

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



chicago jewish historical society

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CHICAGO JEWISH History

Life among the Poles in Old South Chicago

*Memoirs of a Jewish Family
In Business in "The Bush"*

By Ann Friedman

At the turn of the present century, the area on the far southeast side of the city known as South Chicago was not a Jewish neighborhood. It never has been and never would be. Yet in 1902, my father, Harry Frank, was among the early members of a synagogue there, Bikur Cholim Congregation at 8927 Houston Avenue, now the city's oldest functioning synagogue building. With a central *bima* in addition to the *aron hakodesh* on the front wall, the sanctuary retains to this day its Old World aura of orthodox worship.

Earlier that year, Father, moving from the West Side, had bought a frame cottage with a high basement at 8337 Buffalo. Here I was born on February 21, 1904. Our house was typical of the homes in the blue collar neighborhood inhabited mainly by Poles, the kind that was built by a carpenter and his helper and could be erected quickly. When my father had the house moved to the back of the lot, our home was propped on rollers and was pulled into place by teams of horses. Father had an addition built onto the front of the house, which became the grocery store. He later expanded the grocery into a country-style general store. He also installed indoor plumbing in our house. Electricity came later.

Gas lanterns lit unpaved streets that were dusty in summer and muddy in spring. In winter, horses and wagons trampled their paths in the snow, which remained where it had fallen until it melted. To reach the city, we boarded trolley cars which clanged their way on rails that lay in the streets.

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Polish-Jewish relationships—always uneasy it seems—are an important element in this memoir of Jewish life in a South Chicago neighborhood. Ann Friedman, who knew of these relationships at first hand, here vividly recounts her family's experiences living and running a small business in South Chicago three-quarters of a century ago. Her memories were originally recorded in an interview with local Jewish historian Nathan Kaplan. Mrs. Friedman currently lives in Hyde Park.

Summer Bus Tour Schedule Includes Two New Itineraries

Repeat Cutler Trip to Old Neighborhoods

Two all-new Sunday bus tours as well as a repeat of a perennial sell-out have been scheduled by the Society as its primary summer activity. This year's tours, in air-conditioned buses and under the able direction of Leah Axelrod, are scheduled for July 9 and 30 and August 20.

Cutler Tour Set for July 9

The July 9 tour will be a repeat of Dr. Irving Cutler's nostalgia trip, Chicago Jewish Roots, and includes a sentimental journey to Maxwell Street, Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Albany Park and Rogers Park. This tour, which leaves from the Bernard Horwich JCC (3003 West Touhy) at 12:30 PM and returns at 4:30, is always an early sell-out and prompt reservations are recommended.

The July 30 outing will be an all-day tour of Jewish settlements in the cities on the lake shore north of Chicago's suburbs. Visits to Waukegan, Kenosha and Racine will be under the guidance of Mrs. Axelrod and Norman Schwartz and the fee includes lunch. Departures will be from the Rush Street entrance of the Marriott Hotel (540 North Michigan) at 9:00 AM and the Horwich Center JCC at 9:30 with return to the JCC at 5:30 PM and the hotel at 6:00.

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President's Message

Oral History: Continuity With The Past

When my parents fled Germany in June 1938, they left behind all our family pictures, books and other personal treasures. These items were left with my grandparents on the assumption that they would soon join us and bring our possessions with them. This was not to be, and our personal pictorial and written history perished with my grandparents in the Holocaust.

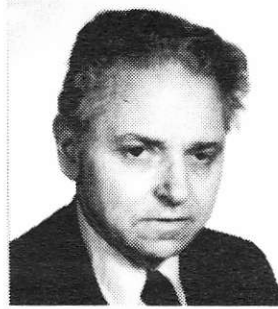
My father died many years ago and very rarely talked of his past life. But my mother reached the good age of ninety last year, and I have had the opportunity of recording part of her past life through the medium of an oral history which I have taped and transcribed at different times. Hopefully, she will consent to continue this project so that her memories and insights can be preserved for future generations of our family and for other interested persons.

The taking of oral histories is one of the projects I learned about from the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Under the direction through the years of such Society leaders as Moselle Schwartz, Sol Brandzel, Adele Hast, Sid Sorkin and Norman Schwartz, the Society has made dozens of oral histories of persons whose lives have enriched our Chicago Jewish community. These histories are taped, transcribed, catalogued and then stored in the office of the Society for future use by researchers and scholars.

Some Taping Experiences

This past year, I participated in the taping of Arthur Weinberg, a wonderful writer of Chicago's radical past, who lamentably passed away earlier this year. I listened with enchantment to the story of Mrs. Ludwig Rosenberger, whose husband donated an outstanding and extensive library of Judaica to the University of Chicago and who, in her own right, is a wonderful artist who traces her roots to a family of musicians, one of whom played with the Chicago Symphony under Conductor Theodore Thomas at the turn of the century.

We taped Marion Ascoli, a daughter of Julius Rosenwald, while she was visiting her son in Chicago and could



President
Walter Roth

sense history in the making with her description of one of Chicago's folk heroes—David Miller, or "Davey" as he was known to one and all.

Miller Story Yet To Be Told

This issue of *Chicago Jewish History* carries a personal recollection of one of Davey Miller's exploits, an example of his defense of the city's Jewish neighborhoods against attacks of vandalism and mob violence. But Davey's daughter has in her possession a wonderful collection of stories about her father, of his ownership with Sam Edelstein of the "E & M Restaurant" at 3126 West Roosevelt Road on the old West Side, of his rise from the jungle of the 1920's to his becoming a famous, if not the most famous, prize fight referee of the 1930's. Davey Miller's full story has yet to be written but oral histories now being taken by members of the Society will help to write it.

