



chicago jewish historical society

CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

“For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come”— Song of Songs

A Day at the Museum: Summer Tour

The Society is pleased to apprise members of a special opportunity: a private tour on Sunday, July 9, of the current Chicago History Museum exhibit “Back Home: Polish Chicago,” which offers a broad understanding of Chicago’s Polish communities, including the Polish-Jewish community. The tour, which will be co-led by Chief Historian and Lead Curator Peter Alter and Exhibit Curator Rebekah Coffman, will include significant Jewish content, particularly in the exhibit’s “Neighborhoods” section. The Society played a role in the formation of the exhibit, offering the names of Chicagoans of Polish Jewish heritage with whom the curators might wish to contact for content development.



The 1948 groundbreaking of Temple Isaiah Israel’s community house

courtesy of the Chicago History Museum

The tour costs \$25 per person. There will be two tour groups – one beginning at 12:30 p.m., the other at 12:45 p.m. – and attendees will be notified, post-registration, of their start time. (Tours will be capped at 20 people per group). To register, email info@chicagojewishhistory.org, writing “Back Home” in the Subject line and indicating the number of participants in your party. Then, go to the CJHS website’s Make a Gift page (www.chicagojewishhistory.org/membership/make-a-gift) and pay for your reservations. Alternatively, send a check to Chicago Jewish Historical Society, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659. All registrations and fees must be obtained by Friday, June 30. Questions? Email info@chicagojewishhistory.org.



Is He Jewish?

With baseball season in full swing — all puns intended — it’s time to for Jewish sports trivia fans to review their list of Cubs and White Sox players who are Jewish or are of Jewish heritage.

See the guy to your left? Should he be added to the list, which already includes Joe Pederson, Kevin Youkilis, Scott Effross, Ken Holtzman, Moe Berg, Jason Marquis, and Steve Stone? See sports maven Edward Mazur’s update on page 17 of this issue.

CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

Thanks to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and our superb journal, *Chicago Jewish History*, I had the thrill of being a special guest at one of Israel's premier institutions, the National Library of Israel (NLI), during a recent trip to Israel. It is a source of pride for the Society, Chicago Jewry, and me, personally, that NLI is a subscriber to *Chicago Jewish History*.

People throughout the world benefit from NLI's trove of resources. I am delighted to be a user of its easy-to-navigate website (nli.org), a recipient of the its newsletter and blog--I encourage you to sign up at [blog,nli.org.il/en/](http://blog.nli.org.il/en/)--and an attendee at its many excellent webinars in English. (I just watched one about the Sarajevo Haggadah presented by Shalom Sabar, Hebrew University Professor of Art History. Webinar recordings are at live-events.nli.org.il/recorded-en.)

During my visit, I wanted to learn more about NLI and meet its staff, with the intention of writing this column and of developing ways for the Society and the Library to collaborate. My visit was graciously coordinated by Rachel Neiman, Director of International Media Relations. She gave me a tour and joined me in meetings she arranged with Eyal Miller, Manager of the Historical Jewish Press Collection, and Dr. Yochai Ben-Ghedalia, Director of the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP). Ms. Neiman also introduced me to Dr. Chaim Neria, Curator of the Judaica Collection, who earned his PhD from the divinity school at the University of Chicago; Dr. Zvi Leshem, Director of the Gershom Scholem Collection of Kabbalah and Hasidism; and Daniel Lipson, Reference Librarian, who researches books looted by the Nazis. Each of these scholars has impressive credentials and multiple areas of specialization.

NLI is an historic institution that continues to grow and evolve. It was founded in 1892 through the vision and collecting efforts of Joseph Chazanovitz. In its first decades, it was known as the B'nai Brith library. The original collection became the basis for the library that was later established at the new Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in 1925. When Mount Scopus became inaccessible during the 1948 War of Independence, the collection of more than 1 million books was moved to the university's temporary quarters and to storehouses. The library's holdings were reassembled when NLI moved to its current home on Hebrew University's Givat Ram campus, which was established in 1960.

NLI is starting an exciting new chapter. As Ms. Neiman explained, NLI is moving later this year to a magnificent state-of-the-art building situated between the Knesset and the Israel Museum. The new building's location, design, setting, amenities, and planned educational and cultural programming are all intended to fulfill the library's enhanced goal to be a sought-after, public-facing institution as well as a research facility.

NLI's holdings are intensive and diverse. It has the world's largest collection of Judaica and Hebraica, and also contains treasured general books and special collections. In addition to books, NLI possesses substantial collections of photographs, maps, manuscripts, music, audio and video recordings, newspapers and periodicals, posters, correspondence, and genealogical materials. Many of these items are digitized and accessible on the NLI website.

I was excited to learn that CJHS and NLI can benefit from working together. I will share the ideas generated from my meetings with Mr. Miller and Dr. Ben-Ghedalia.



Rendering of the new National Library of Israel

courtesy of Herzog & de Meuron



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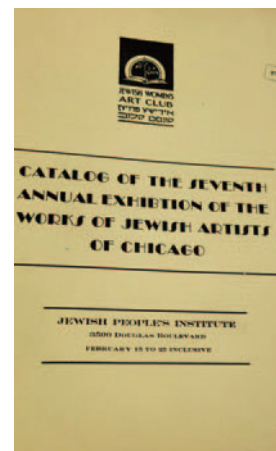
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The ambitious purpose of the Historical Jewish Press Collection (Jpress), managed by Mr. Miller, is to create a central digital portal of all Jewish newspapers and periodicals from around the world. This is a revolutionary concept, he said, because until recently, everyday news was not recognized as a valued historical source. He said, "Now, to understand historical trends, one must go to everyday writing." In addition to scanning millions of print pages in 20 languages using the most advanced techniques, the project aims to incorporate existing digital collections. To that end, we discussed CJHS providing access to the entire digital archive of *Chicago Jewish History*, and I informed him of the Jewish Chicago Research Portal that was created by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois. I will be following up with Mr. Miller to discuss these objectives further. Mr. Miller noted that the archive of two fully digitized Chicago periodicals, *The Sentinel* and the *Jewish Post and Opinion*, are available on Jpress.

The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (CAHJP), established in 1939 and now an NLI subsidiary, focuses on diaspora Jewry. "[It] holds the archives of hundreds of Jewish communities, as well as of local, national and international Jewish organizations and the private collections of many outstanding Jewish personalities...the most extensive collection of documents, *pinkassim* (registers) and other records of Jewish history from the Middle Ages to the present day," according to the CAHJP website: cahjp.nli.org.il/. Director Dr. Ben-Ghedalia echoed the importance of collecting material about everyday life and making it accessible online. Like Jpress, CAHJP uses the highest-quality digital methods to preserve and make its materials accessible.

Dr. Ben-Ghedalia selected archival items pertaining to Chicago for me to view. They included a typed German transcription of the handwritten German diary of Abraham Kohn, which was composed in the year Kohn immigrated to Illinois (1842-1843), and the Jewish Women's Art Club "Catalog of the Seventh Annual Exhibition of the Works of Jewish Artists of Chicago," which was held at the Jewish People's Institute. I enjoyed giving Dr. Ben-Ghedalia background about these items, and I plan to send him material from *Chicago Jewish History* so he can learn more. CAHJP would consider receiving selected items of archival value about Chicago.

My experience at NLI reinforced the importance of our work at CJHS and my pride in our community. Yet it also prompted me to look beyond. The Chicago Jewish Historical Society is vital to the discovery, preservation, and sharing of our local Jewish history, and we are also part of a larger picture. We should be inspired by our interconnections with Jewish communities across time and space and our part in the story of the Jewish people as a whole.



