



# CHICAGO JEWISH *History*

## American Jewish Art Club Celebrates 70:

*Group of Chicago Jewish Artists Reflects  
on its History and the Many Talented  
Artists Who have been Part of it*

By Ethel Fratkin Shulman

**T**he American Jewish Artists Club is celebrating its 70th Anniversary this year. Its predecessor group, Around the Palette, was formed in 1928 when a group of Jewish artists in Chicago felt the need to become organized in response to the events in Europe at the time. These artists wanted to protest the systematic destruction of Jewish scholarly works, books, paintings, etc. in Europe. In Chicago, Around the Palette led the call to condemn these atrocities.

The success of the first exhibition of paintings and sculpture done by Chicago Jewish artists further encouraged these artists to form the group Around the Palette. This exhibit, held at the Hebrew Institute, was made possible by the Jewish Women's Arts Club.

Among the exhibitors in the show were Emil Armin, Todros Geller, Abbo Ostrovsky, William Schwartz and Max Weber. The first annual exhibition of Around the Palette was held at the College of Jewish Studies at 30 N. Dearborn in December of 1931.

In succeeding years, they held exhibitions and lectures in synagogues, cultural centers, and schools, especially at the Sholem Aleichem Institute.

Around the Palette activities included informal discussions of the different aspects of art and artists. These discussions were held in the artists' studios. The studio most frequently used was that of Todros Geller. There, on Friday night, Mrs. Geller would feed

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## *Annual Meeting Features Music and Welcomes Board Member*

The Society's 1998 Annual Meeting and Member Brunch on June 7 proved both a celebration of the Society's work and an opportunity for members to vote on the board members who will guide the Society for the next few years.

Carolyn Eastwood was elected to a three-year term, and Ethel Shulman and Albert Erlebacher were re-elected to three year terms as well.

The meeting

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### Inside:

- Unusual Document Helps Preserve Story of Chicago Jewish Aid to Plonsk
- Oral History of Former K.A.M. President Max Robert Schroyer
- Recalling Zionist Pioneer Nachum Sokolow's 1913 Visit to Chicago

# President's Column



Walter Roth

"The South Side - The Racial Transformation of an American Neighborhood" written by Chicago born Louis Rosen made for interesting reading this past summer. The book had been called to my attention by my son, Ari Roth, who is a friend of the author and is staging a play based on the book at the Jewish Theater in Washington, D.C., where Ari is the artistic director.

Mr. Rosen, now in his early forties, presently lives in New York City but he grew up in a Jewish enclave on the far South Side of Chicago in the area commonly known as South Shore Gardens and South Shore Valley. He attended a local public grammar school and the regional High School, Bowen High.

His story encompasses the two decades beginning in the late 1950's and the building of new Jewish communities in the areas south of South Shore. One of the local areas included in his tale is "Pill-Hill", well known for the many doctors and dentists who settled in the area.

Rosen returned to Chicago recently and interviewed a number of

persons to create fifteen composite characters, of former and current residents of the communities, both Jewish and Afro-Americans.

As a former resident of the Chicago's South Side, a number of the Jewish composites are easily recognizable as persons that were well known to me. The Synagogue, The Jewish Community Center and local delicatessen are all familiar, as is the Rabbi, who is a central part of this sad tale.

It is the Rabbi who was a leader of the Jewish community, a civil rights activist and a man who was the rallying point for many activists. When the Rabbi suddenly decided to leave his congregation, the Jewish community was stunned.

Rosen recalls that he was outraged (as were many others) at this so-called "betrayal". Perhaps he overreacted, Rosen concludes after interviewing the Rabbi thirty years after the event.

The Rabbi tells Rosen not to be so hard on his elders as "the feet of the father sometimes turn to clay in the eyes of his children".

The story Rosen relates to us through his interviews is sad — though not as unusual today as it was over thirty years ago.

It is a story of a thriving white community, stampeded into

suburban flight "as if a "neutron bomb" had hit it. Rumors, block-busting followed by riots, violence and threats panicked the Jewish community.

The middle-class blacks who moved in could do nothing to reassure the fleeing Jews who saw threats to their children in the schools and the dropping of the value of their houses as the only reward for staying. It soon became a familiar story for many such events in the subsequent demise of white neighborhoods in adjacent areas of South Shore.

Strangely and ironically, as Rosen returned to his old neighborhood two years ago he found that it looked remarkably similar to what it did thirty years ago "in fact it looks better now". The houses, the lawns and the trees all look good to him.

"It is all the same — except the Jews are gone. "How is it", he asks "that people spent twenty years building a community only to abandon it?"

The question is harsh — its phrasing may seem unfair to some, but, the answer is part of the history of our people in Chicago, not to be ignored and forgotten.

I highly recommend the book to you for interesting and stimulating reading.

In addition, on behalf of myself and our entire Board of Directors, I wish you our very best for a healthy and prosperous New Year. □

*Looking for Help:*

## Society Publication Seeks New Editor

The Society is looking for someone who can take over the central duties of editing of *Chicago Jewish History*.

Our quarterly publication con-

tains articles, reprints of old documents, excerpts from our extensive oral history collection, letters to the editor, memoirs, and news of Society events.

Our current editor, Joe Kraus, has recently taken on new employment, and he can no longer see to the day-to-day duties of compiling the newsletter. He does intend to

remain involved in the publication.

We are looking for someone interested in Jewish and Chicago history with some experience as a writer as well. Experience with desktop publishing would be helpful as well.

If you are interested or know someone who might be, contact Joe Kraus at (773)274-1323 or, e-mail, j-kraus@nwu.edu. □

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## Annual Meeting

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took place at Bederman Hall of the Spertus Institute and featured a performance by Ella Althshuler.

Althshuler demonstrated her wide repertoire by singing Jewish, Russian, and Broadway songs in addition to performing original compositions.

Eastwood is a new board member, but she is hardly new to the Society.

As the author of *Chicago's*

*Jewish Street Peddlers: Toehold on the Bottom Rung*, the first-ever Minsky Award winning manuscript, she has already contributed a great deal to the Society's mission of preserving and retelling the history of Chicago's Jewish community.

She has also written for *Chicago Jewish History*; her article on the colorful West Side tailor, Hal Fox — inventor of the Zoot Suit — appeared four years ago in volume 18, number 1.

Herself the author of a manuscript based around a series of

oral histories, Eastwood has already announced her intention to work with the Society's oral history project as well as in other capacities.

The annual meeting drew approximately 100 members and their guests and helped usher in our 23rd year as a society.

We look forward to another fine celebration next summer and invite all of you to join us.

