

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



chicago jewish historical society

FORMERLY SOCIETY NEWS  
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# CHICAGO JEWISH *History*

## Manny Abrahams Led Checkered Career as "Boss of the Ghetto"

*West Side Politician Died Defending Rights of Peddlers in Chicago City Council*

By Joe Kraus

Emanuel "Manny" Abrahams rose from working as a West Side peddler to serving in the Illinois State Legislature and Chicago City Council, all the while juggling two masks. To some he was a political scoundrel one step ahead of indictment. To others he was the heroic "boss of the ghetto" out to protect Jewish working class interests. Although largely forgotten today, Abrahams was one of the first Chicago Jewish politicians of consequence and led one of the most colorful careers in the remarkably colorful history of Chicago politicians. From his days struggling to make a living in early Chicago through his neighborhood prominence as owner of a big saloon through his checkered political career and even in his dying moments, Abrahams made his mark.

Born in 1865 to Prussian immigrants who had arrived as early as 1848, Abrahams came from one of the oldest Jewish families in the city. He himself was one of the first generations of Jews to be born, live his entire life, and die in Chicago. His actual birthplace was somewhere on Canal Street, either 610 South or right at the intersection of what is now Canal and Monroe. At the time, of course, the coming financial centers were still residential areas.

*continued on page 4*

## Summer Tour Schedule Set

Make Reservations Early for Popular Tours

Again this summer we have engaged Society board members to conduct tours of areas of Chicago Jewish interest for our members and their guests. There are three tours scheduled and all of them are likely to fill up quickly.

To make reservations, fill out the coupon at the bottom of page 3 and return it to the Society office at 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, 60605. Advance payment is required with

*continued on page 3*

### Inside:

- Walter Roth Asks Whose History We Should Teach
- Ethical Will of Harris Horwich Reveals Jewish Values
- Oral History of Archie Aronin of the Jewish Labor Committee

# President's Column

The coincidence of Passover and my attending a recent Chicago Historical Society symposium called "Whose History Shall We Teach"



Walter Roth makes me think again about the purpose behind our Society and the things we set out to do. Jews have remained Jews for the last four thousand years because we have been particularly careful to teach our children our history. What is the *Haggadah* after all, if not the teaching of our history. The Exodus is not recorded in Egyptian sources, but if it were it would certainly have been depicted in a different light. What difference could it really have made to Pharaoh that one group of slaves managed to escape across the Sinai at the same time as a number of unpleasant natural and unnatural disasters took place? To us the *Haggadah* marks the founding of our understanding of ourselves as a people.

But the question of whose history we should teach remains a difficult and complex one. The Chicago Historical Society is attempting an interesting answer in its new exhibit, "We The People -- Creating a New nation 1765-1820." The exhibit attempts to teach the founding of the United States from different viewpoints that are often neglected in

historical reports of the era: disenfranchised women, black slaves, workers too concerned with their daily chores to take active part in shaping the nation. The principle behind the exhibit is the conviction that the heroes who made the American Revolution were not only George Washington and his famous friends but also the common people whom history has largely forgotten.

Today in our multi-cultured society many peoples are trying to tell their stories: African-Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, women, homosexuals along with many others. At a political level we may occasionally find ourselves in conflict with those efforts. It isn't difficult to imagine a showdown over whether high schools should teach the history of the Holocaust or of slavery in America. I prefer to believe that our separate efforts will ultimately work in harmony, however. We've long recognized that this country is a kind of melting pot in which people of all different backgrounds have been stirred together. The history we tell should also be a melting pot kind of history, a story that makes room for everyone.

Within our own bailiwick of Chicago Jewish history, we ought to be conscious as well of the different strands that have gone into the telling of our heritage. Very often history remembers only the rich and famous. The remarkable *History of the Jews of Chicago* by H.L. Meites, the best single volume on the subject and a book our Society republished two years ago, deals exclusively with established, successful and generally wealthy people. In order to be included in the index for the book, subjects had to make a small contri-

tribution to defray publication costs. The Jews we think of most frequently as having been instrumental in founding our community were those who could afford to have their lives recorded and remembered.

There is another side to our local history, of course, and we have done remarkable things to preserve it in the nearly seventeen years our Society has operated. The *Landsmenschaften* exhibit at Spertus Museum three years ago helped bring to life the organizations that made it possible for many of our ancestors to survive the incredible cultural shift they made in coming from small European villages to the modern metropolis of Chicago. The Maxwell Street exhibit at the UIC Hillel we co-produced with the Chicago Historical Society and the up-coming exhibit on Jewish women's home life in the early part of the century that the Chicago Historical Society is now preparing shed light on aspects of every day Jewish life that have faded into the past. And the different articles in our newsletter, including this issue's feature on Manny Abrahams, have reconsidered a number of different events, characters and organizations out of our history.

I am not arguing for a history that focuses exclusively on our forgotten predecessors, however. We learn a great deal by re-examining such well known figures as Julius Rosenwald, Ben Hecht, Dankmar Adler, Robert Adler, and Emil Hirsch and I know I have learned a great deal from my own study of them. But the history that I would like to see us teach is a history that is as diverse as we ourselves are. We should all strive to record the lives of our people -- from all walks of life -- because history retains its meaning only when the people who tell it, and the people to whom we tell it, recognize it as their own story. □

## Summer Tours

*continued from page 1*

your reservation.

The first of the tours this summer is the annual tour of Chicago Jewish neighborhoods including Maxwell Street, Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Albany Park and Rogers Park. Conducted by Dr. Irving Cutler, this tour sells out every year.

The second tour is a repeat of last year's popular trip to Southwest Michigan, including such famed summer haunts as Benton Harbor, South Haven and Union Pier. This all-day tour is a rare chance to learn about the Jewish farming community of the area and to see nearby places that feel a long way away from Chicago. The tour will be conducted by Judge Sheldon Gardner and Claire Greenberg.

The final tour this summer is a walking tour of the Loop area. Downtown Chicago is full of cultural, architectural and social landmarks of Jewish Chicago, many of which you may well pass daily without realizing it. This walking tour is scheduled to

run from 1-4:30 p.m. and begins at Spertus College, 618 S. Michigan. Tour leaders will be Leah Axelrod, Judge Sheldon Gardner and Norman Schwartz. □

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### *Information Request:* **Seeking Information, Stories on Artist Enrico Glicenstein**

A Researcher organizing catalogue raisonne of Enrico Glicenstein's sculptures, paintings and works on paper seeks information about his art in Chicago collections, as well as personal anecdotes recollecting the artist's years spent in Chicago from 1929 to 1935.

