



chicago jewish historical society

# CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

*“Summer days, summer nights are gone/ Summer days and the summer nights are gone/  
I know a place where there’s still somethin’ going on.” Bob Dylan, “Summer Days”*

## Growing Up Jewish in a Non-Jewish Area: Sawyer Michigan

By Sandy Lopez

People will often ask how it came to be that I grew up in Sawyer, Michigan, a small town near the Indiana border, approximately an hour and a half from Chicago.

The story goes like this: My paternal grandparents, Abraham and Jenny Jacobson, came to Chicago in the late 1800s from Kiev. They had five children; my dad, Irving Jacobson, was the youngest. My grandfather decided that he wanted to bring his family to a small town that reminded him of the village outside Kiev where he grew up. So, he loaded up a horse-drawn vehicle and said, “I’ll stop when I find a place that is like my home.” Ergo, Sawyer.

My father grew up in Sawyer and, according to family lore, my grandmother wanted to give him and his siblings a Jewish education. However, the closest synagogue was in Benton Harbor, Michigan, which was too far to travel. The family was poor. Dad would talk about having chicken fat sandwiches for dinner when there wasn’t anything to eat.

My father met my mother, Gertrude Kaufer, in Chicago and insisted that if they got married, they would move to Sawyer. Reluctantly, my mother agreed. They married in 1945, I was born in 1947, and they were divorced by 1950.

My mother remained in Sawyer, thinking that it was a better place to raise a child than in the city. She had a difficult life as a single parent. She never drove, and she had to depend on the local bus system. She was also an older single mother, competing with younger women for jobs in Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, Michigan, and Michigan City, Indiana.

Sawyer was a Baptist community. My girlfriend in first grade asked if I could come to activity night at her church. I attended and came back with a sparkly painting I had made of Jesus Christ. Mom gently said, “We have our own religion, and you’ll start Sunday school when you’re a little older.”

In terms of overt anti-Semitism, I remember a few instances when my teacher made some questionable comment that infuriated my mother. I went to the same two-room schoolhouse as my father, and I recall my mother marching up the school’s steps to talk to the principal about one of these comments. She stated in no uncertain terms that any other negative comment about Jews would be dealt with at the Board of Education office in Benton Harbor. He was very sympathetic, since he was of another Christian denomination — Seventh-day Adventist — that was not very popular with the Baptist community. Like observant Jews, Seventh-day Adventists do not eat pork. They also observe their Sabbath on Saturday.



The author and her parents in the late 1940s

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## CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

This is a historical detective story I have waited 20 years to tell.

The story begins in 2003 with my visit to an estate sale at the Evanston home of Louise Dunn Yochim (1909–2003) and her late husband, Maurice Yochim (1908–1986). Louise and Maurice, immigrants from Ukraine, were artists, art teachers, and leading members of the Chicago art community and the Jewish community. They met as students at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Louise became a teacher and, later, the supervisor of art for the Chicago Public Schools. She served as president of the American Jewish Artists Club and the Chicago Society of Artists and wrote important books on art education, Chicago artists, and American Jewish artists. Maurice taught art at Chicago Teachers College – now Northeastern Illinois University – and became head of art education for the Board of Jewish Education. He was in charge of the children's art program at the Bernard Horwich JCC in the 1960s and was my teacher when I took my first art class there. Throughout their careers, the Yochims continued to create art and exhibit.

I wanted to acquire a piece of Maurice's artwork that would beautify my living space and be a memento of my connection to him. At the Yochim home, I leafed through a portfolio of prints for sale and happily selected two of Maurice's signed block prints: one was entitled "trees"; the other, "Yom Kippur," depicting a cluster of praying men.

Then I was drawn to another print. It was an undated lithograph that portrayed two traditionally attired Jewish figures, a man and woman, engaged in an energetic dance. In one corner was the signature "Marek Szwarc," with "Paris" written underneath. I never heard of the artist, but I liked the print and bought it.

Who was Marek Szwarc, and what was the background of this piece of art? Did Szwarc have a connection to Chicago? My quest for the answers led to amazing discoveries I could never have imagined.

I learned that Szwarc, a painter and sculptor, was born in Zgierz, Poland, near Lodz, in 1892. He was associated with L'École de Paris (the School of Paris), a term for the hundreds of French and émigré artists, many of them Jewish, who flocked to Paris from 1905 through the 1930s. Szwarc studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1910 to 1914 and lived among Jewish artists, including Marc Chagall and Chaim Soutine, in La Ruche, a cluster of artists' studios in Montparnasse. Between 1911 and 1913, he and fellow artists created the first Jewish art journal, *Makhmadim (Delights)*, expressing the idea of a Jewish renaissance. He then returned to Lodz, followed by travel to cities in the Russian Empire, where he affiliated with a Jewish literary circle that included Ahad Ha-Am and Hayim Bialik. In 1918, back in Poland, he and a group of artists formed Yung-Yiddish, the first Yiddish avant-garde artists group in Poland. He married in 1919, and, with his wife, Guina (née Pinkus), a writer, went back to Paris. Their only child, daughter Tereska, was born in 1920. An unexpected biographical detail is that Szwarc and his wife converted to Catholicism in 1919. Though they were practicing Catholics, his Jewish identity remained strong, and his art, predominantly sculpture and metal bas relief, was infused with Jewish, biblical, and religious themes for the rest of his life.

When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, Szwarc joined the Polish army in exile. After the occupation of France in 1940, he fled to Scotland, while his wife and daughter fled to England. After the war, they all returned to Paris, where he lived until his death in 1958.

I was excited to own a piece of art by Szwarc, but still knew nothing about it. Fortunately, there was a website for Marek Szwarc, with an invitation to make contact. Unsure what to expect, I sent an email inquiry about my print. Soon thereafter, I was elated to receive an email that began, "I am the daughter of Marek Szwarc" and was signed "Tereska Torres Levin." She wrote that the print was probably created in the 1920s and was called "Polish dance" or, as others told her, Chassidic dance, "but it does not look possible, as I think men and women do not dance together when they are hassids." She added, "I am presently in the U.S....If ever you come to Paris and you would like to visit my father's atelier where I live, let me know...From Nov. 30 to next May, many of his works will be exhibited in 2 museums in Germany."

