

August Bondi

The Abolitionist Jew who fought to free the American Slaves

By Jerry Klinger



Am I not a man and a brother?

“Even as a child, I decided to dedicate my life to the ideals of progress and freedom. I never deviated from this decision during the course of my long life, a life rich in stormy events. I have remained faithful to the principles that I swore to uphold during the stormy days of the 1848 revolution.” - August Bondi

At the heart of all things is self-interest.-Judith Rice

The bullets flew with a vicious singularity, wasps ready to sting death upon contact. August Bondi and two other Jewish friends, Jacob Benjamin and Theodor Weiner, tucked their heads down a bit deeper. They edged forward, closer to the pro-slavery enemy firing at them.

The Battle of Black Jack, Kansas¹ raged on, August 2, 1856.

¹<http://www.blackjackbattlefield.org/>

Bondi, Benjamin and Weiner were willing followers of their commander, who fearlessly surged twenty feet ahead of them. They would follow him to Hell if he asked them to stop the slavers.

Captain John Brown² waved them onward. Bondi was the first to jump up.

The opening battle of the American Civil War, *to save the Union and end the evils of slavery*, was on.

Years later Bondi described the scene in his autobiography. It was a strange scene on the Kansas prairie, fighting men calling to each other in Yiddish.

"We walked with bent backs, nearly crawled, that the tall dead grass of the year before might somewhat hide us from the Border Ruffian marksmen, yet the bullets kept whistling... Wiener puffed like a steamboat, hurrying behind me. I called out to him,

"Nu, was meinen Sie jetzt" Now, what do you think of this?).

His answer, "Sof odom muves" (a Hebrew phrase meaning "the end of man is death," or in modern phraseology, "I guess we're up against it").³



John Brown

John Brown was a descendent of a Mayflower refugee family. They came to the wilderness of present day Massachusetts in 1620, seeking religious freedom. They desired to worship God, and live in their own way. Brown was a deeply religious man. He was a Fundamentalist Christian, a Puritan's Puritan, a warrior in the Cromwellian mold.

² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brown_\(abolitionist\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brown_(abolitionist))

³ http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi_and_index.pdf

A Northern newspaperman defined Puritanism as that “which demands religious freedom, as the birth-right of Heaven, in matters spiritual, is the nourisher of that civil liberty which releases the body from secular despotism in matters temporal.” He was a man ready to fight his fellow man violating God’s fundamental laws. Brown’s faith, and willingness to fight for it, echoed that of another Fundamentalist 2,000 years earlier, Judah Maccabee.⁴

Brown’s conservative bible centered Christianity flowed naturally into his love and respect for all of God’s creations. He did not distinguish between the Blackman, Redman or White. Abolitionism was a natural, logical extension to his Puritanism. To Brown, slavery was a dark blot on God’s blessed destiny of America as the land of the free. Slavery was an evil sin. The men who supported it had to be stopped or even wiped out.

Three years after the Battle of Black Jack, Brown was hung by the United States as a traitor. He and his supporters attacked the U.S National Armory at Harpers Ferry, (West) Virginia⁵. His goal was the weapons stored and manufactured there. Brown wanted to arm the slaves. He wanted to help the slaves defend themselves, to make them free.

Brown, defiant against slavery to the gallows, was hung in Charlestown, (West) Virginia. He had been tried in a slave state court. Brown’s body was transported to his small farm in upstate New York. The farm was located in a Black agricultural training community he helped establish.

Southerners saw Brown as a wild eyed radical. He eventually became a martyr, when he was iconicized in northern media, poems and in song.⁶ Brown failed to free the slaves. But he succeeded in beginning the tide that would eventually free them. Oliver Cromwell⁷, the British Puritan revolutionary leader in Britain, like Brown, was eventually defeated. It was Cromwell who overrode the bigotry of his own Parliament and permitted the readmission of the Jews to Britain. Cromwell began the long road in Britain to Jewish emancipation.

More than four hundred years earlier King Richard I (the Lion Heart), the King of children’s stories and Robin Hood, banished the Jews. It was a Puritan Christian, a Fundamentalist, who opened Britain to the Jews again.⁸

Bondi wrote about Captain Brown.

“We were united as a band of brothers by the love and affection toward the man who, with tender words and wise counsel ... prepared a handful of young men for the work of laying the foundation of a free Commonwealth.... He expressed himself to us that we should never allow ourselves to be tempted by any consideration, to acknowledge laws and institutions to exist as of right, if our conscience and reason condemn them.”⁹

⁴ http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/maccabee_judah.html

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Brown's_raid_on_Harpers_Ferry

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSSn3NddwFQ>

⁷ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/cromwell_oliver.shtml

⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/cromwell_oliver.shtml

⁹ Autobiography of Bondi Bio, 1833-1907, Wagoner Printing Company, 1910, Galesville

Captain Brown, and his men, defeated the slavers at the Battle of Black Jack, Kansas. It was an opening victory but a victory that presaged much blood yet to be lost. Nearly 500,000 men from the North and the South would die in the *War to Make Men Free*. The war had been renamed by the victorious North to make clear the meaning of the sacrifice. In the South it remained the *War of Northern Aggression*. But for Bondi, it was from the beginning and to the day he died, the War to Make Men, *all men*, Free.