In the meantime, we invite you as well to consider participating in our various Society activities all year long. □

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## Video History of Chicago Jewry Wins State Award

*Romance of a People: The First Hundred Years of Jewish Life in Chicago, 1833-1933*, the video history of the first 100 years of Jewish Chicago produced by the Society and directed by Beverly Siegel, has recently received an "Award of Superior Achievement" in the Category of "Public Programming: Multimedia Productions" from the Illinois State Historical Society.

Each year, the Illinois State Historical Society recognizes the efforts of dedicated historians through its Awards Program. Their society presents awards to those who have made outstanding contributions toward preserving and interpreting the cultural heritage of Illinois.

*Romance of A People* is a thirty minute video which combines rare film footage, vintage photographs, sound recordings, and interviews to recount the story of the building of Chicago's Jewish community and its impact on the life of our city.

The video's title comes from the title of the program put together for the 1933 Chicago world's Fair on the occasion of Jewish Day, likely still the largest gathering of Jews in Chicago history and a culminating event in the video.

One of the video's highlights is the footage Seigel uncovered of the original pageant; that footage had not been shown publicly in almost 60 years.

In addition, the video features the participation of many long-time Society members. Interviews with several members are incorporated into the finished video, and other

members contributed by writing portions of the script and by offering suggestions on what elements should be included.

Society President Walter Roth said the Illinois Historical Society Award is a welcome acknowledgment of the video's overall quality and of the Society's capacity to produce thoughtful and enduring history.

"*Romance of a People* is something that took many years to see through," he said.

"We have believed it is a valuable and thoughtful work for a long time. It's gratifying to see that others agree with us and recognize the quality of Beverley's and our work."

The video is available through Ergo Media, Inc. of Teaneck, New Jersey, at a cost of \$29.95 plus \$5 shipping and handling.

To order *Romance of a People*, call (800) 695-3746. □

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## Next Open Society Meeting to Feature Michael Karzen

The next open meeting of the Society will feature Michael Karzen, an artist and former teacher, who will speak on Chicago Jewish artists from 1940-1980.

Karzen's talk will feature a slide show in addition to his lecture and question-answer period.

The talk is a reprise of a Society presentation that Karzen gave in 1985. Because that talk was so well received, and because it seems particularly relevant again in light of the American Jewish Artists Club anniversary (see Ethel Shulman's ar-

ticle on page one), we have invited Karzen to deliver it again.

This marks only the second time in 20 years that we have reprised a presentation.

Karzen will talk on October 25 at Temple Sholom. The presentation begins at 2 p.m., with a 1 p.m. social hour. Members and guests are welcome. □

## American Jewish Arts Club

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the artists with her goodies while the debates and critical analysis of each others' work was going on.

The question of whether there was or was not a Jewish art arose frequently. This generated heated and scholarly debates.

Some artists believed that there was a uniquely Jewish art while others felt that art had no religious barriers and still others maintained that works of art reflect the uniqueness of the artists regardless of their religious beliefs. This argument continues to the present day.

Todros Geller, who was considered the Dean of Jewish artists in the Midwest, believed very strongly in a valid Jewish Art.

He was supported by such artists as David Bekker and Leon Garland.

When I was working on my Masters Degree from the Art Department at the University of Chicago during the early 1950s, Todros Geller encouraged me to write my thesis on Jewish Art. When I presented the topic to the Head of the Art department, he would not accept it, his argument being that a uniquely Jewish art did not exist and that there was insufficient research available on the subject.

Even after much arguing on my part, I was not permitted to do my research paper on Jewish Art.

A number of years later, after much research had been done on the subject and there was a

greater awareness of its existence, I understand that someone else's thesis on Jewish Art was accepted.

During the Depression, many of the artists felt the need to express their feelings for the hopelessness of the times. Such artists as Leon Golub, Mitchell Siporin, Morris Topchevsky and Maurice Yochim painted canvases to protest society's inequities.

When Franklin Delano Roosevelt became President he inaugurated a number of programs, including the Federal Art Project under the W.P.A. It employed many of the most talented artists in the country, many of whom were Chicagoans.

Murals, paintings and sculptures were commissioned for the beautification of government buildings. A



**Todros Geller's *The Past Shall Not Be Repeated*, Woodcut**

*Reprinted from Louise Dunn Yochim's Harvest of Freedom: A Survey of Jewish Artists in America*

\$30,000 prize for a mural in the St. Louis post office was awarded to two Chicago Jewish artists, Edward Millman and Mitchell Siporin.

Siporin later became the Head of the Art Department at Brandeis University.

A. Raymond Katz and William Schwartz were commissioned to do murals for Chicago's Century of Progress.

Many of these artists achieved national recognition and contributed in their own ways to the Jewish community.

Here in Chicago, Todros Geller, a prolific artist, expressed himself through numerous media. During his lifetime he received many awards and was recognized as a leading authority in the field of Jewish religious art.

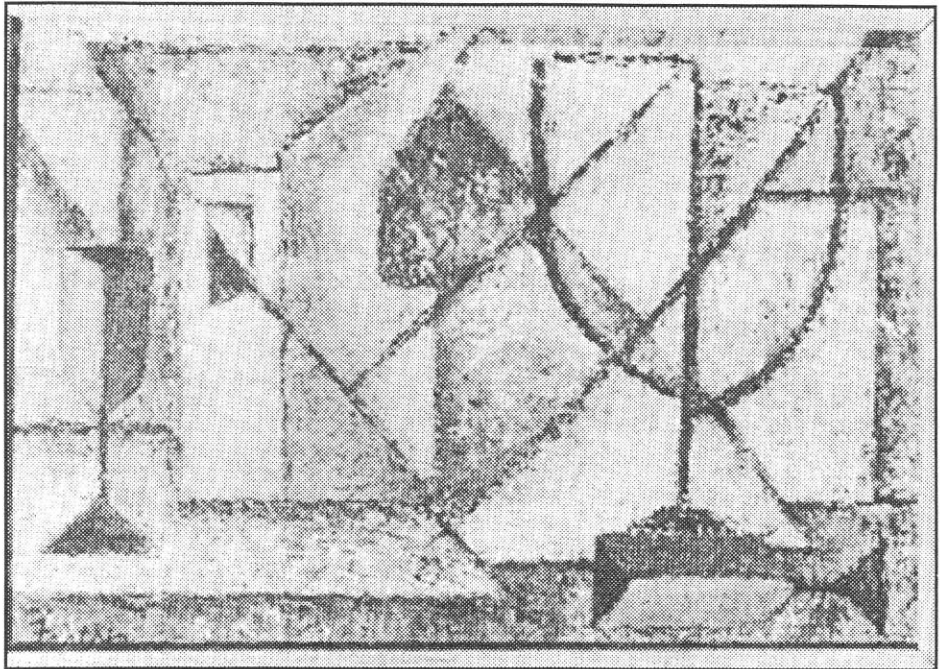
His work can be found in many synagogues throughout the country. During the period 1920-1927 he taught art at the Jewish Peoples Institute. Many of his students such as Mitchell Siporin and Aaron Bohrod achieved national and international recognition.