An item from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People

The Controversial Legacy of Sol Bloom

By Dr. Rafael Medoff and Michael Traison

Editors' Note: An article in the Winter 2023 *CJH* issue, "Jews and the World's Columbian Exhibition, Chicago 1893," by Dr. Chaim Rosenberg, included a short section about Sol Bloom. The essay below offers an in-depth examination of Bloom's life and career, as well as his connections to Chicago.

Chicago's world of vaudeville entertainment and Washington, D.C.'s halls of power provided the bookends to the remarkable career of Sol Bloom. Along the way, Bloom achieved astonishing levels of professional success for a son of immigrants, but also provoked his share of controversy over his actions during the Holocaust and the struggle to establish Israel.

Bloom (1870–1949) was born to Polish Jewish immigrants in Pekin, Illinois, near Peoria, but raised in San Francisco. There, he became involved in the theater at an early age as a producer and manager. Inspired by the exotic Middle Eastern dancers he saw at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1889, Bloom brought similarly racy entertainment to the Chicago World's Fair four years later. His mile-long exhibition, known as the Midway Plaisance, featured North African belly dancers gyrating to tunes created by the 23-year-old Bloom. It inspired a cultural craze known as the "hootchy-kootchy dance."

In the years to follow, Bloom billed himself as "Sol Bloom, the Music Man," as he rose to prominence in Chicago as a publisher of sheet music. But the Windy City could not hold the ambitious Bloom for long. He moved to New York City in 1903, establishing a national chain of music sections in major department stores and soon dipping his toe into politics.

Bloom had been a Republican, but decided it would be more advantageous to switch his party affiliation to the Democrats. When the congressman representing Manhattan's wealthy "Silk Stocking" district passed away in 1922, Bloom jumped into the race, winning by 145 votes. It would be the first of 14 consecutive terms in the House of Representatives, a political run that would end only with his death in 1949. Deeply loyal to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic Party, Bloom eventually was rewarded, in 1939, with the chairmanship of the powerful House Foreign Affairs Committee.

***Born to Polish
Jewish immigrants
in Pekin, Illinois,
Sol Bloom went on
to become an
impresario and
Windy City
publisher of sheet
music before
entering the
political fray.***

Not What They Expected

At first, it must have seemed to many American Jews incredibly fortuitous that a son of Jewish immigrants would become chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee precisely at the moment that Jews in Europe were desperately hoping the U.S. would help them escape from the Nazis. But Bloom's eight years as head of the committee did not turn out the way many had hoped.

A number of Bloom's constituents approached him privately for assistance in helping their European relatives obtain visas to come to the United States. Bloom obliged them when he could, as many members of Congress did when receiving such requests. But U.S. government policy on the refugee issue was another matter.

In response to pressure from members of Congress, journalists, and American Jewish organizations, the Roosevelt administration convened an international gathering in Evian, France, in 1938 to consider the Jewish refugee problem. Bloom was chosen to serve as a member of the U.S. delegation, a selection that alarmed Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the era's most prominent American Jewish leader. Wise derided Bloom as "the State Department's Jew," alluding

to the likelihood that the congressman would echo the administration's restrictionist immigration policies. (Bloom did not like Wise much, either; in 1943, he told Vice President Henry Wallace "that Rabbi Wise was a racketeer and that the Zionists were troublemakers."¹) No concrete steps to aid the Jews emerged from the Evian conference, as the delegates simply reiterated their governments' refusal to open their doors to Jewish refugees.²

After World War II began, the Roosevelt administration took the position that there was no way to help the Jews in Europe except to win the war, an attitude that Bloom endorsed, much to the dismay of many in the Jewish community. American Zionist lobbyist Leon Feuer later recalled from his meetings with Bloom that the congressman “even expressed skepticism about the extent of the Holocaust.”³

A delegation of Jewish House members met with President Roosevelt in March 1943, hoping to convince him that the U.S. should press the British to relax its White Paper policy and permit Jewish refugees to enter Palestine. They made a number of additional suggestions to the president for aiding the refugees, but “the answer to all of those suggestion was ‘No’,” one of the participants later recalled. The congressmen were disappointed by the role played by Rep. Bloom in the meeting:

“Bloom was present at this interview. In fact he was already there when the Congressmen had arrived and very obviously had primed the President for the meeting. He sat on a couch in a corner of the room, did not participate in the conversation, did not assist his fellow Congressmen in any way, [and] very evidently played the role of assisting the President out of a difficult situation rather than assisting his fellow Congressmen who had come there to do some good for the Jews.”⁴

Bloom became a lightning rod for criticism following his selection as a member of the U.S. delegation to the Bermuda conference, an Anglo-American meeting on the refugee problem that was held in the spring of 1943. Dr. Nahum Goldmann, cochairman with Rabbi Wise of the World Jewish Congress, was alarmed by the choice of Bloom for the delegation. Including a Jewish congressman would give the State Department “an alibi” for its claim that nothing could be done to aid the Jews of Europe, Goldmann warned.⁵ Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long admitted as much in his diary, where he wrote that he chose Bloom because the congressman was known to be “easy to handle” and “terribly ambitious for publicity.”⁶

The Bermuda conference opened on April 19, which, ironically, was both the first night of Passover and the outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt against the Nazis. The 12 days of meetings concluded without proposing any significant plans for rescue. Nevertheless, Bloom announced that “as a Jew,” he was “perfectly satisfied” with the results.⁷ In his autobiography, published after the war, Bloom continued to defend the outcome of the Bermuda conference, arguing that any announcement of aid to the Jews could have led “to intensified persecutions.”⁸

Others saw it differently. Representative Emanuel Celler (D-New York) characterized Bloom as “a sycophant of the State Department” and, in a thinly-veiled slap at his colleague, called the Bermuda conference “a bloomin’ fiasco.”⁹ The journal of the U.S. religious Zionists, *Hamigdal*, denounced Bloom as “a stooge to impede Jewish protests against the nothing-doers of the Bermuda conference.”¹⁰ Assessing the conference, Nahum Goldmann told his colleagues: “The State Department was much worse than the British, and Sol Bloom was worst of all.”¹¹

Jewish activist and journalist Meyer Nurenberger later recalled a conversation he had with Bloom shortly after the conference. The congressman told Nurenberger “that he took along matzohs when he left for Bermuda—it was the Passover season—because he was such a good Jew.” Nurenberger continued: “So I told him that I thought it would have been more important for him to eat bread there and save some Jews rather than to eat matzohs. He was very angry and told me he was through talking to me.”¹²



Some of the American and British delegates to the Bermuda conference. Left to right: Dr. Harold W. Dodds, president of Princeton University and chairman of the U.S. delegation; Richard Law, British Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs; Congressman Bloom; and Osbert Peake, British Undersecretary of State for the Home Department

courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies

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Sol Bloom

Conflicts and Conscience

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Bloom repeatedly sparred with the activists known as the Bergson Group. (Its leader, Hillel Kook—nephew of the chief rabbi of Palestine—used the pseudonym “Peter Bergson.”) The Bergsonites used innovative publicity tactics to rouse public sympathy for European Jewry, such as full-page newspaper advertisements and a spectacular pageant called “We Will Never Die,” which debuted at Madison Square Garden and played in other major venues around the country in 1943. It was staged on May 19, 1943, before a packed house of more than 20,000 at the Chicago Stadium (which was located on what is today the parking lot across from the United Center). The production starred some of the most prominent names of stage and screen, including John Garfield, Burgess Meredith, and Jacob Ben-Ami.¹³

The Bergson Group’s hard-hitting newspaper ads frequently appeared in the Chicago press as well as other major newspapers around the country. An ad headlined “This Is Strictly a Race Against Death!” appeared in the *Chicago Sun* on November 29, 1943. Another declaring, “How Well Are You Sleeping? Is There Something You Could Have Done to Save Millions of Innocent People—Men, Women, and Children—from Torture and Death?” was published in the *Chicago Tribune* on December 20 of that year.

