

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



chicago jewish historical society

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# CHICAGO JEWISH History

## Edna Ferber:

*Her girlhood in Chicago and the Midwest helped her see a world she captured in a series of best-selling novels, making her the first Jew to win a Pulitzer and producing the unforgettable **Show Boat***

By Walter Roth

In the spring of next year, *Show Boat*, one of the most popular musicals ever written for the American stage will be coming to Chicago. Few people remember that this play, with music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein, was based on the novel *Show Boat*, written by Edna Ferber, a Jewish writer who lived in Chicago for many years in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Although she lived in many different places throughout the Midwest as a girl, Ferber spent portions of her childhood and all of her young womanhood here and remains one of the most successful Jewish writers Chicago has produced.

*Born in Kalamazoo*

Ferber was born August 15, 1887 in Kalamazoo, Michigan to Jacob Charles Ferber, a Hungarian Jew, and Julia Neumann Ferber, whose parents were well-to-do Jewish merchants and whose ancestry stemmed from German Jewish bankers, writers, and teachers.

In her 1939 autobiography (the first she published), *A Peculiar Treasure*, she recounted the early years of her life. Her father, a man whose weaknesses she deplored but whose spirit and soul she adored, moved the family to Chicago in 1889 when his store proved unsuccessful. The family moved in with the Neumanns who lived in a four-story house on Calumet Avenue.

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## Video History Project Rolls Forward

*Filming Underway for History of Jews of Chicago Area*

The Society-sponsored video history of the Jews of Chicago project continues to roll along, with production almost half-way complete.

Film-maker Beverley Siegel is producing and directing the project, the first of its kind in the Chicago area. She says that she is

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### Inside:

- Oral History Excerpt from Hillel Gamoran of Beth Tikvah Congregation
- Spertus Museum's Standing on the Shoulders Brings History Home
- Do You Recognize Faces from our Photo?

# President's Column

As I was reading an article on Edna Ferber in *The Tribune* a couple of months ago, I was surprised at being reminded she was Jewish. I suppose I had known that she was, but somehow I rarely think of her when I think of Chicago's Jewish authors.



Walter Roth

Oddly enough, one could probably make the case that Ferber is the most successful Chicago Jewish writer ever. She certainly sold more books than her contemporaries Ben Hecht or Maxwell Bodenheim. Her audience was broader than such later Chicago Jewish writers as Meyer Levin or Leo Rosten. And, while her critical reputation is certainly no match for Saul Bellow's, she can none the less boast of having had her work in print for more than 80 years.

I began thinking about why we so seldom rank Ferber among our foremost writers as I set out to read a number of her novels in researching the lead article in this issue of the newsletter. I found that her work remains fresh and that it often turns a powerful eye to the experience of being a minority and an outsider in the America of the beginning of this century.

I also found, however, that Ferber chose not to involve herself with her fellow Jews. She certainly never disavowed her Jewishness and never felt that it diminished her. Instead, she seemed to feel that Judaism was something that she -- and her fellow Jews -- would have to outgrow in order to join fully in the American experience.

She saw Judaism and a sense of Jewish identity as baggage that we had brought with us from the Old World. She seemed to believe that we would set it aside of our own accord, just as we had set aside the clothing styles and

languages of Europe.

Ferber does not come readily to mind today as a Chicago Jewish writer because, in large measure, she asked that we not think of her as such. To understand her inclination, I want to recall for a moment the situation of Chicago's Jewish community in her girlhood.

One hundred years ago, in 1895, the Chicago Jewish community was just beginning to take shape. Already on the scene were the German Jewish settlers who first began to arrive shortly before the Civil War. After a half-century they were now the veterans -- already successful as bankers, merchants, and businessmen in all walks of life.

Among their leaders was Julius Rosenwald, chief executive of a new mail order house, Sears, Roebuck & Co., who was destined to be a great Jewish and American philanthropist. There was Judge Julian Mack who became a disciple of Louis Brandeis and a national leader of the American Zionist Movement.

There were the great Chicago rabbis: Emil Hirsch of Temple Sinai, a leader of the Reform movement and a noted teacher of Humanism at the University of Chicago but an anti-Zionist; and Bernard Felsenthal, a renowned Chicago rabbi of the Enlightenment and, in contrast to Hirsch, a leader of American Zionism.

This established, affluent, and enlightened German-Jewish community then, in 1895, had to adjust to the tens of thousands of East European Jews who came seeking refuge in Chicago. The tensions that arose between these two communities on political, business, and social levels are well documented.

Suffice it to say that after a generation or two, the offspring of the East European Jews were quite as successful as their German counterparts in acclimatizing themselves to American culture. The American "melting pot," so

aptly epitomized by Chicago's Jane Addams and the Hull House settlement, was able to transform the impoverished Yiddish speaking masses into integrated Americans with their own successful political, business, and religious leadership within a few decades.

Bernard and Harris Horwich became leaders in business and in Chicago's Zionist movement. Rabbi Saul Silber became the President of the Hebrew Theological College. And the business dynasties of the Crown and Pritzker families were founded by these East European immigrants. These immigrants also founded many learning centers for the study of Jewish culture and religion.

America proved, for the second time in the Chicago Jewish community, that it was a land of promise and opportunity.

But as has been the case with other diasporas in the past, a danger has emerged that now threatens the religious and cultural future of American Jews. Their very success and integration into the American community is leading to a loss of Jewish identity for new generations.

The first half of this century saw two events that made it impossible for American Jews to forget their identity entirely. First, the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust ironically helped sustain American Jewry by providing a final wave of post-war immigrants and by relocating many of the Jewish treasures of the world to the United States.

Second, the creation of the state of Israel inspired two generations of young Jews and continues to have a powerful hold on the imaginations of many young people. Still, as miraculous as the founding of Israel is, it cannot by itself be sufficient to sustain the existence of American Jewry.

We have survived as Jews in America because we have been able to have feet in two worlds: in the world of American ideas, culture, and commerce, and in the world of our Jewish heritage. Our experience

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## Video History

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pleased with the progress of the film. "Part of why I've been happy with the way things are going is that we put in a lot of research at the front of the project," Siegel said. "When you are making a documentary, you have to do your suffering at the beginning of a shoot or you have to do your suffering at the end."

Siegel reports that she has conducted more than thirty background interviews for the project and she has worked for the last two years in consultation with Society members and other historians familiar with Chicago Jewish history.

The idea behind the video project is to make the history of Chicago's Jews more accessible to all of Chicago. The completed project will be available for purchase by Society members and others, but it may also be broadcast locally. "We do have some interest from local television stations," Siegel said.

The video history project is the most comprehensive history project the Society has undertaken since its republication of H.L. Meites's *History of the Jews of Chicago* in 1990.

Jewish historical societies in other metropolitan areas have produced similar histories, but no one has ever done so in the Chicago area.

To date, Siegel has recorded

interviews with Judge Abraham Marovitz, Sol Brandzel, Marian Despres, Hamilton Loeb, Lorraine Moss, and Peter Ascoli.

"I think that we are getting the best people there are to tell this story," Siegel said. "When people ask me, 'Who is in your video?' they're impressed. It helps build a real momentum for getting other people to participate."

Siegel estimates that the video project will be complete by March, 1996. The Society has not yet determined the price of the video, but *Chicago Jewish History* will announce details as they become available. In addition, the Society is planning to stage an event publicizing the premier showing of the film. □

## Summer Tours Revisited Old Haunts

The Society is pleased to announce that this year's summer tour program proved as successful as the previous years.

