

Glimpses Into American Jewish History (Part 54)

Rabbi Simon Joshua Glazer (1878 – 1938) III

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Kansas City

In two earlier articles we traced the life and rabbinical career of Rabbi Simon Glazer until 1918. Rav Glazer was a rare individual in that he was a secularly educated European trained Orthodox Rov who spoke and wrote English fluently.

Rabbi Glazer left Montreal in 1918 to become the rabbi of Congregation Bikur Cholim in Seattle, Washington. However, in 1920 he accepted the position of chief rabbi of a consortium of Orthodox synagogues in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. (These two cities are “sister cities.” Kansas City, Kansas is the third largest city in the State of Kansas; it is a satellite city of Kansas City, Missouri.)

The rabbi's organizational ability, his determination to work with all the Jewish groups in a community, and his outreach beyond the Jewish community were already evident, therefore, before he arrived in Kansas City. Invited to become head of the eight Orthodox congregations in the Greater Kansas City area, which had federated as the United Synagogues, he was quick to take advantage of the opportunity now afforded him, and he began to implement what he would later refer to as the “Kansas City Plan.”¹

In Kansas City, he successfully centralized, under the auspices of the United Synagogues, many areas of Jewish life, including education, kashrut supervision and philanthropy. He attributed his success to his decision to place the synagogue in the center of his kehillah organization. The synagogue, he argued, was the only institution capable of representing the entire spectrum of the Jewish community. The focus in other cities, where attempts at forming a kehillah had failed, was on kashrut or on other less essential factors in Jewish life. The kehillah, Rabbi Glazer felt, must begin its work in the religious [sic], with the synagogue and related programs of Jewish education. If a good educational system would be set up, then a proper attitude to kashrut would be nurtured and effective controls could be established. Another major factor in his success in Kansas City was the fact that he had obtained both city and state charters for the United Synagogue, something which he had not done in Montreal. Having legal status, the United Synagogues of Kansas City was very effective in implementing its programs.²

His Political Activism

As we have seen, Rabbi Glazer was multi-talented, and he was one of the first Orthodox Jews to understand the importance of using political connections to benefit the lives of American Jews. He spearheaded efforts to block the passage and signing of the Johnston-Dillingham Bill that sought to limit immigration to the United States. This bill was eventually signed into law by President Harding, but the delay in its passage enabled thousands of Jewish immigrants to enter the country.

Rabbi Glazer was an ardent Zionist, so it is not surprising that he played a key role in fostering the passage and signing of the 1922 congressional resolution on Palestine.

On June 30, 1922, a joint resolution of both Houses of Congress of the United States unanimously endorsed the “Mandate for Palestine,” confirming the irrevocable right of Jews to settle in the area of Palestine—anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea:

“Favoring the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.

“Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled. That the United States of America favors the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which should prejudice the civil and religious rights of Christian and all other non-Jewish communities in Palestine, and that the holy places and religious buildings and sites in Palestine shall be adequately protected.”

On September 21, 1922, the then President Warren G. Harding signed the joint resolution of approval to establish a Jewish National Home in Palestine.³

Rabbi Glazer was involved in a myriad of diverse issues. On November 19, 1921 The New York Times reported

Harding Lets Rabbi Adopt Five Orphans in Rumania

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18,—President Harding gave Rabbi Simon Glazer of Kansas City, Kan., executive permission to adopt five children who are now in Rumania. The rabbi has already five children, and the new additions are Jewish children who were left orphans by the death of their mother in one of the massacres in the Ukraine in 1920 and the death of their father in the United States.

Immigration restrictions would have prevented them from coming to the United States, but President Harding agreed to allow Rabbi Glazer to adopt them and thus legalize their entry. The oldest is 17 and the youngest 9 years, and a collection has been taken tip in Kansas City to pay their transportation expenses.