Glicenstein's work remains in a number of Chicago area collections and he produced some of the artwork for the Century of Progress exhibit.

Any information would be deeply appreciated and may be sent to Charlotte Sholod, 1520 York Ave., Apt. 3J, New York, NY 10028. □

## Society Welcomes New Members

We are pleased to announce a number of new members to the Society from this last quarter. We welcome them and invite them and all our members to take part in our open meetings, ongoing Society work and our various efforts to preserve Chicago Jewish history.

<i>Lauren Crawford</i>	<i>Jerry Noble</i>
<i>Morene Dunn</i>	<i>Sheryl Robbin</i>
<i>Susan Friedman &amp; Marc Primack</i>	<i>Lawrence Rohter</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. David Herpe</i>	<i>Charlotte Sholod</i>
<i>Gertrude Horwich</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Alvin Stein</i>
<i>Robin Frooman</i>	<i>Eileen Trafimow</i>
<i>Anna Kahn</i>	<i>Maynard Wishner</i>
<i>Harold Lipofsky</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs.</i>
<i>Dr. Lloyd Mendelson</i>	<i>Michael Young</i>
	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Mark Zivin</i>

We remind you as well to consider giving memberships to the Society as gifts for relatives, old neighbors or friends who may have moved away from the Chicago area but somehow haven't gotten it out of their hearts. □

### Reservation Form -- Summer Tours, 1993

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (Day) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Night) \_\_\_\_\_

Society Member? \_\_\_\_\_ (Include dues now and enjoy the membership rate)

Chicago Jewish Roots (June 13, noon): Adults (members \$16, non-members \$19) \_\_\_\_\_  
Children (members \$7, non-members \$8) \_\_\_\_\_  
All pickups at Horwich JCC (3003 W. Touhy)  
Southwest Michigan (July 18, 8a.m.): Adults (members \$37, non-members \$41) \_\_\_\_\_  
Children (members \$29, non-members \$34) \_\_\_\_\_  
Pickup: Horwich JCC \_\_\_\_\_ Marriott \_\_\_\_\_  
Loop Walking Tour (August 22, 1 p.m.): Adults (members \$10, non-members \$13) \_\_\_\_\_  
Children (members \$7, non-members \$8) \_\_\_\_\_  
Meet at Spertus College (618 S. Michigan Ave.)

Mail Reservations with payment to the Society office at 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago 60605

# Manny Abrahams

*continued from page 1*

## *Young Abrahams at Work*

But an older family did not mean an easy road for the younger Abrahams and he had to struggle early on to support himself. He quit the public schools when he was just 15 and went to work as an errand boy for E. Rothschild and Brothers wholesale clothing house. While he identified himself eventually as a "traveling salesman," he was apparently a peddler whose routes brought him to know many of the other young and future leaders of Chicago's various ethnic communities.

Although he claimed in a *Chicago Daily News* biographical sheet from 1906 that he worked with Rothschild and Bros. for 17 years, he

began his political career with an unsuccessful bid for county commissioner in 1898. Despite losing, he made clear that he wanted to be someone with clout and soon allied himself with the growing Democratic party. In 1891 he secured for himself an appointment as court bailiff.

## *Era of the Ward Bosses*

While Abrahams' appointment came from Mayor Carter Harrison, the most memorable figures in the Democratic party of the day were the ward bosses who controlled huge voting blocs and were not afraid to stoop to questionable tactics to get their way. While Mike McDonald -- whose eventual marriage to Dora Feldman and his conversion to Judaism were chronicled by Society President Walter Roth in the March, 1988 issue of *Chicago Jewish History* -- saw his influence on the wane, the infamous Hinky-Dink Kenna and Bathhouse John Coughlin were growing into their full power as twin bosses of the First Ward.

Kenna and Coughlin maintained their power through their ownership of strategically placed saloons that brought them into contact with -- and gave them the opportunity to satisfy -- enough of their constituents to control the Irish voting bloc on any question they were concerned with. With the clout they held, they could determine elections in wards other than their own (each of Chicago's wards had two aldermen until soon after the turn of the century) and so controlled enough of their City Council colleagues to have effective ownership of the Council.

## *Lays out Political Future*

As part of their organization,

Abrahams followed their model and established his own neighborhood saloon some time around 1890. While his first location was at 14th Street and Racine, he

eventually settled on 921 W. Twelfth St. A shrewd organizer, he saw to it that his saloon came to serve him with the same sort of effectiveness as the ones owned by Kenna and Coughlin. With the influence he held in the Jewish Maxwell Street area and his connections to political figures city-wide, he had laid the foundation for his own career as a political boss.

From his position as court bailiff, he succeeded to serving as clerk of the court in 1903 and then emerged as his organization's candidate for the Illinois State Legislature in 1906. Elected easily, his career looked to be in full flight.

## *First Big Scandal*

In 1909 during his second and final term in the legislature, however, Abrahams found himself in the middle of a political scandal that eventually reached the United States Senate. At the time, Illinois, like many other states, determined its U.S. senators by vote within the state legislature rather than by the at-large elections we know today. While Democrats

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controlled the state house, there was a strong "smoke-filled room" push for the Republican nominee, William Lorimer.

Whether Lorimer would have the votes to win a seat from a Democratic house became a question of anxious speculation. Legislators lobbied one another nervously in the halls outside the chambers and political observers could not predict the outcome of the vote even as the election session was convened.

Since the house members cast their votes in alphabetical order, it fell to Abrahams to cast the first vote. Standing in front of the expectant legislators, he announced he was for Lorimer. He had shown it was possible to break with party labels and vote the way the clout directed. He made it a matter of course for other Democratic legislators to follow suit. Lorimer was elected.

*Stuck with "Bellwether" Label*

Dubbed by the press the "bellwether" of the house for his vote, Abrahams became a central figure in the subsequent U.S. Senate investigation of fraud in the election. Lorimer was not seated for months and Abrahams was twice called to testify in Washington about the circumstances behind his vote. Although the investigation did not turn up sufficient evidence to invalidate the election, Abrahams would find himself stuck with the ironic "bellwether" title for the rest of his life.

