These words by the writer and environmentalist David Fleming resonate deeply with me at this moment as I steer the Center for Small Town Jewish Life. In our first few years, we focused on running a few core programs and building our capacity to execute them well. In our three official years as an organization, we have changed the face of Jewish life in Maine and have gained a national reputation for bringing the best of Jewish education to rural areas. This past summer, we hired our first full-time staff person, Sarah Rockford '15, who has already made an incredible impact on Jewish life in Waterville and statewide.

However, after receiving our Covenant Signature Grant, much of our most important work has not been overtly visible. Now that we have a staff of five Jewish professionals and seven Colby fellows, we will be putting our effort into collaborative decision-making, establishing structures for clear communication, and strategic relationship-building, both on Colby’s campus and statewide. With the urging of the Covenant Foundation, we are also working to transform our approach to programming more broadly. Instead of running many discrete programs, we are beginning to think strategically about how to pull all the threads of our work together. For example, our Fall Shabbaton has evolved from a concert...
for Colby, Bates, and Bowdoin students into a multigenerational cultural event that brings the spirit and ambition of the Maine Conference for Jewish Life to campus during the academic year. The Shabbaton will incorporate teaching from our rabbinical school fellows and will serve as a recruitment hub for Project Zug, an online learning platform from Hadar that will help us cultivate a yearlong, statewide learning community. Our emerging teen-track program will be led not only by our staff, but also by one of our Colby fellows, creating the framework for strategic and consistent Hillel-teen engagement throughout Maine.

We are still achieving important traditional milestones for the Center. We received a $15,000 grant from the Bader Foundation to allow us to bring Maine teens to a major urban Jewish community over the next three years. We sent out our first major solicitation to our growing list of supporters with wonderful results. Our programs are on track to grow and improve throughout the year. However, we are going to slow down some programmatic growth over the next 12-18 months to focus on keeping relationships strong, capitalize on synergies among partners and programs, and better engage the expertise on our national board for the professional growth of our staff and fellows.

This is an exciting moment, and a clear paradigm shift for our organization. I look forward to engaging more with our board and supporters over the next year to grow at a sustainable rate and in ways that will allow us to achieve our mission effectively many years into the future.

B’vrachot (with blessings),
Rabbi Rachel Isaacs
Director
The Fifth Annual Maine Conference for Jewish Life

The fifth annual Maine Conference for Jewish Life was a huge success, with more than 250 participants—our largest group to date! Participants came from all over the state to enjoy three days of learning, praying, and creating community at our new conference location: Thomas College in Waterville.

We were thrilled to offer a wide variety of learning opportunities, which ran the gamut from Jewish ethnomusicology, to an exploration of Jewish approaches to resilience, to an overview of consent in Jewish law. We were particularly excited to offer a set of food-centric sessions, in which participants cured green beans, kneaded challah, sampled Jewish-Italian pastries, experienced Mishnah through a meal, and kasherized (ritually prepared) heritage, Maine-grown chickens under the supervision of a shochet (ritual slaughterer).

We were also able to gather everyone together for beautiful Friday-night prayers, followed by the ever-popular tisch, with a wide variety of Saturday morning options, including Renewal, traditional egalitarian, and traditional non-egalitarian minyanim, a prayer hike, a yoga service, kids programming, and Torah study. There were ample opportunities—structured and free-form—for kids and teens to enjoy learning and socializing, and, as ever, the experience was made sweeter for Jews of all ages by the chance to connect with friends from near and far.

We’re excited for and looking forward to next year’s conference—invitations to apply to teach went out earlier this fall!

Melanie Weiss
Director of Summer Programs
Learning a song entirely in Hebrew about cake and then eating cake. Celebrating a baby naming, wedding, and bat mitzvah. Learning the rituals of mourning. Hebrew games, songs, and stories. Making mezuzot. Hiking in the woods. Making friends. These are just some of the highlights from a week of learning and building Jewish community in Maine.

For me, there are two highlights to Funtensive. One is watching the amazing amount of knowledge our kids pick up in a relatively short amount of time. By the end of the week they are asking for food in Hebrew, saying the blessings before and after eating, writing in cursive, and singing new Hebrew songs. Our students have so much fun at Funtensive (thus the name) that they often do not even realize how much they are learning.

My second highlight is seeing the community that is built so quickly. Since we have been doing this for a number of years, children from different communities now look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones. Our younger students meet high schoolers who serve as mentors, quickly finding them to help with an art project or asking to sit with them during story time. At lunch students share stories and laughter before organizing an impromptu game of tag. While parents are consistently impressed with the Jewish knowledge our participants gain, they come back year after year for the community we are able to form.

Some *tachlis* (details):
This past summer was our largest Funtensive ever with 30 students and five madrachim. We added students from Bangor, and those synagogues are hoping to provide transportation for a larger group next year. We also had a larger group from Bath, including Rabbi Lisa Vinikoor, who spent a day with us.

Funtensive is the only affordable, high-quality, local Jewish summer programming available to kids from all over Maine. We are privileged to be instilling in our children a love of Jewish learning, a grounding in Jewish values, and a sense of belonging and pride at being Jewish.

Rabbi Erica Asch
Assistant Director
Maine + Jewish: Two Centuries, a special exhibition at the Maine State Museum, features the contributions of several Colby students working under the auspices of the Jewish Studies Program and the Center for Small Town Jewish Life. Students in my spring course on the Jews of Maine created interactive digital presentations on Franco-Jewish relations, Jewish homesteaders, and Jewish artists. In addition, summer student researchers created educational programs designed to engage young visitors with the exhibit. Erica Asch and I served as advisors to the exhibit curator, and I wrote the essay that accompanies the exhibit.