Geller also served as a Supervisor of Art for the Board of Jewish Education and as Director of Art for the College of Jewish Studies.

After Geller's retirement other members of the American Jewish Art Club followed him as Supervisors of the art programs in Yiddish and Hebrew Schools and in the J.C.C.s. They were Maurice Yochim and Victor Perlmutter, both of whom followed in Geller's tradition.

By 1940, Chicago Jewish artists were enraged by the news they were hearing of Hitler's savage attack on all things Jewish. They gathered together in the studio of William Schwartz to consider their response as Jewish artists and the American Jewish Art Club was formed, with Todros Geller as its first president.

The group's charter membership included many prominent Jewish artists such as Emil Armin, David Bekker, Aaron Bohrod, Todros Geller, Samuel Greenburg, A. Raymond Katz, Mitchell Siporin,



**Ethel Fratkin Shulman's *Shabbos*, Oil**

*Reprinted by permission of the artist*

William Schwartz, Harry Mintz, Louise Dunn Yochim and Maurice Yochim.

The purpose of the club was to effect an awareness of Jewish art and artists in the community. Its activities, in the tradition of Around the Palette, consisted of lectures, forums, symposiums and exhibitions.

Prizes donated by patrons in the Jewish community were awarded at their juried exhibits for works depicting both Jewish and secular subjects.

As I mention Mitchell Siporin, I am reminded that three generations of his family were members of the American Jewish Art Club. Mitchell and his sister, Shoshanah Siporin Hoffman (who painted under the name Shoshanah) were members for many years.

In her later years, their mother, Jennie Siporin, picked up a brush and began painting her primitive works. She was called the Jewish Grandma Moses and became a member of the club.

Years later, Joshua Hoffman, a sculptor and the son of Shoshanah, also became a member. He later moved to New York and has achieved great recognition.

For many years the American Jewish Art Club held their annual exhibits in the Fisher Hall Gallery at the Board of Jewish

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*The Head of the Art department would not accept it, his argument being that a uniquely Jewish art did not exist and that there was insufficient research available.*

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# Zionist Nachum Sokolow Called for Moderate Vision of Zionism in 1913 Visit

By Walter Roth

There is a splendid group photograph in H.L. Meites's 1924 *History of the Jews of Chicago* entitled "Nachum Sokolow and a Group of Chicago Zionists Taken on the Zionist Leaders First Visit Here, April 1912."

Meites was mistaken — Sokolow's visit to Chicago really took place a year later in April 1913 — but, nevertheless, the photograph pictures fourteen prominent early Chicago Zionists. Sitting between Chicago Zionist leaders Bernard Horwich and Max Shulman is Nachum Sokolow.

Sokolow was following a tradition established by early Zionist leaders, such as Aaron Aaronson and Shmarya Levin who visited the Jewish communities in America to explain their cause and to obtain much needed assistance for their impoverished brethren in Palestine.

The Chicago Tribune on Monday, April 14, 1913 under a front page headline "Jews Cheer Plea of Noted Zionist" reported: "Nachum Sokolow of Warsaw, Poland, a leader of the Zionist movement, spoke to an audience of nearly 1,000 yesterday at the American Music Hall. When he was introduced by Max Shulman, chairman, the audience arose, waived hats, handkerchiefs and canes, and cheered for two minutes before judge Hugo Pam obtained silence for Dr. Sokolow to speak."

Sokolow was well-known to his audience. He was an elder of the new Zionist movement founded by Theodore Herzl at Basel in August 1897. With Herzl's death in 1904, Sokolow along with the younger Chaim Weizman were among the foremost Zionist leaders.

Sokolow was born in 1860 in Poland. Like his colleague Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky, he was a pioneer in Hebrew literature and prolific in Yiddish, Polish, English and German.

Unlike Jabotinsky, Sokolow was not a doctrinaire politician. Instead, was a moderate when it came to political views.

In Poland, he wrote frequently for the Polish press

and was said to have carried off the illusion that he might be a Polish nobleman. His manners and dress were impeccable.

Like Weizman, he loved to travel and when he did, it was always as a dignitary, staying at the finest hotels or clubs, much like an emissary from a foreign country. He was said to be a perfect specimen of a diplomat for the Jews, like a "Shtadlan" of European Jewish medieval history who represented his fellow Jews in dealings with the authorities.

Sokolow talked to the heads of European states, he talked to the Pope, but he rankled many of his Zionist compatriots because of his vacillation on issues and middle-of-the road positions. They said he lacked passion, but they could not deny his genius as a writer and as a scholar and his love for roving missions and travel. His home was in Europe, first Warsaw, then Cologne, Germany and after World War I in London, where his devoted wife awaited him in spite of the fact that he was said to be seldom there.

It was on his first trip to the United States in 1912-1913 that he came to Chicago. His mission was to explain Zionism as he saw it to the Jewish masses in the New World and to seek their aid for settlements in Palestine. His

moderation was quickly apparent as he spoke to his Chicago audience.

In 1913, a year before the outbreak of World War I, he saw Zionism a movement that "looks after the welfare of the Jew as a Jew, whatever the country in which he abides." Unlike many Russian Zionist leaders who spoke of returning all Jews to Palestine, he stressed that a Zionist looks first after the welfare of the Jew. "Judaism, as well as Zionism requires knowledge of Jewish history, traditions and literature."

On April 18, 1913, *The Chicago Sentinel* reported that Sokolow had been the guest of honor at a luncheon given by Jacob M. Loeb, the President of the Chicago Hebrew Institute at the LaSalle Hotel. The *Sentinel* noted that Mr. Sokolow had made a few remarks about the need to support impoverished Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe who had no place to immigrate but to Palestine, then under Turkish rule.

"Nearly 100,000 of our people are living there now - not as Talmudic students, but as workers in trades of all kinds," Sokolow reportedly said. He urged Americans to financially assist their brethren in Russia to settle in Palestine, to build a land for further colonization "by

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*It was said that he and Weizman were a partnership, not without tension and conflict. Weizman's determined doctrinism sharply contrasted with Sokolow's middle-of-the-road views.*

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those without funds.”

“Those with sufficient funds can readily succeed,” he said. “The land is adaptable to the growth of fruit and will yield large profits to the investor but it takes time for the trees to bear fruit and here lies the present difficulty. We need financial assistance. It is for our brethren in America, in Europe and elsewhere to lend their financial support to this work.”

Those present at the luncheon, according to the *Sentinel*, included the following Chicagoans: J.M. Loeb, Max Shulman, N.D. Kaplan, Dr. Pedott, Charles Schaffner, E. Lowenstein, Albert Stein, Max Klee, Israel Cowan, Louis S. Berlin, James Davis, Alfred Meyer, A.L. Stone, Dr. Yudelson, Bernard Horwich, Edwin Austrian, Adolph Stein and W.B. Frankenstein.

