was not primarily Jewish. Because Caba Rivkin worked seven days a week, he was not typically with the other Jews at House of Peace on Friday nights and Saturday mornings. Caba thus exemplifies the acculturating behaviors of many second-generation immigrants as they focused more on their individual lives as Americans—keeping his business open—than on their religious convictions. Though the sources do not express Jacob's explicit feelings about his son working instead of observing the Sabbath, he was perhaps open to the adaptations his children made to their own religious practice and the acculturating pressures that surrounded them as young adults who grew up in the United States. It is also likely that Jacob acknowledged that Rivkin's Grocery on Calhoun Street could make money by selling on Fridays and Saturdays to the non-Jewish community members in the area. By working at the Calhoun Street store during the Sabbath, Caba Rivkin illustrated that he valued economic prosperity of the family business over his own religious observance, and by violating the Sabbath, he would not have been seen as strictly Orthodox.

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<sup>54</sup> Rivkin, *My Life Story*.

## COLUMBIA'S JEWISH DELICATESSEN: 1014 LADY STREET & 619 HARDEN STREET

In 1929, just three years after the opening of the 2201 Calhoun Street store, Caba Rivkin converted the 1012 Lady Street location into a joint grocery-delicatessen that expanded into the adjoining property at 1014 Lady Street (Figures 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9). By this point, the newspaper advertisements began to focus more on related items, such as meats, fish, and imported cheeses rather than general grocery items like eggs and flour. Belle Jewler Lavisky, a neighbor of the Rivkins, specifically remembered the barrel of kosher dill pickles that sat right by the deli's front door.<sup>55</sup> A 1930 advertisement listed imported foods that were favored by central and eastern European Jewish immigrants and have become associated with Jewish food culture since, including smoked salmon, smoked whitefish, pickled herring, and salted corn beef. An advertisement from 1932 (Figure 2.11) went one step further, and explicitly advertised "Kosher Imported Delicatessens."<sup>56</sup> The progression seen in these early advertisements for Rivkin's Delicatessen indicates an intended customer base—the Jewish community, specifically immigrants with an eastern European background or other ethnically marginalized groups. Caba's daughter Harriett recalled that her father's customers traveled from small towns surrounding Columbia—Swansea, St. Matthews, and Newberry—as it was the only kosher market nearby. These towns often did not have the resources to build synagogues or open Jewish businesses in the towns themselves and had to venture to

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<sup>55</sup> Emma Bogen Lavisky Bukatman and Belle Lavisky Jewler, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, interview by Dale Rosengarten, March 4, 1997, College of Charleston, <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:62116>.

<sup>56</sup> "Rivkin's Delicatessen Advertisement," *State*, January 17, 1932.

larger cities like Columbia to get the specific products they needed. Thus, businesses in places like Columbia or Charleston often served a much wider consumer base, as they had many out-of-town customers who needed kosher food, especially for holidays. Caba purchased kosher Passover foods from the Manischewitz factory and sent out for kosher deli meat from Chicago and New York.<sup>57</sup> By importing kosher food, Rivkin's provided a very specific service to the Jewish community and hoped to draw in Jewish clientele with promises of food products that met their dietary and holiday requirements.

To Jacob Rivkin and other first-generation immigrants, maintaining a *kashrut* lifestyle was a crucial way to retain their traditional Jewish culture, which is much of the reason he began Rivkin's Grocery as a kosher market. Roger Horowitz contends that kosher food "brought Jews together, not only to share a meal but to sustain connections within a group that was a small minority of the world's population and dispersed, for the most part, among many nations for thousands of years."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the way Columbia's Jews identified with traditional foods helps to understand their connections to their Jewish roots and remaining ties to their home country's culture. The Lady Street location of Rivkin's Grocery and Delicatessen operated as a place where Jews could find comfort in traditional food or at least feel relieved when seeing kosher food for purchase.

The declaration of certain foods as "kosher" allowed Jews to use popular brands in their cooking without the guilt of straying toward *treyf* influences. The introduction of Crisco in 1912 allowed Jews in the South to fry their food without the use of lard or pig

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<sup>57</sup> Zalkin and Zalkin, Oral History Interview.

<sup>58</sup> Roger Horowitz, *Kosher USA: How Coke Became Kosher and Other Tales of Modern Food, Arts and Traditions of the Table: Perspectives in Culinary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 17.

fat; Procter and Gamble advertised their new product by announcing, “The Hebrew Race has been waiting 4,000 years for Crisco!” Crisco was not the only popular product to be deemed kosher. In the 1930s, Rabbi Tobias Geffen worked tirelessly with the Coca-Cola Corporation to adapt their recipe and officially declare Coke as kosher for Passover with certification by the Orthodox Union (OU) that began certifying kosher goods in 1924.<sup>59</sup> With kosher labels on popular American brands, Jews continued to integrate their traditional culture with American consumerism, and groceries or delicatessens like Rivkin’s could sell brand names to their customers. Ferris notes that Jewish Southern food is, “an expression of Judaism in which region deeply shapes both religious practice and ethnic identity.”<sup>60</sup> The way in which Columbia’s Jews practiced their Judaism and embraced their Jewish culture was influenced not just by their background, but also by the region where they chose to build their lives.

When Caba opened a second deli location in Columbia’s historic Five Points neighborhood in 1939, newspaper advertisements from *The State* and *The Columbia Record* changed from advertising *kashrut* to advertising *treyf* food instead (Figures 2.12 and 2.13, respectively). Prior to the opening of Rivkin’s Delicatessen in Five Points, not a single advertisement listed *treyf* food or indicated that the grocery locations sold *treyf* food. In a full-page advertisement for the grand opening of the new store, however, potential customers learned that in addition to whitefish and smoked herring, they could now purchase shrimp salad, barbecue ham, and pork chops (Figure 2.14).<sup>61</sup> By opening his second deli in Five Points, Caba was making a very intentional choice about the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 21, 165.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>61</sup> “Rivkin’s Delicatessen Advertisement,” *State*, February 16, 1939.

future of Rivkin's within the Jewish community. Within the city's geography, Five Points borders the University of South Carolina campus—then considered mid-town—to the east, Columbia's historic Waverly—a racially-mixed neighborhood when Rivkin's Delicatessen opened—to the north, and Old Shandon—a primarily white, middle-class, Protestant neighborhood—to the west. Understanding this area is crucial when considering the intended consumer base to which Rivkin's Delicatessen in Five Points was catering. Much like when Caba Rivkin forwent the Sabbath to work at the Calhoun Street grocery, he also compromised food rituals and laws by selling *treyf* food which would entice a wider variety of customers, especially those who lived in close proximity to Five Points. The Jewish community, now more dispersed throughout the city since the 1935 move of House of Peace Synagogue to Marion Street, would most likely not have visited Rivkin's Delicatessen in Five Points, which was farther away and did not sell food that Traditional and Conservative Jews would have neither eaten nor been around.