Society board member Leah Axelrod coordinated the tours, as she has for several years. She reports turnout was strong for all three of the tours and that the Society was able to attract a number of new members from non-members who participated.

The first tour was a walking tour of the Loop on July 9, directed by Axelrod and past President Norman Schwartz.

Among the highlights was a visit to Chicago's Loop Synagogue.

The second tour was of Chicago's Near Northside on July 23 and was led by board member Mark Mandle. According to Mandle, Jews have been present in the area for over 125 years.

The final tour was an all-day bus trip on August 13 to Ligonier and South Bend, Indiana. Axelrod and board member Sid Sorkin led the tour and board member Chuck Bernstein contributed research.

Ligonier boasted a significant Jewish population as early as the 1850s and features a synagogue-turned-museum, a Jewish cemetery, and several buildings reflecting the Jewish presence in the city.

South Bend remains an active and vital Jewish community in the shadow of Notre Dame University.

Tours for next summer have not yet been scheduled. Those who are interested in joining us next year should check the newsletter for details. □

## Corrections:

The last issue of *Chicago Jewish History* mis-identified the architects of the Central Music Hall built in Chicago in 1879. Dankmar Adler was the sole chief architect.

In addition, there was a typographical error in a memoir by Carol Perel Colby. Perel intended to describe Sylvia Levitt as "immortal." □

## President's Column

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as immigrants has naturally pulled us in the direction of Americanization; only our love of heritage and religion has pulled us in the other.

Perhaps Edna Ferber was merely ahead of her time in giving up her Jewish heritage so willingly. Perhaps her relative affluence and her obvious comfort with American language and culture put her in the situation that many of our young people confront today:

seeing their lives as a choice between a glittering and forward-looking American identity and an outmoded, sentimental attachment to Jewish customs and practices.

Somewhere in her later life, Ferber lost contact with her past, or misinterpreted what she did remember. For all the subtle beauty she could find in the world she described in her books, she was unable to appreciate the heritage in which she grew up.

I like to think that one of the purposes of our Society is to help tell and re-tell our history as a community

so that the young people of our time do not find themselves confronted with the stark choice that drove Ferber away from a real attachment to Judaism, so that they can understand and appreciate the breadth of the history that has created the world they know.

I like to think that our task as historians lies in part in enabling the descendants of the various immigrants who settled in Chicago to use their history as an inspiration to perpetuate our people.

My best wishes to all of you for the New Year. □

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# Edna Ferber

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## *In her Grandparents's Home*

Ferber remembered in great detail the Jewish traditions, meals, and doings in her German grandparents' house. She came to love not only the warmth of the home, but also the intellectual and artistic endeavors of the family.

Her grandparents were immigrants, but they were well-to-do and they had largely assimilated themselves into American practices. They were Jewish, but they also involved themselves in contemporary secular culture.

From them she learned that her grandfather's cousin was a well-known playwright in Berlin. The world she first knew in Chicago was one where her Jewishness marked her in promising ways.

### *Iowa, for Better Luck*

After only a year in Chicago, her father found no better fortune, so he moved the family westward to Ottumwa, Iowa. In her autobiography, Ferber wrote in stark detail of the anti-Semitism she encountered in the small town near the Mississippi River, memories of which often appeared in her later novels.

The Ferbers lived in Ottumwa from 1890 until 1899, and the years proved unhappy ones for the family. Her father soon began to lose his sight and young Edna spent a great deal of her time having to help her mother take care of the family store. The business went poorly and Ferber's mother eventually decided to move once again, this time to Appleton, Wisconsin.

### *A Midwestern Pastoral*

Although Ferber's father died soon after they arrived in Appleton, the experience proved much better than the years in Ottumwa. She would later remember Appleton with great affection. She came to love the Midwestern countryside, the flowers and rivers and the hardy Americans of different ethnic ancestry, whom she described with love and tenderness in her many books.

She began to discover that she had an aptitude for writing and, after graduating from high school, became a reporter for *The Appleton Daily Crescent*.

### *Emma McChesney is Born*

She moved from there to a job with *The Milwaukee Journal* and began the writing that would earn her fame.

Her first novel, *Dawn O'Hara* is set in Milwaukee, but the early work that proved most successful was a series of short stories featuring a delightful and witty woman, Emma McChesney.

Emma worked as a travelling salesman and proved so popular a character that Ferber continued writing about her for years, eventually making her the protagonist of four different novels. She was said to be patterned after Ferber's mother, a strong-willed woman whom Ferber feared, adored, and loved.

### *An Autobiographical Novel*

In her second novel, *Fanny Herself*, Ferber described her own life in Appleton. The old German Rabbi in the book was patterned after a Rabbi Grechter whom she knew well in Appleton, and the hard-working Jewish mother was her own. Her perceptive pen caught the Jewish life in this small Midwestern town, the Americanization of the German-Jewish immigrant families, and the snobbery to the more recently arrived immigrants from Russia and Poland, but Ferber still paints an admiring portrait of the Jewish people.

### *All for Americanization*

At the same time, though, Ferber was all in favor of assimilation. She regularly embraced the "melting pot" ideal for American Jews in her early works. She felt that if Jews were left alone and not persecuted, they would disappear in two hundred years.

Later, in the 1930s, she would lash out at Hitler and other anti-Semites, and she would observe that the Nazi scourge was forcing American Jews to "become intensely racial."

### *A Return to Chicago*

In 1911 with Jacob Ferber dead, Ferber came back to Chicago with her mother and sister Fannie, moving into a three-story apartment on Vincennes Avenue on Chicago's South side, near where her maternal grandparents lived. She then received news that her novel "Dawn O'Hara" had been accepted for publication. It was well received and sold over 10,000 copies in its first edition (a good figure even today).

With this initial success, Ferber fell in love with Chicago. She wrote in her autobiography: "Chicago opened up before my eager receptive eyes. The slightest stimulus sent the imagination racing. First to be out on the Chicago streets, and their smoke-blackened apartment houses and their bedlam traffic; their musty green lake-side parks and windswept skyscrapers --

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strange mixture of provincial town and cosmopolitan city with the stench of the stockyard from the west side, and the fresh tang of Lake Michigan from the east side -- this was to know adventure."

#### *Writing about the City She Loved*

She began to write and publish many short stories about life in Chicago. She wrote about the symphony concerts at Ravinia, Maxwell Street in the heart of the Jewish district on a Saturday night; the Loop at national convention time; the slaughtering of pigs in the Stockyards, and the "Negro" districts of the south side.

She became recognized as part of the Chicago Writers Group, then gaining fame. As a fellow successful writer, she came to meet many of the writers who were then shaping a literary identity for Chicago.

#### *A Glimpse of her Contemporaries*

She wrote in her autobiography: "Carl Sandburg was writing his powerful lusty Chicago poems. Ben Hecht was living there, trying to be Rabelaisian, sliding his eyes around in a leer, trying to hide his warmhearted conventional soul; Maxwell Bodenheim striding along Michigan Avenue in beret and smock, looking like a Weber and Fields version of an artist. They were sometimes referred to as the Chicago School of Writers."

Hecht and Bodenstein were, of course, Jewish, like Ferber. But they were cynical, acerbic and often cruel in their writings, unlike Ferber, whose love of America and her sympathy for its struggling people (particularly mothers) was all-pervasive. She never became close to these writers, though she noted that "many of my Chicago friends were Jews like myself." She found them individually "exhilarating," but collectively "almost too heady."