Now I was intrigued by the daughter of Marek Szwarc. What I came to learn about her made me feel even more privileged to own artwork that represented her family.



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### Chicago Jewish History

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Tereska Torres Levin, usually referred to as Tereska Torres, was acclaimed in France as an author of many novels and two memoirs – a total of 16 books – but as her *New York Times* obituary began (Margalit Fox, Sept. 25, 2012), “Ms. Torres’s personal narrative was far more dramatic than anything in her fiction.”

During the family’s refuge in London, she joined DeGaulle’s Free French forces and was eventually assigned to an intelligence and operations unit. She met and fell in love with Georges Torres, a French Jew in the forces, whom she married in 1944. He was killed in combat in France some months later. (An interesting side note about Georges is that he was the son of Jeanne Reichenbach, formerly Jeanne Torres, who in 1945 married Léon Blum, the first Jewish Prime Minister of France, after two years of voluntary detention with him in a walled barracks near Himmler’s hunting lodge in Buchenwald. A 2019 French movie, “*Je ne rêve que de vous*,” tells the story.) Their daughter, Dominique, who became a journalist, was born after his death. After a period of despondency following Georges’ death, Tereska’s life was revitalized as result of a long-ago fateful incident that had occurred in 1924.

That year, an 18-year-old Chicago-born writer named Meyer Levin was living in the artists’ quarter in Paris. *The Menorah Journal*, which had published his work, assigned him to interview Marek Szwarc, the subject of an earlier article in the journal. Levin wrote in a moving tribute to Szwarc, which appears on the Marek Szwarc website (<https://www.marekszwarc.com/texts.html>): “This coincidence [of how Levin first located Szwarc] marked our friendship with the sign of fate. Szwarc exercised an enormous influence on my life and even, at a later date, he would become my father-in-law.”

Levin became a close friend and admirer of Szwarc and knew Tereska since her childhood. In fact, he had already fallen in love with her before her first marriage, according to an article in *Haaretz*, “Living (As a Jew) in Three Dimensions of Time,” (Gaby Levin, Nov. 16, 2012). After the war, she went to Palestine, at his invitation, to assist him in the filming of his book, “*My Father’s House*,” and his documentary, “*The Illegals*,” about immigration into Palestine after the Holocaust. They married in 1948. By then, Levin had established his reputation as a journalist (including in Europe, as a war correspondent), critic, nonfiction writer, and novelist. Several of his works of fiction were set in Chicago. The couple had two sons, Gabriel and Mikael, and lived at various times in Paris, New York and Israel. Levin died in Jerusalem in 1981. I eagerly absorbed all the information I had unearthed about Szwarc and his family, but I still didn’t know much about my print of the Jewish dancers. That puzzle was eventually solved by an article I found in our very own *Chicago Jewish History*.

Longtime readers of our journal know that former CJHS president Walter Roth z"l, who had endless fascination and adoration for Meyer Levin, composed many articles about Levin and his writings. Roth’s Fall 2005 article, “Meyer Levin, Hassidism, and The Golden Mountain”



Marek Szwarc's “The Mad Dancers”



## Chicago's Sephardic Congregation: A History

By Dr. Sol Hasson, z"l

The Ladino-speaking Jews lived in the European part of the Ottoman Empire, the Balkans, since their expulsion from Spain in 1492. In 1911, before the Balkan War of 1913, in which Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria fought for their independence, the Ottoman Empire saw a diminution of its military might. As a result, it began to draft young men of all backgrounds into the Turkish army.

Serving in the Turkish army was very difficult for Jewish boys, who faced considerable antisemitism. Many opted to emigrate rather than to serve. Coming mostly from Salonica, Istanbul, and Monastir, Tunisia, they left for the United States, France, and Palestine. In this country, the majority settled in New York, but many went to Chicago, Seattle, and Indianapolis.

One of the first orders of business for these Chicago immigrants was to establish a fraternity or brotherhood, as their peers had in New York. In 1909, 15 Sephardic Jews had founded the Fraternidad Israelite Portuguesa, later the Portuguese Israelite Fraternity. The reasons behind the name "Portuguese" are not known. There may have been some Jews of Portuguese origin already established in Chicago.



**Rabbi Shalom Nadoff, who served the congregation for four decades**

photo courtesy of  
Albert Hasson

These émigrés believed it important to establish a fraternal organization because it offered a sense of security with people of similar background and language (Ladino). The Fraternity offered services with a common minhag (tradition): monetary assistance in cases of need, aid and support during illness, and a common cemetery with burial benefits.

For many years, the last item of business was the "Report of Ill Members," during which a member or members of the Fraternity were appointed to visit the ailing member. The Fraternity established bylaws and a number of important committees, including the Kehila and the Cemetery. The Kehila Committee was charged with procuring a place to worship and a rabbi, collecting funds from holiday pledges, and, in general, managing accounts.

Starting in the 1930s, the Fraternity rented space from the Roumanian Synagogue on Douglas Boulevard on Chicago's West Side.<sup>1</sup> High Holiday services were held in a large hall on the synagogue's second floor, and a smaller room on the first floor was reserved for daily religious services. This arrangement lasted until a few years after World War II, when the demographics of the West Side began to change and the Jewish population moved mostly northward—to Albany Park and Rogers Park.

In 1933, Chicago hosted the World's Fair. Among the multitudes who attended were visitors from abroad who rented small kiosks in which they presented their artwork. One such artisan was a silversmith of Yemeni descent from Palestine, Shalom Nadav - who subsequently changed his surname to Nadoff - whom Fraternity members met while attending the fair. Because of his knowledge of Hebrew and the Sephardic minhag, Nadoff was invited to remain in the United States and become the rabbi of the Fraternity. He held this post for 40 years, when he retired and made aliyah to Israel.

