The mid 1800’s through the early 1900’s saw a massive influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia to the United States. Individuals and families alike uprooted their lives to pursue the ‘American Dream.’

Many of these new arrivals were Jewish; they brought skills they hoped would help find them work. Once they had steady employment, many set their sights on bigger prospects, demonstrating an entrepreneurial spirit, building on training they received from family members or seeing a local need and filling it. These skills included tailoring, shoemaking, butchery, and peddling, provided a starting point for many newcomers to America.

The businesses founded with limited investment or overhead by new immigrants grew, and as they grew Jewish businesses diversified. Jewish families carved out industrial niches such as scrap metal collecting, manufacturing, clothing production and retail sales, often creating long-lasting companies that benefitted future generations.

The business life of Milwaukee was affected by broad national and international events like war and depressions, while opportunities expanded for Jews with increased access to education and diminished anti-Semitism. Businesspeople responded to these forces: they updated their commercial enterprise and utilized new technology. Inspired by the drive and imagination of their forebears, many younger entrepreneurs pursued their own dreams and ideas. Creating new innovations, these endeavors added to Milwaukee’s ever-changing business landscape.

Through moving stories, artifacts and oral histories, this exhibit will explore the diverse, nearly 170-year history of Milwaukee Jewish businesses.

This exhibit explores the history of Jewish business in Milwaukee. Through this exhibit, you can connect with the following themes:

- Immigration
- American History
- Financial Literacy
- The American Dream
**Immigration:**

People like Bernhard Peck, Harri Hoffmann and Nate Zelazo came to this country and started businesses. They represent millions of people who sought opportunity in a new land.

- Bernhard Peck, he created a small butcher shop that his son and grandson built into a large empire, building on the skills of their ancestors in Czechoslovakia.
- Harry Hoffman fled Nazi persecution and started in a tannery. His family had owned a furniture factory in Europe, and because of this skill, Harry was asked to create trivets from a rhinoceros hide and was given white shoe polish as a reward. Noting that this shoe polish did not smear, Hoffmann started working with a co-worker to manufacture and sell this shoe polish. When his partner cut Harry out of the business, Harri tracked down someone with the secret recipe and built a shoe polish business for himself.
- Nate Zelazo emigrated from Poland as a teenager; his family owned a shoe factory in Poland, but coming to the United States was like taking a time machine; the height of technology in Poland was the automobile and Nate came here and in high school he began learning about atoms and molecules. To put himself through college, he became an engineer and started Astronautics, a leader in the field of aviation. Among the many things this company has developed are navigation systems for airplanes, space shuttles and the military.

You can hear more of these stories by clicking on stories related to Bernie Peck, Lorraine Hoffmann and Nate Zelazo. There is a heading of immigration stories that adds more to this theme.

**Questions to Consider:**

- Why would immigrants be drawn to fields like scrap metal dealing or tailor shops?
- How did peddlers utilize recycling and bartering in their businesses?
- What skills do you feel like you would need to start a business?
- What was the role of kids in the workforce as opportunities and expectations shifted?

**American History:**

This exhibit connects to several major moments in American History:

**1860 – 1865  Civil War**

The Civil War led to a need for uniforms and supplies for Union Troops. Several garment factories grew their businesses during this time period including David Adler & Company.

**1914 – 1918  World War I**

During World War I, more women entered the workforce. Companies like Rhea Manufacturing (which was started by a woman, Ida Rosenberg), created uniforms for Red Cross volunteers. Additionally, this is a period when there is massive change in the way that Milwaukee sees itself. Prior to World War I, German is commonly spoken.

**1920 – 1933  Prohibition**

Alcohol consumption and production was outlawed by the 18th Amendment. This put a serious damper on Milwaukee's breweries. Many started producing soda and root beer. It meant a financial boon for Master Lock. The lock company opened a year after Prohibition was enacted. In 1928 Master Lock gained national recognition for shipping 147,600 padlocks to federal prohibition agents in New York for locking up the speakeasies they raided.
1929 – 1939  The Great Depression
The Twenties were a time of unchecked growth that led to the market crash of 1929. Many businesses had to close their doors. Marty Stein describes his father paying off his employees and closing his shop. While the economy was horrible, many used this time to experiment with new ideas. Irving Solomon began making popcorn and selling it to bars. The salty popcorn increased liquor sales!