In 1923 he publically challenged H. W. Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, to a debate. Evans (wisely) declined to debate the good rabbi!⁴

In 1930 he made a trip to Russia. On his return he reported on the reign of terror prevalent at the time in the Soviet Union. In an interview he told the New York Times

The military police are given the right to shoot down in cold blood any one believed to be conspiring against the government. Among this vast number are nearly 4,000,000 Jews who have the option of becoming Communists or dying before the firing squad.

Children are locked in rooms with crucifixes or the scrolls of the orthodox Jewish faith and told to pray if they become hungry. When no food is produced, the children are led into a room where servants bring them any delicacies they ask for. In this manner they are taught to believe that the Christian and orthodox Jewish faiths gain them nothing, while the Soviet regime can bring them anything.⁵

In 1923 Rabbi Glazer relocated to New York, where he served a number of congregations. He began as the rabbi of Beth Medrash Hagadol in Harlem, NY, then he served as rabbi of Temple Beth-El in Brooklyn from 1927 to 1930, and finally as rabbi of the Maimonides Synagogue in Manhattan from 1930 until his passing in 1938.

A Prolific Writer

A prolific writer, Glazer published 26 books and hundreds of articles in newspapers and journals. His multivolume *History of Israel* and his translations of Maimonides' writings were considered useful educational tools for untutored laymen. He also wrote instructional material for children like the *Sabbath School Guide*, published while Glazer was a rabbi in Toledo. In addition, Glazer often edited the local Jewish newspapers in communities where he served as rabbi. While in Des Moines, Iowa, for example, Glazer was the editor of the *Jewish Herald*, and in Toledo, Ohio, he assisted in the publication of the *Jewish Compromiser*. In Montreal he was part of the editorial staff of the *Jewish Times*, revived the dormant *Yiddisher Shtern*, and was one of the founders of another Montreal Yiddish newspaper, the *Kanader Adler*.⁶

His Passing

On May 22, 1938 Rabbi Glazer died at the age of 60. His New York Times obituary reads in part

Since coming to the United States more than forty years ago, Rabbi Glazer had held many important positions, among others, those of chief rabbi of the United Synagogues in Montreal, 1907-18; chief rabbi of Kansas City, 1920-23; rabbi of Beth Hamidrash Hagodol, this city, 1923-27. From 1930 until his recent

retirement he was head of the Maimonides Synagogue and school at 312 West Eighty-Ninth Street.

Rabbi Glazer had been president of the Central Council of Rabbis of America and chairman of the executive committee of the Assembly of Rabbis of America. He was the author of twenty-six volumes dealing with philosophy, religion and Jewish history, including a "History of Israel" in six volumes, and translations of Maimonides and the High Holy Days prayer books.

Surviving are his widow, Ida Cantor Glazer; three sons, B. Benedict Glazer, who is an associate rabbi of Temple Emanuel; Charles and Aubrey Glazer, all of New York, and two daughters, Mrs. David Schmeer of New York and Mrs. Sidney Goldberg of Newark, N. J.⁷

The passing of Rabbi Simon Joshua Glazer marked the loss by American Jewry of an unusual rabbi, activist, and scholar.

¹ **Rabbi Simon Glazer and the Quest for Jewish Community in Kansas City, 1920 – 1923** by Joseph P. Shultz and Carla I. Klausner, American Jewish Archives, 1, 1983 pages 13 – 25.

² **The American Rabbinic Career of Rabbi Gavriel Zev Margolis** by Joshua Hoffman, Masters Thesis, Bernard Revel Graduate School, Yeshiva University, July, 1992, pages 90 - 91 (unpublished).

³ http://www.mythsandfacts.com/article_view.asp?articleID=100

⁴ **The New York Times**, October 30, 1923.

⁵ **The New York Times**, March 7, 1930.

⁶ **Orthodox Judaism in America, a Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook**, by Moshe D. Sherman, Greenwood Press, 1966, page 77.

⁷ **The New York Times**, May 23, 1938.