



chicago jewish historical society

# CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

## The Annual Book Issue

*“Move to the front of the line/a voice says, and suddenly/there is nobody/left standing between you/ and the world, to take/the first blows/on their shoulders” —Linda Pastan\**

## MLK Jr. and the Chicago Seven in Highland Park: Reflections on Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf at Congregation Solel

Organized by Linda Verin

*Editors’s Note:* The following is the first installment of a series about Highland Park’s Congregation Solel and its rabbi in the 1960s, Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, a dynamic Chicago presence and vocal progressive who served at Solel from 1957 to 1972 and at Chicago’s KAM Isaiah Israel from 1980 to 2000.

When Rabbi Wolf died in December 2008, his lengthy news obituary in *The News York Times* (December 8, 2008) mentioned his relationship with then-President-Elect Barack Obama, whom he publicly supported. In the obituary, the victorious candidate summed up Rabbi Wolf’s modus operandi in his dealings with others:

“My conversations with him were always lively. You knew that if he disagreed with you, he would let you know in no uncertain terms – especially if he thought you were overlooking the moral dimensions of an issue, or rationalizing your own failure to live up to the highest moral principles. But he did it with kindness, and often with a smile or a laugh to let you know that even though you were just plain wrong, and had no idea what you were talking about, he still loved you.”

This series was arranged by Linda Verin of Birmingham, Alabama, who attended Solel in the 1960s with her family. She solicited memories and vignettes from many of her peers, who are now scattered throughout the United States.

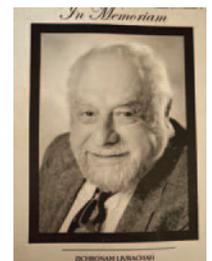
Additional contributions will be published in successive issues of *Chicago Jewish History*.

### Congregation Solel and Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf in the ‘60s

By Linda Verin

I’m a most unlikely person to be putting together a piece for the esteemed Chicago Jewish Historical Society. I remember a conversation between my parents: Should we join a temple or a country club, as they couldn’t afford both? They decided on a temple, Congregation Solel. When I arrived and heard it called shul—with a pool, due to a pond outside—I hoped we’d been lucky enough to join both.

My family celebrated Jewish holidays, but I had no formal Jewish education prior to joining Solel at 12. In Sunday School, the teacher read a word from the Bible I didn’t understand. Innocently I asked, “What’s circumcision?” Everyone laughed; I doubt I raised my hand again.



The late Rabbi  
Arnold Jacob  
Wolf

continued on page 11

\*Excerpted from “The Death of a Parent,” *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems 1968–1998*, by Linda Pastan, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998

## CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

The Chicago Jewish community lost an iconic, irreplaceable leader. Dr. Irving Cutler passed away on July 24, three months after celebrating his 100th birthday. We are grateful that he was blessed with a long and productive life.

As a CJHS member and reader of this journal, you have benefited from Irv's deep knowledge of our community and city. Irv's personal qualities were as remarkable as his erudition. Those of us who were privileged to get to know Irv on a personal level were struck by his kindness, generosity, and approachability. This issue of *CJH* features tributes to Irv by CJHS colleagues and family members. We hope you will recall your own fond memories of Irv.

Irv influenced and inspired me in many ways. Here are a few of my reflections.

*"The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb."* Before I knew of the Society, I heard about Irv's 1996 book. I purchased it and excitedly read it from cover to cover. This book helped spark my interest in becoming involved in the Society some years later. I am honored that Irv added his autograph to my copy. His book remains the most comprehensive single modern resource about Chicago Jewish history.

Tour of historic Jewish neighborhoods. Irv's famous tours of historic Jewish neighborhoods were in great demand. I was lucky to participate in a 2014 tour of the West Side, where my parents grew up. Irv's tour was not just about the past. He had developed relationships with current people and institutions in the neighborhood, so the tour guests were given a more intimate experience. Our visit to the former KINS synagogue at 1308 Independence Boulevard (just a few doors from my mother's childhood home), now the Greater Galilee Missionary Baptist Church, included an inside tour—revealing the original Jewish decorative elements—and welcome remarks from the pastor.