1939 – 1945  World War II
The United States entered WWII in 1941 after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Some businesses grew as a result of World War II. Others like Becker Meats and Holeproof Hosiery were impacted by rationing. You can see how the scrap industry responded to the war effort through the newspaper article posted on the wall.

1946 – 1970’s  Post-War Expansion
The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the G.I. Bill, provided benefits for returning World War II veterans. Benefits included low-cost mortgages, low-interest loans to start a business, cash payments of tuition and living expenses to attend college, high school or vocational education, as well as one year of unemployment compensation. Many returning veterans utilized these funds to attend college and this paved the way for Jews to enter professions.

Additionally, this was a time of real estate expansion. From shopping malls to new suburban neighborhoods, this boom led to growth in building supply companies, developers, real estate businesses and the businesses that moved into these malls. Polacheck and Company helped developed Mayfair, Southridge and Northridge Malls. The last two owned by the Kohl family.

1970’s to Today
The Milwaukee business climate compacted, as manufacturing moved out of the city. Some businesses like Century Corporation closed as they couldn’t compete with online retail prices. Others, like Polacheck and Company, merged or sold to larger businesses.

The Great Recession led changes in businesses. Kerns Carpet One closed several offices, but continued to provide service. As older members retired in some businesses, the next generation did not necessarily want to take over and people

TO DO IN THE EXHIBIT:
- Find artifacts that relate to one of the time periods listed above. What time period does this showcase? What does it say about that business and the era?
- Can you think of other events that may have impacted Milwaukee businesses?
- Listen for stories in the Historical Events section of the Kiosk.
- Can you find Max Gottlieb and his two businesses in the exhibit
FINANCIAL LITERACY:

Many of the people who started business began with limited means. They determined what was needed and worked to fill specific needs. Dani Gendelman started her business, Interplan, when she realized that there were not people helping businesses furnish their offices. They did not necessarily have a great deal of capital or money when they started. Harry Soref’s friends invested in his idea and enabled him to create Master Lock. There are many programs that help students consider their own business ideas.

This is taken from Junior Achievement’s “Mind Your Business” Program
(http://studentcenter.ja.org/Business/MindYourOwnBiz/Pages/default.aspx)

So you want to run your own small business. Be your own boss. Make lots of money. You've got a great idea for a product or service. These are the seeds of entrepreneurship. Every successful business begins with one good seed.

Your first steps in exploring your future:

- Understand and know yourself: What kind of entrepreneur are you?
- What are your interests?
- What is most fun for you?
- What do you know most about?
- How do you like to spend your time?
- How hard are you willing to work?
- Learn from SBA's Young Entrepreneur Award winners and JA's student entrepreneurs as they share their success secrets and strategies with you.
- Do you have a great idea? Successful entrepreneurs create new ways to solve old problems.
- Is there a better way to do something?
- Is there a new way?

Brainstorm and explore different ideas. Test different solutions. Think creatively. Successful entrepreneurs are quick to spot trends.

Understand that business is basically about buying and selling. Sellers control the supply of what is sold, and buyers control the demand for what is purchased. Research the "demand" for your idea.

Some other resources include:
- Entrepreneurial Kids: http://library.thinkquest.org/11sep-oracle-82/746218557/
  - This is a show is produced by American Public Television and provides insights into financial literacy
THE AMERICAN DREAM:

Throughout the exhibit, there are stories of people starting with nothing and working their way up the ranks. In looking at this, it is interesting to note “The Family Tree of Julius Krasnopolsky.” The family emigrated from Poland and changed their name to Goldstein. One grandchild rose through the ranks at Boston Store, while his sister created a garment company during World War I. Ida Goldstein Rosenberg opened Rhea Manufacturing, which became Glen Manufacturing and was owned by her nephews. Two of Ida’s daughters married the men who founded Manpower.

- Look for more stories that showcase upward mobility in the exhibit.
- What would your American Dream in business be?