We urge any of our members who would like to join us in preserving Chicago Jewish history by helping record the memories of our elders to please let us know of your interest so that you can take part in this adventure. We will be glad to teach you some of the skills that are required to take an oral history. When taking oral histories, you will be directly involved with history itself. You will learn of memories not written down in any books. But best of all, you will feel a continuity with the past and a greater identification with the history of our Jewish community.

Walter Roth President

Summer Tours

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The other new tour, on August 20, will be of significant synagogues of the South Side with Mark Mandle and Jessica Young as guides. How neighborhoods,

people or architecture rendered certain congregations unique or special will be the theme. The tour will depart from the Horwich JCC at 12:30 PM and the Marriott Hotel Rush Street entrance at 1:00 with return to the hotel at 4:00 and the JCC at 4:30.

Advance Reservations Required

Advance prepaid reservations are required for all tours. A reservation form appears on page eleven of this issue. Fees for the two half-day tours are \$12.00 for members and \$15.00 for non-members. Fees for the all-day tour of the north shore cities, including lunch, are \$28.00 for members and \$33.00 for non-members. Children through high-school age pay lower fees as indicated on the reservation form.

Questions concerning the summer tours, one of the Society's most popular activities, are best addressed to Mrs. Axelrod at 432-7003.

Society Receives Grant from State Humanities Council

Recognition of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society's importance and value to the community has come from the State of Illinois in the form of a cash grant from the Illinois Council for the Humanities. The publicly-funded group recently awarded the Society \$1,800 to assist in the preparation of its exhibit on *Landsmanschaften*, scheduled to open October 1 at Spertus College.

"This is the first foundation grant our Society has been awarded," said Jan Hagerup, chairman of the exhibit, "and it will enable us to make known the story of the mutual aid societies which were so important to immigrants before the days of public welfare and social security." The exhibit will contain organization records, memorabilia, photos, audio tapes and reminiscences of the dozens of groups formed by *landsmen*, migrants from a particular *shtetl* or region in Europe.

"The grant is a 'first' for the Society which we expect not only to make the exhibit more vital and interesting but also to pave the way for additional foundation grants to assist our group in its

many endeavors," President Walter Roth said. He wants to express particular thanks to Dr. Adele Hast, who, with Ms. Hagerup, was instrumental in preparing the grant proposal papers. ■

Rising Costs, Improved Services Require Dues Increase

Rising costs and the improvement of Society services and products have combined to make necessary a nominal increase in organization dues effective June 1 of this year. Regular membership is now \$25.00 per year, family membership is \$35.00, senior citizen membership is \$15.00 and patrons and sponsors are at \$50.00 and \$100.00 respectively. A full dues schedule appears on the final page of this issue.

"Expenses for postage, bus transportation, printing and refreshments have all increased and must continue to be covered by dues income inasmuch as we are not a fund-raising organization," Membership Chairman Marian Cutler reminds members. "The new Chicago Jewish History also costs more than the old Society News, but I know we all agree it is well worth the cost.

"Members in good standing were offered opportunities to renew their memberships for the current year at the old rates, and I am happy to report that all except a few did so," Mrs. Cutler reported. The mailing list has now been revised so that only current members are included. ■

Hillman Exhibit at Hull House Open To Members

Society members are invited to view an exhibit devoted to the life and achievement of Sidney Hillman, who began his career as a clothes cutter in Chicago during the early years of this century and went on to found the powerful and respected Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and to become one of the country's most respected and powerful

labor leaders.

Hillman, labor advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and leader in social legislation, is the subject of an invitational conference later this month and an exhibit at the Hull House Museum, both on the campus of the University of Illinois—Chicago.

Created by Cornell University, the exhibit will be available and free to the public through July of this year. It is open weekdays from 10:00 AM through 4:00 PM and on Sundays from noon until 5:00 PM.

Hillman, probably the most influential Jewish labor leader since Samuel Gompers, married another Chicago Jewish activist, Bessie Abramowitz, who herself became a major figure in organized labor.

The Society is a supporting sponsor of the conference and exhibit, which are under the general direction of Stanley Rosen, professor in the labor education program at the University of Illinois. ■

Annual Members' Brunch Concludes 1988-89 Meetings

Three Persons Added to Society's Board

Closing out the year's series of meetings, Society members gathered for brunch at Spertus College on Sunday, June 4. The annual meeting and subsidized members-only brunch featured a program of Yiddish, Hebrew, opera and Broadway music presented by singer Eileen Berman and pianist Jerry Preskill.

At the brief formal meeting three new members were elected to the board of directors and five directors were re-elected to regular three-year terms. Joining the new board are Daniel Beederman, Ed Mazur and Tom Meites. Re-elected to terms expiring in 1992 are Sol Brandzel, Clare Greenberg, Burt Robin, Moselle Schwartz and Milton Shulman.

Continuing members of the board are Leah Axelrod, Charles Bernstein, Irving and Marian Cutler, Jan Hagerup, Mark Mandel, Joe Minsky, Elsie Orlinsky, David Passman, James Rice, Shirley and Sidney Sorkin and Irwin Suloway.

Also on the board along with past presidents Adele Hast, Rachel Heimovics,

Muriel Rogers and Norman Schwartz are the current officers: Walter Roth, president; Burt Robin, vice-president; Elaine Suloway, secretary; and Herman Draznin, treasurer.

Newly elected board members were placed in nomination by Sol Brandzel, chairman of the nominating committee. Brunch arrangements were, as usual, in the capable hands of Hospitality Chairman Shirley Sorkin. —I.J.S. ■

Society Gets Copy of 1883 Montefiore Communication To Chicagoan

English Philanthropist Sent Letter to Zion Temple

AXerox copy of a letter written by Moses Montefiore to the president of a Chicago congregation more than a century ago has been given to the Society.