Oral history interview. In 2018, Irv was interviewed in his home by me and Board member Alissa Zeffren. This was my first visit to Irv's home. Then age 94, he was a gracious, sharp, and colorful interviewee. During the visit, he showed us a completed book about his life, written as a legacy for his family. In addition to having the honor to conduct the interview, we were given a glance at the enormous collection of archival and historical material amassed by Irv over decades.

Defense of the "Three Patriots Monument." (Robert Morris, George Washington, Haym Salomon Monument). Irv joined a CJHS panel in a 2021 online program we created for the Chicago Monuments Project. His participation added depth and authority to our presentation of the history, importance, and relevance of the monument. Viewers who knew Irv by reputation told us they were in awe to see him.

Attending important community programs. Even after traveling independently became difficult, Irv kept abreast of events and found ways to go to important ones. He attended a 2016 gathering at the Stone Temple Baptist Church, 3620-24 Douglas Boulevard (formerly the First Roumanian Congregation) to celebrate the landmarking of the building. In his 100th year, Irv attended the first annual Sukkah Design Festival in North Lawndale in fall 2022. Shortly thereafter, he attended the opening of the photo exhibit, "Then and Now: 10 Decades of Jewish Community in West Rogers Park," at the Northtown Library. In April of this year, he was honored at the centennial dinner of the Chicago Board of Jewish Education with the L'Dor V'Dor Award. Irv composed a speech about the necessity of knowing and teaching our history.

***Irv's personal qualities were as remarkable as his erudition. Those of us who were privileged to get to know Irv on a personal level were struck by his kindness, generosity, and approachability.***



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Contributing, learning, and sharing. Prior to spring 2020, when the Society board meetings were held in person at Spertus Institute, Irv appeared at nearly every board meeting with a briefcase in hand. With the shift to Zoom meetings, he was able to attend every meeting. He was fully engaged in Society affairs, and readily shared his expertise and wisdom. Over time, Irv added an unexpected, delightful aspect to the meetings. The end-of-meeting agenda item, "new business/items of interest," was Irv's chance to tell us what he was reading – the book he had finished, the one he was reading, and the ones he would read next. His choices spanned topics and genres. "What is Irv reading?" became an eagerly anticipated agenda item.

Into his 100th year, Irv passionately shared his knowledge and experience. A prolific contributor to *CJH*, his output accelerated in his final years. He wrote an astounding six articles between 2020 and 2022 – "My Mother, the Jailbird" (Spring 2020), "Maxwell Street – Then and Now" (Summer 2020), "Growing Up in North Lawndale" (Winter 2021), "Around Chicago in 90-Plus Years" (Fall 2021), "Jews in the Produce Business" (Summer 2022), and "North Lawndale – Then and Now" (Fall 2022).

Though Irv's passing sadly represents the "end of an era," we are heartened that his invaluable contributions to CJHS, and to the Chicago Jewish community, are timeless. Irv, so passionate in his lifetime about the mission of CJHS, made an extraordinary gesture to extend his legacy. His family fulfilled his wish to make a substantial donation to CJHS. In so many ways, Dr. Irving Cutler will enrich our community for many years to come.

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## Speaking Up and Taking a Stand on Israel

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society is appalled by the savage Hamas assault on Israel on October 7. The extreme brutality and cruelty shown by Hamas compare with the worst antisemitic massacres of the past century. We firmly stand by Israel during this very dangerous and beleaguered time.

By now, you have learned of Hamas' systematic hunting and herding of whole families and people of all ages; the gleeful torture, mutilation, burning, raping, and murder of victims and the psychological torture of victims' families; the destruction and looting of homes and entire communities; the seizure of hostages; and the exploitation of social media to intensify terror.