Soon after World War II, the Fraternity established a youth group for high schoolers, which became known as the Junior Sephardic League (JSL). The group was very successful in bringing many high school- and college-age young people together. Early members included the Varon sisters, Charles



**Interior of Chicago's Sephardic Congregation**

photo courtesy of Joyce Neiman

<sup>1</sup>The congregation actually began more than 100 years ago, according to member Joyce Neiman. In 1922, it rented space in a social hall at Racine Avenue and Roosevelt Road. A Hebrew school was formed, and classes were held at 13th Street and Blue Island Avenue (per Charlie Meshulam, z"l). After renting at the Roumanian synagogue, it moved to Lawrence and Kedzie avenues, New Israel on Touhy Avenue, and, finally, to California and Morse avenues—before buying property on Howard Street.

Ventura, Sam Amado, Rickie Pardo, Esther Aronesti, Tillie Levy, and Jack Levin, along with many others. Sol Hasson attended his first meeting in the fall of 1946 while he was serving in the United States Army. At least eight marriages between Sephardic couples resulted from the contacts in the JSL. Most of these individuals would later become active members and leaders of the Fraternity.



Exterior of the synagogue

photo courtesy of Albert Hasson

At the same time, and into the early 1950s, many second-generation young people, a number of whom were World War II veterans, were encouraged by their elders to become leaders in the Fraternity. One young person who was persuaded to assume the mantle was Hasson, who was elected Secretary of the Fraternity at a 1952 meeting that took place at the Fraternity's West Side coffeehouse, which also served as an unofficial Ladino-speaking social club.

Beginning in the early 1950s, members began looking for a permanent building for a synagogue. Their efforts were abandoned after three locations were identified but were subsequently deemed, for various reasons, to be unsuitable. The attempt was taken up again a decade later, when membership in the Fraternity had taken a growth spurt. Hasson was appointed to head the search.

Hasson worked with a Realtor, who presented to him a number of lots on the Evanston side of Howard Street. Hasson was able to negotiate a price of \$37,500 for three lots - \$12,500 each - and he sketched out a plan, including a rough architectural layout, that Fraternity leaders accepted.

Architect Aaron Daniel, a member of the Fraternity, was selected to design the synagogue. His completed work would include a skylight above the Aron Kodesh (the Ark). Fundraising efforts to cover the mortgage were led by Grace Marcus, née Kamhi, who had managed the JSL decades earlier. The Sephardic Congregation was ready for worship in 1971. Rabbi Nadoff was succeeded by Rabbi Michael Azose, who remained with the synagogue until his retirement in 2009.

Complementing the Fraternity was the Ladies Auxiliary, which originally had been called the Sociedad Benificiansa de Damas. The group later became known as the Sephardic Israelite Sisterhood (SIS), and it was led by Sol Hasson's wife, Tillie, who succeeded in attracting many members of North African and Iranian descent. The new SIS soon became very active with many programs, including an annual SIS dinner and a Father's Day Brunch, all of which raised considerable funds for the synagogue.

In the 1980s, a building directly west of the synagogue was put up for sale, and the congregation decided to purchase it. The expansion allowed for a new social hall, offices, and entrance.

In 1990, Chicago was chosen as the convention site for the American Sephardic Federation (ASF). The convention committee was chaired by Hasson, who, with other committee members, formed the ASF, Midwest Division. The convention was very successful and profitable, and the ASF Midwest Division continued for another two decades as a thriving social organization.



The burning of the synagogue's mortgage, 1978

photo courtesy of Joyce Neiman

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## Chicago's Sephardic Congregation

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Rabbi Hertzel Hillel Yitzhak, who succeeded Rabbi Azose, has led the congregation for the last 14 years. In 2020, he was joined by Rabbi Shimshon Yitzakov, who serves as assistant and program coordinator.



The late Dr. Sol Hasson  
photo courtesy of  
Albert Hasson

*About the article and author:* Dr. Sol Hasson was a pillar of Chicago's Sephardic Jewish community. Born in 1927 in Naples, Italy, to parents from Salonika, Greece, he, along with his older sister, fled the Nazis in 1940. He was raised by an aunt in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago. A graduate of the Illinois Institute of Technology, he later received his doctorate from Northwestern University. He worked for many years at Advance Transformer Company. He died last summer at 94.

The article, edited for *CJH*, is an abridged version of a more extensive history that can be found on the website of the Sephardic Congregation. Dr. Hasson, in his original article, noted that he gleaned historical information about the synagogue from many of its original members, particularly Abraham Pinto.

## The Chicago Jewish Historical Society Awards the Muriel Robin Rogers Prize to Niles North High Students

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society was pleased to award the Muriel Robin Rogers Chicago Jewish History Award this past spring to two Niles North High School students, Alexander Ford and Albert Bogdan, who made a short documentary, "*Never Forget Luckman*," about the late Jewish athlete Sid Luckman, who was a revered Chicago Bears quarterback. The award was given to the two students as part of the annual Metro History Day competition, an event sponsored by the Chicago History Museum. The award is named in honor of a beloved founder and the first President of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Muriel Robin Rogers died in 2019.

Bogdan, a rising senior, said that he and Ford, friends since elementary school, were intrigued by Luckman's hard-knock early years and impressed by his stature as "a trailblazer for Jewish fans across America." The two students, under the tutelage of their history teacher, Pankaj Sharma, relied on many sources in the development of their film, including R.D. Rosen's biography of Luckman, "*Tough Luck*." They also had an opportunity to interview the author about his subject.

Ford said that as he and Bogdan, both sports fans, delved more deeply into their research, they "began to realize how much bigger [Luckman] was than just the NFL."

For his part, their teacher, Mr. Sharma, delighted in his students' accomplishment. He noted, "Sid Luckman is the greatest quarterback in Bears history and is buried in Skokie, where our high school is located, so it seemed like a great topic for their research focus. I am very proud of the documentary that they were able to create such an interesting figure in Chicago history."



Niles North High School students Alexander Ford (left) and Albert Bogdan were awarded the CJHS Muriel Robin Rogers Prize.



## One of a Dozen (Jewish Women in Congress): An Interview with Representative Jan Schakowsky

By Esther Mosak

Jewish women are playing an outsized role in public affairs. In the U.S. Congress, there are currently two Jewish female Senators – Nevada’s Jacky Rosen and California’s Dianne Feinstein – as well as 10 Representatives, including Florida’s Lois Frankel and Debbie Wasserman Schultz, California’s Sara Jacobs, Vermont’s Becca Balint, North Carolina’s Kathy Manning, Washington State’s Kim Schrier, Michigan’s Elissa Slotkin, Oregon’s Susanne Bonamici, and Pennsylvania’s Susan Wild. All are Democrats, as is the Chicago area’s very own Representative from Illinois’ 9th District, Jan Schakowsky, who has served in Congress since 1999.