The letter was the result of the international Jewish observance of Montefiore's centennial year in 1883. At that time Henry Greenebaum, president of Zion Temple, sent the British philanthropist known as the uncrowned king of the Jews a letter of congratulation on behalf of the congregation.

The letter acquired by the Society is a personalized acknowledgment handwritten by his secretary and signed by Montefiore. It is interesting to note that the letter, sent by registered mail, was delivered to Zion Temple, then on Ashland Avenue near Washington Boulevard, even though no street address was on the envelope. (Would that the post office were that efficient today!)

Zion Temple Now in Oak Park

Zion Temple, the second oldest area synagogue to be founded as a Reform congregation, later became Washington Boulevard Temple and is now Oak Park Temple B'nai Abraham Zion. Greenebaum, the city's first Jewish alderman and a founder of three different congregations, was a prominent banker and financier whose descendants, direct or indirect, include many eminent citizens of Chicago. The letter was given to the Society by Leon

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Growing Up Jewish In South Chicago

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Running a Neighborhood Grocery Store

In our grocery, Father sold live pigeons for food. On the day the *shohet* came, our few Jewish neighbors bought chickens. My mother worked in the grocery even though she could not read English. When customers asked for Campbell's tomato or vegetable soup, their only products in those years, Mother looked for the letter "t" or "v."

Each customer was waited on personally, and we came to know much that was happening to them—births, communions, marriages, sickness and death. Children were born at home and were delivered by midwives. Deaths were great tragedies because families were left destitute when husbands died. If mothers died, family life became sad and difficult.

We lived in a Polish neighborhood known as "The Bush" although a small number of Jewish merchants and their families were scattered among the Polish immigrants. Most wage earners were steelworkers who pulled twelve-hour shifts. The eight-hour day was not to be introduced until 1912, and then most workers had to wait a year or longer until their department was reorganized to reduce their daily hours.

Selling Goods on Credit

Industrial workers were poorly paid. Father sold to the families on credit, writing down the amounts in little payment records that customers carried with them. Payday was every two weeks and the women came in to settle their accounts. The housewives also brought in their boarders' credit books. Some boarders were single; others were married and working to bring their wives and children to the United States. Having a boarder was a way of reducing family expenses, and it was very common.

During strikes my father extended credit for the duration, which sometimes ran into months. He also carried accounts for them during work layoffs and at times when illness cut off income.

Jewish Life in South Chicago

On *Shabbos*, my mother dressed us up although we five children did not attend services. Father left for services on Saturday mornings. After services he went from the synagogue to the bank with a deposit of the receipts he had brought with him. Orthodoxy had to give way to practicality and necessity.

On the high holidays, Father reserved an entire bench for the family, and he sat in the aisle seat. Whenever we wanted to leave, we had to pass him and he would ask us where we were going.

Mother sat in the gallery with the women in accordance with the orthodox tradition which of course holds that women should be kept out of sight lest they distract men from thoughts of God.

Next door, in a building my father eventually also owned, was a saloon. In the rear of the saloon was a room where marriage receptions, private parties and celebrations were held. One day my father was told about a Jewish couple who came from Europe with small children and had no place to stay, so my father turned over the back room of the saloon to the family until they could get started. One of the two little boys became a doctor and the other a dentist. Both are very successful.

Going "Back" to the West Side

In the first years that we lived in South Chicago, there were no kosher butcher shops. Like other Jews, my father boarded a trolley to the West Side Jewish neighborhood to load up on kosher meat and foods.

My grandfather lived at Fourteenth and Morgan, a one-minute walk from Maxwell Street. On the corner was and still is the Maxwell Street police station which was eventually to become the visual headquarters setting of the television series, "Hill Street Blues." In the opening scene of that program, there was a shot of the station building. Around the corner at Fourteenth and Peoria was the bath house. It was very popular, and the women would use the bath house as a *mikvah*. Few people, even among the "rich" had private baths. And, like the rich, Grandfather as well as our family burned coal in stoves for warmth and hauled out the ashes.

The block where Grandfather lived consisted of small, closely-set deteriorated clapboard cottages. Houses were lighted by gas-burning jets protruding from the walls. The street was devoid of greenery and trees. I enjoyed going to Grandfather's because it gave me a chance to walk up and down Maxwell Street. What I especially looked forward to was buying hot chestnuts or knishes, not common in South Chicago.

Some Family History

My father had been born in Riga, Latvia, under Tsarist rule in 1865, the year the American Civil War ended. My mother, Bessie Satinofsky, started life in a Ukrainian village where, when Cossack soldiers rode their horses through the town, Jewish families hid in their homes to avoid the whip lashings of the soldiers. To come to America, Mother traveled six weeks by rail and sea. In the dark, poorly ventilated hold of the ship, she would not eat unkosher food. She had brought with her a supply of dry bread.

My mother had always insisted that Rumanian Jews were thieves and that they behaved like wild gypsies. However, when I introduced her to my future husband's family, who were from Rumania and quiet, she conceded that she might have been wrong. After our marriage, my husband and I lived on the northern edge of the neighborhood for many years.

Polish-Jewish Tensions Rise

Around Passover in about 1915, a rumor swept our neighborhood alleging that a Jew had murdered a Polish

boy to get blood to make matzoh. It was about that time the Tsarist government was trying to convict Mendel Beilis for the "ritual" murder of a slain Russian boy. There was world-wide reaction as governments and private citizens protested to the Tsar. In Chicago, Jane Addams addressed a mass meeting on the subject. Beilis was freed, but the idea of Jews killing Christian boys for blood persisted and had reached South Chicago.

Over the years my father had befriended the neighborhood people, but they were nonetheless taken in by the rumor and the usual diatribes: Jews were thieves, Jews were murderers, and the rest. The more militant Poles warned others not to enter Jewish stores. My father kept the door closed, and customers stayed away. Jewish parents kept their children home from school. Even in good times the Polish boys beat up Jewish boys. I do not remember that any Jew was actually physically harmed during this tension, but we lived in fear.