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society unconditionally and unequivocally condemns these acts. As we already see, they are targeted not just at Israel, but the entire Jewish people. As members of a Jewish historical society, you understand the need to know our history and learn from it. We urge each of you to stay informed, get involved, donate where needed, and speak up as individuals and through groups and institutions. This is a critical time. Timidity and silence are not options.

Rachelle Gold

Co-President

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# THE BOOK SECTION

*"You become a writer because you need to become a writer—nothing else"*  
*Grace Paley*

## Books by CJHS Members and Friends

**The Midwestern Native Garden: Native Alternatives to Nonnative Flowers and Plants, an Illustrated Guide.** By Charlotte Adelman and Bernard L. Schwartz. Ohio University Press/Swallow Press, 2001.

**Prairie Directory of North America: U.S. & Canada.** By Charlotte Adelman and Bernard L. Schwartz. Lawndale Enterprises, 2002.

**The City in a Garden: A History of Chicago's Parks, Second Edition.** By Julia S. Bachrach. The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

**Inspired by Nature: The Garfield Park Conservatory and Chicago's West Side.** By Julia S. Bachrach and Jo Ann Nathan. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

**Downtown Naperville.** By Jodi Hirsch Blackman. Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

**This Used to Be Chicago.** By Jodi Hirsch Blackman. Reedy Press, 2017.

**Chicago's Jewish West Side.** By Irving Cutler. 2009.

**The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb.** By Irving Cutler. University of Illinois Press, 1996.

**Synagogues of Chicago.** Edited by Irving Cutler, Norman D. Schwartz, and Sidney Sorkin. Project supervised by Clare Greenberg, 1991.

**The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present.** Co-edited by Sandra McGee Deutsch. Scholarly Presses, 1993.

**Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900–1932: The Argentine Patriotic League.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

**Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. Duke University Press, 2010.

**Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. Stanford University Press, 1999.

**Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders.** Co-edited by Sandra McGee Deutsch. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

**Clear It with Sid! Sidney R. Yates and Fifty Years of Presidents, Pragmatism, and Public Service.** By Michael C. Dorf and George Van Dusen. University of Illinois Press, 2019.

**Creating Chicago's North Shore: A Suburban History.** By Michael H. Ebner. University of Chicago Press, 1988.

**The Ma and Pa Story: A Novel.** By Anne H. Edwards. Amazon, 2019.

**Remembering Chicago's Jews.** By James Finn. Creative Space, 2015.

**Out of Chaos: Hidden Children Remember the Holocaust.** Edited by Elaine Fox. Preface by Phyllis Lassner. Northwestern University Press, 2013.

**Corporate War: Poison Pills and Golden Parachutes. A Novel.** By Werner L. Frank. Amazon, 2010.

**The Curse of Gurs: Way Station to Auschwitz.** By Werner L. Frank. Amazon, 2012.

**Judenhaus: Small Ghetto at Grosse Merzelstrasse 7.** By Werner L. Frank. Amazon, 2016.

**Legacy: The Saga of a German–Jewish Family Across Time and Circumstance.** By Werner L. Frank. Avoteynu Foundation, 2003.

**A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction.** By Joel Greenberg. Bloomsbury USA, 2014.

**A Natural History of the Chicago Region.** By Joel Greenberg. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

**Of Prairie, Woods, & Water: Two Centuries of Chicago Nature Writing.** Edited by Joel Greenberg. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

**Tables Turned on Them.** By Michael Greenberg. Page Publishing, 2019.

**Red Star, Blue Star: The Lives and Times of Jewish Students in Communist Hungary, 1948–1956.** By Andrew Handler and Susan V. Meschel. 1997.