U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky has represented the 9th District of Illinois, which includes much of Chicago’s North Side and the city’s northern suburbs, for almost 25 years.

Representative Schakowsky spoke at an event on Capitol Hill earlier this year honoring the women of the 118th Congress. It was organized by the National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, and Jewish Women International. The same week, the White House hosted its first-ever summit of Jewish women leaders. In an interview afterwards with *CJH*, she reflected on her upbringing, the Jewish values that inform her public service, and the role of women and youth in politics. Her responses have been edited for the publication.

*What would you like us to know about your colleagues, the other Jewish women in Congress?*

We have kind of a sisterhood. We do have meetings of Jewish members, men and women, to discuss things about foreign policy, Israel, and we have guests come in. But we also want to be part of an international movement, an international sisterhood, to see the empowerment of women everywhere. Historically, Jewish women, especially Jewish mothers, have been made fun of for looking bossy, for seeming to want to run the show. Women want to have some influence, not only in their families, but in the world. We’ve increasingly added to our numbers in Congress. These are fantastic women, so smart, so articulate, so ready to make sure we protect not only women, but health care, equal rights – a very Jewish agenda. I must say, “Justice, justice you shall pursue...” [from Deuteronomy]. I see women doing that. We do have occasions when Jewish organizations sponsor events that we’ll support, on issues like civil rights, equity, health care, reproductive rights. Jewish women inside Congress and out are very much involved in these kinds of organizing efforts and being advocates for these kinds of issues.

*What are some of your domestic priorities right now?*

The taking away of reproductive rights is shocking. It is shocking to us that, after almost half a century of *Roe v. Wade*, that right was taken away, and it seems to get worse every day. It’s clearly discrimination against women. I have a little saying, *Roe* [the Supreme Court decision establishing choice as a constitutional right] wasn’t the beginning of women having abortions, it was the end of women dying of abortions. A lot of us are focused now on the lack of equity, how women of color are more likely to die in childbirth, to lose infants. I think it’s attached to Jewish culture – to care about other people. We are part of a world in which we ourselves, as a people, have experienced oppression and antisemitism, which is right now on the rise, unfortunately. Our commitment to justice, is driven, I think in part for all of us, by our Judaism. It extends to people at home and around the world.

Gun violence is an incredible issue for us right now. Highland Park (a Chicago suburb with a large Jewish population and the scene of a mass shooting in July 2022) is not far from where I live. The gun violence is everywhere. And children are dying. I had a roundtable with high school students, one of whom had a bulletproof backpack that she carried with her all the time. It was very, very heavy, but she wouldn’t even put it in her

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## Jan Schakowsky

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locker. They have these drills, they're constantly thinking about how dangerous it is in school, and a lot of these kids carry this trauma with them. There doesn't seem to be any safe place. So, we're very involved in trying to get a ban on assault weapons.

*Tell us something about your family's history in Chicago.*

I have Ukrainian blood running through my veins. My grandparents came from a place near Kiev. At that time, it was part of Russia. My mother was actually born in Canada. I'm first-generation American. My father was born in Lithuania; he came as a small child. My grandparents were settled in the Humboldt Park neighborhood by the Salvation Army (which is currently helping settle other migrants in Chicago). I still have a warm spot in my heart for them. My grandfather, Sam Cosnow, was a peddler. He'd get up at the crack of dawn, and he would go to the barn behind his house at 2606 West Walton and take out Teddy, his horse, and hitch him up. He would go to the vegetable market, then load up his car, and schlep mostly potatoes up and down the alleys in Humboldt Park. My grandmother made all the clothes for the four children. By the way, she was very happy when, after Uncle Bob was born, the visiting nurse told her about birth control. That was the end of that. She was really grateful. My Aunt Diana went on to business school, and the other three all graduated from college. My mother was a teacher, and my Uncle Bob worked at the Board of Education. Their older brother, Uncle Nat, was born in Russia; he worked for the Illinois Crime Commission. Everybody ended up middle class. My mother, Tillie, was introduced by my Uncle Nat to his friend Irwin, my dad. I have his naturalization papers. My parents were happily married well over 50 years. Our family ended up in Rogers Park. I remember seder at my grandmother's house and at my mother's. We were members of a Reform synagogue, which I am still, but not the same one. I grew up in a primarily Jewish community. I started at Clinton [elementary school] then moved to Rogers School. I went to Hebrew school. And, by the way, I was bat mitzvahed. That was not that common. I went every Saturday to a bar mitzvah, but I don't remember going to any other bat mitzvahs. My sister was 10 years older than me. That was her idea. She wanted everything for me. When I went to Sullivan High School, it was about 90 percent Jewish. I took my Judaism totally for granted. That was my world.

*You have remained an active supporter of Sullivan up until today... so much so that its new gym is named after you.*

A book has now been written about Sullivan. It is called "Refugee High." I'm very involved [in alumni affairs]. I've always had a lot of affection for Sullivan. I went back - I can't remember how long after my graduation - and one of the teachers said, "Oh, those were the golden days. These kids now, it's not really good." And I thought to myself, "If you don't love these kids, if you don't respect and care about them..." Of course, the school has changed. I feel a real affinity for the immigrant community and the struggles of the immigrant community, which are ongoing every day. With some of these kids, the scars are there, and things are really difficult at home. The other thing about these refugee kids now, sometimes they're the only English speaker. So, they grow up having to translate all the time. Now, when I was growing up and we'd go to my maternal grandparents house every Sunday, the first thing I'd do is I'd run out to see Teddy, the horse. And then, they got one of those early televisions, the big box with a tiny little screen. The parents and the grandparents would be in the kitchen talking Yiddish, which I never learned. I just have the key phrases. So that was my life, every weekend with the TV, or out with Teddy. He didn't work on Sunday. That was a beautiful time.