#### *A Rabbi She Can Respect*

On Sunday mornings, she went to the Jewish Temple (Sinai) on Grand Boulevard to hear Rabbi Emil Hirsch, a leader of The Reform Movement. "Aquiline, acid, interpretive, bold -- all these words crowd the mind when one tries to describe this great Jewish scholar. Courageous, too, and wise with a terrible wisdom, like the prophets."

She was deeply influenced by Hirsch's humanism and universalistic interpretation of Judaism. She was not religious in a formal way. She wrote: "God is Good and Good is God." Among the female friends in Chicago, Edna remembered Lillian Adler, a Jewish feminist active in the United Charities of Chicago and the Maxwell Settlement House.

#### *Chicago as a Home Base*

She also began to travel, particularly to see New



Edna Ferber

York publishers and other artistic acquaintances. But she continued to live in Chicago with her mother at different places in the Hyde Park area. "I wanted to picnic in the woods south of Chicago; I wanted to see the kids in Lillian Adler's dancing class at Maxwell Settlement; I wanted to bathe in Lake Michigan which seemed to be so accommodatingly at the foot of every west-east Chicago street."

She covered several Democratic and Republican national conventions held in Chicago. As a syndicated reporter, she worked with the writer William Allen White, who became a close confidant of hers. In 1912 she met Theodore Roosevelt, then running for the Presidency, at the Congress Hotel.

#### *Roosevelt an Emma Admirer*

Roosevelt's first remark to her was "What are you going to do about Emma McChesney?" the heroine of her serialized short stories. She was immensely flattered that Roosevelt had read all her stories and was taken aback at his suggestions for further tales for her heroine.

In early 1914, she published the second volume of the Emma McChesney stories called *Personality Plus*, to great acclaim and success. She took her first trip by ship to Europe -- to Hamburg, Vienna, Budapest, Prague and Paris -- a view of the old world and its cultural life right

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before the First World War.

*At Sea, at War*

Her observations on this trip were perceptive, incisive, and magnificently naive. She sailed back to America in August, 1914. At sea, she noticed that the German crew had suddenly become inept, unlike their usual manner. She learned that war had been declared by the Germans, "but it was their war and none of our business. How grateful I am to have seen that Europe in 1914 just before it vanished, never to return. Gay, brilliant, beautiful, richly historic... And the madman who was to follow -- he of the Charlie Chaplin mustache and the hysterical women's voice -- had not been thought of."

Back in the states she often stayed in New York when she was not in Chicago with her mother and began to work on her first play. *Our Mrs. McChesney* starring Ethel Barrymore, the leading star of the American stage at the time. This play and others she wrote soon after were not great successes -- but others soon would be.

*Political Observations*

She returned to Chicago in the spring of 1920 to cover the Republican Convention to be held there in the summer. She met Herbert Hoover, Frank Lowden, Hiram Johnson and Senator Robert S. La Follette of Wisconsin.

She also met the man the Republicans would nominate for the Presidency, Warren G. Harding. She listened to his speeches and thought: "Here is a living cartoon of the American Fourth of July stuffed shirt order."

*A Novel Inspired By a Chicago Friend*

She went to California to cover the Democratic Convention and began to write a new novel, *The Girls*, which won superb reviews and was dedicated to her friend Lillian Adler, "who shies at butterflies but not at life."

She took her mother, who had been ill with pneumonia, on a trip to Europe in 1923. They visited post-war Berlin and Ferber keenly observed the social upheavals then occurring. "They killed Rathenau," she observed (the German minister assassinated by Nazis). "Europe an entire continent was doomed. This I shouted at the top of my voice when I returned to my country... Well, what if Europe is sick! It's none of our affair."

*Another Home in Chicago*

In the summer of 1923, Ferber returned to Chicago

with her mother, taking up residency at the Windermere Hotel, on Chicago's South Side across from Jackson Park. In the next years, while residing in Chicago with her mother and often living in New York, she wrote some of her greatest novels.

Even though she often spent only a few weeks in localities where the novels took place, her research and imagination let her to write *Cimarron* (about life in early Oklahoma with a Jewish peddler, Sol Levy, as one of its secondary characters and with Sabra Cravat as its feminine heroine); *American Beauty* (about Connecticut history); and *So Big*, which was published in 1924.

*An Unprecedented Honor*

In 1925, she became the first American Jewish writer to win a Pulitzer prize for *So Big*, the story of a boy whose strong, virtuous mother, Selina DeJong, spent her

life working outside Chicago in order to raise her son. It sold over 300,000 copies and became the basis for two films, one silent and one sound.

Now famous and rich, Edna took a luxury apartment in the early 1930s at 50 Central Park West in Manhattan.

*Show Boat is Born*

Here then begins the saga of *Show Boat*. She had written a short story called "Old Man Minick," a tale about an old man who comes to live with his son and daughter-in-law. George Kaufman, the playwright, contacted her, offering to do the story for the stage. It was produced to critical acclaim, except for *The New York Times*, which panned it.

Depressed, Ferber recalled that Winthrop Ames, the play's producer had told her one evening during a tryout outside New York: "Some day let's all run away and join a show boat troupe on the Mississippi and forget there are things like Broadway and First Nights." "What's a show boat?", Edna replied. Ames described for her the shows and games staged on these floating boats and Edna remembered her own life and of the trips with her mother across the Mississippi.

*Show Boat Combines Two Stories*

The rest is history. She wrote the book *Show Boat* about life on the Mississippi through the eyes of her heroine, Magnolia Ravenal and Ravenal's father, Captain Andy, and folded into it a story she had already been working on about the Clark Street gambling district near Chicago's notorious levee district.

She worked on the book for over a year, and when published by Doubleday, it was an immediate smashing best-seller. It became an international hit. The description of the "low" life in the Chicago Loop district still makes compelling reading today.

She met Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein, and sold them the musical and dramatic rights to her story. She worked with them for many months to bring the play to the stage.

*Brought to Tears by Music*

And then one day, she recalled, Jerome Kern appeared at her apartment. He sat down and played "Ol' Man River." "The music mounted, and I give you my word my hair stood on end, the tears came to my eyes, I breathed like a heroine in a melodrama. This was great music. This was music that would outlast Jerome Kern's day and mine."

*Playwright Success*

Ferber was not only a great novelist, but she was also a successful playwright. In years to come, in collaboration with George S. Kaufman, she had such outstanding hits as *Dinner at Eight*, *The Royal Family*, *Stage Door*, and *The Land is Bright*. She also frequented the gatherings of playwrights and other writers gathering at the Algonquin Hotel -- but that is another story.

*Attacks on Hitler*

As the noose began to tighten around German Jewry in the 1930s, Ferber wrote a number of scathing attacks on Hitler and his cohorts. Despite her thorough Americanization, she also turned her pen against the anti-Semites she encountered in America.

*Middle East Observations*

In 1934, she decided to go on a trip to Egypt and Palestine. She detested Egypt, the Land of the Pharaohs. "I can't account for it," she wrote. "The fields seemed to me to be fertilized with old dried blood of centuries." Palestine was different. She now recalled that the Jews



from the 1995 Broadway cast of *Show Boat*

were the "original farmers."

She remembered Aaron Aronson, a Palestinian agronomist and pioneer who had been to Chicago and of whom she knew, had discovered a new strain of wheat that would help to feed millions. She loved Jerusalem. "I know why it was known as Jerusalem the Golden. It is golden."