In October 1943, the Bergson Group announced that it would be bringing more than 400 rabbis to Washington to plead with President Roosevelt for rescue action. According to Bergson’s sources, Bloom tried to dissuade the protesters from coming, telling the organizers of the protest that it would be “undignified” for such “un-American looking people” to rally in the nation’s capital.¹⁴ The march proceeded, and although the rabbis were snubbed by President Roosevelt, their protest gained widespread publicity for the rescue cause.

The following month, the Bergson Group’s allies in Congress introduced a resolution urging creation of a government agency to rescue refugees. In an effort to help the Roosevelt administration stall and block the resolution, Bloom scheduled full hearings on the measure, although that procedure was normally reserved for actual legislation, not this sort of sense-of-the-Congress resolution. He wanted to use the hearings to rally opposition to the resolution. Bloom also insisted on calling Bergson to the podium, even though he had not been scheduled to testify, and questioned him roughly about his status as a foreigner and the forceful wording used in a Bergson Group telegram concerning the hearings.



Congressman Joseph C. Baldwin, Transradio News Features president Herbert S. Moore, Congressman Sol Bloom, American Labor Party chairman Dean Alfange, and publisher William Ziff discussing the Gillette-Rogers rescue resolution, November 1943.

courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies

At the conclusion of the hearings, Bloom mobilized enough votes in the committee to shelve the resolution without a vote. Hoping to demonstrate that those who shelved it were not indifferent to the suffering of the Jews, Bloom subsequently published the closed-door testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, thinking that Long’s arguments would undermine the case for the resolution. That strategy backfired when Long was discovered to have wildly exaggerated U.S. efforts to aid refugees. Mainstream Jewish organizations joined the Bergson Group in challenging Long and U.S. refugee policy. The controversy helped galvanize the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to unanimously adopt the resolution. These developments, combined with behind-the-scenes pressure by Roosevelt’s sole Jewish Cabinet member, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., and his staff, persuaded President Roosevelt to establish the rescue agency that the resolution had urged.

Bloom’s effort to block the rescue resolution ignited another round of criticism in the Jewish community.

An editorial in the *Baltimore Jewish Times* charged that Bloom had become “a Shabbos goy for the State Department [by] performing certain duties which the administration itself finds distasteful.”¹⁵

Bloom’s animosity toward Bergson continued long after the controversy over the resolution. At one point, Bloom even tried to persuade the FBI to deport Bergson, who was a citizen of Palestine, from the United States. The congressman sought, but failed, to convince the FBI that Bergson “would eventually provoke sufficient antagonism among citizens of the United States to cause anti-Semitic pogroms.”¹⁶ The fact that those pogroms never occurred did not change Bloom’s perspective.

In a postwar interview, Bergson recalled a discouraging conversation he once had with Bloom:

“He told me what he would do for the Jews. As chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, he was invited to all sorts of diplomatic functions. He told me exactly where he sat, what his rank was, that all the ambassadors knew he was a Jew and that he didn’t smoke on the Sabbath. He said he loved cigars and that to him the most important part of a meal was not what you ate, but the cigar afterwards. Then he told me about this big dinner on a Friday night given by the Secretary of State. And when the cigars came, he refused one because he was a Jew and he didn’t smoke on the Sabbath. That was what he did for the Jews!”¹⁷

Bloom and Zionism

Although generally supportive of the Zionist cause, Bloom sometimes backed down in deference to objections from the White House or State Department. He supported the Roosevelt administration’s plan, in 1943, to demand that Jewish groups refrain from any public discussion of Palestine for the duration of the war. Publicly, Bloom endorsed the Taft-Wagner and Wright-Compton resolutions of early 1944, which called for opening Palestine to Jewish refugees and creating a Jewish commonwealth there; behind the scenes, however, Bloom collaborated with the War Department to have the resolutions shelved.

One episode, in particular, illustrated the precarious balancing act that the former vaudevillian tried to maintain between the strongly pro-Zionist sentiment of American Jews and the less-than-sympathetic attitude of the Roosevelt administration.

When two Saudi princes visited the U.S. in the autumn of 1943, the administration was anxious to ensure that Jewish groups would refrain from criticizing the visitors. The State Department turned to its reliable ally, Congressman Bloom. He contacted Jewish journalists and urged them “not to publish any attacks on the sons of Ibn Saud.”¹⁸

Bloom also convened a group of Jewish congressmen to inform them that “the State Department had expressed the confident hope that Ibn Saud’s son[s] would not be publicly attacked by any Jewish or Zionist group.” According to Bloom’s account, all of the congressmen acquiesced, except Rep. Celler, who told the meeting that “he planned to attack Ibn Saud and his son in a radio broadcast.” All of Bloom’s efforts “to dissuade Mr. Celler not to do this were in vain.” So Bloom enlisted Nahum Goldmann to try to persuade Celler that criticism of the Saudis would “make a bad impression.”¹⁹

Goldmann urged Bloom to ask the State Department, in turn, to press the Saudis to refrain from their usual anti-Zionist rhetoric. It appeared that the Jewish leaders and the administration had a deal: During the visit, Jewish leaders would keep quiet, and the princes would say nothing about Palestine. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency optimistically reported: “It is understood that the Arabian delegation is not expected to make any anti-Zionist statements during its stay in the United States.”²⁰



Bloom’s political nemesis, U.S. Representative Emanuel Celler, Democrat of Brooklyn
courtesy of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies

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Sol Bloom

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The Jews kept their part of the bargain; neither Celler nor any of the major Jewish organizations criticized the princes. But the Saudis did not cooperate. Prince Faisal told the Washington press corps that British Mandatory Palestine should become an Arab state and join a "United States of Arabia" that would include Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.

Sol Bloom was in many ways a tragic figure. Undoubtedly anguished by the plight of the Jews in Europe, he was nonetheless unable to overcome the political loyalties and personal predilections that kept him from responding to the crisis in the way that many American Jews hoped he would. His chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee during that critical period in Jewish history was testimony to his personal success, but did not translate into substantial efforts to promote the rescue of Jews from the Holocaust or the creation of a Jewish state.

About the Authors:

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Dr. Rafael Medoff (left) and CJHS member Michael Traison

Endnotes

¹ John Morton Blum, ed. *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace 1942-1946* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), pp.193-194.

² Melvin I. Urofsky, *A Voice That Spoke for Justice: The Life and Times of Stephen S. Wise* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1981), p.304; Stephen S. Wise, "As I See It," *Opinion*, June 1943, p.5.

³ Leon Feuer, "The Birth of the Jewish Lobby: A Reminiscence," *American Jewish Archives* 28:2 (November 1976), p.112.

⁴ Feuer to Silver, March 24, 1944, p.2, File F39/24, American Zionist Emergency Council collection, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

⁵ Joint Emergency Committee for European Jewish Affairs minutes, April 10, 1943, Box 8, American Jewish Committee collection, YIVO Institute, New York City.

⁶ Henry L. Feingold, *The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938-1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), p.195.

⁷ "Congressman Sol Bloom Declares Bermuda Refugee Conference Was a Success," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Bulletin*, May 24, 1943.

⁸ Sol Bloom, *The Autobiography of Sol Bloom* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948), p.273.

⁹ Feingold, p.208.

¹⁰ "Rumor Behind the News," *Hamgidal* III:6 (June 1943), p.10.