*So how did you move from Teddy the horse to a leadership role in the U.S. Congress?*

I was from a family of teachers. My mother thought I should be a lawyer, but I didn't know any lawyers. That was good of her to suggest that, but I became a teacher. I didn't teach for long. I got married at 20 and had two kids within a year and a half, then retired for a while. And then became an activist. What about? Getting



This headline, from the late 1990s, recalls Schakowsky's rise to political prominence and pays tribute to her predecessor, the late U.S. Representative Sidney Yates, who was also Jewish.



freshness dates on food in the supermarket. A small group of women formed an organization because we were just outraged that you could not know how old any of your food was in the supermarket. We called ourselves National Consumers United, all five of us. Not just suburban or north suburban, but national! And we printed a book that sold a couple of thousand copies. It took a couple of years, but we won. Not because we passed legislation, but Jewel [supermarkets] started advertising, "Come to Jewel. We have freshness dates on our house brands." And then it snowballed. Oscar Mayer, Kraft. It's on everything now, even the meats. We had been thrown out of the store by a butcher who wouldn't tell us how old the food was. The stores found it helped so much for inventory control, because anybody could see a date. It helped them, because they could order more appropriately, and they saved money. It worked for business, as well as the consumers. We became shareholders, owned one share of the National Tea Company, one share of Jewel. We'd go to the shareholders' meetings and make spectacles of ourselves.



The gym of Chicago's Sullivan High School is named after the congresswoman.

*You went on to become Program Director of Illinois Public Action, and then Director of the Illinois State Council of Senior Citizens, before serving for eight years in the Illinois House of Representatives. Currently, you are the Chief Deputy whip in Congress; a ranking member on the Innovation, Data and Commerce Subcommittee; and vice chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Why do you identify as a progressive?*

I've always been a progressive, identified as that. From the beginning, well, I wouldn't have articulated it as Jewish values. But as I grew up, I realized that is absolutely was. Not just the teaching of Judaism, but the culture. My parents were not active in politics, but they were Democrats because they believed in rights for ordinary people. My mother was a teacher and my father was a furniture salesman, so pretty modest... But I see it so vividly now, and for many years now, that it's all of one piece. That fighting for other people, as well as for yourself, is what the world should be like. I see what's going on in places around the globe. I've had the privilege as a member of Congress to do a lot of traveling and to see the struggles of women, of poor people, of hungry people around the world. Here in the United States, there are many children who are called food insecure - that's a euphemism for hungry. I've always had a comfortable roof over my head, but so many people don't, and there is a constant struggle for housing, just the effort to be able to keep that roof... Being in a privileged position to be able to address these issues is such a blessing. Not that so much progress has been made - there's a lot of work to do. It is consistent with the values of my very middle-class family. Growing up, it was a big deal to go out to dinner. We never really went out to dinner. But I realize now how privileged that lifestyle was. And here I am, as a fighter. My slogan was, "Put a Fighter on Your Side." There were those who were against that slogan and thought "fighter" was too aggressive. But I said, "That's what I do, and I'm always going to do."

*What would be your message to young people thinking of a career in public service?*

In my office, interns can help constituents, even with tough issues like immigration. They can make things happen, get a sense of accomplishment. We try to create opportunities for young people to feel a sense of agency. Let me tell you about young people. When I'm in a classroom, I used to say to kids, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Now I say, "What do you want to do now?" Because the voice of young people, when it comes to everything from environment to guns, can be so incredibly powerful.

I didn't mention the environment before. We're at ground zero now. Humanity will go on, the planet will go on, but life could be pretty miserable. Young people are walking out of schools now. And they're walking out on guns. This is their century. And beyond. I have been approached by young people who are very worried about carbon emissions, and they're worried about drilling on public land. And certainly, they're afraid to go to school. We finally did pass a handful of bills that are going to save lives. We have to go farther. But it's because of the advocates. And a lot of them are kids. That's why I say, "Your time is now. You don't have to be 18 years old to be involved in a campaign. You can make phone calls, you can go door to door, you can do a lot of things. You can do tech better than anybody else. Don't wait. This is your world. This is your time."

## Growing Up Jewish in Sawyer, Michigan

continued from front page

I believe that because my mother did not fit prevailing antisemitic stereotypes of the 1950s — ones that depicted Jews as wealthy, urbane, educated, and domineering — the townsfolk were more tolerant of her. She was poor, had not been educated beyond the 10th grade, and relied on government-surplus beans and rice to feed us. Much of my wardrobe was of the hands-me-down variety.

My father remarried when I was 5 and settled in Union Pier, a largely Jewish resort area three towns east of Sawyer. My weekends and summers would be spent there, so between relatives in Chicago and my friends in Union Pier, I had a lot of Jewish exposure. My father and stepmother were friends with the small Jewish group who were year-round residents, and they played a large part in contributing to my Jewish identity.

Mom and I moved quite a bit in my first 10 years of life — back to Chicago, then to Florida and Benton Harbor — so that she could remain gainfully employed. By the time I was in fifth grade, we had returned to Sawyer permanently. The middle school I attended was a new building that accommodated students from several communities.

I didn't realize until several years later that at my eighth-grade graduation ceremony, the local rabbi was asked to do the benediction. Looking back, I'm moved by the administration's sensitivity to me, the only Jewish child in school!

I began high school in Three Oaks, Michigan. (Sawyer was too small for its own building). I desperately hoped I would run into someone Jewish. In looking through a yearbook the summer before my freshman year, I saw a senior wearing a mezuzah for her senior picture. As it turned out, her brother was in my class, and they were half Jewish.

I began confirmation classes at Temple Beth-El in Benton Harbor. Rabbi Joseph Schwartz taught the class, and I enjoyed listening to him and looking at his cute son.

As I reflect on those years, I see my childhood and adolescent experiences in Sawyer as fun-filled. They exposed me to diversity. My mother was always instilling in me tolerance for people of all races, ethnic groups, and religions, and was not reluctant to speak up about any injustices done to anyone. These experiences helped to define my character and promote an understanding and acceptance of others.

*About the author:* Sandy Lopez moved to Chicago following her college graduation and was a caseworker for the Cook County Department of Public Aid. She married a man from the Detroit area and settled in a Detroit suburb that has been her home for 50 years. She has been a social worker for almost five decades.



