Since the first Jews took up residence on Long Island, writes Brad Kolodny in his book, *The Jews of Long Island, 1705-1918*, “there were Jewish individuals and families living on Long Island whose experiences intersected with major events in world history” (p. 5). Many more lived alongside them, and together they account for the many names and stories in this book, each briefly mentioned and occasionally contextualized. *The Jews of Long Island* reads more like an encyclopedia than a history book, eschewing any overarching narrative or analysis in favor of chapters that focus on descriptions of a specific place and its population. Residents of that area will undoubtedly be fascinated to discover the names, occupations, and relationships of their town's earlier inhabitants, and perhaps to search for their own ancestors on the accompanying lists. Meanwhile, the photographs and newspaper clippings will surely captivate local history buffs, depicting prominent individuals, buildings, and business endeavors from each town.

To be clear from the outset, this is not an academic book. The text does not include a single citation or reference, though the images are impressively well sourced. The bibliography lists only eleven books and omits crucial electronic resources—like findagrave.com—that the author identifies in the preface. The book has no introduction beyond a brief methodological discussion, no conclusion, and no analytical question or central argument. Yet this book possesses a value of its own, as different types of books serve different purposes in the community. While this text would be out of place in a classroom, it could well take pride of place in a library belonging to any of the included synagogues or organizations. It might even inspire a new generation to delve into the sources themselves to conduct their own research on their families' and communities' history.

*The Jews of Long Island* is easily comprehensible for readers of all ages. Many of the pages have only a paragraph or two of text accompanied by abundant photographs and illustrations. Furthermore, almost half of the book's pages consist solely...
of lists of Jews sorted by location. Occasional inconsistencies, like a 1917 map of South Main Street in Freeport that purports to show Jewish-owned properties as of 1920, hardly detract from the wealth of cartographic and architectural images, nor from the gradual urbanization story implied by the photographs. Neither do the recurring grammatical problems, mostly missing words and comma splices, since the book’s primary value lies in the humanity it represents through photographs, drawings, stories, and even simple genealogical charts. Any reader who has enjoyed exploring their own family tree will appreciate tracing a surname through multiple generations in a particular city. Meanwhile, the family listings are often accompanied by tantalizing tidbits of detail—for instance, Nathan Simonson of Brookhaven “may have been a shopkeeper in 1705,” and Morris Spitzer of Lynbrook was a “confectionery merchant”—that hint toward the imagination of entire lives filled with countless additional facts (pp. 102, 242). One wonders if Leo Perry (“worked for the IRS”), born 1894, ever gave filing advice to his Northport neighbor Max Saltz (“co-owner Saltz and Alter dept. store), born two years earlier (p. 193). The content of the book occasionally drifts past Kolodny’s declared intention not to include any people born or activities undertaken after 1918, like the story of the Harry Katz carpet company—founded in 1924—that continues through 1987, but it always returns to the book’s central theme of celebrating real people doing ordinary things, frequently accompanied by visual illustration.

The limited criteria chosen by Kolodny to decide whether a given resident of Long Island is Jewish, and thus qualified to be included in the book, raise concern. He wrote that he would accept only individuals buried in a Jewish cemetery, indicated as a Jew or a Yiddish- or Hebrew-speaker on government documents, or documented as a member or leader at a synagogue or Jewish organization. Kolodny further extended Jewish status to relatives of people fitting those criteria, without requiring additional evidence. Yet these criteria lack attention to the nuance and complexity of Jewish affiliation, including those who are born Jewish, participate in Jewish communal life, practice Jewish rituals, or self-identify as Jewish or as part of a Jewish family. Kolodny regretfully narrowed these qualifications, substituting his own that simplify Jewish identity by assuming that a Jew’s spouse or child (or another relative) is automatically Jewish, while underrepresenting Jews who did not have geographic access to a Jewish cemetery, did not feel welcome in Jewish spaces, or had not traditionally converted, but who nonetheless could have contributed to and broadened this book’s picture of Jewish life on Long Island.

Intermarriage, for example, has always existed in North America, spreading after the first known instance in 1656 to encompass 10-15 percent of Jewish marriages in colonial times.[1] Few such marriages involved conversion, but unconverted spouses and children often identified as Jewish and participated in ritual observance. During the years from 1776 through 1840, within the temporal range of The Jews of Long Island, 28.7 percent of American marriages involving Jews were intermarriages.[2] Even traditional Jews explored new ways to engage with their religion, and the complicated resulting circumstances—intermarried Jews seeking burial in Jewish cemeteries, or “unconverted” children observing halachic Jewish rituals—highlight the “indulgent social norms”[3] encountered by a Jewish community continuing to experiment with observance and affiliation in an America where religion was voluntary.[4] This matters because Kolodny has presented a narrower, less comprehensive portrait of Jewish life on Long Island, limiting the reader’s prerogative to contemplate where the boundary might lie. By omitting any mention or accounting of the potential Jews whom he excluded, Kolodny has erased those Jews of Long Island whose Judaism manifested in less mainstream or standardized ways.
Ultimately, especially in light of Kolodny’s role as the president and founder of the Jewish Historical Society of Long Island, the book’s inviting, image-heavy presentation and segmented, list-based layout indicate the environments where these stories will thrive, like museum-style exhibits, synagogue libraries, and the bookshelves of the residents, congregants, and students of the towns depicted. Though not an academic book, *The Jews of Long Island* represents a thorough documentation of a set of local communities, and provides a valuable compilation of material for those interested in delving further into an examination of Long Island’s rich Jewish past.

Notes


[3]. Ibid., 28.


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