At times a mob milled through the streets, and on one occasion the fire department came with their horse-drawn engines and hosed the crowd to disperse them.

Family Tries to Help

My grandfather and uncle came from the West Side to find out if we were safe. Since we didn't have a telephone, I don't know how they knew what was going on in the neighborhood. It was not in the newspapers. They got off the streetcar on Buffalo Avenue and had to walk one block to our house in that tense environment. Since my grandfather had a beard, he was endangered because there were punks who thought it a show of manhood to knock down bearded Jews and pull or cut their beards, or even to singe or put gum in them.

My grandfather and uncle reached us safely. After a visit, we walked them to the streetcar while it was still daylight. My father was a small man who never weighed more than 135 pounds, but he had a forceful personality. Yet, on that occasion it took courage to walk that one block and back.

Davey Miller to the Rescue

There was one effective source of assistance—Davey Miller. He was a fight referee who owned a restaurant on the West Side. It was known that he and his friends responded to calls for help from Jews who were threatened or assaulted. They were a tough bunch. Several were amateur boxers.

I don't know who asked him to assist us, but this time Miller used brains rather than brawn. He visited the priest at St. Michael's Church at Eighty-third Street and South Shore Drive, the parish of the Polish people in our area. Miller also had a reputation for being a diplomat. He requested the priest to ask from the pulpit if any of their children were missing. There was no response. The rumors ended, calm was restored to the area, and Jews in this South Chicago neighborhood called The Bush were able to continue their sometimes uneasy lives among Polish Americans. ■

Twenty Questions On Local Jewish History

by Nathan Kaplan

1. What Chicago-born singer whose maiden name was Goldberg introduced "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," "Shine On Harvest Moon" and "Over There?"
2. Who were the two pals who co-edited a boys' newspaper as twelve-year-olds? One became a nationally syndicated columnist and the other a Nobel Prizewinner.
3. What Chicago architectural landmark was built for a Jewish-owned department store?
4. What Nobel Prizewinner dropped out of Englewood High School when his father died?
5. What local showman was fond of quoting his rabbinical father even after becoming an international star?
6. Who was the Broadway producer who ran away to join the Buffalo Bill Circus at age 12? His parents brought him back to his Chicago home.
7. Who changed modern naval warfare, but as a 5-year-old boy sailing from Europe for Chicago was afraid to be on the boat?
8. To defend themselves, Jewish peddlers at the turn of the century formed a protective association. What famous woman helped the organization establish itself?
9. What Chicago author sold as his first story one he had written at the Jewish People's Institute?
10. Who was the public servant that saved St. Patrick's Day for the Chicago Irish when it appeared that they would not be able to celebrate the day with shamrocks?
11. Which Academy Awardwinner used to walk down Roosevelt Road to sit alone by the lake after a theater performance?
12. Who was the well-known violinist whose teacher told him he would no longer instruct him because the lad did not like to practice, though he enjoyed playing?
13. What prompted the House of Rothschild to make a gift to a Chicago institution?
14. Which famous international musician won a five dollar first prize at an amateur contest at the Central Park Theater?
15. Which Chicago building has the largest collection of statues of persons in the Hebrew Bible?
16. To which talmud torah did the first Marshall Field make a contribution?
17. What local newspaper columnist was elected president of his high school class despite much hostility toward Jews?
18. Which famous surgeon started a professional medical organization after he was denied entrance to an organization of his specialty because he was a Jew?
19. What Chicago composer wrote "Let Me Call You Sweetheart?"
20. What popular gangster was decorated by the French government for valor in World War I?

Answers can be found on page 7

Divine Coincidence?: An Incident of Travel

By Sol Tax

In November of 1959 the University of Chicago hosted the Centennial celebration of the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. Among the participants was Julian Huxley, the grandson of Thomas Huxley, Darwin's friend and greatest proponent of his theory of evolution. Sir Julian—then only recently knighted—loudly proclaimed his atheism, which he contrasted with his more timid grandfather's "agnosticism." When he and Lady Huxley dined at our house one evening, I therefore thought to challenge him with a true happening that might surprise him. Up to that time I had told the story which follows only within the family.

In the summer of 1931, fresh out of the University of Wisconsin, I found myself hitchhiking to and from the Mescalero Apache reservation in New Mexico. All went well until on the return trip in September my suitcase was stolen in Joplin, Missouri, and I was stranded without even my suit jacket. I was told to contact the police in St. Louis when I reached there, and I resumed my hitchhiking the next morning in shirtsleeves. Out on the highway without a suitcase, I knew that only local trucks might stop for me.

After one such ride into the open countryside, I found myself walking miles along the concrete highway with car after car ignoring my thumb. Suddenly another large sedan passed me but then—miracle?—stopped a hundred yards ahead and waited. I was doubly surprised when the back door opened for me and I saw that there was a woman and a small baby as well as the man at the wheel. I got into the back seat and the woman at once began to question me.

A Striking Coincidence

When I told her I was a student bound for Chicago, she asked my name and family and then stopped and said to her husband in triumph, "See, I knew I had to ask you to stop. You see, when our older daughter was a baby dying in the hospital in Chicago—the doctors had done all they could and had given up—I sent for your grandfather, Rabbi Paul Taxey, and he came from Maywood, prayed for our daughter and she recovered."

The couple then went on to explain that they now had a store in Tulsa and had started that morning for

This delightful tale of an unusual coincidence—and its aftermath—not only confirms the theories of "Jewish geography"—the idea that almost all Jews have some meaningful interconnections—but also introduces us to a gifted turn-of-the-century local Jewish rabbi and his family. That family includes the author, a distinguished University of Chicago anthropologist and longtime CJHS member. Further information concerning Rabbi Taxey and his Maywood Jewish community would be welcomed.