For his part, Abrahams defended his vote as part of Chicago politics. As he explained in a 1913 conversation with a *Chicago Daily News* reporter:

"Bellwether" Say, I could 'n' stood for the rest [of the charges about the election] and grinned, but that "bellwether" got my goat. You bet I voted for Lorimer, and I'd vote for him tomorrow under the same circumstances.

I've known Lorimer for thirty years. Knew him when he was a Halsted Street car conductor. He's my friend. Say, what is a fellow to do when he knows his own party can't win and his friend is a candidate. All he can do is vote for his friend. And that's just what I did. This is a Lorimer district and I'm a Lorimer man when it comes down to brass tacks [even] if I am a Democrat. And the people of the district endorsed my vote for him.

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Abrahams decided not to run for re-election in 1910 and his legislative career came to an end. Whether he felt tarnished by the scandal, had grown temporarily weary of politics or had been promised favors for his vote by Chicago area bosses is anybody's guess. For the next two years, however, he returned full-time to his saloon and to the unrecorded politics of the neighborhood.

*Rivals Turn to Bombs*

Things were not quiet for the temporarily retired politician, however. He was accused in the newspapers of running one of the area's largest gambling operations and he continued to be haunted by the Lorimer scandal. In 1912 a bomb exploded near the saloon, apparently in an attempt to intimidate him. It did the reverse: Abrahams announced soon after that he would run for City Council against the well established 20th Ward Alderman Dennis Egan.

The big political issue of the moment was an ordinance that Egan had supported making it illegal for peddlers to yell in the streets of certain parts of the city during the hours of 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. While designed to protect the day-time sleeping hours of the many Irish night watchmen and street car drivers, the ordinance marked a serious obstacle to the business practices of many Jewish and Bohemian peddlers. Not too long

removed from his own days as a peddler, Abrahams vowed to change things.

Six months later, in February, 1913, another bomb exploded, this one in the doorway of the saloon itself. The explosion was powerful enough to knock out every pane of glass on the three-story building and seemed ominous enough for at least one newspaper to declare it "the first bomb in what promises to be a gambling war as fierce as any ever waged in the city."

*"I'm no Boss!"*

Abrahams denied the bomb had anything to do either with gambling or the aldermanic campaign, blaming it instead on residual anger over the Lorimer election. Explaining that he had given control of the bar over to his brother Morris, he claimed, "What! Me a police and gambling boss! I never bossed anything but a bartender in my life. I don't run no saloon any more and I never did run no gambling house."

But Abrahams fought back against whoever it was who had perpetrated the attack by pushing forward with his aldermanic campaign. In a hotly contested primary he managed to defeat Egan by a narrow margin. Local election commissioners -- in some cases appointed by Egan -- charged him with vote fraud, but further investigation seemed to indicate Abrahams had indeed won the election. It was by this time just another scandal for the man who found himself increasingly referred to as "the boss of the ghetto."

#### *Elected in Contested Vote*

Republicans and disgruntled Egan supporters made a last ditch effort to stop Abrahams from getting on the Council by attempting to run former Alderman Fick against him in the general election. With help from Kenna, Coughlin and Mayor Carter Harrison II, whose father had been assassinated years before, Abrahams managed to

keep Fick from getting on the ballot. The Republican party candidate turned out to be a college student with no political experience and no chance of winning an election against as well-organized and well-backed a candidate as Abrahams.

Once in office, Abrahams set about securing his place. He granted free peddling licenses to his supporters, managed to put some of his own people in the police department, and began appointing his allies to various key positions. Most galling to his opponents was his appointment of A.R. Goldstein as director of the Maxwell Street Market. Under Goldstein's

management, Abraham's supporters among the peddlers prospered while those who did not support him found it considerably more difficult to get by. Abrahams' opponents in City Council brought charges

against Goldstein soon after his appointment, but for the time being Abrahams was still on the offensive.

#### *Manny's Finest Hour*

On July 1, 1913, Abrahams rose before Council to argue for removing the ban on peddlers yelling. It happened to be in the midst of a devastating Chicago heat wave. Thirty people had died from the heat the day before and another 69 had collapsed from it. The *Record-Herald* ran a headline, "Pedestrians Topple Over and Women Drop Dead in Their Kitchens."

Abrahams himself was as fiery hot as he had ever been. When Alderman Nance, a supporter of the ban on peddlers, argued that the ban should remain in place in consideration of the perhaps 60,000 Chicagoans who were home sick each day, Abrahams retorted:

The peddler don't make as much noise as the automobiles on the boulevards. There are only 4000 peddlers and they

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don't make a tenth of the noise that 20,000 do at the [Chicago Cubs'] west side ballpark, right next to the county hospital where there are 2000 sick all the time.

Pointing out that the ordinance was already selectively enforced by neighborhoods as it was, he argued it was an instance of discrimination against Jews and other recent immigrants trying to earn a simple living for themselves.

It may well have been Manny Abrahams' finest hour. The ensuing vote overturned the ordinance and left Abrahams standing as one of the more influential members of City Council. With the popular support he held in the ward and with his demonstrated political savvy there was no reason to think he would not remain a Jewish version of Kenna and Coughlin for as long as he wanted.

#### *Collapse*

But then the unexpected happened. While the cheers of "Good boy, Manny" continued to well up from his supporters in the gallery, Abrahams' face took on a pained expression and he staggered into his seat. He quickly passed out and slumped to the floor. He had suffered what the coroner would call apoplexy and died hours later without regaining consciousness. The "boss of the ghetto" had given his life defending the rights of Jewish peddlers.

Such a dramatic exit secured Abrahams a reputation as someone who concerned himself with the poor and otherwise unrepresented immigrants of the burgeoning West Side. The correspondent for the *Daily News*, in a notably sensitive report, interviewed several of his constituents who had come to sit *shiva* with the family. "Manny was good to his landsmen," one man said. "His people he did not forget. That is what he was here for. he did not forget."