The *Sentinel* article concluded with a statement that on his tour in the United States, Sokolow had received much encouragement.

Another article containing Sokolow's view was earlier published in the *Sentinel* on April 11, 1913. He again stressed the need for colonization in Palestine and the need to encourage Jewish culture and education there.

He also reassured American Jews that Zionism did not oppose immigration of Russian Jews to America if they could manage to immigrate there.

As he put it, Zionism did not consider that “a loss to Palestine or our cause. There is no competition between this country and Palestine in that regard...While by far the great bulk of those Jews who come here will remain in

America, we Zionists feel that even from those or their descendants, there will probably be settlers who may some day come to Palestine, and immigrants from such a land and trained under its great and glori-

ous institutions will be of tremendous asset to their brethren in the land of their common past, when that land becomes again a land of their common present.”

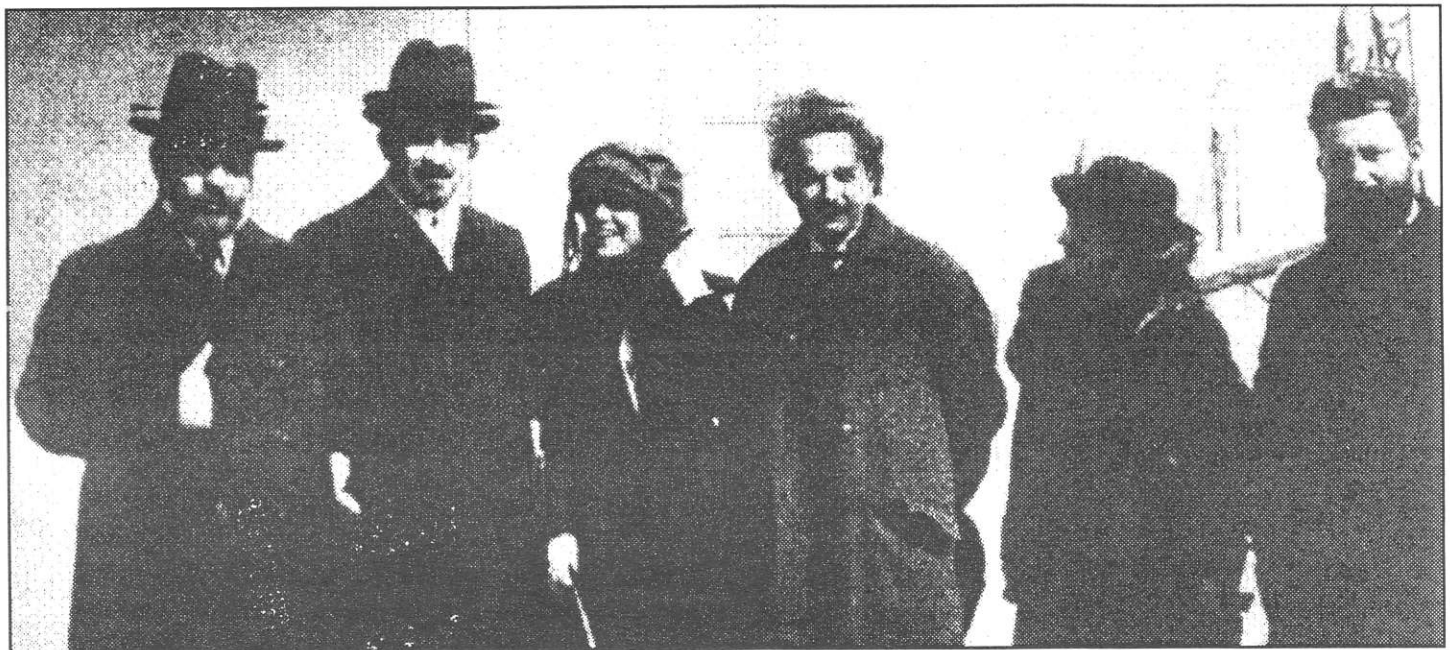
During World War I, Sokolow found himself in London, closely working with Weizman and other European leaders to obtain a commitment for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. It was said that he and Weizman were a partnership, not without tension and conflict. Weizman's determined doctrinism sharply contrasted with Sokolow's middle-of-the-road views. Sokolow

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*With Israeli leaders recently speaking of Jewish life in the Diaspora countries such as the United States in a more positive light, Sokolow's vision seems renewed.*

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The Original Caption as H.L. Meites wrote it:

Nachum Sokolow and a Group of Chicago Zionists

Taken on the Zionist Leader's first visit here, April 1912 [sic]

Upper Row: B.A. Antonow, H.L. Meites, D.P. Pollock, Bernard Shulman, Meyer Abrams, Harris Horwich, H. Miller, and Jonah Fisher; Lower Row: H. Steinberg, H. Waiss, B. Horwich, Nachum Sokolow, Max Shulman, Samuel Ginsburg, Benjamin Perlstein

# Document Reveals Extent of Aid Offered by Chicago Plonskers to Jews of Europe

By Sid Sorkin

A few years ago, Norman Schwartz, past president of the Society, received a phone call from a member of the Plonsk Mutual Aid Benefit Society. Mr. Schwartz was invited to come down the Plonsker's basement to look at a 2' x 2' x 5' document, enclosed in a heavy wooden frame and covered with a quarter inch sheet of plate glass.

Mr. Schwartz commented, "I could barely get it into my car."

The document was written in Yiddish and concerned a *yeshiva* in the town of Plonsk which is 40 miles northwest of Poland's capital, Warsaw. Thanks to Rabbis Shmuel Katz and Josef Posner of the Northwest Suburban Chabad Lubavitcher, the document was recently translated.

But, first a word about the Plonskers over there and over here.

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Jews were on the books in Plonsk by 1446. It was part of the Council of Four Lands in the 15th and 16th centuries. It was the birthplace of David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, in 1886, and it was known as a place of Zionist activity.

The Jewish population was 2,801 in 1808 and 8,200 in 1939.

As if the carnage of World War I wasn't enough, the area endured the Russian Revolutions of 1916 and 1917 and then the war between the Russian Reds and the Polish and Russian Whites.

Poland fought for its own independence, which it established in 1920. Recovery was slow, and Poland suffered another economic crisis in the late 1920s.

A change in economic policy by the Polish government devastated Jewish communities across Poland

During this time, some of the Jews of Plonsk were supported by the Polansker Relief Verein of Chicago. The report of the distribution of funds was signed by a

rabbi and the members of his committee in Plonsk, and a copy was sent to the Verein in Chicago.

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What Rabbis Katz and Posner found were the names and addresses of 115 children who were the beneficiaries of the \$400 sent in two equal payments in October and November, 1927.