August Bondi, *Anshel Mendel Bondy*, was born July 21, 1833 in Vienna, Austria. His father was Herz Emanuel Naphtali Bondy. He was born in Prague, Bohemia about 1788. His mother was Martha Frankl, a member one of the oldest and most respected families in Prague. She too was born in Prague. Both families relocated to Vienna for economic opportunities as privileged Jews.

The name Bondy is not a Jewish name. It is Italian. There is a tradition in the Bondy family that the name Bondy originated with a 17th century ancestor, Yomtov Landscreiber. Yomtov's job was a privileged, administrative position in the Bohemian kingdom. He was responsible to record the Jewish communities' census, and report the assessment and payments of taxes to the central government. His name was a combination of Hebrew, Yomtov – good day, and the German for his occupation – Landscreiber – official record keeper.

Because of his close working relationship with the Christian authorities in Bohemia, Yomtov was strongly advised, he Christianize his name. Having traveled in Italy and being familiar with the Italian language, Yomtov adopted the Italian translation for good day, Bondi. He Germanicized the spelling of his name to Bondi.

Anshel's education in Vienna was somewhat typical of the Jewish elite seeking access to mainstream Austrian education and opportunity for their children. He was educated in Catholic schools, specifically the Catholic College of the Order of the Piarists. At school, he was regularly exposed to Catholic religious guidance. He was never obligated to convert.

To balance out his Jewish identity his parents sent him to Jewish congregational schooling separately. He was exposed to his Jewish heritage, his religious values and with an emphasis on Pirke Avoth, (Ethics of the Fathers), Psalms, Kohelth, and Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed.

The Bondis hired a private tutor for Anshel to continue his studies and prepare him for the University. For six years, Moritz Stern, a Jewish Hungarian medical student from Presburg was Anshel's private tutor. There was a heavy focus on secular studies and Hebrew, German, French, Hungarian and Latin.

Anshel's father formed a deep impression upon his son's character. Herz Bondi had become a Mason. He joined the Masonic fraternity in Frankfurt am Main (1811). Though a secretive society, the Masons were well known for their mutual aid and assistance to fellow Masons

when life took a difficult turn. He learned from his father the Masonic values of love and respect of all men. Anshel later described these high moral teachings as having been bred into him.

It was in combination and the example of his parents, his Jewish faith and an understanding of other faiths he that he formulated his own very Jewish identity.

“My parents always impressed upon their children that Jews or Christians, high or low, all are children of a common Father. These principles affected my conduct all through life. While keeping a strictly Jewish house, my parents favored my knowledge of other religions. I had read the “New Testament” before I was eight years old...I could not, under these conditions, help forming my mind according to the command of Moses, “Thou must love the Eternal, thy God and thy neighbor as thyself.” Enthusiastic Jew and lover of humanity.”¹⁰

His father told Anshel of a very unusual charitable organization for a Jew to be included in. During the Napoleonic wars, Herz, as part of the charitable organization, searched the battlefields of 1813-1814. They would care for the wounded, Christian or Jew. They would help the non-combatants caught in the fighting or when their homes were burned and their communities were pillaged.

Herz told young Anshel how he personally saw Napoleon on the Bridge over the Elbe issuing orders during the battle. Herz, and many Jews, admired Napoleon. The Jews admired Napoleon because he and the French revolutionary forces contributed so much to the extension of religious liberty and toleration for the Jews. Many Jews volunteered to fight for Napoleon and France. Some rose to very high rank in the French army. Andrea Massina¹¹, one of Napoleon’s greatest field marshals, was reputed to be of Jewish origin. Anshel never forgot the stories.

In 1847, Bondi was 14. He enrolled in the Academic Gymnasium and excelled in his studies.

Throughout Europe something was changing. It grew in Vienna where students no longer tolerated the arbitrariness of academic restrictions. By 1848, a willingness to challenge the authority of the state seethed just below the surface.

Bondi wrote, *“Then followed those glorious days of March, 1848, glorious for those young spirits who arose as one man, burning with desire to kindle the light of freedom of ‘Liberty’ in priest-ridden, despotism-cursed Austria.”¹²*

The spark that lit the Revolution of 1848 in Austria began innocuously. It was so seemingly innocent that it logically should not have caught the tinder to spark the fire of Revolt.

10 Autobiography of Bondi Bio, 1833-1907, Wagoner Printing Company, 1910. pages 93-94

11 http://www.theodora.com/encyclopedia/m/andre_massena.html

¹² http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi_and_index.pdf pg. 95

“On the evening of the last day. (Tuesday) of the Carnival of 1848 (February), seven young men, mostly medical students, enjoyed a merry making in the Wieden suburb of Vienna. Only a few weeks before the French expelled Louis-Phillipe. They argued over the event and expressed their preference for a free government in Austria; at last one called out.

‘Lets have some fun and play Vienna revolution and the expulsion of Metternich”, prime minister of Austria for 25 years, who with Nesslerode, was the chief support and and sheet anchor of European despotism.