The same year Rivkin's Five Points deli location opened, Caba and his wife, Katie Roth, moved to 1507 King Street, in a section of town away from the Jewish neighborhood, and much closer to the new store. In 1920, the family moved from their original 1012 Lady Street home and by 1923 moved into an apartment building at 1012 Hampton Street that Jacob had purchased to lease out. This move, however, kept them within two blocks of the main store and one block of the synagogue. Lewis Rivkin and his wife, Jennie Winter, were the first of the family to move a significant distance from their original home and business when they moved to 1113 Fairview Drive in 1938; Caba's move one year later put him less than five blocks from his brother and sister-in-law in a neighborhood across town known as Melrose Heights. Jacob Rivkin's adult

children began to feel comfortable with moving out of the city's Jewish neighborhood by the late-1930s. Having moved both his home and his business away from the Gates-Lady-Hampton Street area, Caba Rivkin and his siblings exemplified the ideals of second-generation immigrants whose acculturation into American society led them to compromise parts of their traditional identity and embrace aspects of their host country's culture. Rivkin's Delicatessen, remembered by Caba's daughter Harriett as "one of the first Jewish delis in the South," made the journey from an eastern European Jewish establishment in the heart of the Jewish community to one that fused Southern and Jewish food cultures and served more members of the greater Columbia area.<sup>62</sup>

Jewish delicatessens became locations where Jews could assert their cultural heritage through food. Judaic Studies scholar Ted Merwin writes, "the deli had served both as a place for the reinforcement of American Jewish identity and as a comfortable space for non-Jews to sample Jewish culture."<sup>63</sup> Rivkin's Deli in Columbia supports this argument—by the time Caba Rivkin's store moved to Five Points, it was both a familiar name within the Jewish community and a place for Columbia's non-Jewish population to experience Jewish culture while still consuming *treyf*, Southern food at their leisure. Delis like Rivkin's became symbols of acculturation and the transition that second-generation immigrants experienced. They were gathering spots for second-generation Jews, public spaces where they could safely express their Jewish identities around non-Jews.<sup>64</sup> Rivkin's Deli was no exception. Belle Jewler Lavisky recalled, "a lot of what

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<sup>62</sup> Zalkin and Zalkin, Oral History Interview.

<sup>63</sup> Ted Merwin, *Pastrami on Rye: An Overstuffed History of the Jewish Deli* (NYU Press, 2015), xiii.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

went on in old Columbia happened in Caba Rivkin's grocery, delicatessen." The Southern Jewish deli, like its more famous New York equivalent, served as a space in which Jews could eat Jewish food, speak Yiddish if they wanted to, and spend time with their fellow Jews, while in the presence of the non-Jews.<sup>65</sup> Non-Jews frequented the Five Points location of Rivkin's Delicatessen, especially after Fort Jackson reopened for military training at the onset of World War II. Rivkin's Delicatessen was always open to soldiers from Fort Jackson, and Caba and Katie often opened their home to young Jewish men for dinner or if they needed a place to stay.<sup>66</sup> Though only serving kosher-style food, Rivkin's was still considered a Jewish deli, as it was a proud Jewish family who ran it. At Rivkin's, a Jewish customer could order smoked whitefish on rye with a dill pickle, while his non-Jewish neighbor ordered a barbecue ham sandwich and a cold Budweiser on the side, or a bagel with cream cheese in lox—both were available.

#### THE LEGACY OF THE RIVKIN FAMILY BUSINESS

The experience of Jacob Rivkin as a first-generation immigrant, and of his children, who entered adulthood in the United States, offers an example that many Southern Jews would recognize. When Jacob ran his family business, there was more emphasis on serving the Jewish community and adhering to traditional foods that followed the rules of *kashrut*. He got his start as a member of Columbia's Jewish sub-economy. While Caba and his wife, Katie, were still devoted members of Beth Shalom, it was his position as a second-generation immigrant that allowed him to balance the

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<sup>65</sup> Belle Lavisky Jewler, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, December 21, 2015, College of Charleston.

<sup>66</sup> Zalkin and Zalkin, Oral History Interview.

cultures of the old with the new.<sup>67</sup> Caba ran Rivkin's Delicatessen with his sights set on expanding the business by opening multiple locations and serving the broader Columbia community, rather than staying within the primarily Jewish neighborhood where he grew up. By 1948, both locations of Rivkin's Delicatessen had been sold. Caba, wanting to retire from food service, sold the Lady Street location to Harold Miller, a Jewish transplant from Philadelphia, who opened Miller's Delicatessen in 1941; seven years later, Caba Rivkin sold the Five Points location to Miller as well. In an interview with the *State*, Caba Rivkin reflected back on his career and gave advice to anyone thinking of retiring—"Don't."<sup>68</sup> Though he thought he was ready to retire, Caba often regretted selling his delis to Miller; he also resented the five year non-compete contract he and Miller signed.

Harold "Groucho" Miller grew these delicatessen locations into a southern deli franchise that continues into the present. Today, there are over 30 locations of Groucho's Deli spanning South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia, with five locations in the greater Columbia area alone. The legacy of the Southern Jewish deli lives on, even if Rivkin's does not. While a customer at Groucho's can purchase sandwiches rife with ham and bacon, the history and heritage behind the deli is still very much Jewish. Groucho was known in the area for his homemade corned beef, often a deli staple, but also made potato salad and coleslaw recipes he brought from up north. Like Rivkin's Delicatessen

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<sup>67</sup> Caba and Katie Rivkin thought a Jewish education was very important for their daughter Harriett, but there was no formal instruction at the Orthodox temple, so Harriett was sent to the Reform Sunday School at Tree of Life. In an oral history interview conducted by Historic Columbia's Jewish Heritage Initiative, Harriett noted, "People will tell you that Katie Rivkin and Caba Rivkin were wonderful members of the Jewish community there." See: Zalkin and Zalkin, Oral History Interview.

<sup>68</sup> Rob Wenzell, "Retired Shopkeeper Misses Routine," *State*, October 8, 1990.

in Five Points, the proprietors of Groucho's identify strongly with Columbia's Jewish community. Bruce Miller, Groucho's grandson and the owner of Columbia's Five Points branch, currently serves as president for the Tree of Life Congregation, thus further showing the family's long-held devotion to their Jewish culture. From the time Jacob Rivkin opened his first grocery in 1912, to Caba's first delicatessen in 1930, to the Groucho's Deli that stands on Harden Street today, the nature of Southern Jewish food has changed immensely. The Rivkins were a Jewish family whose businesses served their immediate community of fellow immigrants and religious kin, but as Jacob's children grew and formed how they wanted to be Jewish Americans, the influences of religious law faded away and were replaced instead by a drive to expand the family business and continue to serve good food to the people of Columbia.