This \$400 in American dollars was exchanged into approximately 600,000 Polish zlotys.

For each child, the document listed an address, the schools he or she attended, and the names of his or her parents or guardians; the document noted if a child was an orphan. Many were the children of widows, and quite a few had parents without any occupation at all.

Many children ended up eating their main meal of the day at the *yeshiva*. Many also received shoes, shirts, or other necessary items from the fund, and the document records such provisions as well.

For all of the items the children received, the document listed the merchant or tradesman from whom

the cloth, thread, buttons, shoes, shirts, socks, or other items that were purchased.

It should also be noted that even the teachers' salaries were funded from the Chicago

*Many children ended up eating their main meal of the day at the yeshiva. Many also received shoes, shirts, or other necessary items from the fund, and the document records such provisions as well.*

*tzedakah.*

A complete accounting of the disbursement of funds was sent to the Chicago *landsleit*.

How could one judge the impact of this largesse upon the 8,000 Jews of Plonsk?

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Jewish Plonsk was liquidated by the Germans between November 1 and November 5, 1942.

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The generation that had immediate ties to their *shtetl* found ways to help — if not their families then their community.

The remnants that survived the Holocaust did not reestablish the Jewish community in Plonsk. Most of those who were located in displaced person camps or scattered across Europe were given opportunities to begin new lives in North and South America or in Israel.

Again, they received help from their *landsleit*, the Jewish Agency, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

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## Sokolow

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came to the United States and Chicago again in 1922 with Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky to conduct a fund raising campaign for Karen Hayesod. After decades of struggle, he finally succeeded Weizman as President of the World Zionist Organization for a short period in 1933. He had also become a renowned scholar, historian and diplomat.

Sokolow died on May 17, 1936.

His visits to Chicago gave our city an opportunity to meet this remarkable man in person. Blessed with a photographic memory and a soothing manner — which was unusual for Zionist leaders, to say the least — he

helped to persuade many Jews to accept Zionism.

His speeches in Chicago in 1913 are a good example of how this unusual man tried to convince American Jews to embrace Zionism while at the same time continuing to build their lives in America.

While this position clashed with other Zionist thinkers of his day and later with some Israel leaders, such as David Ben-Gurion, his views have a prophetic ring to them in our day.

With Israeli leaders recently speaking of Jewish life in the Diaspora countries such as the United States in a more positive light, Sokolow's vision seems renewed. Today, like Sokolow in 1913, increasing numbers of Zionists see no conflict between encouraging Jewish education and culture in the United States and the upbuilding of a Jewish homeland in Israel. □

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## American Jewish Art Club

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Education building until the building was sold. The exhibitions then moved to the Covenant Club for a short time. Later, they moved to Spertus College.

Several years ago they could no longer exhibit at Spertus since it was felt that many of the artists' works did not have Jewish content. This led to discussions of what the goals of the club should be.

Since the artist is free to choose his or her own subject matter, it was recently decided to rename the club the American Jewish Artists Club.

Throughout the years the club has functioned under the leadership of numerous well-known artists such as Todros Geller, Samuel Greenburg, Leo Segedin, C.E.

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*Some believed that there was a uniquely Jewish art while others felt art had no religious barriers; others maintained that works of art reflect the uniqueness of the artists regardless of their religious beliefs.*

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Cooper, Michael Karzen, and Sheldon Burke.

For many years Louise Dunn Yochim was the "glue" that held the group together. At the present time Irmgard Hess Rosenberger is continuing in her footsteps.

The club's current membership includes many professional painters, sculptors, printmakers, craftsmen and art educators.

Currently the American Jewish Artists Club is celebrating its 70th anniversary.

The 70th annual exhibition will be held at the Dittmar Gallery in the Norris Center of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois from September 14 through September 30. □

*Thanks to Louise Dunn Yochim, whose book, "Harvest of Freedom" was the source of much of the material on the early years.*

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## Plonsker Document

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As with all of the other *landsmanshaften*, a great portion of the Plonsker Society's money and energies came to be directed toward helping Israel.

For the Chicago Plonskers, most of their funds went to the Jewish National Fund, and Plonskers still in

Israel, the Ark, and other needy Jewish organizations in Chicago. There is also a separate Plonsker Cemetery Association.

Until September of 1997, some Plonskers of Chicago were still meeting three times a year. □

*The above article is adapted from Sorkin's book, Bridges to an American City: A Guide to Chicago's Landsmanshaften, 1870-1990. Sorkin is a long-time Society board member.*

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## Society Receives Additional Grants for Fair Project

The Rosenthal Foundation and Sam Pfeffer have each pledged \$5000 toward a Society project that will reprint the original program from Jewish Day at the 1933.

The Rosenthal Foundation made an identical pledge last year to help with the same project.

Jewish Day was the largest gathering of Jews in one place in the

history of Chicago.

The highlight of that day was a magnificent pageant staged by thousands of Jewish children and performers at Soldier Field.

Called *Romance of a People*, the pageant inspired us at the Society with the title for the recent award-winning video history on the Jews of Chicago.

The funds that the Rosenthal Foundation and Sam Pfeffer have donated will underwrite the annotation and republication of the original program from Jewish Day.

When the project is finished, every member of the Society will have a copy of an original document that helps illuminate one of the most exciting occasions in city history.

Elegant and full of specific historical information, it also preserves ephemera such as unusual ads and a graphic layout that reflects the styles and tastes of the early 1930s.

There is no specific time table on the project, but we look forward to its completion and to the contribution it will make to our collective knowledge of Chicago Jewish history. □

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## Society's Summer Tour Series Boasts Another Good Year

The Society's annual summer tour series, organized and overseen by Leah Axelrod, has proved successful yet again, with all three of this year's tours filling up and winning good reviews.

This year featured a tour of significant sites of Chicago Jewish labor, a tour of Jewish Milwaukee, and a reprise of the Chicago Jewish roots tour that Dr. Irving Cutler has led for the last several years.

Tours are a fascinating and entertaining way to appreciate history since they bring you face-to-face with the buildings, streets, parks, and other places where that history

took place.

In addition, they offer a chance to see old friends and to make new ones while taking part in the work of our Society.

If you are disappointed at having missed this season's tour program, resolve to join us next summer.

Our tours tend to fill up quickly, but we would be happy to make room for you and your friends. □

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## Larry Stern to Speak at January Open Meeting

Noted photographer Larry Stern will speak at the January 10 Society open meeting at Temple Shalom.

Stern's subject will be his long-term project to photograph the synagogues of Chicago, and he will bring slides of his work.

Stern's work has been widely reproduced, but his talk promises to be a rare opportunity to see the scope of his project and to ask him questions about it.

Through his photographs he has already preserved images of Jewish Chicago that are often unavailable anywhere else, and he has done so with unusual skill.