One of the students repented Metternich and the others, with their knotted pocket handkerchiefs, expelled him from the room.

The next day the students sobered up and thought about what they had done the night before. The thought, this is no game. We must try and make this real.

*From Small Acorns
Large Oaks do grow*

On March 12, 10,000 students had a assembled to petition the government for academic reforms. They couched their reforms with idealistic goals, more bombast than understood. The one thing they all understood was the desire to not have the government control their studies and their voices. They called for:

*Freedom of conscience
Freedom of the Press
Freedom to teach and learn”¹³*

Monday, March 13, the students marched to present their petition of grievances to the government. Prince Metternich¹⁴ had alerted his secret police and the military. Bondi was in the front ranks of the protesting students. His mother knew of his revolutionary interests. She, even with the normal trepidation of a parent, encouraged him to participage.

Before the unarmed students could present their petition, the soldiers opened fire. A dozen students fell around Bondi. Heinrich Spitzer, 18, a Jewish student from Voisenz, Austria fell on top of Bondi.

The soldiers fixed bayonets. They charged. Bondi attempted to rise but was clubbed down. Luckily he was only grazed by a bayonet thrust. The Austrian peition for change had turned into a bloody revolution.

¹³ http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi_and_index.pdf pg. 95

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klemens_von_Metternich

The Austrian Revolution of 1848 was one of a series of revolutionary movements that arose across Europe from France to Russia. Their seeds were not as simple as student academic protests in Vienna but were almost universal in their demands to shake off the oppressiveness arbitrary Aristocratic rule, linked with Church control. Freedom, freedom as was expressed in the American revolutionary ideals, like an infection, had gripped revolutionary France in the late 18th century. Napoleon spread the ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity until it decayed into his megalomaniacal Imperial dictatorship.

The infection set in was ruthlessly put down. It was not put away. The American infection would reemerge in country after country throughout Europe. It kept reappearing from the end of the Napoleonic era until it exploded, aggressively demanding human liberty, in 1848. Human liberty also meant toleration of different views, faiths, and goals. It meant a limit to Aristocratic tyranny, it meant freedom of speech, it meant a Constituion that defined the limits of governmental power and emancipation of the people. It meant the removal of legal, social, political and religious limitations on the citizens of their respective countries.

It meant emancipation for all, emancipation of the Serf from feudal slavery, emancipation of the Jew....

Emancipate the Jew?

Freedom for the Jew?

The struggle for Jewish freedom, equality under the law, equality of opportunity free from legal restrictions, discriminations, abitrary religious control was *radical*. In two thousand years of European Jewish life, freedom for Jews, toleration of Jews, barely existed. Jewish life was tenuous. Jews were not entitled to the legal protection of the countries of their birth. Jews were foreigners permitted to be (temporary) residents only by suffrence of the Crown with the agreement of the Church. Jews were not citizens of the countries they had lived in for generations. They could be and were expelled for virtually any reason once their usefulness was finished.

From the late 18th century and through the nineteenth, even into the 20th century, the struggle for Jewish emancipation continued. There were three distinct periods of Jewish emancipation. In all three periods, without the fundamental support of idealistic Christians, Jewish emancipation would not have happened.

The first period lasted fifty years, from 1740- 1789, just prior to the French Revolution. The second period, longer in duration, and deeply influenced by the radical experiment across the Atlantic in America, stretched from 1789-1878. The third period of Jewish European emancipation extended from the 1878 Congress of Berlin¹⁵ to the rise of Nazi power in 1933¹⁶.

¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Congress_of_Berlin

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany

The movements for Jewish emancipation paralleled and were coincidental with European national liberation movements. At times, the movement to liberate the Jews were seen as fulfillments of the ideals of domestic national movements. Many efforts to emancipate the Jews traced their roots to the Napoleonic Wars.

The French Revolution, and the initial idealism of the Napoleonic liberation movements, spread legal Jewish emancipation to wherever the Napoleonic armies were victorious. In the Low Countries, the Germanies, Eastern Europe, Italy, legal restrictions on Jews fell. The Medieval Ghetto walls crumbled before the cannons of French artillery. Most Jews within the Ghetto walls looked outside with confused trepidation. Some joined the Napoleonic armies tired of waiting for the Messiah. The majority of Jews, from a long history that invading armies come and go, remained neutral. Some Jews even remained loyal to the old regimes thinking it might help them someday.

Jews responded to the possible new Napoleonic freedoms with caution and a historic awareness of reactionism if Napoleon left. Napoleon was defeated. The old ways returned. Jewish emancipation had made inroads but the inevitable anti-Semitic reaction developed. Jews were not citizens but fifth columnists, always potential enemies of the state, living at tolerance in Christian lands. They had to be forced out or strictly controlled was heard in the salons and streets of Europe again.

Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo but the ideas of human liberation and the seeds of future change were planted if not dormant. The seeds germinated yet again in the violent revolutions of 1848. Tragically, for Christian and Jew alike, the Revolutions of 1848 were again defeated.