Chicago, and would stop overnight in St. Louis and then take me along.

A Rational Explanation

The Huxleys were as non-plussed as they should have been, and after considerable discussion I told them what I had concluded over the years: My family had long since known that my brothers and I, and our father, had a characteristic walk about which I was occasionally teased. If we assume only that this walk was shared also by my father's father, the Rabbi whom I remembered only from a visit he made to Milwaukee when I was young, the miracle becomes explicable. The woman in the car—whose name I had long since forgotten, if I knew it—saw walking in the road what seemed to her *a person she remembered from an extraordinarily emotional time in her life*, and she simply had to stop.

Needless to say, the Huxleys happily accepted this hypothesis. Since then that characteristic walk has been verified by at least two women cousins who knew us all as we grew up. Nevertheless, the 1931 coincidence recalled in 1959 continued to amaze us; but it was not the end of the story.

A Further Coincidence

In 1956 I had accepted the task of organizing into a single community the anthropologists of the world, which required traveling in every part of the world. In those years travel into the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe could be accomplished only through designated travel agents. One in downtown Chicago was Gordon's, through which the University of Chicago travel bureau worked. By some chance it was only a few months after our dinner with the Huxleys that one evening I received a phone call from an official at Gordon's, Dick Fried, who was preparing my tickets and needed to ask me something. To my surprise he opened the conversation with the question, "Professor Tax, do you ever hitchhike?" When I jokingly denied that I would do so to Europe, he explained that he was asking about the past, reminded me of my hitching a ride in Missouri, and said, with some emotion, that he was a baby in that car!

I have regretted since not visiting him, at least to ask about his parents and sister. Except now for the last name, I know nothing whatever about any one of them. Some time after this brief exchange I learned that Fried was (also) the Record Editor of *Chicago Magazine*, to which I subscribed and could see his name on the masthead, and later I heard that he had moved to the same position on the *Saturday Review*. Obviously I am more than sorry not to have pursued Dick Fried for more information. The fact that those were the busiest years of my life is insufficient excuse. Perhaps the Chicago Jewish Historical Society has records of him and his family.

An Unusually Gifted Rabbi

Chicago historians perhaps already know something of the person and family of Rabbi Pesach Taxey,

reputed to descend from the Prague scholar, Yom Tov Heller (1579-1658), described in my 1971 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Rabbi Taxey died when I was perhaps ten, after at least one visit to us in Milwaukee to put a *hechsher*, a seal of approval, on what we understood to be the first vegetable margarine, the Palmolive Company's "Troco."

The rabbi was a chemist, said to have invented laundry "blueing," many bottles of which one cold night exploded under the porch of his house in Maywood. He was also at one time hired by the town of Zion City, Illinois, to help develop a soap industry, but he returned home because they permitted no smoking in that fundamentalist town.

And His Family

Rabbi Pesach Taxey and his wife Frema Weitzman had five children who survived to have families: Bessie was the first, and she married Oscar Turner (brother of August Turner who was the first to arrive in Chicago, and who founded the Turner Manufacturing Company). Aunt Bessie was for us the head of our extended family, and it was to her home on Austin Boulevard that all of us came.

Morris Tax (sic!) was the second child, and the oldest of three brothers, all of whom married in Wisconsin, where my mother's family lived. Indeed, Morris married Kate Hanowitz, my mother; his younger brother Dave Taxey married my mother's younger sister, Bessie; and the youngest, Jay Taxey, married Ruth, daughter of the eldest sister, Anna. Jay and Ruth eventually settled in Chicago, where he developed real estate and where his daughter, Joan Taxey, is a painter. Ruth's younger sister, Mae Goodman, is associated with Stuart Brent Books and writes for both the *Tribune* and the *Sun-Times*. We were always relatively close-knit whether growing up in Wisconsin or in Chicago...but this now goes beyond the story I tell! ■

Answers to Twenty Questions on Page Five

1. Born Nora Goldberg, she became one of Broadway's biggest stars as the legendary Nora Bayes.
2. Sydney Harris and Saul Bellow co-edited a newspaper for boys published at the Association House on North Avenue.
3. The Carson Pirie Scott State Street building was built as the Schlesinger and Mayer store.
4. Herbert Brown, winner of the 1979 Nobel Prize in chemistry, dropped out of high school at age 14 to run the family hardware store and support his mother and two sisters.
5. Mike Todd believed his father was the smartest man he ever knew. He often began explanations by saying, "My father once told me...."
6. Florenz Ziegfeld, Senior headed the Chicago Musical

College for many years and hoped his son would follow in his footsteps as a classical musician.

7. Admiral Hyman Rickover, the father of the atomic submarine, failed a subject at John Marshall High School. His after-school job as a Western Union delivery boy left him sleepy in class the next morning.
8. Jane Addams at Hull House, who later won the Nobel Prize for peace, assisted the peddlers.
9. While bumming his way in Texas, Nelson Algren Abraham read a magazine ad for would-be writers placed by the Jewish People's Institute. On his return to Chicago, he attended classes at the JPI, writing his story on an office typewriter.
10. Congressman Adolph J. Sabath intervened with the Department of Agriculture which had banned the importation of shamrocks. This was around 1925.
11. Muni Weisenfreund, later known as Paul Muni, acted in his father's Yiddish theater on Roosevelt and Union.
12. Jack Benny trained at the Chicago Musical College. His professor later taught at Yale. Not until after the professor's retirement did he learn that Benny Kubelsky was Jack Benny.
13. Following the Chicago Fire, English literary figures formed a committee to collect books to be sent to Chicago. The Rothschilds donated a sum of money.
14. Even when he was a boy, the talents of Benny Goodman were apparent to all. At thirteen he earned more than his father playing at picnics and week-end functions.
15. Among the statuary of Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago are found the representations of Abraham, Moses, Ezekiel, Elijah, Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and the Archangel Michael.
16. Marshall Field was among the contributors to the first talmud torah in Chicago at Clinton and Judd, then the first street south of Roosevelt Road.
17. Irv Kupcinet was the president of his class at Harrison High School.
18. Dr. Max Thorek founded the International College of Surgeons, headquartered on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago.
19. Leo K. Friedman composed the music in his office at 36 West Randolph when that street was Chicago's Tin Pan Alley.
20. Samuel "Nails" Morton was a Maxwell Street youth known for his defense of Jews beset by religious and ethnic attacks. After the war, he became a gangster, was a popular man-about-town and died in a riding accident in Lincoln Park.