¹¹ "Office Committee Meeting - May 7th 1943," World Jewish Congress collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

¹² Meyer Nurenberger interview with Hillel Kook, p.55, Bergson Group collection, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

¹³ "Eternal Voice of Jews Asks Revenge; 20,000 Attend Pageant at Stadium," *Chicago Daily News*, May 20, 1943, p.5. For the full story of "We Will Never Die" and its aftermath, see David S. Wyman and Rafael, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America and the Holocaust* (New York: The New Press, 2002), pp.34-36, 71-73, 207-210.

¹⁴ Eri Jabotinsky to Mirelman et al, October 12, 1943, File 2/II/II-chet, "The March of 500 Rab-bis, Correspondence, Invitations, Speeches, Reports, Clippings," Bergson Group collection, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv. For the full story of the march and the subsequent congressional hearings, see Rafael Medoff, *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia and Lincoln, NE: Jewish Publication Society of America / University of Nebraska Press), pp.191-207

¹⁵ "Open Letter to A 'Shabbos Goy'; Attention: Representative Sol Bloom" (editorial), *Baltimore Jewish Times*, December 24, 1943, p.14.

¹⁶ Alden to Ladd, March 24, 1945, Bergson Group file of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

¹⁷ Meyer Nurenberger interview with Hillel Kook, p.56, Bergson Group collection, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs minutes, September 28, 1943, p.3, File F39/381, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

¹⁹ "Conversation with Congressman Sol Bloom - Washington, D.C., September 22, 1943," File Z6/282, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

²⁰ "Sons of King Ibn Saud Welcomed to Washington as Guests of U.S. Government," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily Bulletin*, October 4, 1943.

Picture from the Past: A Portrait of a Jewish Family from Danville, Illinois

By Freddie Yudin

Who is in the picture?

It is the wedding weekend of my Aunt Selma, who is betrothed to Max Sperling. They are in the upper righthand corner. They are mismatched, and it will make their marriage the most tragic and tormented in the family. It is mid-June 1948 in Danville, Illinois, the seat of Vermilion County, located in east-central Illinois.

Selma's marriage will last 29 years. She will take her own life in March 1977. *Sim Shalom*. Grant her peace.

My grandparents, Bill and Ada Smith, are in the middle of the photo. They will be married for almost 68 years. They met in a town, a veritable Jewish shtetl, southeast of Pittsburgh, and were married in November 1912. They moved to Danville in 1924, when Selma was 6 weeks old. Philip, who is in between his sisters, is the youngest of my uncles and aunts and the only child born in Danville. Bill, *Velvul* to the matriarch Ada, was born outside Vilna, Lithuania. Ada was born in Grodno, now in Belarus. Yiddish was their mother tongue.



When my mother, Ann, who is next to my Uncle Phil, heard from Selma that she was going to marry Max, her spirit sank. She knew he was too straight, too proper, and did not have half the warmth of Selma. What was the hurry of a 24-year-old woman? Selma walked inside her own beauty, troubled in temperament, looser than most for the time. She would be mated for life in that generation's rules. All the sisters' marriages would fall short. All the brothers would have marriages lasting longer than 50 years, and two would stretch theirs into more than 60 years.

Jenny was the firstborn of my aunts and uncles. She is second from the top left. Jenny moved to San Diego in the late 1930s with her husband, Julius. They would be married for 34 years until Julius's life was cut short by a brain tumor.

My mother, who has me in her womb, is in between Jenny and Philip. She will be married for 47 years until 1993, when she divorces my dad, Julian, who is not in the photo — where was he? — for philandering one too many times in public. Nevertheless, my dad never stopped loving my mom. But she stopped loving him then. She died from the exhaustion of Alzheimer's in April 2011. My dad followed her to the grave 23 days later. Who was left to love on earth?

Sidney, the oldest of my uncles, is next to his dad. He was as bad at making and keeping money as his dad was at making money. If there was a mid-level gangster class in Danville, Sidney was part of it. He moved to Indianapolis in 1952 to try to make it on his own. His wife, Evelyn, who is above him, would inherit money upon her mother's death, and they would move to Daytona Beach, Florida, in the mid 1980s. Sidney would die young for the family — not reaching 75 — in 1989.

Philip would be the last to marry. He wed Elayne Weinstein of Pittsburgh in 1956. Their marriage would last 63 years. Elayne is the last of my aunts and uncles alive. She is 92. Uncle Phil was a believer in monogamy—not a standard among his brothers or father.

In front of Selma is Louie, the happiest-go-lucky man-child of his generation. He was married to Blanche, who is above him and provided the alpha-smarts in their marriage. She moved them to Silver Spring, Maryland, a

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Picture from the Past

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suburb of Washington, D.C., in 1968, to be closer to her family and stop her daughter's romance with a young man of whom she did not approve. (That daughter, my cousin Beverly, would eventually be married to her husband, Peter, whom she met in Washington, for 53 years.) Blanche also let

Louie share his sexual warmth with others, keeping him on a long leash. He could never understand it. She loved him her way, not his way.

The four children in the front row were the first of the 15 cousins. Larry Aaron would die of AIDS in 1995. His coming out was never accepted by his dad, Sidney. Mike, the second son of Jenny, was loved by two women. The first, Vonnie, smoked herself to death by the early 1990s. Then Mike met Phuong, a Vietnamese American woman, in his brother Stanley's card room. She still loves Mike, even after cancer rubbed his life out several years ago. Sherry is the oldest of the 15 cousins. She and her husband, David, will convert to Christianity following the death of their teenage daughter from cancer. David proselytized whenever he saw you. The traditions of Judaism were mentioned only lightly in Sidney's home. Finally, there is Stanley, beloved Stan to his mom and sister Debbie, who was born in 1951. Stanley ran the most successful card room in San Diego from 1976 until a few years ago.

No one looking at this picture, a fixed moment in time, would know the triumphs and traumas that members of this family experienced. Bill Smith set up an auto parts kingdom – Bill Smith's Auto Parts – in 1924 that is still run by his grandson Bobby and Bobby's middle son, Jonathan. In the family, there were philanderers, cancer and AIDS victims, converts to Christianity, good marriages, complicated marriages, and a set of cousins who know much about each other – but not as much as we might have.

Uncle Max looked down at the corpse of his dead Selma and declared, "You did not have to do this," when she did have to do this. She did all the domestic chores, ironing all the clothes, folding them, leaving the house in order, and went into the garage and turned on the car so that her life would be exhausted for good.

My father, later in life, asked himself why he could not stop going out on the only woman he truly loved. My mother, ravaged by Alzheimer's, could remember all her family members' names in a large family photo but one – my father's.

My parents rest next to each other in the Jewish section of Springhill Cemetery in Danville, a few feet away from Selma and Max Sperling, who are next to each other, too, for eternity.

Israel at 75

The Society celebrates the 75th anniversary of Israeli independence and the countless Chicagoans, Jews and non-Jews alike, whose indefatigable efforts led to the successful formation of the Jewish state. The late Walter Roth, a cofounder and President of the CJHS for many years, wrote an extensive article in the Winter 1994 issue of the *CJH*, "Zionists' Triumph: Chicago Convention Patched Together Conflicts among World War I Zionists," in which he noted the many local Jewish leaders who hosted a groundbreaking international meeting of Zionists in 1919 that pushed forward the ideals of a modern Jewish state. "Many of the problems relating to Palestine and the Zionist movement with which the delegates dealt still confound us today," Roth presciently wrote almost 30 years ago in his article's conclusion. "Yet, despite all the failed promises and bitter disappointments, the State of Israel exists in no small part due to the efforts of these early American Zionists." Roth's entire article can be accessed on the CJHS website: www.chicagojewishhistory.org.