The idea of human liberation could not be defeated. Keeping the Jew down, discriminated against legally, a second class temporary resident, was inconsistent with general national liberation. How can you discriminate against the Jew without the power of the government being able to discriminate against anyone it chose. Deprivation of the natural rights of the Jew were, despite anti-Semitic feelings toward the Jews, were the deprivation of rights to all.

Jews, outside of the Ghetto walls, understood their emancipation meant identification with their Nation State. It meant assimilating their language, dress, culture and even "modernizing" their religion as the price of emancipation. The conflict within Judaism, Jewish ethnic identity, Jewish messianic identity, even Jewish national identity became centered in emancipation. Who is a Jew? Can a Jew be emancipated and remain a Jew? How did Jewish national and messianic identity blend or conflict with the *Natural Rights of all men*. How did all this mesh with the benefits and risks of Jewish emancipation?

The third period of Jewish emancipation extended from (1878-1933), when it was completed in some parts of Europe. Rumania in the 1920's and Poland in the 1930's were the last to grant Jewish emancipation.

Emancipation of the Jews went with the sudden societal and economic upheavals that characterized the 19th and early 20th century European National movements. The suddenness of the change created instability, fear, anxiety for many Europeans. Fear created reactionism, a desire for stability with what was. The reaction reinvigorated anti-Semitism.

For centuries, the Jew was a subclass in European life. For centuries the Jew was a reviled, barely tolerated, resident of Europe. Suddenly, disruptively, the Jew was thrust as an equal into European life. The changing status of the Jew was a direct challenge to the Church's anti-Semitic millennial teachings. The Jew was the eternal, acursed witness to and the cause of the murder of Jesus. The destruction of traditional European life in the industrializing 19th century needed a scapegoat. The scapegoat was the Jew.

A new form of anti-Semitism arose with a ferocity, a depth and durability that found nurturing in the soul of historic European life – scientific anti-Semitism. Nazism and the Holocaust was to be its natural, horrific extension.

Most Jews, basked in the sun of the rise of man, democratic, egalitarian, constitutional principles of emancipation. They did not willingly recognize the changes that were occurring. The ideals of the French Revolution were clearly trampled with anti-Semitic hatred which seethed just below the surface in the 1890's.

One Austro-Hungarian assimilated, very marginal Jew, who believed that Jewish conversion would be final step to Jewish emancipation and equality, distressfully witnessed the reality of his own delusions.

He was a journalist by profession. His Viennese paper sent him to Paris to cover the Dreyfus treason trial. Captain Alfred Dreyfus¹⁷ was a Jewish French military officer. The journalist, at first, believed that Dreyfus was in fact guilty of passing French military secrets to the Germans. After sifting the evidence himself and observing the French reaction, he came to believe that Dreyfus might not be guilty.

Dreyfus might have been accused because he was a Jew.

It was an incredulous observation for the journalist. For himself, he wanted to believe it could not happen in modern France? France...France was the land of the Revolution, the land of Napoleon. It was a country that Jews believed gave birth to European freedom, toleration and equality and emancipation.

¹⁷ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Dreyfus.html>

The trial progressed. Dreyfus was convicted. The journalist saw something different happening. Anti-Semitism, he was sure before the trial, had been fading. The ancient hatred would eventually die away, he had convinced himself. It would inevitably die in the new enlightened, scientific age. In his own country, Austria-Hungary, anti-semitism would die away as well; he so wanted to believe it. The Austro-Hungarians and less modern European world just needed time.

Could the Jews be deluding themselves, he wondered? Could he and they be wrong? The man's growing awareness shocked him. He was horrified. The pain of disillusionment penetrated his soul.

The vicious French anti-semitic reaction to the Dreyfus trial... he finally understood the Jews faced a new, very old, virulent enemy. The Jews so wanted to believe the dreams of European universal brotherhood. He knew the Jews were so, very, very wrong.

The Jew, no matter how loyal a European, how assimilated they might become, was still a Jew. In what can only be described as an epiphany. it came to him. He knew not from where the answer grew within him or how it got there.

Life came to his pen. Locked in his room for weeks on end, he outlined his answer for true Jewish emancipation, for true Jewish freedom. His solution was simple. His solution was for the Jews willing to do so, to physically return to the land that the Jewish soul had never, ever left, Palestine.

The man was Theodor Herzl.

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Young August Bondi stood on the barricades of the Austrian Revolution that March day in 1848. For months during a spring of terror and fighting, Bondi was there. He joined, shoulder to shoulder, arm to arm, with his Christian comrades, ready to support the ideals of human equality.

"On Corpus Christi Day the National Guard and the Legion took the place of the regular troops during the exercises of the day and in the procession... It was the custom for the clergy, headed by the archbishop, coming from the cathedral, St. Stephen's to march in procession through the kneeling ranks of troops..."

The Jewish students, with one voice, decided to do just as their comrades did, so we Jewish members of the Legion knelt with our Catholic and Protestant comrades before the Christian host. We did this also at a field mass celebrated in honor of our martyred dead, July 29, '48, by the legion Chaplain, Father Fuster."¹⁸

¹⁸ http://www2.ku.edu/~maxkade/bondi_and_index.pdf pg. 103

They were no longer Christians or Jews. They were Austrians.