#### *Man of the People*

A woman at the same scene commented on

the widespread rumor that Abrahams' brother Morris would succeed him, saying, "I suppose Morrie, his brother, will go into the council to take his place. Morrie is a good man, too, but never will he be a man like Manny. Manny knew his people too well."

Another man took pride in the fact that Manny was someone who had learned from experience and who stood for a different kind of Chicago than politicians usually did:

It all goes to show education ain't everything. Look at Manny. He was born right over here on Canal Street. Does he go to school and college and everything? No. When he is a boy he goes to work. He is an errand boy but he learns the business. Then he gets a good job for this here wholesale cloak and suit companies. But he's too smart for that. So he gets into politics.

And they can't keep him down, either. When he's 47, he's a big man....Don't tell me that he wasn't as smart as these fellows that learn out of books.

Abraham's funeral attracted representatives from all the areas of city government and showed that the one-time errand boy had made himself into a big man. Whether we choose to remember him today as a scoundrel or as someone who stood up for what was right when others would not, we can see in retrospect that he helped make it possible for the Jewish West Side to enter into the age of Chicago's machine politics. His first steps toward forging a Jewish voting bloc proved a foundation for other better-remembered bosses like Jack Arvey to build on and develop. There may never have been another "boss of the ghetto" after Abrahams, but West Side politics would not have been the same without him. □

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## Harris Horwich's Farewell to his Family and Friends

*The following is the "ethical will" of Harris Horwich, a long-time Chicagoan and brother of the well known businessman and philanthropist Bernard Horwich. Harris, who lived from 1858-1920, was an early Zionist and someone known throughout Chicago for his broad knowledge of Jewish law. Harris's grandson, Thomas Horwich, has graciously permitted us to print it here.*

Chicago, Intermediate Days of Succoth, 5679 (1918).

My noble wife, sons and daughters, grandchildren and sons-in-law.

Blessed are you to God in my eyes all your days.

My beloved ones, my end is drawing near, and although I do not know when my end will come, my

sickness is severe and I feel that it will bring me down to my grave in the near future. I am neither complaining nor trembling for I do not fear death. I go towards death with a quiet heart and a steadfast and peaceful spirit. Although I did not live as long as my forefathers, may they rest in peace, they lived a life of suffering and pain; barren and solitary were their entire lives, but the Lord Above was gracious to me and gave me in my lifetime all the desires of man, towards which every man that breathes yearns.

The Good Lord blessed me with a gracious and wise wife, a woman of valor and good taste, and she loved me with all her heart and soul. She was both a companion and a mother to me. To her, to your beloved mother, belong all the good qualities, in which the women of our people are outstanding, a charitable soul, and a source of satisfaction (to all). She was efficient in her deeds. All her sets were planned and deliberate,

while I was by nature quick, unrestrained as water, and quickly angered. And it is only thanks to her that the management of our home was always a model for others, without quarrel or strife. Only peace and security permeated our home at all times. Because of this, my beloved ones, it is your obligation to honor her in all ways possible in her old age because she, only she, raised you; all the good qualities which you possess stem from her, for she in her wisdom, in her fluent speech and soft words influenced you and she accustomed you to every good thing. I pray that the good Lord will lengthen her days after I have gone and am no more; I am happy that I am going in the way of all flesh while she is still among the living. May she be a comfort to you after you have lost me. It is your

obligation to love her doubly both as a dear mother and as the companion with whom your father shared a pleasant and happy life for almost forty years.

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*Rarely have you seen me sitting idle, without a Holy Book in my hand. Naturally, it is understandable that all my days were good, and I was always happy and contented in my lot.*

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I say a happy life for I was, generally speaking, the happiest of men. God blessed me with a healthy body and I never experienced sickness of pains. I did not know the pain and suffering of a meager livelihood, and even though I did not possess riches, still I always had enough for the needs of my household, even when I worked for others and my wages were small; for your mother always concerned herself that expenditures should not exceed income, and for this reason we never took a loan and we never had creditors, things that embitter the life of man. The Good Lord was gracious to me also with many dear friends all the days of my life, and in every locality whereat I resided. There are particularly four honorable men, great in spirit and each outstanding in the field of his endeavor. I spent the most happy hours and days of my life with them. I learned much from them, and they guided me, thru counsel, for I bared my heart to