Congregation Beth Jacob: A Shul in Union Pier, Lakeside (Michigan)

By Michael Eliasohn

Editors' Note: The following feature originally appeared on the Michiana Jewish Historical Society website — www.michianajewish.org — and it is reprinted here with the permission of its author and the individuals he interviewed for the article.

Union Pier, population 609, is a small summer resort town in the southwest corner of Michigan, on the shore of Lake Michigan.

But it once had two synagogues, two or three kosher butchers, a Jewish-owned bakery and a Jewish-owned grocery, according to Union Pier resident Martin Schaffner.

It also had a general store, post office, bowling alley, arcade with pinball machines, an ice cream and soda fountain, a beautiful beach, and lots of activities, including sometimes showing movies. The synagogues, one Orthodox and the other Conservative, both operated only during the summer months and through the High Holidays. Toward the end of the Depression, lots of Jewish people came from their Chicago apartments to spend the summer in the Union Pier-Lakeside area and attended the synagogues. (Lakeside is the community to the north.)

Among them was Schaffner, born in 1936, and his family, who lived the rest of the year in the Rogers Park neighborhood in Chicago.

Half of the house on Lakeshore Road they stayed in Union Pier during summers and weekends has been the year-round residence for Schaffner and his wife, Marge, for about 25 years. The couple was married in 1961.

The other half is occupied by his cousin, Louis Price, and his wife, Barbara.

Congregation Beth Jacob, which was Conservative, was built in 1940 on the main street, what is now Lakeshore Road. The shul seated about 150 people and had a daily minyan.



What is now a house, minus additions, was originally the Orthodox synagogue. The house faces Lakeshore Road, about a block southwest of the intersection with Townline Road, which is the dividing line between New Buffalo and Chikaming townships.



This home on Lakeshore Road in Union Pier, minus additions, was originally Congregation Beth Jacob, which closed in the late 1960s or early 1970s. The entrance to the synagogue was where the pillars are.

Prior to its construction, Schaffner said he heard from various relatives that worshippers gathered at what was then the home of his grandfather, Hershel "Harry" Schaffner, for Friday evening and Saturday services. (It's now where the Schaffners and Prices live.) But a relative, arriving Friday for the weekend and wanting to sleep, was kept awake by the service, which led to building of Beth Jacob.

"He used to say he was president and janitor," Martin Schaffner said, referring to his grandfather.

Price said he was told that Beth Jacob was built because it was a closer walk than the Orthodox synagogue, which was to the south. Beth Jacob was a few blocks north of the Schaffner/Price home. Neither man remembers the name of the Orthodox shul and couldn't find anyone who did.

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Congregation Beth Jacob

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Congregation Beth Jacob started in the 1930s in the home of Hershel "Harry" Schaffner and his wife, Shana, before moving to a building constructed to be a shul.

Price said men and women sat separately in both synagogues and services were conducted in Hebrew. English was rarely spoken.

"Services were conducted by members, except for the high holidays, when a cantor was hired. "The place was packed on the High Holidays."

Beth Jacob had a Hebrew school, which met on Sundays, Schaffner recalled.

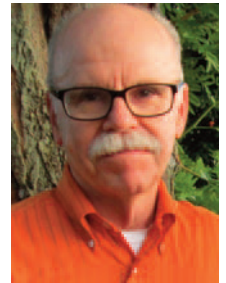
Price celebrated his bar mitzvah at Beth Jacob in 1956 and said he is aware of only one other bar mitzvah conducted there.

Since it was only open during summers, only boys celebrating their 13th birthdays during those months had their bar mitzvahs there.

But in the early 1960s, the Union Pier-Lakeside Jewish population began to shrink and it was almost impossible to get a minyan, Schaffner said, so the Beth Jacob building was sold and the furnishings were distributed. He believes the end came in the late 1960s or early 1970s. The building, with additions built since, is now a house.

Price said the former Orthodox building, which had a similar life span, also is still standing and is now a house.

About the Author: Michael Eliasohn, serves on the board of the Michiana Jewish Historical Society and is a member of Temple B'nai Shalom in Benton Harbor, Michigan.



In a recent email to the CJHS, he wrote, "The two cousins I interviewed for the article and their families belonged to Beth Jacob. Neither could remember the name of the Orthodox congregation, nor could anyone they talked to. Nor could any old photos of either building be found....I am hoping that some old timer reading [the article] will remember the name of the Orthodox congregation in Union Pier, maybe some additional information, and let me know."

Readers, if you have more information about the Orthodox synagogue, please email *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller at robertnaglermiller@gmail.com.

Welcome New Members

Lynne and Fred Brody
Chicago, IL

Don Budai
Chicago, IL

Ellen Dreyfus
Homewood, IL

Karen Finerman
Northbrook, IL

Suzanne Hoffman
Chicago, IL

Kineret Jaffe
Chicago, IL

Sheila Keeshin
Highland Park, IL

Sue Kirschner
Mokena, IL

Esther Kletter
Newton Center, MA

Jonathan Krieger
Chicago, IL

Alan and Rosalie Lahn
Munster, IN

Daniel Neuman
Los Angeles, CA

Wendy Posner
Chicago, IL

Aaron and Eileen Rapoport
Skokie, IL

Erik Rebain
Chicago, IL

Sadie Schuster
Elmhurst, IL

Jewish Child Labor in Chicago

By Dr. Chaim Rosenberg

Former Chicago newsboy leaves \$1,000,000 for Charity,” ran the July 1928 announcement of the death of Adolph J. Lichstern. The Jewish Charities of Chicago, the University of Chicago, and Michael Reese Hospital all benefited from the Lichstern estate, then valued at \$5 million (worth \$85 million today).

Lichstern came to Chicago from Germany when he was 3 years old. He attended public schools and helped his family by selling newspapers on Chicago streets. After graduating from the University of Chicago, he worked as a grain trader on the Chicago Board of Trade. In 1911, Lichstern made his mark by cornering the grain market.¹

Beginning in the 1840s, German-speaking Jews came to the United States. Most were poor and began as peddlers. They fought on both sides during the American Civil War. By the close of the 19th century, many had risen to elite positions in commerce — Andrew Saks, Adam Gimbel, Abraham Neiman, Herbert Marcus, Lyman Bloomingdale, Herman Bergdorf, Simon Lazarus, William Filene, and Morris, Jacob, and Harry Kaufmann, among them — as well as in finance, including Philip Lehman, Solomon Loeb, Marcus Goldman, Jacob Schiff, and Felix Warburg.

In Chicago, Julius Rosenwald led Sears Roebuck; Sigmund and Milton Florsheim developed a great shoe company; and Harry and Max Hart, Joseph Schaffner, and Levi Marx established Hart, Schaffner Marx, a vast clothing business. Moritz Beisinger was born in 1838 into a Jewish family from Baden-Württemberg, Germany. At age 10, he was sent to the United States. Still a boy, he worked as a coal miner, then on a canal boat before coming to Chicago to work in a cattle stockyard. He changed his name to Nelson Morris, and at age 21, established his first slaughterhouse that grew into Morris & Company, one of Chicago’s great meatpacking companies.²

Not all young Jewish immigrants enjoyed rags-to-riches experiences. In fact, few did.