**Young People Speak: Surviving the Holocaust in Hungary.** Andrew Handler and Susan V. Meschel. 1993.

**Women Building Chicago, 1790–1990.** Edited by Adele Hast and Rima Lunin Schultz. Indiana University Press, 2001.

**The Alexandria Letter. A Novel.** By George Honig. Synergy Books, 2010.

**Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village.** By Jacob Kaplan et al. Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

**Logan Square.** By Jacob Kaplan et al. Arcadia Publishing, 2018.

**A Walk to Shul: Chicago Synagogues of Lawndale and Stops Along the Way.** By Bea Kraus and Norman D. Schwartz, 2003.

**The Kosher Capones: A History of Chicago's Jewish Gangsters.** By Joe Kraus. Cornell University Press, 2019.

**Chicago's Only Castle: The History of Givins' Irish Castle and Its Keepers.** By Errol Magidson. Magidson LLC, 2017.

**Minyans for a Prairie City: The Politics of Chicago Jewry 1850–1914.** By Edward H. Mazur. Garland Publishing, 1990.

**Transplanted Lives: The Adventures of Young Jewish Immigrants from Post-Fascist and Communist Hungary to the Free World Following the 1956 Uprising.** By Susan V. Meschel and Peter Tarjan. CreateSpace, 2016.

**East Lakeview.** By Matt Nickerson. Arcadia Publishing, 2017.

**Lakeview.** By Matt Nickerson. Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

**Doors of Redemption: The Forgotten Synagogues of Chicago and Other Communal Buildings.** Photographed and edited by Robert A. Packer. Booksurge, 2006.

**Chicago's Forgotten Synagogues.** By Robert A. Packer, 2007.

**1001 Train Rides in Chicago.** By Richard Reeder. Eckhartz Press, 2018.

**Chicago Sketches.** By Richard Reeder. AMIKA Press, 2012.

**The Curious Odyssey of Rudolph Bloom.** By Richard Reeder. Propertius Press, 2022.

**Monuments Man: The Mission to Save Vermeers, Rembrandts, and Da Vincis from the Nazis' Grasp.** By Anne Rorimer (co-author). Rizzoli, 2022.

**New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality.** By Anne Rorimer. Thames & Hudson, 2004.

**America at the Fair: Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Arcadia, 2008.

**Child Labor in America: A History.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2013.

**Goods for Sale: Products and Advertising in the Massachusetts Industrial Age.** By Chaim Rosenberg. University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

**The Great Workshop. Boston's Victorian Age.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

**John Lowell Jr. and His Institute: The Power of Knowledge.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Lexington Books, 2021.

**The International Harvester Company: A History of the Founding Families and Their Machines.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2019.

**The Life and Times of Francis Cabot Lowell, 1775–1817.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Lexington Books, 2011.

**Losing America, Conquering India: Lord Cornwallis and the Remaking of the British Empire.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland & Company, 2017.

**The Loyalist Conscience: Principled Opposition to the American Revolution.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2018.

**Shields of David: A History of Jewish Servicemen in the Armed Forces.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Wicked Son, 2022.

**Yankee Colonies Across America: Cities Upon the Hill.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Lexington Books, 2015.

**The Fate of Holocaust Memories: Transmission and Family Dialogues,** By Chaya Roth, with the voices of Hannah Diller and Gitta Fajerstein. Amazon Kindle, 2013.

**An Accidental Anarchist: How the Killing of a Humble Jewish Immigrant by Chicago's Chief of Police Exposed the Conflict Between Law & Order and Civil Rights in Early 20th Century America.** By Walter Roth and Joe Kraus. Academy Chicago Publishers, 1998.

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## Books by Members and Friends

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**Avengers and Defenders: Glimpses of Chicago's Jewish Past.** By Walter Roth. Academy Chicago Publishers, 2008.

**Looking Backward: True Stories from Chicago's Jewish Past.** By Walter Roth. Academy Chicago Publishers, 2002.

**She Said What? (A Life on the Air).** By Turi Ryder. Tortoise Books, 2019.

**Mollie's War: The Letters of a World War II WAC in Europe.** By Mollie Weinstein Schaffer and Cydee Schaffer. McFarland Publishing, 2010.