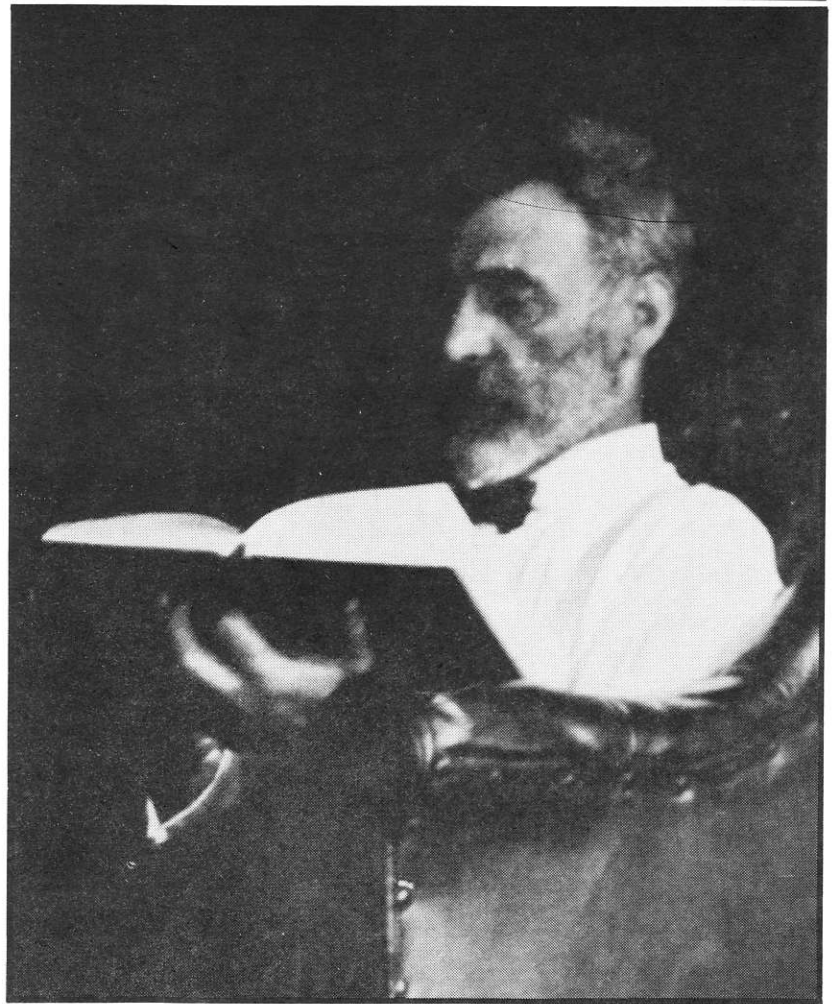


them. I loved them deeply and my soul was bound unto theirs. They are the eminent scribe Zalman Epstein of Odessa; the diligent scribe Feritz Wernick of Chicago; Rabbi Jacob Dalnitsky; and your teacher and uncle B. Horwich. If only you will heed me, take counsel with your uncle B. Horwich in all the great and important undertakings in your life because he is a precious soul, a wonderfully wise person, and to him and his advice give heed.

The best thing I was granted through the grace of the Almighty was the desire and the patience to read the Holy Books. In them I found the best and wisest of friends in the world, and as you know I spent all my free time reading the Holy Books. Rarely have you seen me sitting idle, without a Holy Book in my hand. Naturally, it is understandable that all my days were good, and I was always happy and contented in my lot.

I therefore give thanks and prayers to the Almighty Lord for the goodness and the grace which he bestowed upon me in the years that I dwelled on earth, not merited by my deeds and actions. Know my beloved ones that I never quarreled with you, punished you or spoke harshly to you, except when you were lax in learning Torah and in doing your Hebrew lessons. You should know that the Torah was an elevation to my soul all my life. All educational matters I left to your mother, and she in her knowledge fulfilled her mission in the best possible manner; therefore my last words to you and my last commands are - pay heed, for this is the only thing which I command and order you - the other things are only a request, and it is your prerogative to fulfill them as you wish.

I command, order, and forswear you, by all that is clear and holy to you, as sure as your mother lives, that each one of you shall teach Torah, Hebrew, and our people's history to his sons and daughters in their youth; for I will not



**Horwich at about the time he wrote his ethical will**

find rest in the grave if my descendants will grow up without learning Torah, without knowledge of our people's language and all that our people experienced. My desire is that the boys shall say "Kaddish" after me for a full year after my death. If this shall be difficult for them, then at least whenever they can. They would not come to the synagogue only to say Kaddish but also to pray in *tallis* and *tefillin*, a little or a great deal, and thus to act in all years on the day of my passing. Most important and most honored to me is my request that for the whole first year you read the "Tanach" each and every day, without missing a day. Six pages, which means three full pages doubled, in the small Tanach of Retteris. Read in it even if you will not thoroughly understand all that is written there. And so through the year you will have read the entire Tanach three times and my lips will utter in the grave: "not in vain

did I strive to raise my sons in Torah".

The girls should go to the synagogue every holiday upon which Memorial Services are read; in the first year of my death, to read in the Hebrew Tanach one doubled page, each and every day throughout the year and also to read the English Tanach from the beginning to the end. I ask my family to visit my grave twice a year; not to weep there, but only to remember my name as a blessing. I ask that as long as your wonderful mother, may God prolong her days, shall live, that you will not remove the chests of Hebrew books from their place, and after "100 years" to divide the books between all members of the family. And there shall they stand as a testimonial that the books were the most precious belongings to your father.

With my full heart and soul I ask my sons and my daughters, that when the time comes for your younger sisters to marry -- if it shall be at all within your power, to give them to men who shall know a little or a great deal of the Hebrew language, and are not completely ignorant in all things related to Jewishness, may the good God help you.

My beloved ones, be careful of scoffing at the honor of the Jewish leaders, always honor those who possess Torah knowledge, the general scholars "maskelin" and those who engage in working for the Jewish community. May God guard you from talking blasphemy or ridiculing all things which are holy to men of perfect health in Israel; in any group which shall desire to laugh at the Torah of the Jews in order to show their wisdom, you must show an angry face, so they shall stop, for they shall know that their cleverness is not acceptable to you. Do not separate yourself from the Jewish community; ally yourself in everything (Jewish) according to your ability and especially be friendly to the Zionist organizations and pay regular dues. When God shall make you more prosperous, my sons, go up and visit our land Israel, at least once in your lifetime. I am happy that I was privileged to live up to this time, for the hope of Israel is soon to come. May Israel be built and

settled speedily in your days.

The strongest of my desires and the climax of all my wishes is that all members of the family will live with love and in peace without carrying tales not quarreling. You see that my family is not an exception in the least from the majority in our city, but many honor and revere it, only because the brothers (B. & H. Horwich) lived in peace and security, with love and friendship. This I also will seek from you, I especially ask the women not to be unduly sensitive, and to forgive each other if on occasion someone will be careless in her remarks.

With this in mind I part from you, my dearly beloved, and I give thanks to the Almighty Lord that he blessed me with worthy sons and daughters, nor did I experience the travail of rearing children, and that I was feared to lead six daughters unto marriage, and to marry them to good, righteous, and honorable men.

May God be with all of you, my beloved ones. □

## Ethical Wills Common Practice

The practice of writing ethical wills is an ancient one in Judaism, one that thrived in the middle ages and that can be traced back as far as the *Pirkei Avot* of the Talmud. While the idea of just what such a will entails has changed over time, the consistent element of it is that it discusses questions of morality within the context of the individual's own life.

We members of the editorial board were struck by Horwich's will for its thoughtfulness as well as the beauty of its writing. Those of you interested in further examples of ethical wills might want to consult *Ethical Wills* edited by Chicagoan and long-time Spertus College instructor Nathaniel Stampfer and Jack Reimer or *This I Believe* by Jacob Rader Marcus. Each prints a number of such documents, including several by Jewish Chicagoans including former K.A.M. Rabbis Liebman Adler and Jacob J. Weinstein, Rose Haas Alschuler, Elias Greenebaum, Joseph B. Greenhut, Avraham Kreizman, and Jennie Stein Berman. □

## Teacher Lloyd Mendelson Speaks about Jews in Public School System

Dr. Lloyd Mendelson, long-time administrator and teacher in the Chicago public schools and member of the Chicago Teachers Union, spoke before the Society's Winter open meeting on Jewish involvement in the public schools.