Hundreds would be dead by October, 1848.

It seemed a shadowy moment of memory to him, just a year before in school, Bondi had sat mesmerized. His teacher read to his class the stories and dreams of men from a distant land, the words of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson. His young spirit dreamed of freedom and on the barricades of Vienna as he stood to fight for it. Bondi was only 15.

“Prof. Podlaha, of the 5th and 6th gymnasium classes, taught me Poe[try] and Rhetoric. He often read to us of Washington, Jefferson and the American Revolution from translations of the American authors...The friars, as teachers, paid no attention to the creed of their scholars.”¹⁹

Bondi had a strong sense of economic justice. He felt deeply for the workingman and poor.

“One evening while on guard at the university, in a heated discussion, I defended the laboring classes of Vienna, then struggling for a slight increase of wages to ward off starvation.”²⁰

Bondi was imbued with more than just the ideals of the rights of man. He understood what the rights of men were as equals if they controlled their own destinies. Free men earned the right to the fruits of their labor. No one owned the right to sell their labor, the sweat of their own brow, except themselves. Free men were free when what they worked for, that which was theirs, they could keep or sell as they chose. Labor did not belong to the State, the Aristocracy or the Church. It belonged only to free men. It was their God given right, – their unalienable right.

The equality of men had been taught to him from the beginning.

“My tutor, Moritz Stern, was liberal minded, yet an enthusiastic Jew, and whenever we walked for an airing, conversed with me on Judaism and religious subjects from a liberal standpoint. I could not, under these conditions, help forming my mind according to the command of Moses, “Thou must love the Eternal, thy God and thy neighbor as thyself.”²¹

The Austrian Revolution of 1848 initially went well. Quickly the tide of war changed. The Conservative forces, allied with the Aristocracy, the Church and the army, crushed the revolt. In a year, it was over.

Leopold Kompert, the famed German writer and enthusiastic supporter of the 1848 Revolutions wrote:

¹⁹ Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 94

²⁰ Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 104

²¹ Bondi, *ibid.* Pg. 93

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” Jeremiah 8:20

The sun of freedom has risen above the fatherland, but for us it is nothing but a bloody northern light. The larks of redemption warble in the sky; for us, however, they are the screaming harbingers of a terrible storm....

Because slavish hordes and petty merchants have failed to understand the spirit of freedom, we Jews just suffer....

To stand still and to wait, to wait patiently, until all who are now opposed to us will make peace with us, until the spirit of humanity is victorious? Or, since “we are not saved,” to seek salvation elsewhere – and to move to America? ...

But to all the others, the oppressed and persecuted, those who have been driven from their homes and plundered in the notorious communities, all those who have gained nothing but calamity from this “freedom,” all those who feel in their hearts that it will take a long time before there is peace for them in the fatherland...to all those we say: we are not saved. Salvation can only be sought in America!”²²

Economic calamity befell the Bondi family during the spring of 1848. Their business failed as the conditions in Vienna deteriorated significantly. The Bondi family read the handwriting on the wall. They knew that the Revolution was doomed. The best they could hope for was to go to America.

Bondi was reluctant to leave.

“All my closest and best friends, old classmates and chums agreed that the time was near when the revolution in Vienna and Hungary would be drowned in blood, and that I should not oppose the decision of my parents.”²³

September 23, 1848, via Bremen, on a bark of 800 tons called the *Rebecca*, the Bondis sailed for New Orleans.

The Bondi family had a private cabin and passed the voyage uneventfully. After a six week journey, August Bondi and his family arrived in America, the land of freedom. He saw for the first time, African slaves. Not fully comprehending what he was seeing and not understanding the culture that could take dark skinned human beings and convert them into animal servants, he tried to process what he saw. He had just come from the European world where thousands of men had died and more were still dying for freedom. Seeing African human beings made into chattel, degraded into slaves, was something he did not expect to see.

²² *The Jew in the Modern World, A Documentary History*, edit. By Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, pg. 463-464

²³ Bondi, *ibid*, pg. 105

"We arrived at Balize on the 7th day of November, were taken in tow, with two other vessels, by a tug on the evening of the 8th. On the 9th the tug stopped at a plantation for wood; I went ashore and there saw, for the first time, Negroes at the sugar mill. They were late imports from Africa, men and women clad only in coffee sacks, open at both ends, slipped on and tied around the waist."²⁴

They continued upriver, arriving at their new home late in November, St. Louis, Missouri.

Ironically, they rented very modest rooms on 3rd Street between Market and Chestnut, not far from the waterfront.

Today, the former site of that modest brick building in the German immigrant section of St. Louis is part of the greenway of the St. Louis Gateway Arch.



The Gateway Arch is better known as *the Gateway to the West*. It was built as a monument to the westward expansion of the United States.²⁵

On the opposite side of the greenway where the Bondis lived, was the Missouri Federal Court house where the infamous Dred Scott²⁶ trial would take place in 1857.

²⁴ Bondi, *ibid*, pg. 107

²⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gateway_Arch

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dred_Scott



Dred Scott

Scott was an American slave and the “property” of Dr. John Emerson. Emerson had taken Scott to a free state during his travels. Scott claimed he and his wife were free.

