

# Creation of Women's League of the United Synagogue

January 21, 1918

Jewish Women's Archives

Five years to the day after the creation of the [National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods](#), Conservative synagogue sisterhoods joined together on January 21, 1918, to form the [Women's League of the United Synagogue](#). The founding president of the League was [Mathilde Roth Schechter](#), wife of Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Mathilde Schechter, born in Silesia and educated in Breslau and London, had married Solomon Schechter in 1887 and came to the U.S. in 1902, when Solomon was appointed president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The Women's League was just one in a line of significant projects for Mathilde Schechter. Before establishing the League, she had helped to establish a Jewish vocational school for girls on the Lower East Side of New York, and had helped to publish a hymn book called *Kol Rina — Hebrew Hymnal for School and Home*.

The Women's League's mission was to promote traditional Judaism in homes, synagogues, and communities. In line with that goal, one early project was the establishment of a kosher boarding house for Jewish students in New York City. Other projects included publications providing guidance on domestic religious ritual as well as traditional recipes and music. In addition, the League became involved with social action from an early date, taking an especially active role in the Jewish Braille Institute.

The League, now called the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, has grown from an original 100 women in 26 sisterhoods to 600 affiliated groups across North America. As it has since the beginning, the League continues to be involved in public policy issues, including women's health, literacy, and foreign policy. Since 1972, the League has also helped to support sisterhoods in *Masorti* (Israeli Conservative) congregations.

**Sources:** *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, pp. 1201-1203, 1493-1497; Women's League for Conservative Judaism, [www.wlcj.org](http://www.wlcj.org).

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The "Yankee" Jewish women of the first half of the twentieth century created the infrastructure of American-Jewish women's organizational activities. The founding of synagogue sisterhoods began with the Reform National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods in 1913, followed by the Women's League for Conservative Judaism in 1918, and the two Orthodox sisterhoods, Mizrahi Women's Organization of America (AMIT) in 1925 and Emunah in 1935. Pictured here is the Orthodox Congregation B'nai David Sisterhood of Detroit, Michigan, ca. 1950. Among those seated are *Rebbetzin* Yetta Sperka (top left), wife of the synagogue Rabbi Joshua Sperka; Mrs. Hyman Adler (top right), wife of the congregation's cantor; and Mrs. David J. Cohen (second row, center).  
Institution: Ahava Rivka Sperka.

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