Mendelson reported that Jews have been active in public education in Chicago throughout the city's history

as teachers, principals and board members. From Sol Brandzel, former president of the Board of Education as well as a board member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, to countless volunteers and teachers, Jews have helped make the school system work.

Mendelson explained that the early Chicago schools were rife with corruption. Throughout the Depression era, the Board of Education made decisions on such matters as teacher contracts, furniture purchasing, textbooks to be used, personnel, budget and non-teaching jobs. The superintendent was merely a figurehead and so board members



**Lloyd Mendelson**

Photo by Norman Schwartz

were subject to lobbying and outright buying of votes.

Following World War II, difficulties with the schools reached such a critical point that the entire system found itself at risk of losing its accreditation. With the resignation of then superintendent William Johnson and the infusion of new students as a result of the baby boom, the schools entered a dynamic period of growth.

Among the Jews who took part in that period was Bessie Lawrence. Principal of the Jenner school at Cabrini Green in the 1970s, she rose to be deputy superintendent of the whole school operation, the highest position in the school bureaucracy that any Jewish person has held in recent years.

Mendelson described Curtis Melnick, the Hyde Park-Woodlawn District Superintendent as the "guru" of all district superintendents. Melnick also started a B'nai B'rith education lodge and served for a time after his retirement from the public schools as the acting dean of education at Roosevelt University.

Among other Jewish educators that Mendelson singled out were Sofie Reitel, Milton Kohler, Harold Corey, Edwin Letterer, Sam Dolnich and Joe Hauseman. □

## Maxwell Street Market Colloquium Plans Announced

A broad coalition of individuals and groups has announced plans to hold a colloquium to discuss the history and future of the Maxwell Street Market. The Chicago Jewish Historical Society is a co-sponsor and invites all our members to consider attending the discussions on May 23 at the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle Center.

The colloquium will feature a series of panel discussions and presentations on different aspects of the market. Among the people scheduled to speak are Society board members Irving Cutler and Ed Mazur. Carolyn Eastwood, author of the Minsky-Award winning *Chicago's Jewish Street Peddlers*, will speak as well. UIC-Hillel director and Society Board member Elliot Zashin is one of the colloquium's organizers.

While some of the speakers will focus on the rich and varied history of the market, others will discuss its current state. Alongside slide show presentations of what the market

looked like in the days when it was principally a Jewish-run market on a European model, there will be interviews with and considerations of current vendors.

The day-long event runs from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. when it concludes with a public reception. Different programs will feature different formats, but colloquium organizers hope that audience members will participate in as well as enjoy the day's presentations.

In addition to the scheduled programs, organizers hope to arrange for participants to spend at least some time at the market itself, perhaps eating lunch there.

In addition to the Society, other co-sponsors of the colloquium include the Jane Addams' Hull-House Museum, the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, the Illinois State Historical Society, and the Chicago Athenaeum. In addition, the Illinois Humanities Council has provided a grant to help underwrite expenses for the colloquium.

For further information or to offer your services as a volunteer in preparing for the colloquium, contact the UIC-Hillel at (312) 829-1595. □

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## Merrill Weber Joins Society Board

The most recent addition to the Society's board of directors is Merrill Weber, a Chicago attorney with a long-time interest in Jewish history. Until recently with the firm of D'Ancona and Pflaum where he came to know Society President Walter Roth, Weber is now chief executive officer of Weber, Halpert & Co., an investment firm specializing in investments in Israel.

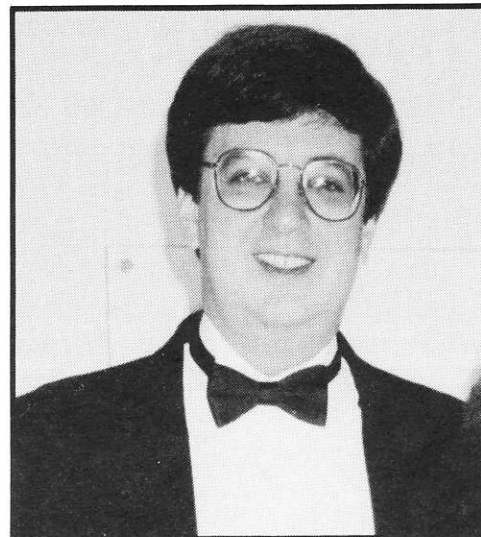
Weber has already become involved in the Society by taking a lead role in the ongoing project to produce a video tape history of the Jews of Chicago. "I like popularizing history," he said of the video tape project. "I believe in different means of communication and I think this is a good way to reach people who might

not open a big book on Chicago history."

Although born and raised in Highland Park, Weber has spent most of his adult life in New York City where he received both Bachelors and Masters in Journalism degrees from Columbia University. He worked in Chicago for the City News Bureau and was involved in some local political campaigns before returning to Columbia for law school and a New York legal career. He has lived in Chicago since 1991.

A history major as an undergraduate, he says he has long been interested in Jewish issues. "I've been very interested in Jewish history, Jewish culture, Jewish literature, Jewish everything all along," he said.

He sees the Society as a good way to uncover and present Chicago Jewish history. "I like a lot of what the group does. If you go to enough of



the big **Merrill Weber** meetings, you get a good picture of the history of the city," he said.

Weber is married to Mindy Kallus, a Chicago attorney. They have one daughter, Stephanie, two-and-a-half years old. □

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## Letters:

### Dear Mr. Roth:

I am learning so much from your pieces of history in the Newsletter. Please continue them for a long time!

In reading Mark Mandel's summary of Professor Ebner's talk at the October meeting, I see that while it included background information of how the Jewish communities in the North Shore were created, nothing was included about Evanston, which is part of the North Shore, right? And the history of how the Jewish community of Evanston was born is really quite interesting. I may be one of the last people that has memories of how the Evanston Jewish community was born, so I am offering here the story as I remember it. It might be quietly incorporated in the material already in the archives to complete the picture. So, here goes:

I don't have the exact day, but I know it was 1943, the year Maurice and I were married. Maurice, at that time, was Hillel Director at Northwestern University. Just before our arrival, two women, Sarah Braun and a Mrs. Klee were meeting to choose cards for JUF solicitation in the North Shore area,...the cards included prospects from Highland Park, Glencoe, Winnetka and Wilmette. They had only their own cards from Evanston.