—Nathan Kaplan■

Editor's Note

Because the series of Jewish trivia quizzes was a popular feature of *Society News*, predecessor of this quarterly, local Jewish historian Nathan Kaplan was moved to submit his own list of "Twenty Questions" (and answers) which we are happy to publish. Others with relatively obscure bits of local Jewish history are encouraged to submit their questions and answers, which we will endeavor to publish from time to time.

Aron J. Messing, B'nai Sholom's Peripatetic Rabbi

*Rabbi with Itchy Foot Left and Returned
Three Times*

By Jessica Young

It is not unusual for rabbis to come and go as both rabbis and congregations seek congenial and mutually satisfying relationship. The congregation which is now KAM-Isaiah Israel, the city's oldest, typifies this phenomenon as well as the other of long, continuous tenures on the parts of such rabbis as Liebman Adler (31 years' service), Tobias Schanfarber (41 years) and Joseph Stolz (46 years).

At the other extreme there is the case of Rabbi Mayer Mensor, who served KAM just six months in 1857-58 and was asked to leave with nine months remaining on his contract. The congregation paid him and bought him a one-way train ticket out of town.

Then there is the strange case of Aron Messing, the subject of this article. He came to Temple B'nai Sholom in 1868 as the first ordained rabbi of that young congregation, which was eventually to be merged into what is now KAM-Isaiah Israel.

Educated in Prussia

Rabbi Messing had been born in Prussia in 1840, a descendant of a long line of Polish rabbis. He was the oldest of four brothers, two others of whom also became rabbis in the Midwest. After religious study under a Hassidic rabbi, he received a secular German education culminating in a Ph.D. before coming to America in 1867.

Even though young, he still held to many traditional Jewish practices in his Chicago post, and B'nai Sholom could not pass a resolution introducing "family pews" (mixed seating) until Messing left for California in 1870. Messing explained his departure differently. In a memoir, he wrote, "In vain had my old congregation made strenuous efforts to retain me, but I could not withstand the advantageous offers from San Francisco. When my contract expired, I refused to become a candidate for reelection."

It may be worth noting that of Messing's seven unordained predecessors at B'nai Sholom six had served for three years or less. We do not have a clue to why the rabbis came and went so steadily. What is remarkable is

Chicago had a number of colorful and charismatic rabbis during the nineteenth century whose personalities and individualism shaped their congregations. This article traces the exotic travels of one who, if not particularly charismatic, was certainly an individualist with an unusual career both in Chicago and elsewhere. Dr. Young, a historian who is archivist at KAM-Isaiah Israel, recounts the story of Rabbi Aron J. Messing based on sources in congregational archives.



Rabbi A. J. Messing

-Meites Photo

that in the case of Aron J. Messing he came and went and came and went and came and went.

Returns from California

In 1873 Messing returned to Chicago and B'nai Sholom. The congregation had been without a rabbi since 1871, and, indeed, without a temple after the Great Fire. Messing was clear about why he chose to leave California, and it wasn't because he missed Chicago's winters. "...being young, impetuous and unyielding," he wrote, "I had made some enemies by my own fault. My adversaries, who were good and prominent men, and sincere in their opinions, were unwilling to forgive and forget my inconsiderate and hasty remarks; and my reelection would have caused discord and disharmony in the congregation."

In 1874, during this second stint at B'nai Sholom, Aron Messing confirmed the congregation's first class of girls and boys. And in 1875 he wrote a letter to Isaac Mayer Wise affirming his support of the newly founded Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Perhaps he felt the need to write because his position on Reform had heretofore been ambivalent. This time Messing stayed at B'nai Sholom until 1876.

He wrote that he left after a second great fire in Chicago left him homeless. That fire, however, occurred in 1874. At any rate, Messing and his family were in Peoria, Illinois, from 1876 through 1877. In Peoria, he was warmly welcomed by the small but enthusiastic Jewish community. They seem to have been eager to retain his services, but, wrote Messing, "Of course, my sphere of action was narrowly circumscribed in that town."

Once again the call to California could not be denied. Messing came to Beth Israel congregation in San Francisco "after my repeated declinations and their urgent invitations."

Travels in West and Australia

Surprisingly, however, Messing seems to have been disinclined to remain in San Francisco for long periods of time—despite his Beth Israel connection. Between 1877 and 1890 he was busy travelling all over the American West, to other cities in California and through Nevada, Oregon and Washington among other places. His mission

was to solicit funds with which his congregation might build a temple.

Along the way he gave out Hebrew and religious school books. He preached and taught. He organized religious schools, societies and congregations. In his farewell address to Beth Israel in 1890 he was careful to note that he had always been accompanied by an officer of the congregation and noted that monies collected had never been handled by him personally.

Perhaps the most astounding aspect of his activity during these years was his mission to Australia, accompanied by letters of recommendation by Dr. N. Adler, none other than the Chief Rabbi of England. Once there, Messing discovered that he could more readily realize his financial goals in his own country. One wonders why he had not figured this out before.