**A Bicentennial Commemoration of the Prairie State: Readings from the *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*.** Edited by David W. Scott. Foreword by Leah Joy Axelrod. Southern Illinois University Press, 2018.

**African Americans in Glencoe: The Little Migration.** By Robert A. Sideman. The History Press, 2009.

**Discovering Second Temple Jerusalem: The Scriptures and Stories That Shaped Early Judaism.** By Malka Z. Simkovich. Jewish Publication Society, 2018.

**The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria.** By Malka Z. Simkovich. Lexington Press, 2016.

**Beyond the Scent of Olives.** By Alice Solovy. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

**A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War: Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers.** Edited by Jean Powers Soman and Frank L. Byrne. University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

**Irma: A Chicago Woman's Story, 1871-1966 .** By Ellen F. Steinberg. University of Iowa, 2004.

**Learning to Cook in 1898: A Chicago Culinary Manual.** By Ellen F. Steinberg. Wayne State University, 2007.

**From the Jewish Heartland: Two Centuries of Midwest Foodways.** By Ellen F. Steinberg and Jack H. Prost. University of Illinois, 2011.

**Blossom Winters Is Driving on the Los Angeles Freeways.** By Albert Zimbler. CreateSpace, 2012.

## Meet CJHS Author Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch

Longtime CJHS member Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch, a professor emerita of history at the University of Texas at El Paso and an expert in modern Latin American history, has just published "*Gendering Antifascism: Women's Activism in Argentina and the World, 1918-1947*"



(University of Pittsburgh Press), a study of Argentina's Victory Board, a group of women, some 45,000 strong, who coalesced to support Allied troops in Europe. By knitting and sewing garments for the soldiers, as well as providing supplies to them, they stood defiantly against their own country's neutralist and at times Fascist-sympathizing government. While the majority of Victory Board members were not Jewish, a sizeable minority were.

This is not the first time that Dr. Deutsch has written about the Jewish women of Argentina, the South American country with the largest Jewish population. Among her body of work has been "*Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880-1955*," which received a Latin American Jewish Studies Association Book Award.

CJH Editor Robert Nagler Miller recently talked to Dr. Deutsch, who grew up in Chicago's South Shore and West Rogers Park, about her research and the origins of her interest in Latin America. An edited version of their conversation follows.

RNM: Why did you choose history as a scholarly pursuit?

SMD: In college, at Beloit, and in graduate school, at the University of Florida, I'd never had a woman professor of history. In fact, I had never considered women's roles in history.

RNM: It makes sense that you would want to remedy that situation. But why Latin America, and why the focus on fascism and efforts to counter it?

SMD: There is more than one answer. Let me start with the purely intellectual interest. At Florida, to complete an assignment, I was looking for a book on Argentine political history. I came upon such a book - translated into English, it was called "*The History That I Have*

*Lived.*" It was horrifying. The author was a fascist, and he was describing Argentine history through a fascist lens. It piqued my interest.

RNM: But you have also suggested that there were other influences that led you to study fascism?

SMD: Yes. Both of my parents were Holocaust survivors. They both endured the camps.

My father was Lithuanian and came from a religious family. Even before the Germans came in, the Lithuanians killed many of the Jews in the small town where he was raised. My father had been married, and he'd had a child with his first wife. Both his wife and child were killed in a camp. My father was on the Death March from Dachau at the end of World War II. The Germans beat him, and they permanently injured his arm.

My mother grew up in Danzig, now Gdansk, in Poland. Her father was from Berlin, and he had been a decorated veteran in World War I. Her family knew they were Jews, but they were not religious. My mother survived the Lodz Ghetto, Auschwitz, and Ravensbrück. Everyone in her immediate family died, except for one of her sisters. They encountered each other in the last days of the war, in Bergen-Belsen, and they took care of each other. When my mother's sister got typhus, my mother nursed her. And when my mother came down with it, my aunt tended to her.

Unlike many children of Holocaust survivors, I learned about my parents' earlier lives. None of it was hidden from me. My mother talked openly about it.