Maine + Jewish builds on a decade of research into Maine’s Jewish history by Colby students and myself. Students gathered historical information first about Jewish life at Colby, in Waterville, and the Kennebec Valley and then about facets of the statewide Jewish experience from the early 19th century to the present. An exhibition that students mounted on campus in 2011 was the first to present artifacts and images reflecting the breadth of Jewish life in Maine, past and present; many of those objects are now on display at the Maine State Museum.

Maine + Jewish is the museum’s first effort to explore the whole range of a large ethnic community. One of the key reasons why the museum’s leadership was willing to embark on this ambitious project, three years in the making, is that they knew they could build on the work of Colby and community historians and draw on the expertise of Center for Small Town Jewish Life staff. The exhibit is well worth a visit to Augusta, but you can also learn more at the website of Colby’s Maine Jewish History Project.

Rabbi David Freidenreich
Associate Director
Joey Weisenberg Brings Torah of Music to Waterville

We are gearing up for the Fall Shabbaton with Joey Weisenberg, creative director of Hadar’s Rising Song Institute. Scheduled for October 26 and 27 at Colby, the Shabbaton will feature the stirring niggunim that Joey is known to bring to the table—community singing, learning, and the joy of a community Shabbat in the brisk days of fall in Maine. Joey was a featured artist at the Shabbaton two years ago when it was a much smaller event; the community building that is at the core of his musical teaching inspired us to ask him to return to Waterville to sing and celebrate Shabbat with our extended community again.

The Center for Small Town Jewish Life’s Fall Shabbaton has expanded to become a much-anticipated weekend, serving as a reunion of sorts for the community of people who attend the Maine Conference for Jewish Life in June. We have enhanced our programming to provide more learning and artistic offerings and learning opportunities akin to those offered at the conference, catering to the wishes of an audience that is craving deep Jewish learning and togetherness more often throughout the year.

In addition to a Shabbat infused with niggun, we are delighted this fall to offer a Shabbat-morning prayer hike amidst the spectacular foliage, and an invigorating run for those so inclined; a homemade community Shabbat lunch feast; Torah study with Joey; and engaging learning sessions with two of our rabbinical-school interns, Lily Solochek and Natalie Shribman. Colby student Gabby Foster ‘19 will facilitate a dance workshop on Shabbat afternoon, and Rebbetzin Lisa Mayer will weave some lively, adult-only Jewish tales in a storytelling session. As the sky darkens and the stars emerge, we’ll close our time together with havdalah with Joey. It promises to be a wonderful weekend of multigenerational learning celebrating the best of small-town Jewish life.

Registration for the Shabbaton is just $10 per family, with scholarships available. Maine college students can attend for free. For the full schedule and to register, go to: colby.edu/jewishlife/fall-shabbaton

Liz Soloway Snider
Shabbaton Coordinator
Welcoming New Program Coordinator
Sarah Rockford

The Center for Small Town Jewish Life welcomes Sarah Rockford ‘15 to the staff as our program coordinator. Sarah writes:

As a student at Colby, I witnessed the genesis of the center and the diverse programs that have come to define the rhythms of Jewish life in Waterville. Watching the center grow from a demonstrated need into an organization with momentum all its own, I have perspective on the grit and innovation that characterizes the essence of the center.

My diploma states that I majored in both French and global studies, but it ought to include the crash course I received in Jewish communal organizing. As a Hillel president, Waterville Jewish Leadership Fellow, and recipient of the College’s Carrie M. True Prize for Religious Leadership, I became an avid apprentice of the inner workings of our Jewish communal institutions; Hillel became a platform from which I could celebrate my Jewish heritage with fellow students, and Beth Israel Congregation in Waterville became a home where I learned what it meant to be a member of a tightly knit Jewish community.

Since graduating from Colby in 2015, I have worn many hats. Among other ventures, I’ve worked on small, organic farms in Maine, as administrative assistant and b’nai mitzvah tutor at Temple Beth El in Portland, and I’ve facilitated sustainable-trail-building initiatives as a project leader in the mountains of Colorado. This work has taken me far afield, and it has offered me the opportunity to hone teaching, leadership, and communications skills that serve as a strong foundation for my work at the center.

As program coordinator I am thrilled to take on several, evolving roles within the organization. My four main areas of responsibility are:

• Continuing to build and maintain the relationships between Colby Hillel and Beth Israel, Waterville through joint programming.
• Facilitating the growth of Hillel and local synagogue relationships at Bates College with the town of Auburn and at Bowdoin College with the town of Bath.
• Supporting center communications, including maintaining social media platforms and our blog, while also working to better document our programs throughout the year.
• Starting the Maine Jewish Food Network to create opportunities for Jewish Maine farmers, chefs, and foodies to connect around locally produced food and Jewish tradition. We are in the planning phases of this project and hope to roll out our first programming in 2019.

At the close of this season of reflection and anticipation for the year to come, I am honored to be here, surrounded by talented people dedicated to creating vibrant Jewish life in this place I call home. I look forward to serving the community, striving to make vibrant Jewish life an accessible reality for everyone in Maine, and getting to know friends of the center beyond Waterville.

Sarah Rockford ‘15
Program Coordinator
Founded in 1813, Colby is the 12th-oldest private liberal arts college in the country. Its 2,000 students come from nearly every state and more than 80 countries for Colby’s renowned academic programs, a curriculum that encourages exploration, and collaborative learning experiences led by world-class faculty.

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