Groucho's Deli in Five Points is the only extant building that previously housed a Rivkin family-owned store—the four groceries and Lady Street delicatessen have since disappeared from the landscape of Columbia. 1012 and 1014 Lady Street are now a large parking lot, 1000 Gates Street is now an empty lot being used for construction, and 2201 Calhoun is at an intersection surrounded by banks and Columbia city government buildings. Destroyed during Columbia's Urban Renewal campaign, Jacob Rivkin's stores were a few among many buildings leveled to revitalize the city. Following national trends to revitalize “blighted” areas of town, typically minority neighborhoods, Columbia's Urban Renewal resulted in the demolition of many historic resources including the locations of the Rivkins' businesses.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Urban Renewal,” accessed March 18, 2018, <https://www.historiccolumbia.org/properties-and-gardens/urban-renewal>



Figure 2.1 Jacob and Tama Rivkin with their three young children (circa 1906), *image courtesy of Beth Shalom Synagogue.*



Figure 2.2 Members of the Rivkin family at the wedding of Raphael Rivkin and Rachel Winter (1920). Front row, left to right: son Lewis Rivkin, father Jacob, grandfather Avram, bride Rachel Winter. Back row, left to right: mother Tamara Rivkin, daughter Sarah, son Caba Earle Rivkin, flanked by twins Bessie and Celia, groom, Raphael Rivkin, *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



Figure 2.3 Caba Rivkin as a young boy, ten or eleven years old, standing in front of the original House of Peace synagogue with his bicycle (circa 1914-1915). He began delivering groceries via bicycle in 1914, *image courtesy of Historic Columbia*.



Figure 2.4 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map (1919) showing the intersection of Gates and Lady Streets. Rivkin's Grocery at 1012 Lady Street can be seen in the bottom left quadrant, *image courtesy of University of South Carolina Digital Archives*.



Figure 2.5 1012 Lady Street, location of Rivkin's Grocery and Delicatessen (1957), *image courtesy of University of South Carolina Digital Archives*



Figure 2.6 Gates Street, second location of Rivkin's Grocery operated by Jacob Rivkin's son, Raphael (1958), *image courtesy of University of South Carolina Digital Archives.*

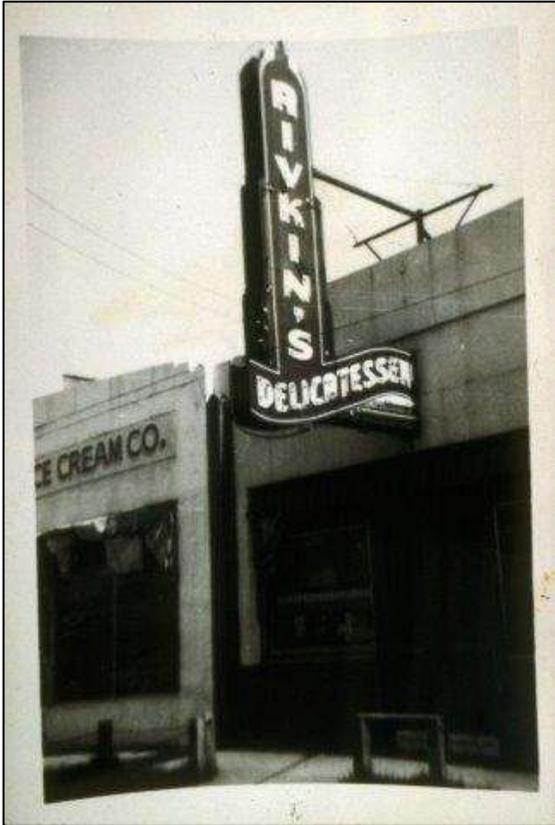


Figure 2.7 Exterior of Rivkin's Grocery and Delicatessen at 1014 Lady Street (date unknown), *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



Figure 2.8 Interior of Rivkin's Grocery and Delicatessen (date unknown), *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*



Figure 2.9 Caba Rivkin in front of Rivkin's Delicatessen (1936) at its original location, 1014 Lady Street, *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

**LOOK—READ—BUY!**

Fresh Country Eggs, dozen	\$ .12
"Our Home" Flour, 24 lbs	1 10
Sugar, 25 lbs	1 75

Goods delivered to any part of the city. We make a specialty of chickens. Give us a try and be convinced.

J. RIVKIN

1012 Lady St.
Phone 3061

Figure 2.10 First advertisement for Rivkin's Grocery at its original location, 1012 Lady Street (September 2, 1921), *image courtesy of The State newspaper.*

*You know Howard never used to come home for lunch.*



*But now - since I look to keeping a few cold cuts in the house - he always wanders in about noon!*



If you are looking for better quality in the cold cuts you buy, wander in to this Kosher grocery and delicatessen the next time you are down this way.



**CHEESE**

Limburger, Roquefort, Edam, Pineapple, Camembert, Old English, Cream Cheese, Pineapple Cream, Roquefort Cream, Imported Swiss, Velveeta, Swiss Gruyere.

**MEATS**

Spice Beef, Salama, Wieners, Knock Wurst, Bologna, Corn Beef, Roll Beef, Press Beef.

**FISH**

Anchovies, Anti Pasto, Pickled Fish, Herrings, White Fish, Smoked Salmon, Keg Herring, 14 Different Sardines.

**RIVKIN'S**

KOSHER IMPORTED DELICATESSENS

Phone 4361  
1014 Lady St.

WE DELIVER

Figure 2.11 Advertisement for Rivkin's Delicatessen, including a list of "Kosher Imported Delicatessens" (January 17, 1932), *image courtesy of The State newspaper.*

**RIVKIN OPENS NEW STORE TOMORROW**

**We Congratulate RIVKIN'S**

MOFFATT & DUPRE CO.

**The MARSHAK Co., Inc.**

**RIVKIN'S**

**Our Best Wishes to RIVKIN'S**

Columbia Cereals Bottling Company

**White Rose Products**

**SEEMAN BROS.**

COLUMBIA NOW HAS A MODERN DELICATESSEN AND SERVICE STORE

**"RIVKIN'S"**

1014 Lady Street

**Announcing Our Opening**

Smoked Fish	Meats	Chases
Smoked Butter Fish	Corn Beef	Sausages
Smoked White Fish	Smoked Beef	Sides
Smoked City Fish	Salades	Cakes
Smoked Eggplant Salads	Salads	Pastries
Smoked Salmon	Pastry	Delicacies
POTATO SALAD	Ice Cream	COLD SLAW
Salads	Low Meat	Knock Wurst
Smoked Fish	Smoked Beef	Smoked City Fish

Complete Assortment Pickles - Olives - Kraut - Foreign and Domestic Sardines

Soft Drinks and Sandwiches Delivered or Served in Our Modern Store

**Oboy Baked Bread**

**"RIVKIN'S"**

**C. D. KENNY CO.**

**BOSCH COFFEE**

**Big Boy Bottling Co.**

**Best Wishes to RIVKIN'S**

**A. Goodman & Sons, Inc.**

**CONGRATULATIONS to RIVKIN'S**

**Claussen's BREAD-CAKES**

**"RIVKIN'S"**

**H. J. HEEFF CO.**

**CONGRATULATIONS to RIVKIN'S**

**I. Ockerswitz & Sons**

**We Congratulate RIVKIN'S**

**I. Rokaich & Sons**

Figure 2.12 Full-page advertisement for the opening of Rivkin's Delicatessen at its original location, 1014 Lady Street (November 23, 1930), *image courtesy of The Columbia Record newspaper.*