The talk begins at 2 p.m., and the Society is sponsoring a social hour starting at 1 p.m. □

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## Consider Us for Year-End Gifts

Did you know that you can receive tax benefits for contributions to the Society? Of course, your annual dues are tax deductible. But, did you realize that any additional gifts during lifetime also qualify for an income tax deduction (assuming you itemize deductions) and that gifts given at death qualify for a charitable deduction against an otherwise tax-

able estate?

While we hope you will want to make lifetime gifts so you can see the good that is accomplished, it is very easy to make testamentary gifts by your last will or living trust. Simply have your attorney include language similar to the following in either your will or your trust, as the case may be.

For unrestricted gifts:

"I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or specified property) to the Chicago Jewish Historical So-

ciety, of Chicago, Illinois, for the unrestricted use of the Society, as determined by its Board of Directors."

For restricted gifts:

"I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or specified property) to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, of Chicago, Illinois, to be used solely for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_."

If you or your attorney has any questions about this, please give us a call. □

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## Society Newsletter Seeks Memoirs of Jewish Chicago

*Chicago Jewish History*, the newsletter of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, occasionally publishes memoirs of individual Chicagoans.

Examples of the sort of memoirs we publish include one man's memories of growing up as the grandson of a West Side butcher and one woman's recollections of helping to entertain Jewish soldiers during World War II.

Individual memoirs give us the opportunity to present history in its narrowest contours. The stories that you might recall from your childhood or from some unusual situation in which you found yourself often prompt other peoples' memories to flow as well.

The memoirs we seek are refined versions of the same stories you may well tell at family gatherings or when you and old friends come together.

Keep in mind that manuscripts should be no longer than six double-spaced pages and, preferably, should be submitted on IBM-compatible

disk in WordPerfect, Microsoft Word, or ASCII format. (For those of you without access to computer technology, good old paper will work also.)

The editors consider both the caliber of the writing and the originality of the subject matter in weighing which memoirs we will be able to publish.

We attempt to comment on every memoir submitted, but are not always able to do so. Be certain to include a return address and phone number with your submission.

We encourage you to record what you remember from your firsthand experiences. Memories are most convincing when they are most personal.

Much of the rest of the work we publish in *Chicago Jewish History* focuses on broad themes, famous individuals, or notable events. Memoirs allow us to focus on the history that most of us actually lived.

Suitable memoirs may involve distinctive personal memories — details as obscure as the name of the corner market or the way a neighbor might hand wash her laundry — but should do so in a way that helps

evoke a broader past.

Keep in mind that your story ought to be a good one, but that the best memoirs function by inspiring the reader to recall his or her own story.

If you are considering potential topics, think of the stories you would most like to share with younger family members.

The most successful memoirs are narrow in scope. They tell a specific story and bring in surprising details that suggest a broader kind of history.

Unsuccessful ones often fail because they attempt too broad a scope and then do not do justice either to the material they recount or to the context in which it took place.

For example, a memoir on Lawn-dale would probably be too broad; one in which you recount a couple years of your your childhood on a particular block or in a particular neighborhood would likely be more successful.

The editors accept query letters, but cannot guarantee the publication of any work that is submitted.

Submissions may be sent to Joe Kraus at 2443 W. Lunt, Chicago, IL, 60645. □

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## Help Wanted with Oral Histories

One of the ongoing projects of the Society is to capture the history preserved in our midst through the recollections and stories of community leaders, business pioneers and other exceptional Chicago Jews. We invite you to take part in that effort by joining the oral history committee.

Conducting an oral history is a way to record and publicize history that can be as rewarding to the interviewer and the subject as it is to the Society and community. Many Society members are experienced takers of oral histories and are available to

give you advice on how to prepare and conduct interviews.

Think for a moment about friends and neighbors with rich backgrounds. Let us know about them so we can record their stories for future generations. Better yet, let us know about them and then work with us to record those stories yourself.

Such oral histories are invaluable documents for recording history. We make it a practice to publish excerpts of a different one from our files in each issue of *Chicago Jewish History* where we hope they are of some current interest, but there is no way of knowing

what uses future historians will find for them.

Taking and preserving oral histories is a means of stockpiling raw material for the writers and storytellers to come.

The oral history project has been a priority of the Society the past year and we are anxious to include as many of our members as possible in the work and planning. The voices we record and transcribe may well turn out to be the voices that tell today's history to tomorrow's historians.

For information about how to get started conducting oral histories, contact the Society office (312)663-5634. □

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## Radical Elders Project Wins Grant Group Seeks Nominees as Interview Subjects

The Chicago Radical Jewish Elders Videotape Project has been awarded a grant for \$24,000 from the Steven and Alida Brill Scheuer Foundation.

The project, directed by Stanley Rosen, Professor Emeritus, Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois, will add another 70 videotaped interviews to the 70 interviews already completed.

Rosen is a former board member of the Society, and many of the Project's Jewish subjects have spoken about their experience as Jews.

The grant will be used to train and pay six interviewers who will conduct video interviews and to provide financial support to the

Chicago Jewish Archives of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in order to help catalogue and maintain the project.

In addition, the grant will provide financial assistance to individuals who will produce written summaries of present and future tapes and will help underwrite a national survey to locate other collections, projects, and repositories of similar audio and video tape histories of Jewish radical elders.

Rosen and others involved in the project have already interviewed more than 50 different subjects. The project asks subjects to explore, "the relationship between radical or progressive and Jewish consciousness in terms of their individual Jewish life history."

Individuals already interviewed include Leon Despres, Manny Tuteur, Elyne Handler, Jack Spiegel, Carl Shier, Charlotte Koch, Milton Herst, Sandy

Patrinos, Eli Levin, Martie Cohen, and Peshke and Moishe Stein.

The Scheuer Foundation is devoted to the advancement and understanding of Jewish life. The foundation is interested in funding projects which stimulate an understanding of the Jewish condition and its history in America and elsewhere.

Information on the Radical Jewish Elders Project as well as application forms for being interviewed will be sent on request.

A video explaining the project is also available for \$20.

The project will be administered through the Illinois Labor History Society at 28 E. Jackson, Room 1012, Chicago, Illinois, 60604-2215. Their society can also be reached at (312)663-4107.

In addition, Stan Rosen can be reached at P.O. Box 5496, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87502, (505)473-4803. □

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## Society Welcomes Members Joining the Past Quarter

It's been a quarter of growth for the Society and we would like to welcome the many new members who have joined in the last three months.

We welcome each of them separately and all of them collectively. The job of telling the history of our community is possible only when all of us participate in it.

We are an all-volunteer organization, and we rely on our new members to help us continue making possible the projects and research that we do.

We look to them to ratify who we are and what we have chosen to do. When they join us in our ongoing

projects, those projects flourish. In company with our existing members, they make possible our Society as a whole.