During the years 1880 to 1914, some 21 million immigrants came to the United States, mostly Southern and Eastern Europeans. Among them were 2.5 million impoverished Yiddish-speaking Jews from Russia. The Russian Jews who came to Chicago, reported the *Chicago Tribune*, in 1891, were “little affected by modern culture, ignorant of our language and culture ... and domiciled in wretched dwelling houses in the worst part of our city, where they have created their own ghetto... Persecution abroad developed a hereditary tendency to trading [leaving them fit] only for making a livelihood by peddling or by unskilled labor.” They settled on the West Side of Chicago, “in a district bounded by Sixteenth Street on the south and Polk Street on the north and the Chicago River, and Halsted Street on the east. One can walk the streets for blocks and see none but Semitic features and hear nothing but the Hebrew patois of Russian Poland. In this restricted boundary, in narrow streets, ill-ventilated tenements, and rickety cottages, there is a population of from 15,000 to 16,000 Russian Jews.”³

By 1910, there were 50,000 poor Russian Jews huddled together in the Chicago ghetto. By 1927, the ghetto contained some 60,000 Jews (out of Chicago’s total Jewish population of some 225,0000), with a population density of 11,000 per square block. The ghetto was “probably the most crowded section of Chicago.”⁴

The ghetto Jews eked out a living working in clothing sweatshops or as traders, selling goods on carts along Maxwell Street. Wages were low. “Catholic or Jewish, many immigrant parents felt they had no choice but to send their children out to work, rather than to school... The number of Jewish newsboys skyrocketed in New York and Chicago... Jews and Italians distinguished themselves as the smartest, toughest and most tireless traders, partly because they were also the hungriest.”⁵ Other Jewish children delivered telegraphs or worked in the sweatshops, making clothing.



Newsboy on Maxwell Street, 1906

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Jewish Child Labor

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In the early days of the newspaper, “the Irish boy held absolute possession,” wrote Jane Addams of Hull House fame, in 1903. “The Jewish boy came next. He would not fight the Irish [but] every day he was at his post, in winter and summer, in good weather and bad; the customer could depend on his appearance with the paper. So, his trade increased and at last he gained a monopoly at the corner. “By 1900, there were 4,000 newsboys and newsgirls in Chicago, with Jewish kids (5 per cent of total) competing against Italian, Scandinavian, German, Black and Irish kids. Few earned more than \$1 a day, but a busy corner, like Clark and Madison, could bring in \$5 a day. Working long hours, newsboys missed parts of their schooling, suffered ill health and some of them picked up the bad habits of smoking and gambling. After only two years in public schools the immigrant child “in all intents and purposes has become an American, while his parents remain European peasants.”⁶



Chicago boy messenger strike, 1902

Florence Kelley and Hull House



Florence Kelley (right) with her husband, Lazare Wischnewetzky; their son, Nicholas; and her mother-in-law

Florence Kelley entered Cornell University in 1876, as a member of the school’s first coeducational class. Because she was a woman, she was “denied opportunity for graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania in my own city of Philadelphia.” Instead, she was admitted to the law school of the University of Zurich, Switzerland, where men and women were accepted on equal terms. Zurich then was a haven for Jews denied admission to imperial Russian universities.⁷ In Zurich, Florence attended socialist meetings, where she met Lazare Wischnewetzky, a Russian Jew from the seaport of Taganrog who was studying medicine. Florence married Lazare in 1887. She completed the translation from German to English of Friedrich Engels’s *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published under her married name, Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky. Florence, Lazare, and their son, Nicholas, left Zurich to settle in New York, where two more children, Margaret and John, were born.

In New York, where Lazare was employed at the Zander Mechanico-Therapeutic Institute, the marriage failed. Determined to escape Lazare, Florence in 1891 fled with her three children to Chicago, where she divorced Lazare and was granted sole custody of the children.⁸

Now known as Mrs. Florence Kelley, she moved into Hull House and was employed by the Illinois Bureau of Statistics to monitor conditions in the sweatshops and small factories of the West Side. Led by Florence Kelley and Jane Addams, the regulation of child labor became Hull House’s most important project.⁹

“Large numbers of young girls are employed thirteen hours a day throughout the week, and fifteen hours on Saturday,” wrote Florence Kelley in 1895. In one candy factory, “little girls sit closely packed at long tables, wrapping and packing the caramels. They are paid by the piece, and the number of pennies per thousand paid is just enough to attract the most ignorant and helpless children in the city.... Children are found in greatest number where the conditions of labor are most dangerous to life and health... Bennie Kelman, a Russian Jew, four years in Chicago, was found running a heavy sewing-machine by foot power in a sweatshop of the nineteenth ward where knee-pants are made... He had been put to work in a boiler factory when just thirteen-years-old, and injured himself lifting heavy masses of iron.”¹⁰

Florence Kelley estimated that in 1895, between 25,000 and 30,000 people were employed in Chicago’s 2,378 sweatshops, many of them located in the densely populated tenements of the Jewish ghetto. Work-

ing there were many children “whose backs have been made crooked by continuous work on heavy machines... Many boys and girls are unable to speak English, or read and write in any language.” The alleys of the ghetto were “noxious with garbage and refuse.” Sick children “with smallpox, scarlet fever, scabies or diphtheria” roamed about in the sweatshops, infecting the workers and depositing germs on the clothes being made.¹¹

Bat Sheva Abramowitz, renamed Bessie by an immigration official at Ellis Island, began work as a teenager in a Chicago sweatshop. She earned \$3 working 60 hours a week. In 1910, young Bessie, Hannah Shapiro, and Anna Rudnitsky were leaders of the Chicago Garment Workers’ Strike. Hannah began working at age 13. Her job at the Hart, Schaffner Marx sweatshop on Halsted Street entailed sewing the pockets of men’s trousers, earning 4 cents for each completed item. On September 22, she walked off the job. “We all went out,” Hannah said, “We had to be recognized as people.”¹² The four-month-long Chicago strike led to protests in other cities and, in 1914, to the formation of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, led by Bessie and her husband, Sidney Hillman.



1910 Chicago Garment Workers’ Strike

The predominantly Jewish Chicago Cloak Makers’ Union protested against child labor, setting 14 years as the earliest age to work in a sweatshop.¹³

Jewish Training School



Chicago’s Jewish Training School, circa 1910. It was designed by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan.

four-story Jewish Training School on Judd Street, between Clinton and Jefferson, in the neighborhood where most of the children lived.¹⁴

The public schools in the ghetto were poor. Chicago’s German-Jewish elite reckoned that little could be done to improve the lot of the Russian-Jewish parents, but their children should be helped to become “clean, honest, useful, educated Americans [and become] intelligent, skillful, competent manual workers instead of traders.”

Leon and Emanuel Mandel, owners of Mandel Bros. a leading Chicago department store at the corner of State and Madison, led the fund drive to lift the children of poor Jews out of poverty. In 1887, “Leon Mandel donated the magnificent sum of \$20,000 toward the establishment of a school [to] equip the sons and daughters of our Jewish poor with the power of making a healthy, honest, and honorable livelihood, and with the desire of living in a respectable and self-respecting manner.” Emanuel Mandel gave \$5,000. Other donors to the Jewish Training School were the estate of Max A. Meyer, Charles Schwab, and A. A. Kahn. They commissioned Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, architects of the Transportation Building at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, to design the

In 1906, O.J. Milliken, principal of the Jewish Training School, wrote that it aimed to “acquaint the children of Russian-Jews with the English language, our America methods, and American institutions and to help them advance themselves.” For the boys, the training was “as practical as possible,” with a focus on carpentry, printing, and other trades. For the girls, the school sought to connect them with domestic and commercial

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Jewish Child Labor

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worlds.”¹⁵ According to Charles Zeublin, the Jewish Training School had “a seating capacity of eight hundred, contains twenty-two rooms. The machine-shop accommodates thirty boys, and the joinery-shop thirty-five. There are also molding, drawing, sewing, and kindergarten rooms, and a physical and chemical laboratory.” The Jewish Training School building was destroyed by fire in 1953.¹⁶

History shows that many of the bright and ambitious children of Russian Jews, much like the German Jews a half-century earlier, chose academic studies rather than learning a trade. They flocked to the universities—to such as degree that by the 1920s, Ivy League colleges sought to restrict Jewish admissions. Then-Harvard University President Abbot Lawrence Lowell believed that his college would “lose its character as a democratic national university [and that] further increase in the proportion of Jewish students would not only be bad for the Gentiles but disastrous for the Jews themselves.”¹⁷

In 1938, Congress passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, banning child labor. Childhood was now for schooling and play, not for work.