**Rivkin's DELICATESSEN**  
Formally Opens Thursday at  
**619 HARDEN ST. (5 Points) PHONE 2-1963**

<p>CONGRATULATIONS to the new <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> SUMMER BEVERAGE CO. 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p> <p>CONGRATULATIONS to the new <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> CAROLINA PAPER CO. 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p> <p>CONGRATULATIONS — and — <b>Best Wishes</b> — to the new — <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> COLUMBIA DAIRIES 617 Main St. Phone 2-1911</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Buffet Refreshments</i></p> <p>You and your friends are cordially invited to visit our new Delicatessen tomorrow (Thursday) evening between the hours of 6 and 9, at which time we are holding Open House. This is to be our grand old time.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>GIFTS FOR THE LADIES</b></p> <p><i>Cheese</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples</td> <td style="border: none;">Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup</td> <td style="border: none;">Cranberry Figs Apples</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Salads</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Potato String Vegetables</td> <td style="border: none;">Chicken Salad Macaroni</td> <td style="border: none;">Fruit Tarts</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Meats</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers</td> <td style="border: none;">Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles</td> <td style="border: none;">Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Fish</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams</td> <td style="border: none;">Steaks Fried Steaks</td> <td style="border: none;">Pork Chops Fried Steaks</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BEER SANDWICHES</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> 619 Harden St. PROMPT DELIVERY Phone 2-1963</p>	Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples	Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup	Cranberry Figs Apples	Potato String Vegetables	Chicken Salad Macaroni	Fruit Tarts	Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers	Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles	Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes	Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams	Steaks Fried Steaks	Pork Chops Fried Steaks	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Schlitz</i> OF BRASSERY</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Compliments of <b>ED. CLARY</b> and the employees of <b>KRAFT-PHENIX CHEESE CORP.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WELCOME TO FIVE POINTS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> "We Wish You Every Success"</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ECONOMY DRUG STORE</b> CUT-RATE DRUGS Phone 2-1124 Five Points Building</p>
Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples	Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup	Cranberry Figs Apples												
Potato String Vegetables	Chicken Salad Macaroni	Fruit Tarts												
Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers	Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles	Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes												
Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams	Steaks Fried Steaks	Pork Chops Fried Steaks												

Figure 2.13 Half-page advertisement for the grand opening of Rivkin's Delicatessen's second location, 619 Harden Street (February 15, 1939), *image courtesy of The Columbia Record newspaper*

**RIVKIN'S DELICATESSEN RIVKIN'S**  
FORMALLY OPENS TODAY AT FIVE POINTS  
**619 HARDEN ST. PHONE 2-1963**

<p>CONGRATULATIONS to the new <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> SUMMER BEVERAGE CO. 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p> <p>CONGRATULATIONS to the new <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> CAROLINA PAPER CO. 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p> <p>Best Wishes and Congratulations to <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b></p> <p>The business was placed at Five Points, St. Charles has long ago learned the many advantages of business in this strategic location.</p> <p><b>T. LOUIS MURRAY</b> 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Buffet Refreshments</i></p> <p>You and your friends are cordially invited to visit our new Delicatessen today between the hours of 6 and 9 P. M., at which time we are holding Open House. This is to be our grand old time.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>GIFTS FOR THE LADIES</b></p> <p><i>Cheese</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples</td> <td style="border: none;">Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup</td> <td style="border: none;">Cranberry Figs Apples</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Salads &amp; Sandwiches</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Potato String Vegetables</td> <td style="border: none;">Chicken Salad Macaroni</td> <td style="border: none;">Fruit Tarts</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Meats</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers</td> <td style="border: none;">Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles</td> <td style="border: none;">Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes</td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Fish</i></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams</td> <td style="border: none;">Steaks Fried Steaks</td> <td style="border: none;">Pork Chops Fried Steaks</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BEER SANDWICHES</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RIVKIN'S DELICATESSEN</b> 619 Harden St. PROMPT DELIVERY Phone 2-1963</p>	Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples	Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup	Cranberry Figs Apples	Potato String Vegetables	Chicken Salad Macaroni	Fruit Tarts	Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers	Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles	Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes	Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams	Steaks Fried Steaks	Pork Chops Fried Steaks	<p style="text-align: center;">Compliments of <b>ED. CLARY</b> and the employees of <b>KRAFT-PHENIX CHEESE CORP.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WELCOME TO FIVE POINTS</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b> "We Wish You Every Success"</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ECONOMY DRUG STORE</b> CUT-RATE DRUGS Phone 2-1124 Five Points Building</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BEST WISHES</b> to <b>Rivkin's DELICATESSEN</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">From <b>DAVE STODER</b> Agent for Hulbert Manufacturing Co. 619 Harden St. Phone 2-1963</p> <p style="text-align: center;">All Five Points Stores including Stokes, Shivers, Chappin and Culbert 2-1124</p>
Swiss Port Salad Pineapple Peaches Pineapples	Lettuce K. S. Salad Lettuce Ketchup	Cranberry Figs Apples												
Potato String Vegetables	Chicken Salad Macaroni	Fruit Tarts												
Cold Cuts Sausages Hamburgers	Salads Lettuce Ketchup Pickles	Coke Soft Drinks Fruit Cakes												
Shrimp Cakes Fried Clams	Steaks Fried Steaks	Pork Chops Fried Steaks												

Business and Recreational Center  
SHOP AND RELAX AT FIVE POINTS  
**BOWL AND FUN EVERY DAY**  
FIVE-POINTS BOWLING CENTER

Figure 2.14 Full-page advertisement for the grand opening of Rivkin's Delicatessen's second location, 619 Harden Street, *image courtesy of The State newspaper.*

## CHAPTER II:

### A STRONG-WILLED IMMIGRANT WOMAN AND HER STORE

Like Jacob Rivkin, Clara Kligman Baker arrived in the United States as a young person and learned to balance her life as a first-generation Jewish immigrant living in America. Clara wanted to acculturate into American society and began to merge her Jewish culture with new American traditions. She made a concerted effort to learn English, rather than solely speaking Yiddish with members of her family or other Jewish immigrants; she forged relationships with other members of her neighborhood, namely African Americans, as opposed to other Jews; and she ran a grocery business whose purpose was not to sell kosher products, but instead provide locally available products to the community around her. While the Rivkins' story was originally one of Jewish people selling Jewish food, the Baker story is a fundamentally different one as it is the story of Jewish people selling Southern food.

#### KLIGMAN & BAKER FAMILY HISTORIES

Hyman Baker—whose name changed from Chaim Becker at Ellis Island—and his oldest son, Louis, left Bialystok, Poland for America in 1894 near the beginning of the first wave of eastern European Jewish immigration. Boys as young as twelve and thirteen

years old would be taken from Jewish houses by Russian soldiers during pogrom raids.<sup>70</sup> Like many others, Hyman feared that his two sons would be dragged away from home to serve in the army, so he ventured to America bringing his wife and other children over not long afterward. Henry Becker, Chaim's cousin, retained memories of the terror and violence long into his adulthood.