As Sarah Braun related to us subsequently, she and Mrs. Klee were lamenting that there was no Evanston Jewish community to welcome and greet the Rabbi and his bride. They speculated that there might be Jews in Evanston that they didn't know, or who are not known as Jews. They decided to conduct an experiment. They placed an ad in the *Evanston Review* announcing that a reception was to be held in Hillel House to

welcome Rabbi Pekarsky and his bride, and that all members of the Jewish community were welcome to attend. They had no idea whether ten people, or if any, would attend.

At two o'clock that Sunday afternoon some 90 people arrived! Some, upon discovery that their neighbors were also Jewish, clasped each other in joy. You cannot imagine the enthusiasm and excitement that filled the Hillel lounge that day. Right there and then, spontaneously, it was decided to organize. A date was set for an organizing meeting. Sarah Braun (Mrs. Isadore) was elected to be the first president. At that meeting it was decided initially to meet for all Jewish holidays. The next Jewish holiday was Purim, and a gathering of families was planned for a Purim program and as a reception for additional families that could be located.

The rest is history.

--Nell Pekarsky

*Oral History Excerpt:*

## **Archie Aronin Speaks on the Jewish Labor Committee**

*Aaron "Archie" Aronin was the Chicago director of the Jewish Labor Committee from 1948 to 1965. While the JLC was originally formed in 1934 by a coalition of labor and socialist groups to assist victims of fascism, Aronin redoubled such efforts by calling attention to problems of racial and religious discrimination in a series of conferences on the problem of prejudice that drew national attention.*

*The following excerpt is from an oral history interview with Aronin in April, 1992 conducted by Marvin Rogoff of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Chicago Jewish Historical Society member Sue Weiler provided us with the oral history.*

**Rogoff:** What attracted you to JLC and what attracted them to you?

**Aronin:** I was education director, board member and president, of Hyde Park Co-op. One of my best people, Annie Laurie Fish, wife of Hy Fish, educator at Roosevelt University, and consultant to JLC, suggested they interview me. Arthur Goldberg, chair of co-op personnel committee, chief counsel for Steelworkers, interviewed me for co-op job as education director. In the early 1940s I was director of security at the FPHA housing project for UAW members. I'd been active in Civil rights since college. This seemed like a very natural thing; besides I was promised \$85 a week. When I get there, I got \$80.

I come from a Jewish family. My folks were very traditional and to them being good and decent meant doing mitzvahs. Everybody was created equal and we should do good things on earth. This was the way I was brought up. In Madison I was active in the campus cooperatives and the Young People's Socialist League. Bert Seidman, director of social security, AFL-CIO, recently retired, was my buddy in campus cooperatives at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1939-41. These young socialists, cooperatives and pacifists educated poor little Aaron

from Mayville, a small town where we were the only Jewish family. I looked to working for a better world...felt this was my mission some how or other.

**Rogoff:** Who hired you, who decided?

**Aronin:** I was hired by Hy Fish who consulted with Manny Muravchik, national director of the civil rights department of JLC. But the authority it turned out was Jacob Siegel. Siegel was Chicago area editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, and the chairman of JLC of Chicago. He was a very bright person and people were beholden to him because they wanted to get their names and stories into the *Forward*. Whether the Jewish unions or the *Arbeitering* or the Polish bund

or labor he was the one who was the boss. Another wonderful fellow, Morris Shiskin, father of Mary Minkus [who would become JLC secretary], labor editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, was beloved by the labor

movement. I remember Sam Holland, a lawyer with the Jewish Federation and the Bureau of Jewish Employment problems. Most of the others were nice people but they weren't active in policy making.

**Rogoff:** In 1948, what was happening in civil rights in the JLC and the community at large?

**Aronin:** Strong developments came from the national AFL and national CIO. When they merged [1955], Morris Shiskin had been either top civil rights director or one of the most important people from national office who said "unions must do civil rights work." He told them: "wherever there is a JLC staff member, that person will help you develop your programs." This made it relatively easy for us to become functional with many labor unions even those which were considered conservative.

My first several years I was practically appointed by Michael Mann, regional director of CIO, to be their civil rights staff person. I spent half my time in his office working with his staff developing programs. At the same time I worked with civil rights organizations, the Mayor's Commission on Human Relations, the Chicago Council on whatever, and the state's civil rights department, as well as the labor movement.

The first couple of years Jack Barbash worked

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*My folks were traditional and to them being good meant doing mitzvahs...I looked to working for a better world, felt this was my mission somehow.*

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**Archie Aronin in 1955**

Photo supplied by Stanley Rosen

with us, his contact was largely the AFL. For a year or so Lillian Herstein, who was a wonderful woman coming out of the teacher's union, worked in the office. Her contacts with the AFL were very helpful. When the merger came, my buddy, the secretary of the CIO, Paul Iaccino, became secretary of the Chicago Federation of Labor. We got them a civil rights committee and I became the staff person for that committee.

**Rogoff:** So the JLC really provided the bulwark for the unions' civil rights during that era? What were the civil rights issues at that time?

**Aronin:** Fair employment practices campaigns for a number of years until we got the law passed. Fair housing in Chicago and Milwaukee, I worked there also, and state fair housing legislation. Public accommodations, for example, there was a national teachers union convention in one of the hotels on the near north side, in the 1950s. Some of the delegates came over and said we can't eat here. So I went to the restaurant and told them Mayor Daley would not like it if he didn't feed his delegates. I went to Ottawa, IL for a union conference with Jackie Lee, of the Steel Workers. Jackie Lee was driving and I wanted him to

stop off to have a bite and he didn't want to stop. It didn't occur to me immediately why he didn't want to stop. They didn't serve blacks in restaurants on the way from Chicago to Ottawa. I went to a steel workers convention as a consultant during those years in Alton, IL. They said a black cannot stay overnight in East St. Louis. When I look back to the 1950s I get amazed at how terrible the civil rights situation was in this United States.

**Rogoff:** Let's talk about those civil rights conferences the JLC sponsored. How was the decision made to have that specific activity? Whose idea was it, who proposed it?