We have some clues about what was going on in San Francisco that may help to explain his travels. First of all, the rabbi's salary at Beth Israel was not competitive. Messing explained in his farewell note to the California congregation in 1890 that he could "most probably remain here to the end of my existence, but as a husband and father, I consider it my duty to better the worldly circumstances of my family by giving heed to the call from Chicago." B'nai Sholom was calling yet again.

California No Bed of Roses

More telling is Messing's complaint that, "The strain upon my nervous system has become of late almost unendurable, being held responsible by the public for everything that occurred in the synagogue or in the routine of business by its board. Having created this institution, it is very natural that a cry was raised up by my opponents that this synagogue belonged to me and everything was done by my orders; while in truth, the officers of my congregation, although my friends, have often done things contrary to my wishes."

We do not know what Messing was blamed for in San Francisco. Probably his choice of the word "synagogue" instead of the term then preferred by the Reform movement, "temple," suggests that he was still not reconciled completely to Reform.

And perhaps the officers of the congregation were unwilling to concede that Messing had "created" the institution from which he was now taking his final leave. After all, someone had to be running Beth Israel while their rabbi was soliciting his way across Australia.

"Home" at Last

As Messing prepared to return to Chicago in 1890, he reflected on his time in California. "In looking back now upon the many years of my administration here, and considering the numerous trying hours, remembering the many sleepless nights, the obscured vexatious days, the cares, the troubles and mortifications my opponents caused me, I must restrain my feelings of resentment towards them and will only mention now the good I have experienced." One assumes that on Yom Kippur these opponents were forgiven, though one is inclined to suspect that if indeed

Messing did forgive, he surely did not forget.

So in 1890, fifty years old, Aron J. Messing returned to Chicago and to Congregation B'nai Sholom for the third and last time. He served until the merger with Temple Israel in 1906, when he became Rabbi Emeritus with the installation of Gerson B. Levi as the first rabbi of the united congregation. Messing died in 1916, still Rabbi Emeritus of B'nai Sholom Temple Israel. He never went to California or to Australia, or even to Peoria again. ■

Strange History of B'nai Sholom Congregation

Congregation B'nai Sholom, the one Rabbi Aron Messing served with so many interruptions, was Chicago's second Jewish congregation. It was founded in 1849 as a break-off from the pioneer KAM at a time when there really weren't enough Jews in Chicago to support two congregations. Consequently, it existed in a bare bones fashion for nearly twenty years without its own building and without an ordained rabbi.

Its organization was the result of social and, to a lesser degree, religious differences among the German Jews at KAM. The ruling element there were Jews from Bavaria and nearby German states. They looked down upon the German-speaking Jews from Prussia, which had been enlarged by taking over huge portions of Poland. These Prussian Jews felt such slights keenly enough to break away and form Kehilath B'nai Sholom or KBS, as it was known in its earlier years.

KBS met in a series of rented rooms and halls after its initial services over a clothing store on Lake Street. It put its resources of the time into a more necessary burial ground at what is now Jewish Graceland (still extant on Clark Street near Irving Park) rather than into a synagogue building. Only in 1864, after fifteen years, were members able to build a building at Harrison and Federal Streets, which, of course, they lost soon after in the Chicago Fire of 1871.

After the fire it took five years before enough funds were raised for a new building, further south on Michigan Avenue and Fourteenth Street. That edifice was outgrown by 1890, and the now burgeoning congregation moved to a larger building just vacated by its old rival, KAM. This building, at Indiana Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street, served until well after B'nai Sholom's 1906 merger with the much younger Temple Israel.

In 1914 the combined congregation completed a large building on Michigan Avenue and Fifty-third Street, which housed it at the time of its merger with Temple Isaiah in 1923.

The resulting congregation was known as Isaiah Israel, and B'nai Sholom's identity was further submerged. It is ironic that B'nai Sholom's final metamorphosis came later, in 1971, when it was rejoined as a part of Isaiah Israel with KAM, the very congregation it broke away from at its birth well over a century before. —I.J.S. ■

Montefiore Letter

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Despres, former alderman and a prominent lawyer, and his wife, Marion Alschuler Despres.

Spokesman for the Jews

Moses Montefiore, certainly the most respected and best known Jew of the nineteenth century, was a British philanthropist of Italian Jewish descent, whose status as a Jewish spokesman made him a successful intervener in worldwide Jewish problems and led to audiences with the Czar of Russia, the Sultan of Turkey and the Pope, and these resulted in improvements in the condition of Jews in several countries.

Chicago Jews named one of their first Hebrew free schools in his honor, and, after his death, the city named a public school in his memory. ■

Lillian Herstein Subject of Article in Labor Magazine

Those interested in local Jewish history will be pleased to learn that Lillian Herstein, educator, labor leader, activist and advocate of women's rights and many other social causes, is the subject of an extensive article in the April, 1989, issue of *Labor's Heritage*, a quarterly journal published by the Meany Archives of the American Federation of Labor.

Although scholarly in tone, the piece by Lester Engelbrecht is replete with anecdotes and details which convey the wit and sparkle she displayed throughout her long life. She died in 1983, just a few years short of reaching her hundredth birthday, entertaining and articulate to the end. After her ninetieth year, it was still possible to meet her on a CTA bus returning from a meeting concerned with one or another social problem, as verbal and as vital as ever.

One of the sources for the article was an interview with her old friend and counselor in good causes, Leon Despres, who spoke at the Society's April meeting.

—I.J.S. ■

Large Turnout Hears Despres on Jewish Politicians

April Meeting Offers Anecdotes, Assessments

The largest member turnout of the year attended the April 23rd Society meeting at Congregation B'nai Zion. Members came in large numbers to hear former Alderman Leon Despres discuss Jewish politicians of the past seventy years. They were not disappointed.

Relying primarily on his long memory and his first-hand knowledge of a great many politicians, Despres managed to include a large number of officeholders while concentrating on five in particular. The five were Julius Rosenwald (not a politician in the usual sense), Henry Horner, Jacob Arvey, Earl Bush and Sidney Yates.