Endnotes

¹ New York Times, July 7, 1928 and Jewish Telegraph Agency, July 13, 1928).

² Walter Roth. Nelson Morris and “The Yards.” *Chicago Jewish History*, Volume 32, No. 2, Spring 2008.]

³ *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1891.

⁴ Maurice H. Knight. “The Chicago Ghetto Re-Surveyed.” *Social Studies*, Volume 6, No. 2 (Dec. 1927), pp.242-252.

⁵ Vincent DiGirolamo. *Crying the News: A History of America’s Newsboys*. New York: Oxford, 2019

⁶ Jane Addams, “Newsboy Conditions in Chicago,” Chicago Federation of Settlements. 1903.

⁷ Tamar Lewinsky and Sandrine Mayoraz. *East European Jews in Switzerland; Student Migration of Jews from Tsarist Russia to the Universities of Berne and Zurich*, 1865-1914. De Gruyter, 2013.

⁸ Nicholas Kelley later graduated from Harvard and went on to serve as assistant secretary of the U.S. Treasury.

⁹ Florence Kelley, edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar. *Autobiography of Florence Kelley: Notes of Sixty Years*. Chicago: Charles Kerr, 1986.

Also, Lyn Gordon. “Women and the Anti-Child Labor Movement in Illinois, 1890-1920.” *Social Service Review*. Volume 5, No. 2 (June 1977), pp.228-248.

¹⁰ *The Residents of Hull House, Hull House Maps and Papers*. Boston: Crowell, 1895. Chapter on Wage Earning Children by Florence Kelley and Alzina Stevens.

¹¹ Florence Kelley. “The Sweating-System.” Chapter in *Hull House, Maps and Papers*, 1895, pp.27-45.

¹² Committee to Investigate the Garment Workers Strike,” testimony of Anna Shapiro, II, 242-272. Videotaped interview with Hannah Shapiro Glick, by Rebecca Sive-Tomeshivsky (Chicago: University of Illinois Chicago Circle, 1976)

¹³ Charles Zeublin. “The Ghetto.” Chapter in *Hull House Maps and Papers*, 1895.

¹⁴ 1890 First Annual Report of the Chicago Jewish Training School.

¹⁵ O. J. Milliken, The Jewish Training School of Chicago. *The Elementary School Teacher*. Volume 6. No.6 (February 1906) pp.278-280.

¹⁶ Zeublin, 1895.

¹⁷ Henry A. Yeomans. *Abbott Lawrence Lowell, 1856-1943*. New York: Arno Press, 1977. pp. 209-216.

Exhibit: Jewish Life in Central Illinois

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) exhibit “‘Pulling It All Together’: Jewish Community Advocacy, Activism, & Fellowship in Central Illinois, 1959-1984,” featuring administrative documents, news media, ephemera, photos, and artifacts from the Central Illinois Jewish Communities Archives, will be running in the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections room - on the third floor of the university’s main library - through May 2023.

This exhibit explores how small-town Jewish Illinoisans used identity-based organizations to participate politically and socially in the mid to late 1900s. Integral to the exhibit’s development were two CJHS members: **Erez Cohen**, the UIUC Hillel Director, and **Sybil Mervis**, a UIUC alumna and a leader in the Central Illinois Jewish community who donated much of her Central Illinois Jewish archival material to her alma mater.

Will Wonders Never Cease?

By Dr. Edward Mazur

The Chicago White Sox baseball team for 2023 chose as its opening day pitcher a right hander by the name of Dylan Cease.

Hardly a familiar Jewish name. When someone's name appeared in the media for an achievement of dubious distinction, my mother, the late Rena Kleinbort Mazur, frequently exclaimed, "Was he or she Jewish? Oy vey!" Cease's achievement is far from a dubious nature, of course.

In 2017, the Chicago Cubs hoped to repeat their championship season of 2016. The White Sox were in an all-too-familiar period of rebuilding. That summer, the Cubs traded pitcher Cease, outfielder José Jiménez, and two others to their crosstown rivals in exchange for José Quintana, a starting pitcher who, they hoped, would enhance their chances for repeating glory. Cease had been a sixth-round draft pick of the North Siders and was ranked overall as their number 63 prospect. The trade turned out to be a positive for the White Sox and a negative for the Cubs.

The World Baseball Classic, which was just held, has rules that a player can suit up for any country where he holds citizenship — or where he would be eligible to attain it. Thus, Team Israel became a gathering of American Jewish Major League baseball stars. Dylan Cease finished second in the American League Cy Young voting in 2022, and his name on an early version of the Team Israel roster surprised and delighted Jewish baseball fans.

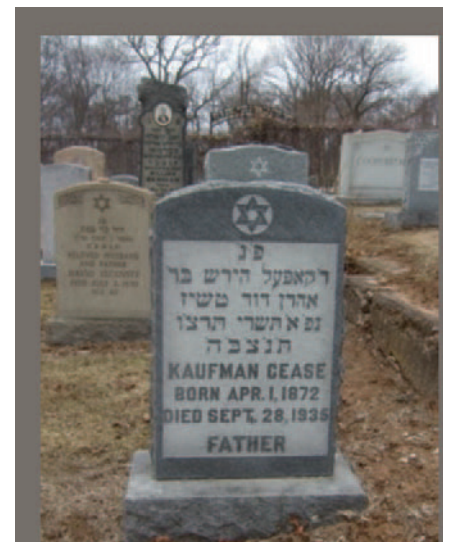
Research by reporters for the *Forward*, professional genealogists, and others have uncovered a most interesting story behind the name Cease. The *Forward's* Louis Keene discovered that Dylan's father, Jeff, played high school football and that his paternal grandmother, Betty Cease, played professional baseball in the 1940s. An in-depth search on JewishGen.org by Keene suggested that "Cease" could be an anglicization of "Suissa," a common Mizrahi surname. Renee Stern Steinig, a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists from New York, found burial and other records for people who appear to be Cease's grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents—all of whom are buried in Jewish cemeteries! Steinig discovered that Jeff Cease's parents, Harold Cease and Betty Wright Cease, are both buried in Lakeside Memorial Park, a Jewish cemetery in Doral, Florida, as are Harold's parents, Edward and Sarach (Beck) Cease. Betty Wright's parents were probably not Jewish, according to Steinig, since a minister officiated at Betty's mother's funeral.

Tracing the Cease ancestry into the 19th century, the FindaGrave.com profiles for Edward's parents, Kaufman and Esther Cease, indicate that they are buried in Adas Israel Cemetery in New Haven, Connecticut. Their tombstones show their Hebrew names: Koppel Hirsh, son of Aharon David, and Esther Malka, daughter of Avraham Leib. According to Steinig, both probably immigrated to this country in about 1890: Kaufman, from Austria; Esther, from Russia. On their wedding record, Steinig has noted that the surname is spelled "Csya."

All this has led Louis Keene to conclude that Dylan Cease is most likely eligible for Israeli citizenship under Israel's Right of Return Law because it seems that his father and, at the very least, his father's father were Jewish.

Dylan Cease, in an Instagram to Louis Keene, responded that "My dad's side of the family is Jewish." Asked whether he identified as Jewish, the White Sox hurler said, "I don't necessarily identify as it, but acknowledge it's in my ancestry."