“The United States Supreme Court decided 7–2 against Scott, finding that neither he nor any other person of African ancestry could claim citizenship in the United States, and therefore Scott could not bring suit in federal court under diversity of citizenship rules”.²⁷

Dred Scott, though born in Virginia, had been taken to a free state. Scott’s going to a free state did not emancipate him. He remained property. The court considered him property and returned him to slavery. Scott’s new owners, the Blow family, became abolitionists. Scott was emancipated by them three months after the trial, May 26, 1857.

Life in St. Louis was difficult for the Bondi family. Each member of the family did what they could to survive economically. Bondi’s father did a little peddling. His mother and sister tried to teach needlework. August, now 17, took a menial job with the Ruthenberg Brother’s Dry Goods for \$8.00 a month.

*“When first ordered to sweep the store I broke out in tears. A late member of the Vienna Legion to do such menial work—but I soon came to it, but never became a proficient sweeper.”*²⁸

Bondi tried various jobs, even a small business partnership in St. Louis. None were successful. What did attract him was the feel of political life in America. The ability to protest, to parade, to argue, to assemble, to petition gripped him and the other 48’er German immigrants like him. It was a new experience to be able to do peacefully in America what could only be done with blood in Europe.

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dred_Scott

²⁸ Bondi, pg. 107

Bondi, still a teenager, already had seen more than most men in a lifetime. He began to enjoy life. He began to feel life and purpose in St. Louis.

"I had a good time swimming, fishing and on excursions. I joined the Society of Free Men (Freier Männer-Verein), where I became acquainted with Dr. Henry Börnstein editor of the Anzeiger des Westens, and Prof. Franz Schmidt, late president of the Frankfort Parliament..."

"We youngsters from the barricades and struggles of the revolutionary movements of Germany, Austria and Hungary, who had there been initiated into politics, were eager to grasp the opportunity which would prove our important political influence in our new home. It was not sympathy with the Negro slave; it was antipathy against the degradation of labor which made us a solid unit to back Thos. H. Benton..."²⁹

"We had no votes, as it required five years residence for full citizenship and only full citizenship could vote at that time, but we could argue, talk and discuss, and while some stood aghast at the cheek of the exiled youngsters, the crowds listened, were led to consider, were influenced to vote. Then and there was planted the seed of which Gen. Lyon reaped the harvest. The young exiles of '48 kept Missouri in the Union. They furnished the brains to the physical forces of German workmen. By them united St. Louis was firmly held in the grip of loyalty to the Union."³⁰

He did not understand his political activism would have future long term implications for freedom. It was beyond anything he understood at the time. Bondi was barely 18 years old.

In the fluid American culture, his impressions and comprehension of slavery was evolving. He had not been born with racial prejudice against Blacks. He encountered it in America. The only racial prejudice he knew was anti-Semitic, anti-Jew. He and many Jews had joined the idealistic liberal revolutions of Europe to fight all hatred against any European. It was in their own self interest to find a way to a make better world for all people.

In America, Bondi was experiencing something new and different. He was a young impressionable man, little more than a teenager. He was adrift in an aggressive frontier world.

During his first few years as an immigrant, Bondi struggled to form his opinions, his responses to the justice or injustice of the parallel American slave and free economic systems. He was trying to adjust to his new world, to his new chosen home and its values. He had to take the values that were implanted in him by his family, his Jewish identity, his own idealistic humanity and come up with a livable synthesis. All people go through the same generational struggle to find how and where they fit in with whom they were. Bondi was no different. He needed to go out into the world.

²⁹ Bondi, Ibid. pg. 109

³⁰ Bondi, Ibid., pg. 110

Bondi left St. Louis and secured a job on a river boat, the *Brazos*, out of Galveston, Texas.

“During my stay in Texas I gathered a great deal of information on southern life. When in Galveston the howlings of the slaves receiving their morning ration of cowhiding waked me at 4 o’clock a.m. I found the Yankees the most cruel masters. The native southerner had a full knowledge of the Negro character and treated slaves with regard to their dispositions, so different from whites. Hospitable to any white man, no matter how poor, they yet had no consideration for the poor white laborer. The sick slave received attention, the sick white laborer none. I make these statements from my personal experience and observation. Every good-looking young man from the north could have his pick of southern young ladies of first families. I was only 18years, yet if I had been willing, several of these young ladies would have fallen in love with me. I disliked to marry a woman with slaves. Had I stayed south I would have joined the Confederate army, but while really I did not have much sympathy for the Negroes, I felt that my father’s son was not to be a slave driver.”³¹

Bondi did not have much sympathy for the Negro. He did not understand the Negro. He had even less for the slave owner and even less for the hypocritical cruelty of Yankee economic exploiters. He was conflicted by the currents of American life, on the one hand a Jew and on the other hand a young man living in a cruel world that oppressed white and black together. He struggled to find his path.

Bondi’s experiences with slaves and whites, ultimately directed him. There was something in his character, something in his soul that did not sit well with human cruelty to anyone.

While on a duck hunting trip with the young son of the *Brazos*’ pilot, Bondi spoke out.