We are grateful for our continuing members as well as the following new members:

<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Sandy Aronin</i>	<i>Bessie Joss</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Harold Burak</i>	<i>Helen Kaplan</i>
<i>Beverly Chubat</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Abe Matthew</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Mel Eisenberg</i>	<i>Mary Rosenthal</i>
<i>Judy Franklin</i>	<i>Mrs. Albert Siegal</i>
<i>Aviva Futorian</i>	<i>Shirley Weinstein</i>

We invite everyone to participate in all of our activities.

See the newsletter and other mailings for announcements of our quarterly open meetings and consider participating in our oral history project, our other ongoing

projects, and in the planning process behind the many new events we undertake.

Above all, we ask you to help us in expanding the audience for our work.

When you yourself are interested in something you learn at one of our meetings, through a Minsky publication, through our newsletter, through one of our summer tours, or through some other medium, please share what you've found with friends, neighbors, and relatives.

Spread the word about what we do, and you'll be doing some of our most important work.

Finally, please consider giving memberships to our Society to anyone you can think of who might appreciate Chicago Jewish history. Your gift to them is a gift to us as well. □

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*Oral History Excerpt:*

## Max Robert Schroyer Recounts Experiences as K.A.M. President

*The following oral history excerpt was taken by Society Past President Norman Schwartz on August 25, 1986 at the offices of Max Robert Schroyer, 230 W. Monroe.*

**Max Robert Schroyer:**[Having received an engineering degree from the University of Michigan.] I tried to get a job when I graduated. At the time, the best job I was offered paid \$100 a month. And I just wouldn't accept that. So I went back for a Master's degree.

**Norman Schwartz:** In what?

**Schroyer:** In mechanical engineering. In air conditioning. At any rate, my father — in spring vacation of that year, my father was operated on for prostate and they discovered he had a very bad case of cancer. And the doctor told me he would never come back to work, that I'd better do whatever I had to do to take care of his business. So I didn't go back to school. I wrote them a letter, and told them I couldn't come back. I would be back later; keep my experiments, and I would finish at a later date. But my father didn't die for almost a year, and by that time I didn't want to go back.

**Schwartz:** He had an insurance business ...

**Schroyer:** No. He didn't have an insurance business. he was a manufacturer of tinware and a jobber of household goods. He had a very successful business, but it was a disappearing business. Our business was done mostly with variety stores and small department stores. And the things we sold became obsolete, because we catered to the immigrant population who lived in apartment buildings or houses where they lived practically in the kitchen. And they cooked their meals. For instance, the biggest item that we manufactured by hand were wash boilers. I find that my children don't even know what a wash boiler is. It's a dead item. And we used to sell them by the thousands. We used to sell stove pipe. People had stoves in their kitchens, and they had to have pipes for ventilation. The items were all old fashioned, even when I was taking over the business after my father died. It was an old fashioned business, and the chain stores were taking away the business — like Kresge and Woolworth — fellows like that were coming in. The little variety stores were dying because they couldn't exist. So, I went to be an insurance man. I had a few other things in between ...

**Schwartz:** I know that you've been active in the Jewish community for a number of years. Tell me when you kind

of started in that?

**Schroyer:** Well, I would say this. I went to religious school at Temple Isaiah, and I was very much interested. I had the feeling that I was the best in the confirmation class as far as knowing what was going on, being interested. But when it came to confirmation services, I remember the rabbi picked the son of the richest guy in the congregation to be the valedictorian. I never forgot that. I'm very much upset about that.

**Schwartz:** What age did people get confirmed at in those days?

**Schroyer:** Well, I got confirmed ... As a matter of fact, at 13. The rabbi was very hesitant to let me in the class, but I was that far ahead in school because my mother put me into school at 5. So I graduated at 12 from grammar school. The rabbi was very hesitant to let me in the confirmation class, but these were my friends and I insisted upon it. He finally gave in.

**Schwartz:** There was no Bar Mitzvah in those days at Isaiah?

**Schroyer:** No. This was a Reform congregation. There was no such thing as a Bar Mitzvah. We didn't even have services on Friday night.

**Schwartz:** When were the services?

**Schroyer:** On Saturday morning. That's all, just Saturday morning.

**Schwartz:** No Sunday either?

**Schroyer:** No Sunday... And my grandparents — my mother's parents — were stalwarts of that congregation. As a matter of fact, they belonged to that congregation when it was on the West Side. It was originally on the West Side somewhere. I don't even remember where, before they moved to 45th and Vincennes. Because at that time and in those years — 1911 to 1920 — that was the exclusive neighborhood for Jewish people in Chicago. My grandparents had a home on Grand Boulevard. That was a lovely street. Do you know Grand Boulevard? It changed its name twice ... [it's now] King Drive.

**Schwartz:** There were a lot of synagogues on Grand Boulevard?

**Schroyer:** Just Isaiah and Sinai. I don't know of anyone else that was there. Then, Grand Boulevard was really a beautiful street. Between 35th and Washington Park there was a beautiful drive in the middle and drives on each side. They were three streets, really.

**Schwartz:** Parkways.

**Schroyer:** Parkways, yes. It was a beautiful street with beautiful homes there. We lived on Vincennes which was one block away. ...

**Schwartz:** Anyhow, you went to the Sunday School and got confirmed? You indicated an interest in Judaism. Was there anything like the Young People's Division?

**Schroyer:** There was nothing like the Young People's Division, and there was nothing like keeping in touch with a confirmand. The result was I went away to Michigan. In the next three or four years, several things happened. First of all — not in the order of when they occurred — but, first of all, my mother and father both died in the succeeding four years. And we had no membership; confirmands were not connected. I didn't even hear from the temple. All I knew was that they merged with Temple Israel. Rabbi Stoltz retired and Rabbi Gerson Levy took over. And they moved the building over Hyde Park Boulevard, so I really didn't have any connection with the synagogue.

What really happened — as far as that part of my life is concerned — I got married, and I lived on the South Side. One day I got a telephone call from a fellow named Mountner ... Leo Mountner. And that he'd like me to join K.A.M. That Rabbi Freehof was being offered a congregation and was threatening to leave and the only way they could keep him was to get a couple hundred more members. So, I didn't have much of a connection, so I joined.

That's how I happened to join K.A.M.

**Schwartz:** I want to go back to a couple of things. When you were at Michigan was there any kind of Jewish activity there?

**Schroyer:** There was some kind of Jewish activity. We had a Hillel Foundation. I would say that they were not very popular. I never attended. I was very active on the campus.

**Schwartz:** Do you belong to a Jewish fraternity?

**Schroyer:** Yes. I belonged to ZBT, Zeta Beta Tau. And I would say that while we were Jewish, without a question of doubt — there was not one single non-Jewish person in the fraternity all the four years I was there, not one — we didn't go to services. We really didn't do anything Jewish, which I objected to, but there was no sympathy for that.