*Reflections on Zionism*

In the young faces of the Jewish settlers, she felt hope for her people. She observed: "I am not a Zionist... I only know this, with increasing assurance: that if suffering has for centuries been the badge of all our race it is high time to tear off the badge and to put in its place another -- a new one shiny one which says that justice is the badge of all our race."

She returned to America and continued to write as one of America's great novelists. But she seemed strangely unaffected by the calamity befalling the Jews of Europe.

*Wartime Activities*

During the War period, she wrote a number of novels, including the highly successful *Sarasota Trunk* published in 1942 about the gaudy life at this New York spa in an earlier period. But she knew her politics and when her old colleague from Chicago days, Ben Hecht, tried to enlist her for his pageants and propaganda for the Zionist Revisionist cause in America during the War,

she refused.

In his autobiography, *A Child of the Century*, Hecht mentions Edna Ferber once -- and then only to attack her for not assisting him in his efforts.

The War experience apparently made Ferber more of an American patriot than ever. Judaism seemed increasingly to her a culture that was primarily concerned with codifying moral behavior rather than the sort of religion she felt she could embrace alongside her American-ness.

#### *Her Final Novels*

In 1952 she published *Giant*, a story of Texas and its crassness and bigness. It, too, went on to be made into a film, this one starring James Dean.

After the publication of *Giant*, Edna visited Israel for the second time. This visit, she wrote in her second autobiography *A Kind of Magic*, published in 1963, "Israel was like a Jewish Texas without oil wells." She no longer saw the brightness of the idealistic young Jewish pioneers she wrote about on her visit in 1934. This time she saw Israeli people as "arrogant, ignorant of the world beyond the Israeli borders, and lacking in basic manners."

#### *A Debate with Ben Gurion*

In 1959 she engaged in a vitriolic exchange with Ben Gurion when the Israeli Prime Minister suggested that Diaspora Jewry should settle in Israel. Ferber violently disagreed. Echoing the opinion of her Jewish mentor, Chicago's Rabbi Hirsch, she pronounced that America was her Jerusalem.

In 1958 Ferber wrote her last novel, *Ice Palace*, about life in Alaska. When she published her second autobiography, it was strangely lacking any of the warmth of her first. But she was already sick with cancer and other painful ailments.

A biography written by her grand niece, Julie Goldsmith Gilkert, details her suffering, loneliness, and embitterment in her later years.

#### *A Fitting Epitaph*

Primarily because of her detachment from the Jewish community, particularly during her later life in New York, Ferber is not commonly thought of as a Jewish writer. But her Jewishness obviously gave her a unique perspective in

viewing American life and the struggle of its settlers to build the country.

Edna Ferber died in 1968 in New York City, without the benefit of a Jewish burial ceremony. But as she wrote many years ago, her *Show Boat* lives on. Her 1939 autobiography ends with a fitting epitaph:

"It has been my privilege, then, to have been a human being on the planet Earth; and to have been an American, a writer, a Jew. A lovely life I have found it, and thank you, Sir."

In some way still, she lives on through the words and characters of her many books. □

*Walter Roth is the President of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society.*

## Ferber Published Works All Her Life

*Edna Ferber wrote and published novels, short stories, and plays for more than half a century. The following is a complete list of her major publications. Most are out of print, of course, but a remarkable number remain readily available.*

**Novels:** *Dawn O'Hara* (1911), *Fanny Herself* (1917), *The Girls* (1921), *So Big* (1924), *Show Boat* (1926), *Cimarron* (1930, revised 1942), *American Beauty* (1931), *Come and Get It* (1935), *Nobody's*

*in Town* (Two novellas, including "Trees Die at the Top," 1938), *Saratoga Trunk* (1941), *Great Son* (1945), *Giant* (1952), and *Ice Palace* (1958).

**Short Story Collections:** *Buttered Side Down* (1912), *Roast Beef Medium: The Business Adventures of Emma McChesney* (1913), *Personality Plus: Some Experiences of Emma McChesney and her Son Jock* (1914), *Emma McChesney & Co.* (1915), *Cheerful by Request* (1918), *Half Portions* (1920), *Gigolo* (1922), "Old Man Minick" (1924), *Mother Knows Best* (1927), *They Brought Their Women* (1933),

*No Room at the Inn* (1941), and *One Basket* (1947).

**Plays:** *Our Mrs. McChesney* (with George Hobart, 1917), *\$1200 a Year* (with Newman Levy, 1920), "Minick" (with George S. Kaufman, 1924), *The Eldest: A Drama of American Life* (with Kaufman, 1925), "The Royal Family" (with Kaufman, 1925), "Dinner at Eight" (with Kaufman, 1932), *Stage Door* (with Kaufman, 1936), *The Land is Bright* (with Kaufman, 1941), and *Bravo* (with Kaufman, 1948).

**Autobiographies:** *A Peculiar Treasure* (1939) and *A Kind of Magic* (1963). □



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## Ferber's Novels Capture Tensions and Details of Jewish Midwestern Life

Edna Ferber, the object of this issue's cover story, was a prolific novelist. She was the first Jew to receive a Pulitzer Prize in literature and was a mainstay of best-seller lists for decades.

Today, more than eighty years after Ferber published her first novel, a number of her books remain in print. To round out Walter Roth's portrait of Ferber's relationship to Judaism, we reprint brief passages from some of her lesser known works:

*The following is an excerpt from Edna Ferber's novel Cimarron, published in 1930. In it, a Jew named Sol Levy has become the owner of a large merchant store after coming to the Oklahoma town of Osage as a poor peddler. His business success leads him to run for mayor of the small town, but blinds him to the reaction of his neighbors to the fact of his religion.*

Between him and Yancey there existed a deep sympathy and understanding. Yancey campaigned for Sol Levy in the mayoralty race -- if a thing so one-sided could be called a race. *The Wigwam* extolled him:

Sol Levy, the genial proprietor of the Levy Mercantile Company, is the *Wigwam's* candidate for mayor. It behooves the people of Osage to do honor to one of its pioneer citizens whose career, since its early days, has been marked by industry, prosperity, generosity. He comes of a race of dreamers and doers.

"Why, the very idea!" snorted the redoubtable virago, Mrs. Tracy Wyatt, whose husband was the opposing candidate. "A Jew for mayor of Osage! They'll be having an Indian mayor next. Mr. Wyatt's folks are real Americans. They helped settle Arkansas. And as for me, why, I can trace my ancestry right back to William Whipple, who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence."

Sol Levy never had a chance for public honor. He, in fact, did practically nothing to further his own possible election. He seemed to regard the whole matter with a remoteness slightly tinged with ironic humor. Yancey dropped into the store to bring him this latest pronouncement of the bristling Mrs. Wyatt. Sol was

busy in the back of the store, where he was helping the boy unpack a new invoice of china and lamps just received, for the Levy Mercantile Company had blossomed into a general store of parts. His head was in a barrel, and when he straightened and looked up at the towering Yancey there were bits of straw and excelsior clinging to his shirt sleeves and necktie and his black hair.

"Declaration of Independence!" he exclaimed, thoughtfully. "Tell her one of my ancestors wrote the Ten Commandments. Fella name of Moses."