“While lightering over Redfish bar on the first trip of the Brazos to Trinity River, the bay was black with swans, pelicans, geese and ducks, and Col. Morgan’s 18-yearold son was close to our boat engaged in duck hunting in a skiff managed by a colored boy, who let one oar drop, scaring the ducks. Young Morgan, mad, his gun ready for the ducks, deliberately emptied the load into the shoulder of the colored boy. I loudly condemned such cruelty. (Of course, I put into my remarks all the vinegar of an 18 years smart aleck), when an old man, Rev. Roach, a minister of the southern M. E. church, father of our pilot, stepped up and reproved me, finishing his remarks thus: “We have no use for northern abolitionists, and only your age protects you from deserved punishment.”³²

Young Bondi continued working on the boat until he experienced how the life he was leading was corrupting his soul. He was slowly becoming hardened to what was going on about him.

³¹ Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 113

³² Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 113

Bondi was put in charge of supervising a tired and overworked slave work crew unloading the ship. To get the men to work harder, though they were exhausted, he used a piece of cord wood on them.

“The Negro crew had been up two nights. Capt. Chubb ordered the boat unloaded at once... By 4 o’clock a.m., May 11, the crew tired, having been up three nights hand running, and some, trying to skulk, I poked them up with cord wood, when one of them, “Ike,” turned on me and said, “M’assa, I didn’t think dat of you.” This cut me to the heart. I finished having the boat unloaded by 7 o’clock a.m. The captain came aboard at 9 a.m. I asked for my pay.”³³

Bondi had never abused the slaves before. They saw him as a different kind of white man, different from most of the men that drove them. Ike’s spirit was deeply injured, more so than his body.

“M’assa, I didn’t think dat of you.” Ike’s words stayed with Bondi the rest of his life.

Bondi was disgusted with himself and disgusted with what he did. He vowed he would never do anything like that again. Finishing the unloading, he collected his pay and left the slave world that very morning. Bondi headed back to St. Louis and tried various jobs again. The same pattern emerged. He could find nothing in the life of a clerk that attracted him.

“About the middle of March,(1854) I happened on a Greeley leader in the New York Tribune, appealing to the freedom loving men of the states to rush to Kansas and save it from the curse of slavery to be fastened on it by the “squatter sovereignty” principle contained in the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.”³⁴

Popular sovereignty is a central tenet of faith in a Democracy. The people have a right to choose who will rule their lives by a representative government elected by the majority of its citizens. Majority rule is also one of the major imperfections of Democracy. The majority of voters can vote for a candidate, a political or social direction. It does not mean that their choice is the best, the right one long term or the moral one. Democracies have frequently made good choices and very bad ones.

Underlying the central tenet of faith in a Democracy is the belief that mistakes of popular sovereignty can be corrected in the next free election. The principle assumes a fundamental belief in the inherent goodness of the American people. Amoral decisions of popular sovereignty can and have lasted over many elections. Slavery was a compromise decision between the States needed to enable the American revolutionary experiment to begin. It was a distasteful, necessary and amoral compromise between two competing economic systems that deferred the decision on slavery for a later time.

³³ Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 114

³⁴ Bondi, *ibid.* pg. 116

The Kansas-Nebraska Act³⁵ was one of those moral decisions for a later time. It was a raw struggle of popular sovereignty for the dominance of one American economic system over the other, slave or free. The majority of the citizens of the territories would have the right, after an election, to choose the form of government that they believed best for themselves. The principle flaw in the democratic process was the naïve assumption that people voting in the Kansas election were legal residents and entitled to vote.

Pro-slave Missourians flooded into Kansas temporarily. They came specifically, to vote, establish a majority and control the election. Free soil Kansans were intimidated, terrorized, not to vote. The pro-slave majority was declared the winners. Kansas was declared a slave state. A pro-slave constitution was written.

The election was stolen. Fraud, illegal voters, corruption and terror made the slave victory possible. The stolen election was overturned later but only after more blood had been spilled.

Kansas was admitted to the Union as Free State, January 31, 1861.

With his St. Louis business partner, Jacob Benjamin, Bondi squatted on a piece of farm land on the Mosquito branch of the Pottawatomie (Creek) in Franklin County (1855). The two Jewish partners raised pigs. They became friendly with a Free Soiler³⁶ farmer and his sons not far from their land; John Brown and his sons. When Border Ruffians³⁷, pro-slavery thugs, burned Bondi's homestead, it was the Browns who rode to his support.

Bondi joined up and rode with John Brown through 1856.

Six months after the Battle of Black Jack, February 1857, Bondi was appointed the postmaster of Greeley, Kansas. For the next four years, until the outbreak of the Civil War, he ran the secret Underground Railway station³⁸ there. Underground Railway stations were dangerous endeavors, hiding escaped slaves and aiding their journey north to freedom. It was especially dangerous as Bondi had married a Jewish girl, Henrietta Einstein and began raising a family.

December 23, 1861, two days before Christmas, with his wife's encouragement, Bondi enlisted in Company K of the Fifth Kansas Cavalry. He served for three years, fighting in almost all the engagements his regiment took part in. He advanced to the rank of first sergeant.