My grandmother explained, "You are now old enough to know that a pogrom is in progress." She pointed to the oven and said: "I am going to hide you inside, as it is now cool. Do not answer anyone unless it is your father or mother or myself. We will call to you by your Jewish first name only." She made me crawl into the iron oven and closed the door on me. I never saw her alive again.<sup>71</sup>

It is not surprising, then, how many millions of Jews moved far from the persecution against and killing of Jews in the Russian Empire. Soon after landing in New York, Becker sent for his wife, Annie, and two younger children to join him in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, where he had chosen to settle after visiting relatives in Charleston; Frank Baker was approximately ten years old when he headed to the United States to meet his father and brother. In Poland, the family had been forced into one of the Jewish ghettos, and were only allowed into town for selected activities, like shopping or work.<sup>72</sup> Their new life was quite different. The Bakers were the only Jewish family living in Mount Pleasant at the end of the nineteenth century and had to take a ferry to Charleston to attend synagogue. Charleston may have had the largest Jewish community in the state, but those living on the outskirts or in more rural areas still needed to exert

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<sup>70</sup> Laurie Baker Walden, "A March Through Time: Baker and Kligman Family Roots," September 1999, pt. II, p. 26.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

extra effort to uphold their Jewish traditions. Though Hyman Baker thought it important to learn English, Annie preferred to speak Yiddish to her husband and children, and the two parents made sure their children learned Hebrew and lived in a traditional, Jewish household celebrating holidays and learning Hebrew stories and songs.<sup>73</sup> Frank Baker lived with his family in South Carolina for much of his childhood and had been in America nearly twenty years by the time his future wife, Clara, arrived.

In 1912, the same year Rivkin's Grocery opened, Clara Kligerman and her younger sister, Esther, boarded a ship to New York City. The sisters—ages twenty and thirteen—set sail for America, leaving behind their parents and nine other siblings in Nikolaev, Ukraine. When Clara and Esther passed through Ellis Island, their name changed from Kligerman to Kligman, and they began their lives as immigrants in the United States, a journey of cultural negotiation, family building, and entrepreneurship.

In Ukraine, Clara was one of eleven children born to Alta Belitzky and Lazer Jacob Kligerman; only three children—Clara, Louis, and Esther—made the dangerous and uncertain journey to the United States. Jacob ran a lumber yard, and the family was relatively well-off, unlike many of the immigrants who chose to leave the Russian Empire. Prior to arriving in the United States, Clara Kligman's Jewish identity coincided directly with her family's treatment in the Old Country. Esther Kligman Baker—Clara's sister who went on to marry Frank Baker's brother, Jake—recalled the lengths to which her family would go to protect themselves from the pogroms: "Our little house at the lumber yard always had a picture of Christ in the window [...] About twice a year, there were pogroms against the Jews. The Czar's men would look for the Jews and tear up their

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

homes. But we'd always put up the picture of Christ in the window and they wouldn't touch us."<sup>74</sup> The Kligerman family was thousands of other eastern European Jews who sought refuge from persecution, violence, and anti-Semitism by traveling to America, experience shared by many other Jewish families in the United States.

The two girls went to America by themselves to join their aunt, uncle, and cousins in New York City.<sup>75</sup> Clara and Esther embraced the opportunities afforded them in their new home—during the day, they worked at a shirt factory, and at night, they attended school to study English and history.<sup>76</sup> One night, Clara and Esther attended a charity event in the city. The man sitting next to Clara Kligman offered to help her with her coat and became interested in her. After Frank Baker met Clara Kligman in New York City, he convinced her to visit his family down South. Frank had moved from Mount Pleasant to Brooklyn to look for work after his first wife died in childbirth and had been living there when he met Clara. The two married in Mount Pleasant in 1917, temporarily moved to Estill, South Carolina, and then finally settled in Columbia by 1926. Esther, on a visit to see her sister Clara, fell in love with Frank's younger brother Jake; the two married in Columbia where they had access to a rabbi, thus bringing the Baker and Kligman families even closer together in the state capital. This decision to move with Frank to the South

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<sup>74</sup> Walden, "A March Through Time: Baker and Kligman Family Roots," 17.

<sup>75</sup> One of Clara's uncles, Nathan Wolin, was the first of the family to leave Russia for America. Like Hyman Baker, he was afraid that his three sons would be conscripted into the Czar's army and, after going bankrupt, Wolin and his family left the country. Not long afterward, he would write to the Kligermans, asking for Esther to join them in the United States so as to keep his wife company while he and his sons worked. Esther, only twelve years old at the time, could not make the trip alone. She remembered, "My parents thought I was too young to go by myself, so Clara, who was five years older, went along. Clara was mad at me because she didn't want to come. She didn't speak to me during the entire trip."

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

would become one of the most foundational choices in Clara Kligman's life, changing the way she, as an immigrant, a Jew, and a business owner, would represent herself and the legacy she would leave for her family.

#### BAKER'S GROCERY: 931 GATES STREET

With these memories of ethnic marginalization and growing anti-Semitism Clara and Frank Baker opened their store in Columbia in 1926. As Jews in the South, the Bakers, like the Rivkins and others in their community, had to decide to what extent they would embrace their Jewish culture and customs. Clara's engagement with her Jewish heritage did not always align with her role as a business owner and operator in Columbia. Rather than settle in the heart of the Jewish neighborhood as the Rivkins did, Clara and Frank Baker instead rented a property a few blocks further from the synagogue, on the block halfway between College and Pendleton Streets, in the northwest quadrant of Ward One. Bound by Gervais, Pickens, Heyward, and Huger Streets, Ward One consisted primarily—though not exclusively—of African American residences, churches, and businesses.<sup>77</sup>

It is unclear why the Bakers chose this location closer to one of the largest

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<sup>77</sup> M. Anderson-Roberson, "Ward One Community History: A Forgotten Community Speaks," Ward One Columbia, accessed March 20, 2017, <http://wardone.wixsite.com/wardone/history>. During the late nineteenth century, Ward One had a mixture of white and black residents, but by the twentieth century, and the time the Bakers were living there, most of the white residents along with wealthier black residents had moved outside the neighborhood's boundaries. During the first half of the twentieth century is when Ward One became known as a primarily African American working-class area in Columbia. See: A.N. Bouknight, "Casualty of Progress: The Ward One Community and Urban Renewal, 1964-1974" (Master's thesis, University of South Carolina, 2010), Retrieved from <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/1809>.

African American neighborhoods rather than to the other Jewish families in the city, but perhaps it was because of the availability of the property when they moved to the city. Baker's was not the first grocery store to sit at 931 Gates Street—its earliest listing as a grocery appeared in the 1911 City Directory under the ownership of a D.M. Shealy. By 1918, Joseph and Sarah Wessinger operated the Wessinger Grocery Company from that location, and from 1923 to 1925 L.M. Clarkson was the grocery's proprietor. Classified advertisements in the *State* and *Columbia Record* newspapers list "small stock of groceries and fixtures" being sold around 1924, indicating the movement in and out of the property.<sup>78</sup> It is likely that the Bakers were the first Jewish grocers to exist in the building, but not in the neighborhood. Less than one block away stood a branch of Rivkin's Grocery that had been open for seven years. Property values in Ward One were low in 1926. The Bakers rented the location on Gates Street—the building was valued at \$25 in the 1930 census, only a few years after they opened their business.<sup>79</sup>

Living in a two-room apartment at the back of the store, Clara and Frank Baker were one of very few non-black families on their block, where the typical housing stock was shotgun-style houses described by Clara's daughter as "uneven rows of clapboard shanties."<sup>80</sup> A 1927 Columbia city directory lists twenty-four total lots on the 900-block of Gates Street, of which only five (including Baker's) were not owned or rented by

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<sup>78</sup> "Classified Advertisement," *State*, July 27, 1924.