*The following is an excerpt from Edna Ferber's So Big, her novel of 1924. It tells the story of Pervus, the doomed husband-father who must drive his vegetables to the Chicago Haymarket every day in order to earn bare sustenance. Notice the detail Ferber captures at the same time as she is able to advance her story.*

Pervus drove into the Chicago market every other day. During July and August he sometimes did not have his clothes off for a week. Together he and Jan Steen would load the wagon with the day's garnering. At four he would start on the tedious trip into town. The historic old Haymarket on West Randolph Street had become the stand for market gardeners for miles around Chicago. Here they stationed their wagons in preparation for the next day's selling. The wagons stood, close packed, in triple rows, down both sides of the curb and in the middle of the street. The early comer got the advantageous stand. There was no allotment of space. Pervus tried to reach the Haymarket by nine at night. Often bad roads made a detour necessary and he was late. That usually meant bad business the next day. The men, for the most part, slept on their wagons, curled up on the wagon seat or stretched out on the sacks. Their horses were stabled and fed in near-by sheds, with more actual comfort than the men themselves. One could get a room for twenty-five cents in one of the ramshackle rooming houses that faced the street. But the rooms were small, stuffy, none too clean; the beds little more comfortable than the wagons. Besides, twenty-five cents! You got twenty-five cents for half a barrel of tomatoes. You got twenty-five cents for a sack of potatoes. Onions brought seventy-five cents a sack. Cabbages were a hundred heads for two dollars, and they were five-pound heads. If you drove home with ten dollars in your pocket it represented a profit of exactly zero. The sum must go above that. No; one did not pay out twenty-five cents for the mere privilege of sleeping in a bed. □

## "Standing on the Shoulders" Tells History at Family Level

The display cases in the second floor Gallery of the Generations room of Spertus Institute for Jewish Studies are sometimes filled with unusual juxtapositions. A pair of feathery, pink mule slippers sits beside a set of silver *shabbos* candleholders; a tattered prayer book rests on top of a saucetop that, a sign reports, was forged from melted copper coins in Europe.

If you looked at them without reading the description of the *Standing on the Shoulders* project, you might think the objects were put together by accident. They seem to have little to do with each other, and most seem to be curious choices for a museum display case.

In fact, the objects are all heirlooms, heirlooms collected by area religious school students who are part of an unusual project in Jewish history. Implemented in several schools throughout the greater Chicago area and facilitated by Spertus, *Standing on the Shoulders* creates a partnership between museum educators and classroom teachers and turns history into a personal experience.

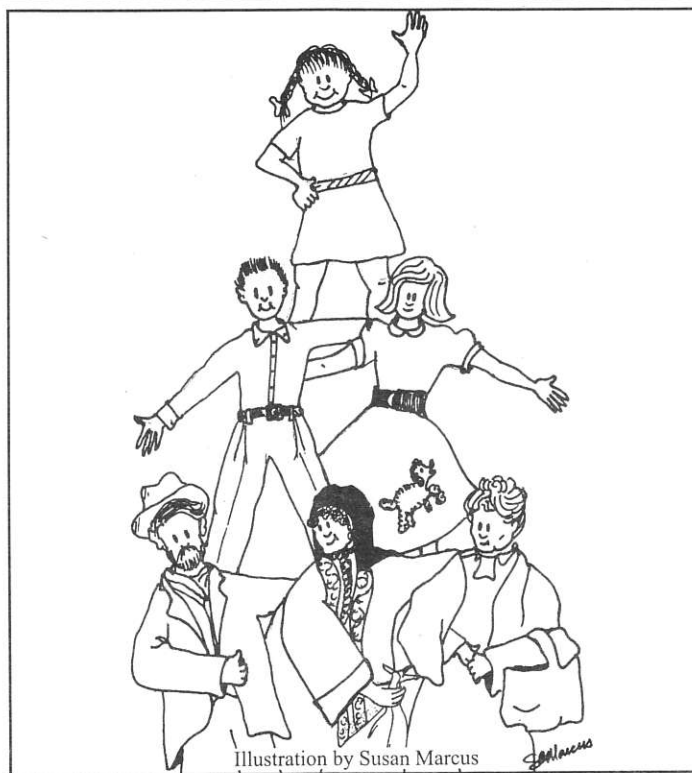
The program consists of a seven-unit curriculum for middle-school students at Jewish supplemental or day schools. The teachers in the religious or day schools implementing the program follow a unit a week as a means to help students explore their family histories in the context of Jewish history.

The program was written as a collaboration among Spertus Museum educational staff Kathi Lieb and Rebecca Krucoff as well as Esther Weiss, principal of Moriah Congregation, and Rachel Mather, a teacher at Congregation Or Shalom, two of the educators implementing the program.

Spertus Museum Education Coordinator Paula Chaiken explains that one of the program's strengths is the way it brings together museum professionals and teachers. "In the museum, we're used to letting objects tell stories. *Standing on the Shoulders* lets us share our experience with classroom teachers and gives us a chance to work with students for longer than a single museum visit."

Throughout the program, the students plan their exhibit, but classroom studies present Jewish history through active learning, using tools such as timelines, biographies, and family stories. After each student documents his or her family history through a series of interviews, the class interprets the decisions and personal accomplishments of their ancestors against the larger tableau of world history.

As a model for the histories the students might write, the program presents a history of Rosemary Ehrenreich Krensky's family. Krensky made the project possible through a donation, and Spertus has a permanent exhibit featuring some of her own family's heirlooms as well as a timeline charting her family history against the backdrop of world and American history. Krensky's ancestors have been in the



The title page from the program's teaching manual

United States since the Revolutionary War. In addition, one of her relatives was married to Rabbi Stephen Wise, the well-known American Zionist leader.

The first four units in the program ask students to think about community history as being like a machine with many parts. The curriculum suggests activities for students to perform that ask them to be conscious of being one part of a larger group. One week they write out brief autobiographies that give them a chance to draw connections between their names and the names of their ancestors. Another week their homework assignment asks them to interview three different family members to begin collecting a family history that recognizes multiple perspectives.

The final three units build up to compiling the museum cases that will contain the students' family heirlooms. Not all heirlooms are tangible, the program stresses; family heirlooms can be stories, customs, or unusual expressions.

Still, collecting tangible heirlooms and using them as part of a public display makes it possible to show how separate family histories all go into producing a group history. The final exhibits, with all of their seemingly random objects next to and on top of one another, not only grab the eye but also present history in an unusually personal way.

Currently, seven schools are enrolled in the program. Some choose to create the exhibition at their synagogue, making it more accessible to family and friends, while others display the objects at Spertus.

For information on implementing the program in a school near you, contact Paula Chaiken, Spertus Museum Education Coordinator, at (312) 322-1776. □

## Society Begins Membership Drive for New Year

As a new year begins, the Society finds itself in the midst of one of its biggest membership campaigns in years. We urge all of our members to help us promote who we are and what we do.

We are proud of being an all-volunteer organization and are proud that we have managed to produce as many programs, tours, annual meetings, and publications as we have. They are the fruits of many different people's talents and energies.

Still, our current membership is roughly the same it has been for the last three years. Although we manage to acquire a number of new members each year, we find we are able only to match our attrition. If we are to grow as a Society, we will have to add more members.

We ask all of our current members to help in the membership drive. If you know people who might be interested in joining the Society, consider mentioning it to them. While we are printing a special form in this month's issue of the newsletter, new members are always welcome to join simply by sending a check along with their mailing address to the Society at 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605. A schedule of

membership dues is printed on the back page of every issue of the newsletter.