If Jewish fans claim Cease, he would become part of a lineage of Jewish pitchers past and present led by Sanford "Sandy" Koufax and Atlanta Braves southpaw Max Fried. Cease decided to not join either Team USA or Team Israel in the 2023 World Baseball Classic contests, instead opting to prepare himself for the traditional baseball season.



The grave of Chicago White Sox pitcher Dylan Cease's great-great-grandfather

Another Profile in Courage: Elmer Fisher

By Joel Barry Fisher

In addition to Chicago Jewish servicemen featured in Dr. Chaim Rosenberg's Winter 2023 "Profiles in Courage" article, *CJH* is pleased to include a profile of an additional Jewish veteran from Chicago, Elmer Fisher.

Elmer Fisher was born on April 21, 1911, the fifth child of Sarah and Jonas Fisher. Elmer grew up on Chicago's South Side. He graduated from McKinley High School – closed since 1954 – and from the University of Illinois School of Pharmacy with a degree as a pharmaceutical chemist. At that time, the 1930s, it was a three-year degree. Elmer then owned and managed a drugstore on the city's South Side.



My father was drafted into the U.S. Army during World War II. Because he had a college degree, and because the military needed officers, he was sent to an expedited officer school. Ninety days later, he was a second lieutenant. In the Army, he drove trucks and amphibious vehicles (DUKW or DUCKS).

Stationed in Iceland for one to one-and-a-half years, Elmer was honorably discharged from the Army after three years. He went back to his drugstore, which his brother managed during his time in the military.

Elmer dated many women until he married my mother in 1954. I was born in 1956. They had no other children. He sold his pharmacy in 1969. He then worked at the pharmacy in the Drake Hotel for several years and, later, at Mark Drugs in Buffalo Grove for another several years.

My parents lived in West Rogers Park since 1961—first at 6136 N Washtenaw, until 1969, then at 6104 Washtenaw, until 1980. They lived in Winston Towers for the following 16 years before moving to Lincolnshire and residing in Rivershire.

Elmer enjoyed going on vacations with my mother and his brother and sister-in-law. For many years, he bowled in the Jewish War Veterans league. He loved me and my wife and our two my daughters, his grand-daughters. He died in 1997.

War Letters

The CJHS was fortunate to receive an email from Denver-based Judith Kaplan Cohen, which read, in part:

"My parents, Dr. Robert and Leona Chernikoff Kaplan, were born and raised in Chicago. In December 1945, my father, a physician who had just finished his training and was in the Army, was transferred to Germany. A few days later, I was born. My mother lived with her in-laws at 833 N. Hoyne Street. My father was in Germany for nine months. During this time, he and my mother wrote to each other almost every day....The letters do provide a detailed description of postwar life in Chicago and experiences of a Jewish Army officer overseas."

Ms. Cohen has generously agreed to share with *CJH* readership a portion of her father's correspondence, which is published below.

14 December 1945

"We have this afternoon just returned from Landsberg, where we conducted a nutritional survey among the 6,300 Jewish DPs at the now most notorious Landsberg Camp....These people have survived the worst of Nazi concentration camps, and only those who became experts at beating the official ration in these places are among them. The others were 'left behind.' The term to what these people do so expertly throughout the countryside is 'scrounge.'"





“‘Incredible’ is a weak word to apply to the tales of these people. They are alumni of the worst concentration camps in Germany. They have long ago lost all fear of death and, at first, to me, oddly, all fear of authority. Most of them are sole survivors of their families.”

22 March 1946

“Yesterday’s experience will be one of the highlights of my whole sojourn in Europe. I had and utilized the opportunity to go to Nuremberg and sit in on a session of the War Crimes Trial. Yes, I was actually there and saw at close hand men who are probably the greatest rogues in world history.”

“While we were there, the English (not American) and Russian prosecutors were cross-examining the star of the show, Hermann Goering. ...He’s an arrogant bastard and very clever at evading the issue. He beats around the bush when a question is asked: ‘Well, that depended on the year; it was different at different times’ or ‘It was not a matter of this; it was a consideration of something else’ and so on.”

“The Germans with whom I have spoken in the past few days are, for the most part, very proud of Goering’s show of courage and wit. At the opening of yesterday’s afternoon session, I heard him answer a question somewhat irrelevantly with: ‘Had Germany won the war, this would have been an entirely different picture of situation.’ The son of a bitch is shrewd.”

CJHS members... YASHER KOACH!

*The Hebrew phrase means
“More Power to You.”*

Erez Cohen, the director of the Hillel at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, authored the article “One hundred years of Jewish life on campus – and counting,” which was published in April’s *Jewish Chicago*.

Board member **Dr. Irving Cutler** celebrated his centennial birthday this past April. Dr. Cutler, the preeminent authority on Chicago Jewish history, is the author of many articles and books on the subject. He was honored for his contributions this spring by the Bureau of Jewish Education of Metropolitan Chicago, which also observed its 100th birthday.

Co-President **Dr. Rachelle Gold** is presenting “Immigrant Artist, Art Educator, Author, and Jewish Community Leader Louise Dunn Yochim” at Bernard Horwich JCC on May 24. Her talk is in conjunction with CJE Senior Life Community Days.

Board member **Rachel Heimovics**, along with her husband, **Mati Braun**, was recently in the *Heritage Florida Jewish News* in an article about interesting Jewish residents of Central Florida.

Board members **Mark Mandle** and **Joan Pomaranc** have been involved in preparations for the observance of the 175th anniversary of their synagogue, KAM Isaiah Israel, the oldest extant Jewish congregation in

Chicago. Pomaranc recently conducted a tour of the synagogue, located in the Hyde Park neighborhood, for University of Chicago Yiddish professor **Dr. Jessica Kirzane** and her students.

David Marienthal’s “*Live at Mr. Kelly’s*” won the Western Canadian International Film Festival’s 2023 Best Documentary. It was also an official selection this year at the Palm Beach International Film Festival and Boca International Jewish Film Festival

Dr. Chaim Rosenberg spoke this past April to approximately 60 Jewish cadets and officers from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point on the history of Jewish servicemen in America’s armed forces. The Zoom presentation – with Rosenberg in Chicago and the cadets and officers in Boston, where they were visitors – came at the request of Major David Frommer, West Point’s Jewish chaplain. Among his many books, Dr. Rosenberg is the author of “*Shield of David: A History of Jewish Servicemen in the Armed Forces*,” portions of which have been excerpted in *CJH*.



Dr. Chaim Rosenberg, on Zoom, with Jewish West Pointers

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור הציבתם



chicago jewish historical society

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Our History and Mission

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1977, is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the United States Bicentennial Celebration of 1976. Forty-six years later, our mission remains the discovery, collection, and

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

dissemination of information about the Jewish experience in the Chicago area through publications, open programs, tours, and outreach to youth and others interested in the preservation of Chicago Jewish history.

Tribute Cards for Celebrations or Memorials The card design features the Society's handsome logo. Pack of five cards and envelopes \$36. Individual cards can be mailed for you from our office at \$5 per card, postage included. Mail your order and check to CJHS, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659-7004. You may also order online at our website.

Back issues of *Chicago Jewish History* cost \$8 apiece. To request back issues, please email the Society at www.chicagojewishhistory.org

Visit our website www.chicagojewishhistory.org

Pay your membership dues online via PayPal or credit card, or use the printable membership application.

Inquiries: info@chicagojewishhistory.org

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations, and includes

- A subscription to our award-winning quarterly journal, *Chicago Jewish History*.
- Free admission to Society public programs. General admission is \$10 per person.
- Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year.

Life Membership	\$1,000
Annual Dues	
Historian	500
Scholar	250
Sponsor	100
Patron	65
Member	40
Student (with I.D.)	10



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