The author and her paternal grandfather

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## Union Pier Bar Mitzvah Prep

By Dr. Edward Mazur

The article by Michael Eliasohn in the Spring 2023 *Chicago Jewish History* ("Congregation Beth Jacob: A Shul in Union Pier, Lakeside, Michigan") reminded me of my summer days as a child on the Michigan shore.

My family and I spent the first 13 summers of my life in Union Pier, Michigan, a small town in southwestern Michigan in what today is called "Harbor Country." My parents, David and Rena Mazur, and my uncle and aunt, Norman and Thelma Kleinbort, rented summer cottages from late June to early September at such idyllic locations as Pier Village, Paradise Village, the Gordon Beach Hotel Cottages, and Gunnard's Cottages. I doubt if they ever paid more than \$500 or \$600 for the entire summer.

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As soon as my grammar school, LaFayette, at 2714 West Augusta Boulevard, "released us" for the summer, a rented trailer would pull up at our apartment building. It would be loaded with all sorts of clothes, bicycles, pots, pans, and other chazerei (junk). It would then proceed to my aunt and uncle's apartment, located above Norman's Jewelry Store on West Division Street, where the packing and loading process would be repeated. Afterwards, we would pile into Uncle Norman's Pontiac Star Chief automobile, towing the trailer and heading for "the country."

My father would come to Union Pier on the weekend. He would take the Chicago and South Shore Electric Railroad from Michigan and Randolph Avenues in Chicago to Michigan City, Indiana. There, he boarded a bus that stopped at all the resort towns between Michigan City and Benton Harbor and St. Joseph Michigan, including Michiana Shores, New Buffalo, Union Pier, Lakeside, Sawyer, Harbert, Bridgeman, St. Joseph, and Benton Harbor. My uncle Norman, Zayde Jacob, and my older brother, Sanford, would come to the cottages on Saturday night after closing the jewelry store and return on Tuesday in the early morning.

These carefree days of my youth were filled with daily swimming in Lake Michigan, riding my second-hand bicycle with a basket for groceries and a horn, playing organized and mostly disorganized sports, visiting the local variety store called Kopecks and the "Three Stores" for what we called a "Jewish beer" - a chocolate phosphate - along with a stop for ice cream on the way to Three Oaks, Michigan.

The summer of 1956 became a very special time for this boychik. In October, I would be bar mitzvahed at the Atereth Zion Synagogue on Chicago's Spaulding Avenue, just south of Division Street, in the neighborhood we called "west of Humboldt Park."

To prepare for this meaningful event, I had to practice my haftorah Monday through Friday, as well as on Sunday morning for my family. I had to do so before anything else could take place. My haftorah teacher was Joseph Schachter, an instructor at my synagogue who would later head the Hillel at the University of Illinois at Chicago before making aliyah to Israel. Because Schachter, who had his own family and needed to make a living, obviously could not spend the summer with me in Union Pier, he came up with the perfect solution. We would record my haftorah and play it on the family record player, which would allow me to prepare for my Saturday morning at Atereth Zion and my bar mitzvah ceremony.

For that entire summer, my day started after breakfast with my taking out the record player, placing an LP record on the turntable, and chanting my haftorah several times, usually under the watchful eyes of my mother. Once she signaled genug, or enough, off came the yarmulke and carefully put away were the record and the record player - at least until the next day. I could then set off with my friends, go to the beach, ride my bike into town, and either hang out or set pins at Irv's Bowling Alley for a dime a line. I do not know how many other pinsetters studied haftorah and worked at the bowling alley, but it was a most rewarding summer in more ways than I could have ever imagined.

When it came time for me to take the bimah, chant the prayers, deliver my haftorah, and give a speech in English, Yiddish, and Hebrew, I was a star, according to my family. My summer in Union Pier prepared me for all of this.

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## Welcome New Members

William Choslovsky  
Chicago, IL

David Druce  
South Euclid, Ohio

Melody Ehrlich  
Chicago, IL;  
Coconut Beach, FL

Jeffrey Flicker  
Chicago, IL

Bradley Miller  
Lincolnwood, IL

David Reiner  
Ridgefield, CT

Joel Rubin  
Skokie, IL

Adam Siegel  
Chicago, IL

Leslye Whittman  
Highland Park, IL

## New Membership Bonus

Not yet a member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society? Consider joining now! When you do so, you will receive a bonus: membership through the entire 2023 *and* 2024 years. Thanks in advance for your support.

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## A Look Back at the City's First Synagogue for LGBTQIA+ Jews

As people worldwide observe annual Pride celebrations over the summer months, it is fitting to remember the roles that LGBTQIA+ Jews in Chicago and environs have played in advancing their civil rights, contributing to the rich fabric of the Jewish community, and working on behalf of the greater civic community.

Perhaps there is no one more appropriate to do so than CJHS member Rabbi Laurence Edwards, who for a decade – from 2003 to 2013 – served as the part-time spiritual leader of Congregation Or Chadash, a Chicago synagogue that was founded in 1975 as a support group for gay and lesbian Jews and quickly reorganized, a year or two later, as a place for Jews to worship. Or Chadash proudly took its rightful place under the auspices of mainstream American Jewry, joining hundreds of other temples and synagogues as a member of the Union for Reform Judaism.

After meeting for many decades at the Second Unitarian Church on West Barry Avenue in Chicago's Lakeview neighborhood, a North Side district that has for many years attracted significant numbers of LGBTQIA+ and Jewish residents, Or Chadash moved up to the Edgewater neighborhood, where it shared space with another Reform synagogue, Emanuel Congregation, on North Sheridan Road. Rabbi Edwards, who had for years served as a Hillel rabbi at Dartmouth College and Cornell University, assumed the pulpit just as Or Chadash was making its move northward from Barry to Sheridan. He recently talked to *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller about his time at Or Chadash, the contributions of its members, and the changing face of Chicago's Jewish LGBTQIA+ community over the past five decades.

*CJH*: You are a straight, cisgender male. How is it that you came to lead a synagogue that was primarily gay, queer, and transgender?