If you are not comfortable contacting a potential member yourself, let us know and we can contact that person. Call board member Elise Ginsparg, the co-chair of the membership committee, and she will be happy to take your information. Her phone number is (708) 679-6793.

In thinking of potential members, consider friends who are no longer in Chicago in addition to your current friends and neighbors. Through our newsletter and other publications we are an organization whose benefits go beyond the boundaries of the city.

Think as well of organizations that might be appropriate for Society memberships. A number of congregations already hold memberships, but we would like to encourage more to do so. A synagogue that joins our Society and then displays our publications in its library gives our work wide exposure.

We are proud of the work we have done as a Society in preserving and recording the history of the Jews of Chicago and in sustaining ourselves over the past 18 years. We are grateful for all of the vital members we currently have and look forward to supplementing them with the new members you can us recruit in the coming year.

## Society Welcomes New Members

The Society is pleased to welcome our newest members, all of whom have joined in the most recent quarter. We welcome them and invite them to participate alongside our current members in all of the Society's ongoing projects.

<i>Hebrew</i>	<i>Philip Garmon</i>
<i>Theological</i>	<i>Norma Meyer</i>
<i>College</i>	<i>Miriam</i>
<i>Dan Alexander</i>	<i>Romirowsky</i>
<i>Phyllis Breall</i>	<i>Paula Pfeffer</i>
<i>Ethel Cohen</i>	<i>Gloria Schachtel</i>
<i>Carol Perel Colby</i>	<i>Dorothy Schneider</i>
<i>Mr &amp; Mrs Michael</i>	<i>Barbara Shmikler</i>
<i>Courlander</i>	<i>Phyllis Tinsley</i>
<i>Allen Dropkin</i>	<i>Mildred Weinstein</i>

As an all-volunteer organization, we believe that we grow stronger with each new member. The history we collect, preserve, and record is most secure when we involve the most voices.

We hope that all of our members, new and continuing, will consider taking part in the new drive for new members. Membership in the Society is not only a rewarding way to pursue a love of history, but it can also be a good gift for otherwise hard to satisfy friends and relatives. Help us spread the word about what we do.

### Sign Me Up for the Society:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

Checks should be made out to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and mailed to 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605. Dues are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

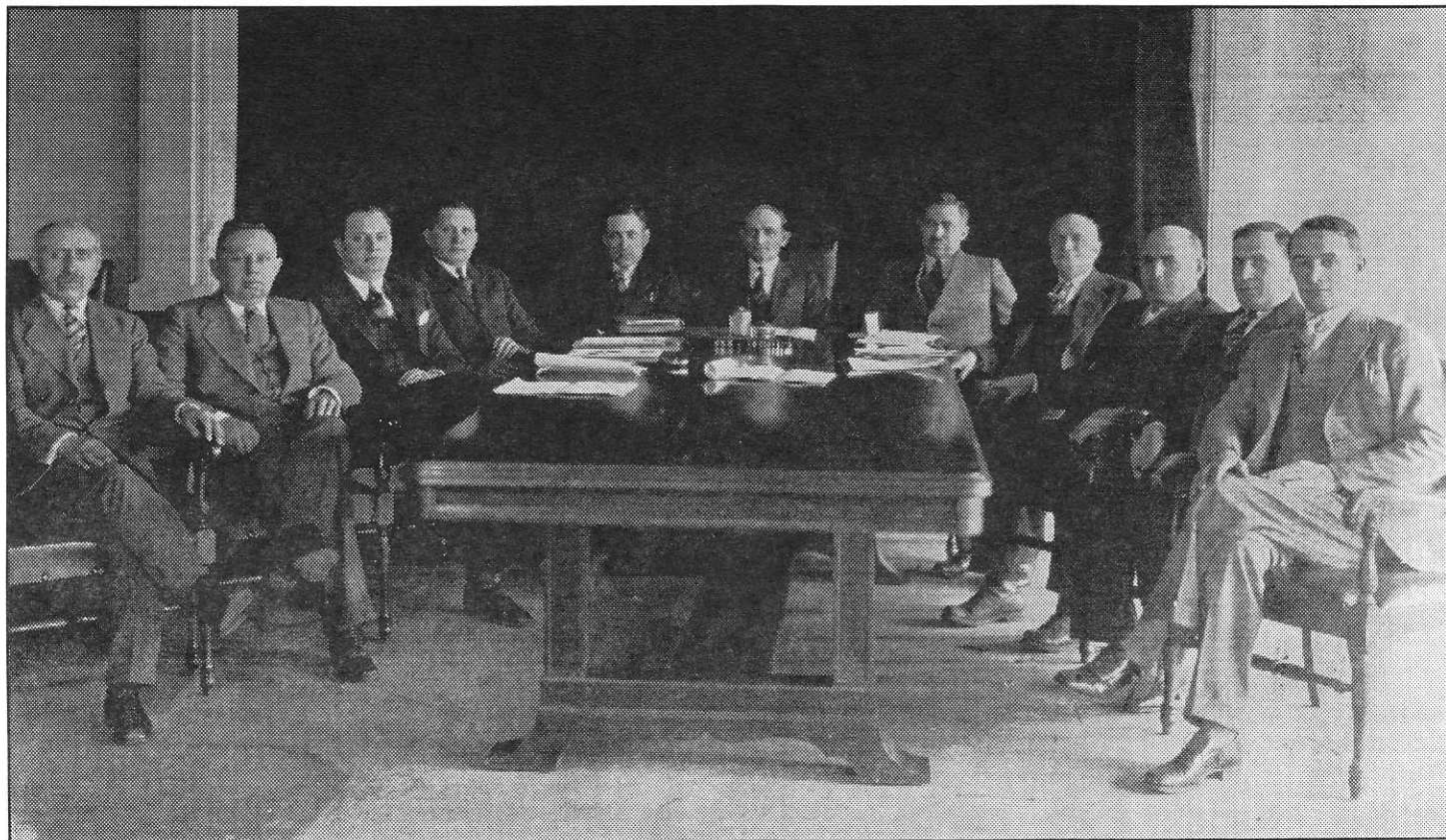
**Regular Membership (\$25)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Family Membership (\$35)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Society Patron (\$50)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Society Sponsor (\$100)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Student/Senior (\$15)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Synagogue (\$25)** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Lifetime Membership (\$1000)** \_\_\_\_\_

### Gift of: (optional)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are you a current Society Member? \_\_\_\_\_



## Sorkin to Speak on Installment Dealers Protective Group

Author, educator, and long-time Society Board Member Sid Sorkin will speak about the history of installment dealers in Chicago before the next open meeting of the Society on Oct. 29 at Temple Sholom.

Sorkin has been researching installment dealers for several years, and has identified more than 450 of them by name.

Part of his research led him to the above photograph, shared with the Society by Ruth Slutzky Eatman. It depicts the board of The City Installment Dealers Protective Association. If you can identify any of the faces in the photo, you can contact Sorkin at (708) 541-2188.

Installment dealers worked by selling items door-to-door throughout the neighborhood. They sold almost all household goods, as Sorkin put it, "Anything from a sheet to a refrigerator; from a watch to a suit of clothes."

While the idea of buying goods from a single representative knocking at the door may seem strange today, Sorkin points out that the dealers were able to back up their products with unusual service.

If merchandise proved to be defective, they replaced it. If a customer wound up in financial straits, they were in a position to negotiate a payment plan. As Sorkin said, "No hassle. That was the key item."

