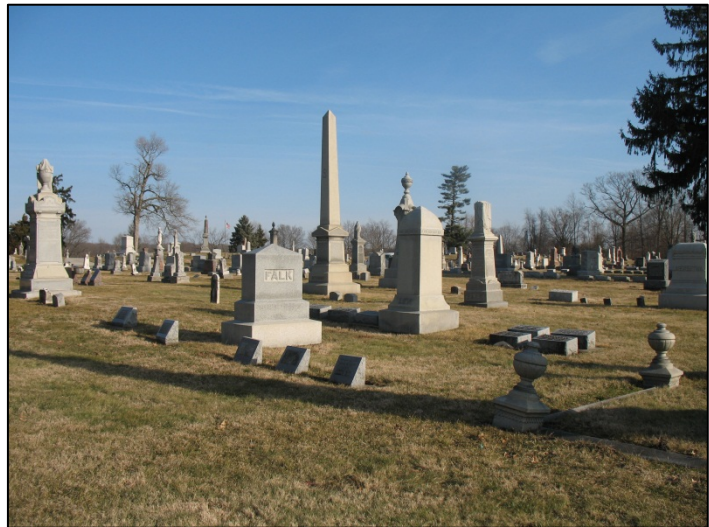


## Jewish Heritage Initiative and Recent Funding

The Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology has recently increased its efforts to embrace the state's diversity and highlight structures associated with populations which have been long been underrepresented. By offering programs about Underground Railroad involvement, teacher materials covering French-speaking population's contributions to the state, and resources about the Native American tribes that called Indiana home, the DHPA's diversity initiatives aim to "promote the conservation of Indiana's diverse cultural resources through the identification, preservation, interpretation, and recognition of sites." One of the DHPA's latest initiatives focuses on the state's Jewish heritage, which remains largely unexamined by researchers and nearly forgotten by most of the state's population. Starting in 2005, the DHPA, with help from the National Park Service, created short profiles on Jewish communities in over twenty Indiana counties, by tracking the first Jewish settlements, the organization of shuls, Hebrew congregations, and Synagogues, and the founding of Jewish-owned businesses that lasted decades from across the state.

With a generous gift from the Cook Family Foundation, the DHPA was able to fund two interns from IUPUI's public history department to continue research for the initiative. Since January, Rusti Keen and Hilary Retseck have worked diligently to learn more about Cass and Miami Counties' Jewish communities. They poured over census records, city directories, Indiana Historical Society's Indiana Jewish Historical Society Collection, local histories and newspaper articles, and present-day contacts to first identify Jewish individuals living in the two counties and then uncover information about their lives and businesses. After making a list of Jewish individuals and pulling addresses from city directories and newspaper advertisements, they determined which structures were once related to the local Jewish



View of the Jewish Section of Peru's Mount Hope Cemetery.

community and still exist, so that they could be documented and added to the Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory. Many Hoosiers may not realize that both Peru and Logansport hosted vibrant Jewish communities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, with many downtown merchants and civic leaders identifying as Jewish and both county seats including Jewish cemeteries.



65 North Broadway in downtown Peru as it looks today. Between 1891 and 1912, the second floor of this building served as the Or Zion Synagogue.

During their research Keen and Retseck discovered rich histories, entertaining anecdotes, and surprising connections about the people who once lived in Miami and Cass Counties. For example, Willie Affelder, the thirteen-year old son of Peru businessman Louis Affelder, shocked the town when he went missing for eighteen months during 1890 and 1891. The teen wandered away while playing with a friend in the woods and made his way to Chicago. Over the next year and a half, Willie managed to travel to St. Louis, Missouri, Denver, Colorado, Buffalo, New York, and California, taking odd jobs to support himself. Once his father received word his son was living in California, Louis traveled west and returned to Peru with his son in time to surprise the rest of the family at Sunday dinner with the boy's

return. Melvin and Herbert Greensfelder, residents of Logansport, fought Cass County Ku Klux Klan activity during the 1920s and 1930s

A few of the buildings associated with Peru and Logansport's Jewish past still remain in the cities' downtowns. The Peru Hebrew congregation was organized in 1870, but it did not have a synagogue until 1891. In that year, the Or Zion Synagogue was opened in a



1-3 South Broadway in Peru's Downtown Commercial District. This building housed Julius Falk's successful mercantile business for over forty years.

second floor room at 65 North Broadway Street, Peru. The synagogue shared the building with Cynthia Stewart, a widowed African American woman from Kentucky, and the barber shop Stewart ran with her daughter. Moses Falk, one of the first Jews to settle in Indiana, came to Miami County in 1838 as a trader. In 1850 he moved to Peru to start his own mercantile store. The Falk store continued to operate in Peru at different locations for over 75 years, first under the watch of Moses, then managed by Moses's son Julius Falk, who is considered one of the first central Indiana businessmen to aggressively use newspaper advertisements to boost his sales. Julius moved the family business to 1-3 South Broadway, a commercial building that still stands near the Main Street-Broadway intersection in Peru.

Some Jews with Miami and Cass County connections went on to find fame outside Central Indiana. Harry Sterne, a Peru resident and brother to the owners of the Peru Woolen Mill, became the United States consul to Budapest during the 1900s. Florence Levy, granddaughter of Or Zion Synagogue's first president Hirsch Baer, was born in Peru but eventually went to star in a Broadway comedy under the stage name Florence Irving before moving to London in the 1920s. Harry Herff, originally from Peru, moved to Indianapolis, partnered with Randall Jones to start the emblematic jewelry company Herff Jones. Today, Herff Jones is a national company still based in Indianapolis that creates school yearbooks, class jewelry, and graduation accessories.

To learn more about the DHPA's Jewish Heritage Initiative and read about some Indiana counties' Jewish populations, visit the initiative's website:

<http://www.in.gov/dnr/historic/3798.htm>.