LE: My predecessor had been a straight woman [Rabbi Suzanne Griffel], so there was a precedent for hiring a heterosexual spiritual leader. But my bona fides were partly due to my sister, Rabbi Lisa Edwards, who was one of the first out rabbis to be ordained in this country. (For several decades, Rabbi Lisa Edwards led Congregation Beth Chayim Chadashim, a Los Angeles synagogue with direct outreach to the LGBTQIA+ community.)

*CJH*: When you came to Or Chadash, the synagogue had been operational for almost 30 years. What was the congregation like in 2003?

LE: It was a lovely congregation of folks who were wonderful in so many ways, and we bonded very quickly. They were mostly an aging group. Many of them had been there from the founding, or near the founding, of the congregation. At the time, there were about 80 members, or membership units, as they say in synagogue parlance. On High Holidays, we had at our peak 150 worshippers.

The members who attended services were very committed. They often led services – since I was only a part-time rabbi – and they were in charge of many rituals. And they really showed up, whether it was for a study group or for a member in need. There was really a feeling of an extended family among the group.

*CJH*: You mentioned that most of the congregants were older. Why was it difficult to attract younger members?

LE: By the 2000s, the struggles of coming out and gaining acceptance by families and the greater community were still there, but they were abating somewhat. Little by little, there was a more welcoming spirit in the Jewish community, and some of the synagogues on the North Side, in particular, began seeking LGBTQIA+ members. At the same time, many younger gay, lesbian, and transgender Jews now wanted to be part of larger congregations from which their older peers had once felt excluded. It was a significant demographic shift.



CJHS member Rabbi Larry Edwards, along with his wife, Susan Boone, at Jerusalem World Pride Day in 2006

*CJH:* In part, that's what led to the absorption of Or Chadash by Temple Sholom a few years after your departure (in 2016), correct?

*LE:* Yes, our success as an institution would ultimately mean that we were not needed anymore. Many LGBTQIA+ synagogues across the country have met the same fate. In some cities, such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C., these synagogues remain, but they now have sizable numbers of members who identify as straight.

*More about Rabbi Laurence Edwards:* Rabbi Edwards grew up on Chicago's North Shore, where his father had once served as President of Highland Park's Congregation Solel (now Makom Solel Lakeside). A graduate of the University of Chicago, he was ordained by Hebrew Union College and earned a doctorate from Chicago Theological Seminary. In addition to his work as a pulpit rabbi and Hillel leader, Rabbi Edwards has taught at DePaul University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. For five years, he served as Book Review Editor of the *CCAR Journal / Journal of Reform Judaism*.

## CJHS at the CHM

On Sunday, July 9, CJHS guests were treated to a custom tour of the Chicago History Museum's (CHM) new exhibit, *Back Home: Polish Chicago*. We were guided by the museum's senior historians who worked on the exhibit: Peter Alter, Chief Historian and Director of the Studs Terkel Center for Oral History, and Rebekah Coffman, Curator of Religion and Community History.

With more than 90 articles and documents and 100-plus photographic reproductions, the exhibit allows museum visitors to experience, "[t]hrough the lens of Chicago's Polish communities... the journeys immigrants have taken to get to the city, the ways they have established themselves in its neighborhoods, and the duality of feeling a deep connection to two places at once," as the CHM notes on its website.

The displays use the term "Polish lands" (rather than "Poland") to reflect the shifting national boundaries and sovereignties in the many decades of immigration to Chicago, which began in 1830. There is Jewish content throughout the galleries, including a map of 1930's-era houses of worship, community institutions, and organizations. An interactive music exhibit gives visitors an opportunity to listen to the Maxwell Street Klezmer band. A gallery about neighborhood life offers photographs and objects relating to synagogues, Jewish schools, religious observance, and life cycle ceremonies.

Mr. Alter described CHM's cooperative relationships in the development of this exhibit. The website states that the exhibition is "a collaborative project and oral history initiative with the Polish History Museum (Warsaw, Poland), Polish Museum of America, and Loyola University Chicago Polish Studies program." During our tour, Mr. Alter mentioned the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located in Warsaw. The CHM's group of high school oral historians from the Chicago and Warsaw areas visited POLIN in the summer

of 2018 with the group's hosts from Warsaw's Polish History Museum. Though the CHM did not collaborate with POLIN on the exhibition, Ms. Coffman's research on POLIN's method of historical interpretation informed her curatorial work, which is documented in the exhibit.

CHM is collecting personal photographs to add to the exhibition. Go to this exhibit link for "Profile of a People" to learn about uploading your photographs: <https://polishchicago.livehost.io/>.

*Back Home: Polish Chicago* is on view through June 8, 2024.

## CJHS Fall Programs

CJHS members, please mark your calendars now for these fall programs:

**Oct. 15.** Mark Guarino, author of "*Country and Midwestern: Chicago in the History of Country Music and the Folk Revival*" (University of Chicago Press), will highlight the many Jews who have been part of these genres. A special guest performer may accompany him. Stay tuned!



**Nov. 19.** Jeff Deutsch, director of Chicago's venerable Seminary Co-op Bookstores, will talk about his new book, "*In Praise of Good Bookstores*" (Princeton University Press), and the role that Jews have played in the development of some of this country's most beloved book emporia.

Both events will take place at the Bernard Horwich JCC at 2 p.m. Admission is free for CJHS members, \$10 for guests. A reception with coffee, tea, and kosher pastries will follow each event. Watch for more information about these programs over the coming months.

## Notes on an Artist (from her Grandson)

By Nathan Ellstrand

If you are interested or involved in the Chicagoland art scene, you would probably recognize the artwork of my grandmother, Beverly (née Singer) Ellstrand. Beverly was an active artist in the region from the 1940s into the early 2000s. Her work in collage, mixed-media, and acrylic was on exhibition everywhere: from the Brickton Art Center in Park Ridge in the Northwest suburbs to the Art Institute of Chicago in the heart of the city.

Her Jewish family emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States in the early 1900s. Her father, Nathan, arrived from Kishenev, Russia (currently Moldova) and first settled in Baltimore before making his way to Chicago. Her mother, Sarah (née Berman), was from Janów Poleski, Poland (currently Ivanava, Belarus). The two met and married in 1924, settling on the South Side of the city. Beverly was born in 1925, followed by her brothers, Leonard and Sidney. Their father worked a range of jobs, including owning a small general goods store and working for the Works Progress Administration.