<sup>79</sup> "United States Federal Census," Ancestry Heritage Quest, 1930. In contrast, Jacob Rivkin was renting out apartments that same year at 1012 Hampton Street, a large building valued at \$6,000.

<sup>80</sup> Ellen Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker: Personal Remembrances of Her Life," December 21, 1974, 3.

African Americans.<sup>81</sup> The African American neighbors worked as general laborers, cooks, cleaners, and drivers. The Bakers were still within walking distance of House of Peace Synagogue at 1318 Gates Street. Jewish resources were still geographically close to them, but the Bakers had a home and business separate from the “local Jewish trade,” as Caba Rivkin called it. It is unclear whether Clara and Frank chose the Ward One neighborhood specifically or simply found 931 Gates Street available when they needed a place to live.

Though Baker’s Grocery is listed under Frank Baker’s ownership, a number of family members recall Clara actually running it on a daily basis, while Frank worked as an inventor, making \$5,000 by selling his patent for a machine that roasted and salted peanuts.<sup>82</sup> He developed ideas about frozen, chocolate-covered bananas—which were sold in the grocery store—designed a helicopter, and invented a “system of wires and plates that provided music and radio broadcasts within a four-block radius for residents who paid 25 cents per week”—especially important because many in the Ward One neighborhood were too poor to afford a radio of their own. He had also been working on a formula to rival Coca-Cola when he died in 1941 at the age of fifty-seven.<sup>83</sup> Tellingly, some of his inventions were food-related and inspired a few of the products that could be sold at the grocery, but ultimately, Frank spent most of his time pursuing other business ideas while Clara dedicated her time to the grocery and her surrounding community.

Frank Baker’s entrepreneurial spirit did not stop with inventions and tinkering;

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<sup>81</sup> *Columbia City Directory*, vol. 1927.

<sup>82</sup> Frank Baker and Hyman Baker, Process of Salting Peanuts in the Shell., US966514 A, filed September 25, 1909, and issued August 9, 1910, <http://www.google.com/patents/US966514>.

<sup>83</sup> “Columbia Jewish Heritage Digital Tour.”

from 1933 to 1937, Baker operated a shoe store at 1318 Assembly Street. Though short-lived, Baker's Shoe Shop was located on the 1300-block of Assembly Street, which since the late-nineteenth century had been full of Jewish-owned and African American-owned businesses. In the company of many of Columbia's established and well-known Jewish families, Baker's Shoe Shop shared the area with businesses such as Henry Steele's jewelry (Steele was the first president of Tree of Life), Joseph Levy's shoe store, Barnett and Abram Berry's cobbler shop, and Moe Levy's Army-Navy and Dry Goods store.<sup>84</sup> In an attempt to expand further into downtown Columbia, Frank Baker tried alternative business ideas, rather than opening another branch of his grocery as Jacob Rivkin did. A few years prior to the opening of Baker's Shoe Shop, Clara and Esther's brother Louis aimed to join them in South Carolina. Jake Baker served as Louis's sponsor and helped to bring him to Columbia in the late 1920s. By 1930, Louis and his wife, Ida (née Lomansky), opened Kligman's Army Store at 1316 Assembly Street, directly next to Baker's Shoe Shop. Baker's Shoe Shop had advertisements in *The State* encouraging community members, specifically men, to bring in old shoes that could either be repaired or purchased from them and likely sold second-hand.

Clara Baker devoted most of her time to the grocery store. John Bell, a long-time customer at Baker's and close family friend, described Clara Baker as "one of the hardest working women you've ever seen in your life," working 12- to 15-hour days at the grocery.<sup>85</sup> Toby Baker Lourie, Clara and Frank's daughter, also recalled how much time her mother devoted to the store. "Momma strongly believed her customers needed her.

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Walden, "Baker and Kligman Family Roots."

[...] During those early years when business was slow, she often kept the doors open until midnight on the weekends.”<sup>86</sup> Later, Clara continued to run Baker's Grocery every day of the week; the only time she closed the store during regular business hours was on Wednesday afternoons when she went to the Temple Sisterhood and Hadassah meetings. Clara put a lot of importance in this involvement with the Jewish community, always getting dressed up with matching shoes and a handbag she bought from Haltiwangers, a nearby department store.<sup>87</sup>

#### “MIZ CLARA” & WARD ONE

The relationships Clara Baker built with her clientele were what made her a well-known figure in the community. Clara Baker was a pale-skinned redhead with freckles who served an almost exclusively African American customer base, she was neither marginalized nor taken advantage of as an “outsider” in an African American community. Through years of reliable service, relationship building, and extension of credit to those in need, she was respected in the Ward One community.

Even though two other Jewish-owned grocery stores existed within a two-block radius of Baker's Grocery—Rivkin's at 1000 Gates Street and Louis Coplan's store at the corner of Greene and Gates—many Ward One community members preferred to shop with “Miz Clara Baker.”<sup>88</sup> Clara sold to her customers on credit if they did not have the money to purchase food and, over time, African American families like the Shealys and Bells worked so closely with Clara Baker that they saw her and her children as family.

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<sup>86</sup> Henderson, “Clara Kligerman Baker.”

<sup>87</sup> Walden, “Baker and Kligman Family Roots,” pt. I, p. 92.

<sup>88</sup> Henderson, “Clara Kligerman Baker.”

Thus, she not only built a strong reputation as a generous and understanding business owner, but also fostered close ties with many of her African American neighbors. Jewish-owned businesses often operated within a nebulous middle ground between white and black in the Jim Crow South.<sup>89</sup> Whereas white-owned businesses would likely refuse service to African Americans, Jewish proprietors like the Rivkins, Bakers, and Coplans were neither considered white nor black and worked instead at economic margins of white society.

Likely due to Clara's willingness to lend credit to those in need, Baker's Grocery experienced relatively little theft, and Clara was never bothered in her store; as Toby Lourie remembered, "The neighborhood would not have tolerated such. She had earned that measure of their respect."<sup>90</sup> John Archie Bell, an African American man whose family lived in Ward One and one of Clara's closest friends, operated a café around the corner from Baker's and often told others in the community not to give her a hard time. John Bell's daughter, Carrie Bell Tucker, remembered the other Jewish groceries in the area and never recalled any instances of tensions or prejudice between the Jews and African Americans.<sup>91</sup> The Bakers became like family to the Bells; when Clara became ill in her old age, she employed Carrie who took care of her each day. Others in the Ward One neighborhood also built a special relationship with Clara Baker—most notably, Oscar Shealy, who started working for Clara at the store when he was a boy. Along with John Bell, Oscar Shealy protected Clara from any potential crime and respected her as his

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<sup>89</sup> "Encyclopedia Judaica: Black-Jewish Relations in the United States," Jewish Virtual Library. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/black-jewish-relations-in-the-united-states>.

<sup>90</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker."