Such dealers were common throughout the city from the 1920s through the 1960s. "I have estimates -- just estimates -- that in the '40s and '50s, the installment dealers in Chicago grossed between \$40 and \$50 million," Sorkin said.

"It is estimated that at any given time in those peak years there were at least 1000 dealers out on the street. Ninety-nine percent of them were Jewish," Sorkin said.

In addition, Sorkin reports, the bulk of the jobbers -- the wholesale suppliers to the dealers -- were located in the traditional Jewish business district along Roosevelt Road from Canal Street

to Blue Island.

"The remnants of those jobber-wholesalers are now located in the Jeff-Ro plaza at Roosevelt and Jefferson, near the former Maxwell Street Market," Sorkin said.

The City Installment Dealers Protective Association was founded in 1922 and continued to exist until 1974 when membership dwindled. According to Sorkin, the Association helped dealers to work together at the same time as it made certain they could not be taken advantage of by wholesalers.

Sorkin recently published a history of the *Landsmenshaften* of Chicago. In addition, he is the author of a history of the Old South Side Jewish community in the September issue of *JUF News*.

He taught history in the Chicago Public Schools for 35 years, the final 25 at Bowen Senior High. He is currently the director of the Society's Oral History Project.

Sorkin's talk is open to the public and begins at 2 p.m. with an hour for casual conversation beginning at 1 p.m. Temple Sholom is located at 3480 N. Lake Shore Dr. □

*Oral History Excerpt:*

## Beth Tikvah Rabbi Hillel Gamoran Talks of Life with a Congregation of Families

*The following excerpt is from an oral history of Rabbi Hillel Gamoran, taken by Society Board Member Sid Sorkin on April 11, 1994 in the Gamoran home. Gamoran has served as Rabbi of Congregation Beth Tikvah for 35 years.*

**Sorkin:** Was there someone along the way, I mean besides, you know perhaps encouragement from your parents, that helped you make the transition into rabbinic school?

**Gamoran:** Well, I do remember one important conversation I had with an uncle of mine. His name was Max Lurie who was a scientist who did some wonderful research on tuberculosis in Philadelphia. And I remember a lunch I had with him once while I was in college, when I was thinking about rabbinic school and I had theological problems. I wasn't sure I could accept the traditional view of God and could I go into the rabbinate and become a rabbi if I didn't believe the way I thought I should have to believe. And he introduced me -- or he at least stimulated my thinking about different concepts of God; that there wasn't just the traditional one, that there could be others to be explored. And this was during the era also in which Mordecai Kaplan's writings were taking their place in the public mind. So that had an important influence on me and as I've gone into the rabbinate, I find that people are ready to accept the new thinking about God and not just the traditional one. So it has not been a barrier in any way.

**Sorkin:** Now, you finished your training for the rabbinate. Was there at that time part of the education a trip to Israel for a year? Or did that come later?

**Gamoran:** That's an interesting point you raise. First, I have to tell you that the Hebrew Union College had the New York school and the Cincinnati school in those days. And I had lived in Cincinnati all my life.

In 1951 the headquarters where my father worked moved to New York and I decided to move to New York as well and go to the New York school of the Hebrew Union College. So even though I had lived all my life in Cincinnati, I went to HUC in New York. They did not have any Israel program in those days. But I wanted very much to go to Israel and study in Israel.

After two years of rabbinic studies in New York, I went to Israel. I took Judith; we had just been married. We went to Israel for a year. And I would say I was not encouraged by the college faculty to make this trip. I had to do it on my own and when I got back and I wanted to get credit for the year of study which I felt was very worthwhile -- I don't want to say *more* worthwhile than the studies in New York. But it was

very worthwhile. But I had to take a battery of tests and I got about a half a year's credit for my year of study in Israel.

Another interesting story -- it doesn't have so much to do with me but with the college -- is that when I finished this third ... year in New York, Nelson Glick wanted all the students to transfer to Cincinnati. It was a time when it was felt it was just too costly and too diverse to have a school in Cincinnati and New York. So they decided that you could go to New York for your first two years but then you had to transfer to Cincinnati. We were seven of us in our class and Nelson Glick, the President of HUC, met with us and told us that we had to go, we had to transfer to Cincinnati.

Now, I was young and kind of free and I probably could've done it, but a number of my classmates were not in position to transfer. None of us *wanted* to but some of them had families and jobs and to transfer would have been impossible. At this time, Louis I. Newman, who was the first ordained rabbi by Stephen Wise, had a synagogue in New York and he said, "If you are thrown out of HUC by Nelson Glick, don't worry because I will ordain you." So we were kind of strong in our resolve to tell Dr. Glick that we could not or would not move. And he finally relented and we were able to finish our studies in New York and graduate from New York.

The *next* class -- the year after us -- was forced to transfer to Cincinnati.

**Sorkin:** Can you tell me about your first congregation in New York? Just a thumbnail of how many years, etcetera.

**Gamoran:** Yes. When I came back from Israel ... it was 1954, and I was invited to be a student rabbi of a new congregation in Morristown, New Jersey. It was about 30 miles west of New York City. It was a congregation that had about, as I recall about forty families when I came. And I used to go out to New Jersey from New York on Tuesdays for adult education and on the weekends for services and Sunday school.

And I did that for the whole year and the congregation grew. And when I was a senior student -- my last year of studies at HUC -- I moved to Morristown, we moved to Morristown and I was the student rabbi there. It was a very fine, growing congregation and I enjoyed it a lot and I *learned* there. Made all of my, hopefully made most of my mistakes there. And when I graduated from the HUC, they invited me to be the rabbi of the congregation. And I stayed there four more years. Most of my efforts were in education there. It was a young congregation, a growing congregation. My recollection is that it had about a hundred and fifty or so families by the time I left in 1960.

**Sorkin:** It more than tripled from your -- in four or five years.

**Gamoran:** Yes. Yes.

**Sorkin:** Why the decision to look for another congregation, if I may ask?

**Gamoran:** I felt it difficult to change the image of the student to the rabbi. I thought that was a difficult transition for me. Even though I had *been* ordained and *was* a rabbi now, there

still was the feeling that I'm the student there. And I had to go to a place where I would come as a rabbi. I think that was the main reason. I felt more comfortable looking -- I announced there that I wouldn't take another contract in the fall of 1959 and I think it was the right decision for me.

**Sorkin:** Could you tick off just a few of the things that you felt that Beth Tikvah was the right congregation for you when you knew they were looking for a rabbi?

**Gamoran:** Well, my feeling was that they ... it was young. I wanted a congregation that had a lot of children because at that point -- and still true -- my main interest was in teaching children. And that attracted me a lot. Everybody in Beth Tikvah seemed to be in their 30s with two children. And in fact, this congregation started with a school. The congregation came after the school. The school was the main emphasis for starting the congregation.

**Sorkin:** That's unusual -- the school first ...

**Gamoran:** They brought in somebody to have classes. And then after the high holidays came and they started a congregation out of it. So that attracted me.

Secondly, there were people with a traditional -- a lot of people with a traditional background. It wasn't people that had a set reform ideology. And I was not in the mold of classical reform. I was more in the mould of trying to bring in more Judaica and more tradition into the reform movement. I felt with a new congregation like this, with young people who had come from Chicago -- many of them from traditional backgrounds, that it was an opportunity to develop a modern congregation but insert many of the Jewish traditions into it. And thirdly, there was just a very good spirit here. I mean, there was a relaxed spirit; there was humor; there was a feeling of respect for the rabbi. They wanted me. And anytime somebody is wanted, it makes you feel good. So I was happy to come here.