Beverly grew up on Chicago's South Side, but soon moved to the Northwest Side. She attended William Taft High School in the Norwood Park neighborhood of Chicago during the early 1940s, where she served on the news department of the school's newspaper, the *Taft Tribune*. In Norwood Park, she met Edwin Ellstrand, the son of Swedish immigrants, and the two of them were soon married in 1950. They moved to the Northwest suburbs, first to Franklin Park, eventually settling in Park Ridge, where they had three children – Norman (my father), Alan, and David.



Beverly Ellstrand's "Life Cycles," mixed media collage



"Environmental Fallout," mixed media, 1997

Beverly expressed a passion for creating art from a very young age, and she would carry that interest with her throughout her lifetime. Between high school and her marriage, she had a successful career in commercial art, developing advertisements for companies throughout the Chicago region. She later received formal art education at the Art Institute of Chicago and Northeastern Illinois University. From the 1950s into the early 21st century, Beverly continued to be active in the art scene, selling her artwork at art fairs throughout the region and entering her work in various exhibitions. She exhibited at the Apollo Theater, Art Institute of Chicago, Brickton Art Center, Chicago Athenaeum, Koehline Museum of Art, North Shore Senior Center, Old Town Art Center, Park Ridge Library, Tom Robinson Studio, and Wood Street Gallery.

Beverly was a member of the Chicago Society of Artists, City of Park Ridge Arts Commission, and Kalo Foundation. Although not religiously Jewish, Beverly occasionally featured her cultural Jewish identity in her art, and she showcased some of this work at the Rissman Family Kol Ami Museum located at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park. Her art can still be seen today as part of the collection of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum in New York City.

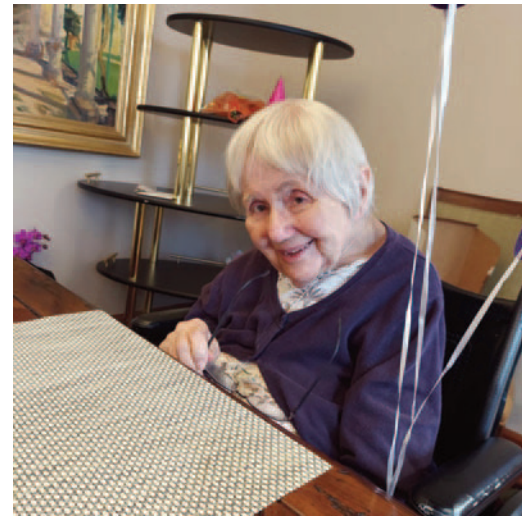
She not only dedicated her life to creating art, but also shared her passion with others through teaching basic drawing, painting, and art appreciation, among other classes. Beverly worked as an instructor, starting in the early 1960s as a teacher at Oakton Community College in Des Plaines. Later, she taught at Suburban Fine Arts Center in Highland Park. She even taught junior high school students art in the basement of her house.



Beverly also cared strongly about social justice, frequently bringing it into her work. During the civil rights movement, Beverly signed an open letter advocating for the racial integration of her home city of Park Ridge. Beverly did not let up in her commitment to a better society, serving as a member of the City of Park Ridge Human Relations Council and a poll watcher. Her artwork even showcased her dedication to social justice, periodically featuring themes of her Jewish identity, protest, environmentalism, and feminism.

Beverly Ellstrand found her calling. She said, "I've always known I wanted to be an artist. Forever. I've never thought of anything else."

Although I did not become an artist myself, she inspired in me a lifelong interest in art. I will always remember standing next to her at the Art Institute of Chicago, carefully analyzing the Impressionist paintings in the museum's permanent collection. My grandmother also influenced my passion for social justice. We used to talk weekly over the phone about politics and various social issues. These discussions would later inspire me to not only pursue an academic career in political history, but also to consistently strive for social justice in my everyday life. Beverly died in 2022, yet the memory of her and her legacy as an artist live on.



The artist in her later years

*About the author:* Nathan Ellstrand is a postdoctoral Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) Research Partner Fellow at San Diego State University. He holds a doctorate in history from Loyola University Chicago. Nathan studies 20th century transnational political and religious history between the United States and Latin America. He is planning to convert his recently finished dissertation, "Reclaiming The Patria: Sinarquismo in the United States, 1936- 1966," into a book.

Nathan is also a longstanding member of the CJHS, and he manages the Society's Facebook page. The CJHS is grateful for his dedication and service.

*Notes about the article:* Nathan Ellstrand is not an employee of DPAA; he supports DPAA through a partnership. The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of DPAA, Department of Defense, or its components.

## Co-President's Column

continued from page 3

(pp. 8-9), recounts how Levin came to publish his 1932 collection of Hassidic stories, translated by Levin from Yiddish into English. (The full name of the 1932 volume is "*The Golden Mountain: Marvellous Tales of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem and of his Great-Grandson, Rabbi Nachman, Retold from Hebrew, Yiddish and German Sources*".) Somehow, I had overlooked Roth's article when it was published.

Roth writes that Levin was introduced to the stories of Hassidic rabbis by Marek Szwarc during a 1930 visit to Szwarc while Levin was en route from Jerusalem to Chicago. Levin, captivated by the lore, began to collect Hassidic stories and study scholarly works about Hassidism. Levin wrote in his foreword to "*The Golden Mountain*" that "[m]any of these tales I first heard from the lips of Marek Szwarc, of Lodz and Paris, a true Chassid and a great artist. To him I am profoundly grateful." The volume was illustrated by Szwarc. In his *CJH* article, Roth reproduced one of the shortest tales, "The Mad Dancers," accompanied by Szwarc's sketch of a male and female dancing - clearly the source of the more developed lithographic rendering that I owned! Ms. Torres Levin had suggested that my artwork was done in the 1920s, but based on this information, it dates from the early 1930s.

I still don't know exactly how the Yochims acquired the print. Did they know Meyer Levin? Did they meet Marek Szwarc? That is another detective story I hope to uncover!

Look to the rock from which you were hewn  
הביטו אל-צור חצבתכם



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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.

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- 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.

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