A number of times Bondi was slightly wounded, but he stayed on. Pine Bluff, Arkansas, September 14, 1864, Bondi was seriously wounded in the groin. He was taken prisoner by the Confederates but because of the seriousness of his wound, he was left for dead. Bondi survived

³⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kansas%E2%80%93Nebraska_Act

³⁶ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Free-Soiler>

³⁷ <http://www.ushistory.org/us/31b.asp>

³⁸ <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2944.html>

and was cared for by returning Union forces. He was discharged two months later, November 10, in Leavenworth, Kansas³⁹.

Bondi tried to open a small store in Leavenworth. It did not work out. He relocated with his growing family to Salina, Kansas in 1866 where he remained for the rest of his life. Most of his ten children were born in Salina. Bondi opened another small business in Salina that was modestly successful. He became a postmaster in Salina and later a Judge in Saline County. Bondi busied himself with charitable and historical projects in Kansas. He was a thirty-second degree Mason, belonged to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

Bondi began his privately published memoirs in 1903. He finished them in 1905. Two years later, he suffered a massive heart attack walking in St. Louis and died. Bondi is buried in the public cemetery of Salina alongside his wife. A Rabbi came from Leavenworth to officiate at the funeral service. Hundreds of local citizens mourned his passing.

Bondi's Jewish identity is somewhat of an enigma. He said he grew up in a traditional Jewish home yet he freely admitted eating pork throughout his autobiography. He never mentioned going to synagogue but he insisted on being married by a Rabbi and his burial was conducted by a Rabbi. He even had one of his daughters married by a Rabbi. His education was in Hebrew and Yiddish with an emphasis on the moral teachings of Judaism such as the *Pirke Avoth*, *Sayings of the Fathers*. Yet at the same time he was exposed to and read the New Testament. He had little problem being blessed by Holy Water and kneeling before the Eucharist in St. Stephen's Square in Vienna as part of the blessing of the troops by the archbishop. Bondi moved easily between the non-Jewish and Jewish world. He took pains to specifically identify Jews in his life.

Bondi's maternal side was a Frankl. The family originated in Moravia/Bohemia the last stronghold of the Jacob Frank heresy in the 18th century.

"Jacob Frank was an 18th century Jewish religious leader who claimed to be the reincarnation of the self-proclaimed messiah Sabbatai Zevi and also of the biblical patriarch Jacob. The Jewish authorities in Poland excommunicated Frank and his followers due to his heretical doctrines that included deification of himself as a part of a trinity and other controversial concepts such as "purification through transgression Frank arguably created a new religion, now referred to as Frankism, which combined some aspects of Christianity and Judaism."⁴⁰

Frankists were Jewish pseudo- militarists. Bondi's family were among the elite Jews permitted to live in Vienna. Though only 15, his mother gave August her blessing to go out and fight as a soldier for liberty. Many Jewish Frankists, marginal descendents of the Shabbtai Tzvi heresies of the 17th century, maintained nominal, superficial, associations to Judaism and strong

³⁹ <http://www.jewish-american-society-for-historic-preservation.org/completedprgms1/leavenworthkansas.html>

⁴⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_Frank

identifications with the Jewish people. The Frankists maintained contact with each other. They were ready and willing to help another Frankist family.

The Bondis had a close association with a probable Frankist family that they turned to for help, more than once, in Louisville, Ky. and in New Orleans, the Dembitz family. The Dembitz family was the matrilineal line of later Supreme Court Justice Louis Dembitz Brandeis. Brandeis reportedly kept a picture on his desk of the family of Jacob Frank. Brandeis used associations with Reverend William Blackstone of Chicago to provide the key influence to have President Woodrow Wilson throw American support behind the Balfour Declaration and Jewish freedom.

Was Bondi a descendent of the followers of Jacob Frank? The evidence is coincidental. He and his family were no more followers of the false Messiah than the thousands of Jews who followed Bar Kochba fighting for Jewish freedom. Jews fought under the Maccabees to free the Temple. Chanukah, the story of the eight candles which developed hundreds of years after the defeat of the Hasmonaeans⁴¹, is a positive link to a past with a common theme. Jews were and are always willing to fight for freedom.

European traditional Judaism met with severe challenges in America. Bondi was no different from many Jewish immigrants. To live on the frontier, away from Jewish communities, meant for many, losing their Jewish identity. Bondi, living in Salina, Kansas, a community too small to have a synagogue or a Rabbi, required his family to know of their Jewish identity and heritage. He may not have kept Kosher, or attended synagogue but his family knew they were Jews. Bondi could have been buried in the Jewish cemetery in Leavenworth. He preferred to rest with his wife in the Salina cemetery with his non-Jewish friends and comrades. Bondi was a Jew but he was also an American and an idealistic fighter for freedom whenever a defender was needed.

The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, www.JASHP.org, has proposed to the city of Salina and the Smokey Hills Museum⁴² to sponsor a historic interpretive marker honoring the memory of August Bondi.

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⁴¹ <http://www.livius.org/ha-hd/hasmonaeans/hasmonaeans.htm>

⁴² <http://www.smokyhillmuseum.org/index.html>