**Sorkin:** Let me go back to something I picked up in the previous interview. And there were no details on this but it sounds like an interesting story and I think we ought to have it. You were giving a sermon. I think it was a Friday night. And you lost the last page. And something to do with an old car. But what was special about this was that your parents were here. Can you sort of embellish that story a little bit? It sounds interesting. Because in the interview that I read, your father had mentioned how come you cut the sermon short?

**Gamoran:** Yeah. Right. Well, that was pretty much the story. I was up there giving the sermon and this was before we had the temple building because I remember where it happened. We were in the school gymnasium -- called Twinbrook School. And I gave the sermon and I couldn't find the last page. So I stopped talking. And I thought did pretty well to smooth it out with a closing sentence or something. But apparently it didn't work because my father said to me afterwards, "Gee, that was an great sermon but it seemed to

have an abrupt ending!" And then I told him what had happened. But that might be confusing with another story which -- I don't know if I mentioned this.

**Sorkin:** Did you ever find the last page? I mean this is what I'm really asking.

**Gamoran:** I don't recall. As it turned out, it was too late to help me that night. There was another story -- you might think I'm always losing things which --

**Sorkin:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Gamoran:** But the other story is that I came home one ... Oh, one Friday afternoon when I was ready to go home and I couldn't find my sermon. And ... Now, that's not -- Here's the story. Scratch that. I came home and I thought I had brought the sermon with me home because I would read it over when I

came home for Shabbat dinner. And I couldn't find it. And I thought now ... I was sure I had brought it home. So at this time, we had a car that was kind of junky and there was a little air space ... the door didn't close a hundred percent. I thought well maybe it fell out on the way home. So when I drove back to the

temple for services, I was driving slowly and looking the whole way to see if I saw it. And I didn't find it. So I got to the temple early and I looked around here. And I still couldn't find it. So fortunately the sermon was pretty much in my mind and I had time to rewrite it. About a week later, I found it under some papers.

**Sorkin:** We all do that. That's .... Let me ask a little bit about this community, not so much the Jewish community but the outside community in terms of accepting, let's say, a Jewish congregation in their midst. What kind of response, not necessarily from your -- you know, opposite colleagues, but the sense of the community? Was there a warm welcome for a Jewish congregation? What did you feel?

**Gamoran:** I think we felt welcomed. Yes, I don't think we've ever had any problems in the community. I joined the clergy association from the start. I've been involved in it. I was the President of the association at two different times, separated by a period of about twenty years. I still have friends and colleagues among the local clergy. And I don't think our congregation's ever suffered any acts of anti-Semitism.

**Sorkin:** Overt acts of any ....

**Gamoran:** We've had vandalism a number of times but I don't think they were anti-Semitic acts of vandalism. We have no proof that they were.

**Sorkin:** Was this during the '70s in particular?

**Gamoran:** Throughout we've had some. '70s and '80s. We had once ... I remember the name of our congregation in silver was removed, torn down from the front of the building. Probably the worst one we had was once when I came here, all the windows on the whole side of the building -- about a dozen windows were smashed. But we don't know that that was anti-Semitism.

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*This congregation started with a school. The congregation came after the school. The school was the main emphasis.*

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**Sorkin:** This happens at public schools and churches and everything else anyway.

**Gamoran:** Yeah, right. Right.

**Sorkin:** Okay. I gather the religious school has always been the sort of center of focus for you. Let me ask you about your decision and the approval of the board that you had to go from a volunteer to a paid staff.

**Gamoran:** Yes.

**Sorkin:** Why you felt that this move was an absolute necessity.

**Gamoran:** I believe that Jewish education has to be serious and has to be professional and the Director of the School has to be able to make demands on the teaching staff, and therefore, it had to be a professional relationship. I had to require lesson plans from the teachers; I had to require regular attendance by the teachers, preparation of the classes; I had to be able to go into the class and observe and make suggestions and sometimes even be critical. And to do this, one needs the authority to hire and fire. And if you use it in that sense -- not that I have been going around firing people, but the Director of the school has to have authority. And you cannot make demands on volunteers. You can ask and hope and request but I felt it had to be a professional, Sid. This was an important view that I held and I'm happy that the board accepted it.

**Sorkin:** Did you remain as religious school director or did you hire a director eventually?

**Gamoran:** I've really been the Director of the religious school throughout my tenure as rabbi here. I have had help in a number of areas. There was a period of time when I had a principal, Sue Miller, who was a wonderful person and a big source of help to me for a number of years.

**Sorkin:** Took over more or less the administration ....

**Gamoran:** She took over -- Some of the administration she helped with and some work with the teachers. And then I've had two other people in recent years who've been a help to me: Barbara Bernstein especially in the primary education and the family education, and a young man named of Scott Meyer who has helped as coordinator for our high school department and our intermediate Judaica studies. But I've always held the primary responsibility. I've never hesitated to walk into a classroom and observe and talk with the teachers about what's going on. I've always worked with the teachers on the individual classroom work and on the overall school kinds of program. One other important aspect of it being a professional teacher and something I've been very strong about over the years is that the teachers need to study. And it's not just coming on Sunday morning or on Saturday morning to do the teaching, but it's also to take classes themselves. And I feel we've developed a wonderful, more

educated group among the congregation with our teachers. They've come every Tuesday night for a number of years.

**Sorkin:** This is your own in-service?

**Gamoran:** Right. In-service. But it was developed years and years ago with the help of David Cedarbaum over while I was chairman of the Board of Jewish Education.

**Sorkin:** You anticipated the next question, but go ahead.

**Gamoran:** So we worked together to develop this program of certification through the Board of Jewish Education. The teachers had to take so many courses in so many fields.

**Sorkin:** You were allowed to certify them?

**Gamoran:** Well, the courses we took, that we provided were accepted by the Board for this program.

**Sorkin:** Okay.

**Gamoran:** In fact, the first couple of years that I was here, I required the teachers to go down to [Spertus] ... in those days it was called the College of Jewish Studies.

**Sorkin:** On 11th Street.

**Gamoran:** On 11th

Street. To take classes. But I was very unsuccessful. I say "required;" it didn't work. I had ten teachers and only two or three of them accepted my requirement.

**Sorkin:** You'll excuse me. That's some schlep.

**Gamoran:** Well, that's what they said. So, ...

**Sorkin:** Especially in those days, you didn't have all these highways that you have now.

**Gamoran:** So what we did is we brought the classes here. We began to offer the classes here. And here we could be more demanding and it worked very well. And it's happened all through the last thirty or so years; we've offered classes on Tuesday nights that the teachers are *required* to take and the rest of the congregation *may* take. And so it's been teacher training as well as adult education for the congregation. We've also built into our salary scale now some incentive for the teachers to take the classes and even to take them beyond the certification so they'll take more. So I feel that's been an important part of the program.

**Sorkin:** Going back to David Cedarbaum for a moment, what do you feel in terms of the service supplied by the BJE? Did they help you, let's say in the recruiting of teachers or curriculum or materials or whatever? I mean even though this was your own specialized field.

**Gamoran:** Well, as far as recruiting teachers, they really were not helpful. It wasn't their fault but most teachers from Chicago or the east didn't want to come out to what they considered was the farm country here. So we never got many teachers outside of our own area. Most of our teachers -- almost all of our teachers were members of the congregation or members of our community. □