RNM: That's a lot to unpack. But why did you decide to concentrate on fascism in Latin America rather than in Europe?

SMD: With the exception of my mother's sister, her only surviving relatives were an aunt and uncle who immigrated to Chile and a cousin who made it to Peru. I remember, as a child, that my mother received communications about their whereabouts, and she yanked me out of Chicago public school to visit them in South America. She said, "You'll learn a lot more down there." She was right.

RNM: That must have been a fascinating time for you.

SMD: I remember we traveled extensively and in Peru saw artifacts from Indigenous peoples from a time before the Spaniards arrived. We also saw terrible poverty. We were driving around the Chilean countryside, and there was such a tremendous disparity between the rich and the poor. It awakened my interest.

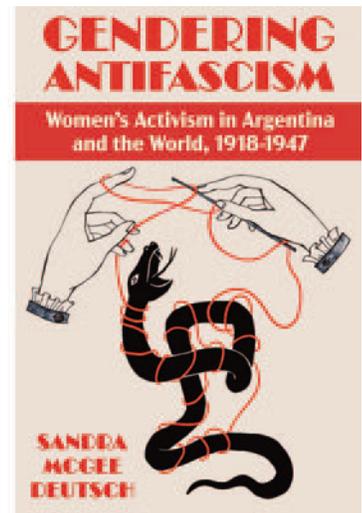
RNM: You were only a child, but it clearly had an impact on your life.

SMD: It was 1959. We came back from South America, and I thought, "I'm going to do something with Latin America in my life." We lived in Chicago's South Shore at the time - we moved to West Rogers Park during my freshman year of high school - and I was supposed to study French in school, but I wanted to learn Spanish.

RNM: Let's jump back to the present. You have studied fascist and anti-fascist movements in Latin America for many years. What are the most important lessons to be gleaned from your research? How can they be applied to current political crises?

SMD: When we encounter antisemitism or racism or fascism, we have to do more than say we are against it. We have to say what kind of society we are for - a society that promotes social and economic equality! And we have to try to understand people with whom we disagree politically, rather than simply denigrate them.

Here, in El Paso, you may recall, we had a horrific shooting at a Walmart in 2019. The gunman turned out to be a white supremacist. Out of the horror, there was a tremendous solidarity of people of all backgrounds who came together to educate, heal, and support our community.



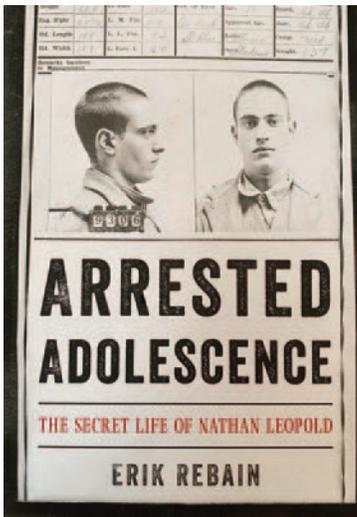
## “Arrested Development: The Secret Life of Nathan Leopold”

By Erik Rebain

The following is an excerpt from the recently published book, *“Arrested Adolescence: The Secret Life of Nathan Leopold”* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023), by CJHS member Erik Rebain, a librarian and archivist who spent years studying and writing about Leopold, who, along with Richard Loeb, was convicted of killing 14-year-old Bobby Franks in 1924. Leopold was around 19; Loeb, 18. All three came from affluent German-Jewish families in Chicago’s Kenwood-Hyde Park neighborhoods. Franks was Loeb’s second cousin and neighbor. This passage, about Leopold’s family, is reprinted with the author’s permission.



