

## Porter County History

In 1836, Porter County was formed, including the territory now comprising both Porter and Lake Counties.<sup>1</sup>

French explorers, traders, and missionaries were the first Europeans to visit and live in the area with the Native Americans. In 1822, the first permanent white settler was Joseph Bailly, a fur trader.

Valparaiso, the county seat, was originally platted as Porterville in 1836. Pennsylvania Railroad reached as far west as 1858 and many of the public buildings of the square were constructed in 1850.

Jacob Lowenstein, an early merchant, founded *Lowenstein's Department Store*. He was from Lithuania and came to America in the 1880s. He worked as a peddler, but eventually could afford to establish a store. His son Mandel "Nick" Lowenstine founded *Indiana Steel Company* and later the *Central Steel and Wire Company* in Chicago.

Other influential business leaders included Alex Lippman, who came to Valparaiso in 1900 and traded hides, furs, and metals; his company dissolved in 1950. Sigmund Freund opened a summer resort on Flint Lake, just north of Valparaiso, in 1910, which he ran until the 1920s. His



*Alex Lippman's home in Valparaiso (Porter County).*

son, Edmund, was a lawyer in Valparaiso.

From the early 1900s until about 1918, several Jewish families owned businesses in the downtown area. Louis Szold owned a store, the Lilienthal family owned a store, David Poncher owned a shoe store, Boris Kozlenko owned a shoe store, Max Bernhart and Ben Pncus were tailors, and Isaac Simon owned a furniture store. Morris Linkimer established *Linkimer's Shoe Store* in 1919. The family ran this business until 1970.

Between 1920 and 1925 several families established businesses. Sam Salberg opened a men's clothing store, Abe Magid opened *Premier Food Market*, Sam Kozlenko opened shoe store, and Mandel Derman operated a rooming house. A.J. Shauer owned the *Old Sheridan Movie Theatre*, and then later built the *Premier Movie Theater*.

Other individuals included Adolph Kolner, who owned a wholesale dress business, Louis Sokoloff who operated a rooming house, Ben Donchon who was a merchant in North Judson, but worshipped in Valparaiso, I.R. Vision was a peddler, Jacob Henry

operated an overall factory, Joseph Gross had a clothing store, Theodore Bodenheimer was a baker, Boris Kozlenko owned a shoe store, Carl Erea worked on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and A.J. Barnetet owned a clothing store.



*The Premier Movie Theater (Porter County) as it looked in 1980. Photo: Gene Gladson Collection, Indiana Division of Historic Prservation and Archaeology.*

In the 1930s, Albert Withal owned the *Valparaiso Metal Company*, Israel Sudekoff owned Sudekoff Dry Cleaners, Sam Simon owned a car dealership, Kalman and Hilda Meyer owned a clothing store, Hyman Miller owned Miller's Market, Chester and Ralph Baker owned Spesco Plumbing and Heating, Abe Retzkoff owned Retzkoff Poultry (formerly Lippman's Hide and Poultry). Burton Langer owned Fetla's Bargain Center, Joanne Cristea and Pearl Vision owned J.J.'s Near New Clothing, and Alan Gluck owned Record mart.

Congregation Adas Israel was founded in 1920. Services were held in private homes, but High Holiday services required the rental of the Knights of Columbus Hall. In 1946, a building was finally purchased; the synagogue was called Temple Israel. In 1984 a fire swept through the building and a new building was constructed on different land.

A religious school was founded soon after the original synagogue was built. In 1952, a section of Graceland Cemetery was dedicated for

Jewish burials. Members of the temple were also active in the greater community, serving on boards and participating in general philanthropy. David Lilienthal was the first chair of the United States Atomic Energy Commission; he also



*The Lowenstine family mausoleum in the Jewish section of the Graceland Cemetery in Porter County.*

served as director of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

The city of Portage, just east of Gary, Indiana has Beth El Cemetery (AKA Temple Israel Cemetery) started in 1924. The congregations are located in Gary, Indiana.

Of the buildings associated with the Jews of Porter County, 26 were surveyed. Zero were rated as Outstanding; two were rated as Notable; 23 buildings were rated Contributing; and one was rated Non-Contributing.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> F.A. Battey & Co, The History of Porter County, Indiana (Chicago: F.A. Battey & Co., 1882).