<sup>91</sup> Carrie Bell Tucker, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, interview by Olivia Brown, April 4, 2017.

employer and a business owner. As a young boy, Oscar carried groceries for the store's customers, but, as he got older, Clara showed him how to price canned goods, properly cut meat, and create an inventory list. He was not only her best employee, but Oscar Shealy bought the store after Clara's retirement. The affection these families had for Clara Baker is best illustrated in the way each family speaks about her. John Baker, Clara's grandson, recalled that John Bell watched over Clara as if they were siblings, and Carrie Bell "knew her ever since [she] was a little girl and used to go in and out of the store."<sup>92</sup> These relationships made Clara Baker and Baker's Grocery notable. She was not simply a Jewish woman operating a grocery and general store; Clara Baker forged lifelong friendships and connections within the Ward One community, seemingly more so than the other Jewish proprietors in her neighborhood.

The Kligman sisters, Clara and Esther, were both also significant in that they were the primary money earners of their families over their husbands.<sup>93</sup> As the breadwinner in her household, Clara dictated the rules at Baker's Grocery. Shocky Shealy, Oscar's nephew, began working at Baker's at ten years old and vividly remembered Clara's two main rules: don't let anyone put their hands in the cash register, and the customer is always right.<sup>94</sup> Clara's independence in running the store further affirmed her strength as a smart, capable, and hard-working woman both in Ward One and Jewish communities. Frank Baker died in 1941, leaving Clara to continue operating the store on her own. Just as she had been when leaving Ukraine at twenty years old to travel to America alongside

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<sup>92</sup> John Baker, Jewish Heritage Collection: Oral History Interview, interview by Robin Waites, March 3, 2016, College of Charleston, <http://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:108593>; Tucker, Oral History Interview.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker," 10.

her younger sister, Clara's tenacity and self-reliance led to her success as a business owner in Columbia. Though Clara spent her life running a grocery in an African American neighborhood, she still distinctly identified herself and her family as members of Columbia's Jewish community. They constructed an American Jewish ethnic identity that was maintained and performed through their choices in food and their surrounding environment.<sup>95</sup> For Clara Baker, however, this connection to Jewish food was expressed in the home rather than through the family business.

#### *YIDDISHKEIT* IN THE KLIGMAN/BAKER HOME

Clara had to balance her involvement in the Jewish community and with commitment to her family's business and the neighbors to whom she sold. Her daughter recalled, "Momma was proud of our Jewish heritage. She couldn't go to synagogue often because of her work, but she supported whatever projects she could [...] Her friends understood her commitment to the store, and she was greatly respected by the Jewish community for her enterprise."<sup>96</sup> A quick look around Baker's Grocery and a customer might see a section of fresh produce with onions, potatoes, and collards; milk and butter, along with eggs bought from an elderly woman in the neighborhood; other goods, like tobacco, medicine, and assorted clothing items; and, a meat counter—the most important factor in discerning who might be customers for Baker's—the meats included ham hocks, pig ears, and pickled pigs' feet.

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<sup>95</sup> Jon D. Holtzman, "Food and Memory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 361–78.

<sup>96</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker," 12. Some of these "projects" might have alluded to Clara's involvement in Hadassah, a Zionist women's relief organization, and the synagogue Sisterhood.

Baker's Grocery was an example of the ways in which Jewish and Southern foodways intersected. In contrast to Rivkin's, which for at least a period offered kosher food for the Jewish community, Baker's was Jewish-owned, yet sold "traditional" Southern foods by offering a variety of pork products and fresh local produce like collard and turnip greens, which, though enjoyed by non-Jews and Jews alike, were very strongly associated with Southern food. Foodways hold a resounding importance for Southerners and Jews. Beth Latshaw draws an interesting comparison, writing that, "the consumption of southern foodways, like ethnic foodways, might be interpreted as a modern-day expression of one's southern identity."<sup>97</sup> Southern foodways were mostly dependent on food availability—certain crops, livestock, or seafood that were native or plentiful in the South—and reflected the influences of the racial make-up of the region, with African American food styles and traditions, many coming from West Africa, playing an important role in shaping Southern food traditions. Thus, by selling food products often associated with Southern culture, Clara was both acculturating into the society around her and pleasing her clientele. Jewish or kosher foods were not in demand for her primarily African American customers and it would not have made financial sense to focus the grocery inventory on a small percentage of possible patrons.

Clara Baker's grocery may not have sold kosher food or ingredients commonly used in Jewish dishes, but the Baker family was still very familiar with old world food traditions. Toby Lourie described Jewish cooking as her mother's "forte," citing specific

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<sup>97</sup> Beth A. Latshaw, "The Soul of the South: Race, Food, and Identity in the American South," in *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South*, Southern Foodways Alliance Studies in Culture, People, and Place (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 102.

eastern European and German foods that her mother made: borscht, strudel, and homemade dill pickles.<sup>98</sup> Thus, Jewish foods themselves held a special place in the Baker household, allowing Clara Baker, her husband Frank, and their children to retain a sense of Jewish distinctiveness, while still serving a group of Southern, African American customers. Though neither a devout attendant of one of the local synagogues nor a mother running a strict, kosher household, Clara Baker was still intimately connected to her Jewish identity.<sup>99</sup> When she left the store Wednesday afternoons to meet with Hadassah, a national Zionist women's organization, Clara Baker was outwardly expressing her support for the Jewish cause in Israel. Additionally, her daughter, Toby Lourie, remembered, "The last Yom Kippur of her life, Momma fasted, though we tried to persuade her not to because of her weak condition. She ignored our pleas [and] climbed the steep steps to the old synagogue."<sup>100</sup> Fasting on Yom Kippur is another indication of Clara Baker's Jewish heritage.

Integration into American society often meant straying from Old Country traditions. Learning to read and write English was one of Clara's personal goals, but it also had business implications, considering her consumer base did not speak her mother tongue, Russian, or most likely Yiddish.<sup>101</sup> Her insistence on hiding symbols of acculturation, like learning English, reveal the social anxieties many Jewish immigrants faced on a normal basis. The hope was that Jewish immigrants could make a seamless

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<sup>98</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker."

<sup>99</sup> Hasia R. Diner, *Hungering for America: Italian, Irish, and Jewish Foodways in the Age of Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>100</sup> Walden, "Baker and Kligman Family Roots," pt. II, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker." Clara did not want members of her family to know she was learning English, however, and did not tell her children until much later in their lives that she had hired a private tutor in her early years living in South Carolina

transition as members of American society and relinquish their space as a marginalized or prejudiced ethnic group. Frank and Clara Baker are both buried in the Beth Shalom Cemetery. Their children are members of the Tree of Life Congregation. It is likely that in her older age, Clara attended synagogue with her children and grandchildren. John Baker said he did not recall “any particular instance where [my grandparents] would have been following through with the holidays,” indicating the lack of priority that Jewish religious practice held for the Bakers, though Frank and Clara’s children would become more involved in the synagogue community later in their lives as well.<sup>102</sup> Just because Baker’s Grocery did not sell to the Jewish community does not imply that Clara Baker did not value her Jewish identity; rather, she opened herself up to integrating into the new city around her by connecting not only with fellow Jewish immigrants and their common heritage, but also with her African American neighbors in Ward One.