**Schwartz:** Who married you?

**Schroyer:** When was I married? That was in Nippersink. I wanted to get married when I wasn't working. You see, I took over my father's business when he died and struggled with it for a couple of years. And really, there was nobody in charge of it but me, when I was 20 years old ... 21 years old. So it was hard for me to go on a wedding trip or anything. So, I picked the day of July 3 to get married because I'd have a holiday for July 4. And on that day, all of the Reform rabbis were on vacation. In those days, all of the Reform temples closed up for the

summer. And the rabbis went away for summer vacation. And I couldn't find a rabbi to marry me so I called up a Conservative rabbi, Rabbi Simon. He was also out of town, but he had an assistant whose name escapes me now.

**Schwartz:** Was that Rodfei Zedek?

**Schroyer:** Rodfei Zedek. ... Anyway, I called him up and told him I wanted to get married. He didn't know me and asked me who I was. And he said to me, "Well, is the girl you're going to marry Jewish?" I said, "Sure, of course she's Jewish." "Well," he says, "I'm a little bit worried. I don't know you, and I don't know her." So I said, "Do you know Philip Weinstein?" He was a member of their congregation. He said, "Sure." So I said, "Why don't you call up Philip Weinstein and ask if he knows me and knows if I'm Jewish." He says, "If you tell me you are, I'll take your word for it." So, he married us.

**Schwartz:** Well, that's an interesting sidelight to what has changed, because at Temple Sholom now we have services all through the summer.

**Schroyer:** Well, I can tell you that I was responsible for that. It went this way. When I became the

president of K.A.M., maybe even before I became president, I couldn't understand why we didn't have services during the summer. And I said to the rabbi, if there's any reason to have services during the fall, I don't see how you can say we don't need Judaism — or services — during the summer. I think that's disgraceful. And I think anybody would say to us, why should we come in October if we don't have to come in July? I said, "Let's start having services all year. And the rabbis agreed. And we started ... we made a big deal out of it.

**Schwartz:** Which rabbi was that?

**Schroyer:** Rabbi Jacob Weinstein. And I believe that as a result of our efforts in that direction all of the temples eventually [came to] have services all year. I think we were responsible for starting that.

**Schwartz:** I think that was a wonderful thing. How could you turn religion on and off just because it was summer?

**Schroyer:** I never could understand that.

**Schwartz:** So then, because of this attempt to keep the rabbi there, to keep Rabbi Freehof at K.A.M., you joined the temple?

**Schroyer:** I joined the temple. And I really didn't know much about this temple, but I had heard Freehof was a wonderful preacher. He gave great sermons, and that was true. And I don't think it was a year after I joined that he left. He left in spite of that. He went to Pittsburgh. And so we picked as a rabbi a young upstart who came up

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there. And because I was near his age — he was younger than I was but not too much younger — I kind of got interested in him. His name was Joshua Liebman. And I was fascinated by him. And the first service he gave was on Rosh Hashanah, and I was sitting in there next to a lot of old guys who thought, “This guy’s no good.” So I decided I’m going to help him.

And that’s how I got interested, and we became very close, intimate friends. I was his closest friend, and we spent three or four years together. That’s when I became active in the temple, when I became vice president and was in line to become the next president. When all of a sudden, out of a clear sky, he announced — he didn’t even tell me he was considering it — he announced he was leaving and going to Boston. And I was really upset. I thought that was disloyal, and I thought (to myself) inexcusable, and he never even told me about it, and so forth. I tell you, I was his closest friend. But that was it. He felt that was a better opportunity, and I can’t blame him. He died about 2 or 3 years later, at the age of 40, so he was a very young man.

**Schwartz:** He wrote some ...

**Schrayer:** He wrote one book, *Peace of Mind*.

**Schwartz:** *Peace of Mind*, yes. That was very well known. Then who became the rabbi there?

**Schrayer:** Then I had the job of picking the rabbi. And I was determined I was going to show Liebman we didn’t need him. I was determined we were going to get an outstanding rabbi. So, who did I go to? I went to Sachar. And I tried to talk him into quitting what he was doing. He was working for B’nai B’rith, and came to be our rabbi. And I said to him... “You can do other work if you want to, but you’ve got to be there for the main service. You’ve got to be there for the High Holidays, and if you’re busy and have other things to do, we’ll get an executive director to run the congregation.” I wanted to get Sachar to be our rabbi. ...

He didn’t come finally, but he says, “I’ll help you find a rabbi.” And he said to me, “I know a fellow named Weinstein in California. And he’s out of the rabbinate because he got in trouble. He had a job in Los Angeles or San Francisco and ... he gave a sermon defending [Sacco and Vanzetti].” As a result he lost his job, and nobody wanted to touch him.

Sachar said, “This is a brilliant guy, and I think you ought to meet him.” So I did. And on Sachar’s recommendation we hired him as our rabbi. Jacob

Weinstein.

And he became my best friend. My wife and his wife were together all the time. But what happened was I wanted the congregation to grow. And I worked feverishly. I started all these committees: we had about 30 committees. We had a chairman for every one. We had educational programs in every one. We went from about 300 members to 900 members in four years.

The only problem was, I had these committees meeting, every one of them... even the house committee had a program of learning how synagogues are built and what the furniture has to be and what all the different appointments have to be in building a synagogue. We had a program for every committee. It wasn’t just a matter of doing the job. I keep calling it a job. And then we got a

secretary to do the jobs.

You’re chairman of this committee, but you’ve got to teach these people. I got Gerald Herst, who belonged to Sinai, and I said to Gerald, “You like music. Why don’t

you run the music but have it schooled. Teach people what Jewish music is.” He got so good at this — he never went to temple or anything; he belonged to Sinai — he finally, when we were on our 100th anniversary, he gave a series of speeches on synagogue music. And I want to tell you, they were terrific.

**Schwartz:** That would have been in 1947?

**Schrayer:** It was the year of our 100th anniversary, yes. ... I got other fellows who never were interested, but I would only take them if they would have an educational program. And I stressed the fact that people go to organizations if they have friends there. It’s got to be social. It can’t be only social. If it’s only social, it’s worthless. But, basically, people like to be with other people if they like them. And we used to have groups. We used to get groups together: the choir committee would be a group of good friends. You know, the house committee would be a group of good friends. And they’d like to have meetings because they got together and used to have something to eat and talk about their problems. And we did a really good job, but we ran into trouble. (Laughter)

The trouble was that everybody who had a committee meeting wanted the rabbi there. Because, how could they have a meeting without the rabbi? So he was starting to get calls for every single night of the week. And he began to complain, and his wife complained. “What kind of a job is this where you don’t have any time off?” □

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