Examples of Various Types

He chose those five as among the best known and also as typical of different strands of political achievement and behavior. In the course of his talk, he also brought in such other politicians of the period as Moe Rosenberg, Morris Eller, Ben Lindheimer, Abner Mikva, Seymour Simon, Arthur Berman, Robert Mann, Aron Jaffee, Ellis Levin, Charles Swibel, David Axelrod and the Marovitz family.

While not overlooking the corruption to which Jewish as well as other politicians are susceptible, Alderman Despres (whom no one has ever accused of corruption) emphasized the really outstanding and unsullied contributions of Henry Horner and Sidney Yates and found "Jake" Arvey to have made some valuable contributions on the local, state and national levels.

Anecdotes Enliven Presentation

In the course of his assessments, the speaker drew from a fund of interesting anecdotes, personal experiences and pithy details, resulting in an altogether fascinating presentation. Despres was introduced by Vice President and Program Chairman Burt Robin. He also introduced the president of Congregation B'nai Zion, who welcomed the Society on the occasion of the Rogers Park congregation's seventieth anniversary.

—I.J.S. ■



Former Alderman Despres, speaker at the April Meeting

Photo by Moselle Schwartz

Record Number of New Members Joins the Society

As the Society closes the year, its membership chairman, Marian Cutler, announced a record number of new members added during the past quarter. She and we welcome forty-eight individuals and couples who wish to assist in the efforts of the Society to preserve and share the history of Jewish Chicago.

Once again these additions bring the total membership to a new high.

Mr. & Mrs. John H. Alschuler	Melvin Lipschultz
Steven Andes	Ted Lowitz
Mrs. Ruth Berg	Jerome B. Meites
Eleanor Berman	Marian Miller
Mr. & Mrs. Sidney M. Blumen	Dr. Harold Mosak
Haskal Breiner	Edward Neisser
Dr. Myron Cohen	Minna Novak
Sara Cohen	Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Pass
Sandi & Dan Elkins	Mary Patlak
Grace Ettelson	George Pekoff
William Friedman	Alan Reinstein
Lewis S. Frost	Shirley & Fred Richter
Ira O. Glick	Fern Rothblatt
Irving & Sarah Goldberg	Leonard B. Sabin
Gerald M. Goldman	Dr. Marcia Siegal
Jack R. Greenfield	Charles & Carol Siegel
Joanne K. Hamer	Mollie F. Shapiro
Ralph Helperin	A. L. Sluizer
James Albert Hermes	David Robert Smith
Mr. & Mrs. Nathan Hoffman	Harriette S. Warsaw
Doris D. Kessler	Lila Weinberg
Rose Kwalwaser	Olga Weiss
Julie Landau	Brent Wortell
Rebecca Leving	Alexander H. Zimmerman

Marian Cutler
Membership Chairman

1989 SUMMER TOURS

The Society is pleased to announce three exciting Sunday historic Jewish bus tours.
All tours are on air-conditioned coaches. Checks must accompany reservations.
ADVANCE RESERVATIONS ARE NECESSARY.

I. July 9, 1989

CHICAGO JEWISH ROOTS

Guide: Dr. Irving Cutler

A sentimental journey to Maxwell Street, Lawndale, Humboldt Park, Logan Square, Albany Park, and Rogers Park.
THIS TOUR IS SOLD OUT EVERY SUMMER—RESERVE EARLY! Only 1 pick-up location.

12:30 - Bernard Horwich JCC, 3003 W. Touhy.....Return 4:30

Members: Adult - \$12 Child - \$6 ("Child" = anyone through high school age)

Non-Mem: Adult - \$15 Child - \$7

II. July 30, 1989

ON THE SHORE

Guides: Leah Axelrod, Norman Schwartz

Tour our neighbors to the north. Travel to Waukegan, Kenosha and Racine. Learn about each of the Jewish communities, explore their areas and visit in their synagogues. *LUNCH INCLUDED IN FEE.*

9:00 - Marriott Hotel, 540 N. Michigan *RUSH STREET ENTRANCE* - 6:00

9:30 - Bernard Horwich JCC, 3003 W. Touhy.....Return 5:30

Members: Adult - \$28 Child - \$23

Non-Mem: Adult - \$33 Child - \$28

III. Aug. 20, 1989 SIGNIFICANT SYNAGOGUES OF THE SOUTH SIDE

Guides: Mark Mandle, Jessica Young

Explore the south side to see and hear how neighborhoods, people or architecture made certain congregations unique and special. Stops will be possible at some sites.

12:30 - Bernard Horwich JCC, 3003 W. Touhy.....Return 4:30

1:00 - Marriott Hotel, 540 N. Michigan, *RUSH STREET ENTRANCE* - 4:00

Members: Adult - \$12 Child - \$6

Non-Mem: Adult - \$15 Child - \$7

1989 SUMMER TOUR RESERVATION FORM

Mail Reservations To: Leah Axelrod, 2100 Linden Avenue, Highland Park, IL 60035

Name _____ Phone _____ [Day] _____ [Night]

Address _____ Member CJHS Dues Included

City _____ Zip _____ [See over for dues schedule. Join & enjoy members' tour rates.]

Indicate below how many for each tour and where you will be picked up:

July 9: _____ Adult _____ Child Pick-up only at Bernard Horwich JCC

July 30: _____ Adult _____ Child Pickup: _____ Horwich JCC _____ Marriott

Aug. 20: _____ Adult _____ Child Pickup: _____ Horwich JCC _____ Marriott

Amount Enclosed: \$ _____ TOURS MUST BE PREPAID

FOR INFORMATION CALL LEAH AXELROD, 432-7003 OR CJHS OFFICE, 663-5634