The extended family was so entwined they had created a communal vacation haven to escape the heat of Chicago summers. In 1901, Leopold’s father and his uncles Oscar Foreman, Henry Steele and Alfred Schwab bought a lot in Highland Park, some thirty miles north of the city and the Leopolds’ home on Michigan Avenue. The families each constructed a mansion for themselves, as well as a Germanic-inspired central clubhouse where meals could be shared beneath walls lined with hunting trophies. The grounds were teeming with life; a ravine running behind the houses offered endless exploratory opportunities for young children, and fruit and vegetable gardens were in abundance around the brightly painted ‘cottages.’ They named their vacation getaway ‘Wildwood.’



Though initially there was some pushback from permanent residents of the suburb about the Jewish families moving in, a local newspaper made it clear that hostility toward their new neighbors would not be tolerated. “Tastes do differ,” one reporter conceded, “but why object to the sons and daughters of Abraham.” After all, the families paid their bills promptly and “That kind of a thing goes a great way with us. We will welcome the Hebrews here.”

Despite the mixed feelings from the community, within the gated world of Wildwood itself, Leopold remembered his childhood vacation home as something of an idyll. Many of his cousins had finished their schooling before he was born, but there were enough children around his age as well as family friends and governesses to keep him happily occupied. The adults were just as likely to cut loose as the children; as their broods put on plays, competed in three-legged races, and rode horses, the adults brought out phonographs to dance on the lawn and Florence was taught to ride a bike, her husband and brothers-in-law running alongside to steady her.

Of course, for Leopold this also included excellent opportunities for ornithological study. Decades later he wrote: “I can never hear [a Wood Thrush] without being carried back to my early childhood, spent in Highland Park...where the Wood Thrush nested on our property. Surely there is nothing more beautiful than those three ringing notes.” He referred to the property as the setting for all of his “Alice-in-Wonderland imaginings.” But the fantasy would soon come to an end; in 1914 the Schwab home and clubhouse burned down during the off-season and the aging families began to spend their summers elsewhere. The Leopolds sold their share of the property in 1920.

# The Yeshiva: A Century of Torah and Leadership

By Dr. Edward Mazur

In 1917, during Sukkot, a group of leaders from Chicago's Orthodox Jewish community met at the home of Rabbi Ephraim Epstein on Douglas Boulevard, near Spaulding Avenue, in Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood. The meeting resulted in the laying of a cornerstone, four years later, for a yeshiva called Beis HaMidrash La Torah—the Hebrew Theological College (HTC)—that is now referred to by locals as “The Yeshiva.” Very few yeshivas in modern times have existed as long as HTC.

“*The Yeshiva: A Century of Torah and Leadership*” is a well written and lavishly illustrated volume that presents the history of the Yeshiva and offers us an appreciation for and insights into an important chapter in the history of Chicago's Jewish communities. From its beginnings at that meeting more than a century ago, the HTC has developed and grown. Today, it is part of Touro University, a private Jewish university headquartered in New York.

The volume is a narrative of visionaries, rabbis, lay leaders, teachers, and supporters who overcame significant hurdles to advance and preserve Torah and Orthodox Jewry in the United States in an environment that, at best, was not amenable to the need for Torah and traditional observances. Over the generations, HTC and its leaders have taught hundreds of thousands of students, many of whom went on to teach Torah across the world.



Divided into a series of chapters with timelines, narratives, biographies, and memories, the volume presents an abundance of primary and source materials that serve to make this tome a welcome source for understanding the complexities of the Chicago Jewish communities.

When Rabbi Epstein and others in the Orthodox community talked about establishing a yeshiva, they were met by critics, one of whom proclaimed, “Hair will grow on the palm of your hand before there will be a Yeshiva in Chicago.” Such naysayers would prove to be false prophets.

In 1920, property at the corner of Douglas and St. Louis avenues in Lawndale was purchased for \$17,000. The cornerstone of HTC was laid on April 16, 1922, and Rabbi Saul Silber became the first full-time president. The building was completed by the fall of 1922, consisting of 16 classrooms with a closet in the dean's office serving as the library. The building was never locked, as there were day and night programs, including a program for women. The first students attended public school and then came to the Yeshiva for four hours of learning. On Sunday, classes took place from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m.