John Baker illuminated what he found most important about the memories of his grandmother:

That store and my grandmother’s hard work and her dedication to what she was doing every day—on her feet all day long, early in the morning until late at night, working hard. The work ethic that she showed me was to stay with me all my life. It’s a physical reminder of the work that she did over many years as the matriarch of the family. It’s just a wonderful legacy that she leaves.<sup>103</sup>

The hard-working attitude of Clara Baker shows the commitment many Jewish immigrants had to businesses they established and opportunities they created upon arrival in the United States. Though Clara did not push her family to eat and serve kosher food,

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<sup>102</sup> Baker, Oral History Interview.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

she still cooked traditional dishes from her eastern European background and expressing her Jewish cultural heritage at home while still asserting her entrepreneurial dedication at the store.

#### WHAT REMAINS OF BAKER'S GROCERY

As Clara aged, she decided not to continue running the grocery on a daily basis; however, instead of passing the family business to her children who were grown and settled in their own occupations, she instructed her son, Dave Baker, to sell the store and all its contents to Oscar Shealy in 1967.<sup>104</sup> Just two years later, Clara Kligman Baker succumbed to breast cancer. Baker's Grocery remained in Oscar's hands for only three years, as Urban Renewal demolished many of the buildings in Ward One to construct more municipal buildings and expand the University of South Carolina campuses. Most of the African American families in Ward One rented their properties and had little recourse when told their homes were torn down.<sup>105</sup> Baker's Grocery at 931 Gates Street was demolished in 1970, just one year after its original proprietor's death. Today, the Silas N. Pearman building for the South Carolina Department of Transportation occupies nearly the entire city block where Clara Baker's grocery once stood. Members of both the Kligman and Baker families still reside in Columbia, are active in the Tree of Life Congregation, and remain proud of the history left by their families.

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<sup>104</sup> Henderson, "Clara Kligerman Baker," 10.

<sup>105</sup> Emily Acerra, Chandler Green, Muriel Lee, and Christine Shestko, *Ward One: Reconstructing Memory*, documentary, Columbia, SC: The Ward One Organization, 2016.



Figure 3.1 Clara Kligman Baker in her 40s (circa 1935-1945), *image courtesy of Lorraine Moses.*



Figure 3.2 Clara Kligman Baker at the home of her daughter, Toby Baker Lourie (circa early 1960s), *image courtesy of Lorraine Moses.*



Figure 3.3 Frank Baker drawn in his 30s (circa 1914-1924), *image courtesy of Lorraine Moses.*



Figure 3.4 931 Gates Street, location of Baker's Grocery (circa 1960s), *image courtesy of Special Collections, College of Charleston.*

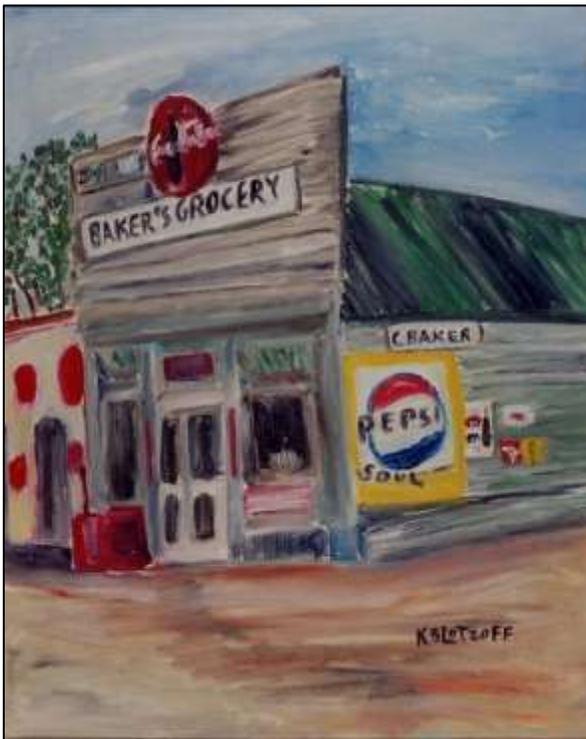


Figure 3.5 Painting by Kathryn Baker Lotzoff, Esther Kligman and Jake Baker's daughter, of her aunt's grocery store (date unknown), *image courtesy of Lorraine Moses*

## CONCLUSION

The third wave of Jewish immigration to the United States was a period of transformation, anxiety, uncertainty, and growth. Eastern European Jewish immigrants arrived by the millions to America's shores between 1880 and 1920, hoping for opportunity, economic stability, and food to relieve them of the hunger they had suffered for many years in the Old Country.<sup>106</sup> Families like the Rivkins, the Bakers, and the Kligmans each have stories about their journeys. Though their lived experiences were different—Frank Baker's family spent time as the only Jews in both Mount Pleasant and Estill, South Carolina, Jacob Rivkin served as an important early member in Columbia's second synagogue, and Clara Kligman left the little family she had in the United States to travel south—it is through these divergences in which a constant is found. The Rivkins and the Bakers found economic success through grocery businesses. The Rivkins and the Bakers asserted their culture and identity through the businesses they owned, the food they ate at home, and the ways they interacted with those around them, whether other Jews, African Americans, or anyone else in the Columbia area. Externally, second-generation Caba Rivkin, who stepped away from strict religious observance, and first-generation Clara Baker acculturated to the world around them, serving Southern favorites

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<sup>106</sup> Diner, *Hungering for America*.

or catering to their consumer base, but internally, their families still observed holidays and kept alive the traditions from the Old Country.

The cooking, sharing, and eating of meals is a fundamental part of Jewish identity, and for thousands of years, Jewish food customs have been a defining aspect of Jewish cultural distinctiveness. These two families identified differently with Jewish and Southern foods as they served specific products to their surrounding communities. Social location and ethnic identification played an important role in defining the identities of eastern European Jews who immigrated to South Carolina in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Rivkin and Baker families both identified with their Jewish heritage, but over time adopted American customs and behaviors.

The personal and business choices regarding religious faith and observance made by the Rivkins and Bakers are key to understanding how and why they sold certain products or ate certain dishes, but other factors of urban geography, community demographics, and economic prosperity also influenced the nature of their stores. Generational differences emerged between Jacob Rivkin and his son. Eventually, Caba owned two delicatessens that touted their *treyf* meats and cheeses. Clara Baker, a first-generation, embraced acculturation and sought to integrate her life with the African American families who lived around her. Additionally, mapping the locations of Rivkin's and Baker's Groceries onto the larger urban landscape of Columbia reveals how the racial and ethnic makeup of different neighborhoods might influence the proprietors in the area. The strong connections Clara Baker forged with the Bell and Shealy families made her as much a part of the Ward One community as the Jewish community with whom she worshipped. Jacob Rivkin leased properties to African American tenants and

opened two grocery locations in predominately African American neighborhoods; however, he chose to place his original store, and his home, in an area surrounded by Jewish immigrant neighbors. The stories of these two families further indicate how space and place influence a person's identity.

When Jacob Rivkin and his family arrived in Columbia, the Jewish community was on the mend in the wake of the Civil War but growing, and Rivkin became a charter member of a synagogue that welcomed a new era of Jewish life in the city. Ultimately, the Rivkins, members of the traditional Beth Shalom, and the Bakers, members of the more progressive Tree of Life, show two paths that early twentieth century Jewish Columbians could take—both, however, embraced their new experience in the South and built their businesses and entrepreneurial spirit around a common search for success as immigrants in a new homeland.

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