**Aronin:** I really don't know. I could say that I did, but I have certain blanks going back 40 years. It seemed automatic, instead of a testimonial dinner, let's have a conference. How did we do it? We get a program committee; we had a dream of a guy for chairman, Ted Robinson, a big wonderful black fellow, like a father. Everybody loved him in the labor movement. He was a lawyer, on the labor department of the State Council of Municipal Employees. If anyone ever said "who said so" and you said Ted Robinson, that was it.

**Rogoff:** You mention only a couple of executive board member's names from JLC. Were there others involved in the planning of it besides Siegel and Holland? Or did they have anything to do with it? The JLC had been started to rescue Jewish refugees from Europe and from what you are saying, Archie, it sounds like civil rights was not their kind of ball game, so you carried the ball.

**Aronin:** No, Siegel and Holland had nothing to do with the planning of the conferences. Members of the JLC, delegates from the *landsmenshaften*, from the [Workmen's] Circle, had their own programs. As I recall some of the speakers we got through the national office. Boris Shiskin came down a few times; Manny Muravchik came down a few times. But the JLC headquarters didn't play any role in the initiation formulation, planning of any sort. After a few years I found that there was an annual (verbal) presentation to the Jewish Federation by Siegel and Muravchik.

About 1958 I made a presentation to the Chicago Jewish Federation about the unions and the civil rights and the delegates and the literature etc. I was going to sit back when Sam Goldsmith, Executive

Director, said: "what are you doing for the Jews?" In other words the money that the Jewish Federation was giving the JLC was for the refugee program. The Federation at that time didn't seem to comprehend that civil rights made a better democracy and a better democracy is good for the Jews. After a few years I ran into a guy who was an assistant to Goldsmith, I think Berman, who did appreciate that work we were doing for blacks and whites and greens and I would get my report to him. Presumably it was excellent because we were getting more money, *gotte nu*.

**Aronin:** Looking back, its hard to believe but the people were so cooperative and so helpful, and so appreciative. We had a host committee that would report to Mary Minkus. I had the good fortune to have wonderful secretaries. Every time we started a conference, we had a Jewish person open it up, a black minister giving a prayer over lunch, and a priest giving a convocation at the end of it. It was beautiful.

We experimented with brand new ideas. The concept of redress of grievances means workers should work through their local staff who could facilitate the grievance with the union and with the employer. Public safety, I invented that too. People in areas of danger of life or limb do not have civil rights opportunities. You have to have a safe community. The Chicago commission on Youth Welfare, came to me as an expert to prepare a piece on the 1967 report of public safety. An array of resources--sheriff, police, health department, other city agencies--have to work to make a city safe.

I got this experience from the Federal Public Housing Authority in Michigan in the early 1940s. We went to the Council of Residents of this housing project providing residence for people working with the B25 bomber. I said "residents, these are the things you have to report to me." I had hundreds of people bringing me information about something that might be a hazard. The manager thought I was a *gonseh kanacher*. When it came to civil rights, I took the same approach.

**Rogoff:** Who was the civil rights director of the AFL/CIO in 1965?

**Aronin:** I was asked to be civil rights director. Because of my domestic situation, I couldn't accept it.

So they went to another JLC guy, Don Slaiman, an auto worker and JLC representative in Detroit.

**Rogoff:** As these conferences went along I imagine the subject matter was geared to the evolving civil rights focuses at the time. Did the tone and focus of these conferences change? For example, we know that in a significant number of unions there was outright exclusion of some racial and ethnic groups. We know that in industry there were lines of progressions in seniority systems that had the effect of restraining blacks and keeping them within certain limited jobs and opportunities. That goes right to the guts of the union contract. Did this get reflected in any of your conferences?

**Aronin:** The conferences, to a large extent, pointed toward city and state legislation. We were always introducing stronger and stronger legislation and implementation of housing, employment and public accommodations. I started out when things were pretty bad. Up until the time of at least 1965 or '68 things were much improved.

The so-called economy can retard any kind of progress. What bothers me terribly is that I feel that the progress we made during that period, during the time of the "great society", has reversed to a large extent because of lack of understanding of the economy, the weakening of the organized labor movement, and the mythologies we have been following. The smoke screen mythology of capitalism with the incantations of free market and free enterprise and growth and horsesh--t like that keeps us from seeing the real society and doing the things that need to be done to undergird the life of people, that of the kids and building on the local level. I feel very strongly that the global corporations that we have based here have achieved a corporation sovereignty that overshadows the people's sovereignty that's required to have a decent democratic society.

And this work that we put in, and which we made progress, has been largely nullified by our blindness and ignorance, greed and corruption. I could cry. □

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*This work that we put in has been largely nullified by our blindness and ignorance, greed and corruption. I could cry.*

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# About the Society

## What We Are

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society was founded in 1977 and is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the American Bicentennial Celebrations of 1976. Muriel Robin was the founding president. It has as its purpose the discovery, preservation and dissemination of information concerning the Jewish experience in the Chicago area.

## What We Do

The Society seeks out, collects and preserves appropriate written, spoken and photographic records; publishes historical information; holds public meetings at which various aspects of Chicago Jewish history are treated; mounts appropriate exhibits; and offers tours of Jewish historical sites.

## Minsky Fund

The Doris Minsky Memorial Fund, established in memory of one of the Society's founders and longtime leaders, seeks to publish annually a monograph on an aspect of Chicago area Jewish history. Members may receive a copy of each monograph as it is published. Manuscripts may be submitted and contributions to the Fund are welcome at any time.

## Membership

Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Chicago Jewish History*, each monograph published by the Doris Minsky Memorial Fund as it appears, discounts on Society tours and at the Spertus Museum Store, and the opportunity to learn and inform others concerning Chicago Jewish history and its preservation. Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations.

## Dues Structure

Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year. The following dues schedule applies to categories indicated:

Regular Membership.....	\$25
Family Membership.....	\$35
Society Patron.....	\$50
Society Sponsor.....	\$100
Senior Citizen Membership.....	\$15
Student Membership.....	\$10
Synagogue or Organization.....	\$25
Life Membership.....	\$1000

Checks should be made payable to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Dues are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

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Burt Robin.....	Vice President
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\*Indicates Past President

## Chicago Jewish History

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