In 1925, HTC had its first graduating class. A group of 10 were ordained rabbis, a veritable minyan. Throughout the 1920s, and to this day, the student body grew, accepting students from across the Americas and overseas. By 1942, the Chicago Jewish Academy, a high school, was formed under the auspices of the Associated Talmud Torahs and Yeshiva. The Chicago Jewish Academy was an affiliated part of HTC until 1961, when it opened its own high school in the West Rogers Park neighborhood near Pratt and California Avenues. Now called the Ida Crown Jewish Academy, it has since moved to a campus in Skokie.

HTC's founders were visionaries. From the outset, they recognized the need for rabbis who could preach and deliver speeches in English. They sought faculty who could meet the challenges of an American yeshiva. Teachers

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## The Yeshiva

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had to possess not only broad knowledge in all aspects of Jewish culture and Talmud, but also in arts and sciences. From the beginning, HTC required its students to earn a college degree, alongside preparation for rabbinic ordination. The students prepared for college by attending the Lewis Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology), the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University.

The Yeshiva had a pioneering role in women's education in the United States. In 1940, HTC opened a Teachers Institute for Women to prepare Hebrew School and Sunday school teachers. (Formerly the Blitstein Institute, it is now the Sarah Hartman Women's College.) This subject is worthy of a stand-alone monograph.

The changing demographics of Chicago's neighborhoods led HTC to sell its building in 1956 to the Chicago Board of Education. HTC was temporarily situated at Congregation Anshe Sholom at Polk and Independence Boulevard before purchasing 16 acres in Skokie for a new campus. This was a more than \$5 million dollar investment in Torah and leadership. By late spring of 1958, the Yeshiva was ensconced on its new campus. Prior to Skokie, HTC had satellite campuses in various locales, including Hyde Park, Austin, Uptown, Albany Park, and East Rogers Park.

The Yeshiva has met the rabbinic needs of many congregations in such places as Battle Creek, Michigan; Evansville, Indiana; Clarksdale, Mississippi; Sioux Falls, Iowa; and the Illinois State Penitentiary. HTC gave special permissions to some young rabbis to accept positions in shuls that did not have partitions between women and men at their religious services.

HTC has ordained more than 400 rabbis. Its alumni include luminaries in many fields. The world of the Yeshiva today is different from that at its founding. But its mission as always is still to create well-rounded individuals guided by Torah in all their endeavors.

For scholars and historians, this volume is a most welcome addition. It also features rich biographies of the rabbis who received ordination from the beginning up to the present. For example, Rabbi Dovid Winchester, who taught for many years at HTC, was a survivor of the 1929 Chevron Massacre in Israel and the "rav" at Congregation Nusach Ari in Albany Park. When the Yeshiva vending machines were stocked with candy he considered less than kosher, he would purchase the entire stock and discard it to prevent students from eating something possibly tref. Rabbi Fasman headed a congregation in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was offered a pulpit at a prestigious shul in Ottawa, Ontario. His Tulsa congregants begged him to stay and even offered him a partnership in an oil field. He accepted the Ottawa position, but eventually became a giant figure in Chicago.

"*The Yeshiva*" is the result of many contributors, led by Rabbi Shmuel Schumann, CEO-HTC, and Project Director and Managing Editor Rabbi Mordechai Millunchick. They and their team of researchers and contributors deserve a heartfelt mazel tov. To be sure, the book would have benefited from an index and glossary of terms, but this should not detract from the overall achievement.

"*The Yeshiva: A Century of Torah and Leadership*," (2023, Hebrew Theological Press, Skokie, Illinois, 579 pages). \$36 at the HTC offices; \$50, if shipped.

***Since its founding in 1917, Hebrew Theological College, also known as The Yeshiva, has had a worldwide influence in the sphere of Orthodox Jewish education, providing outstanding instruction to prospective rabbis, teachers, and secular leaders not only in ancient Jewish texts, but also in the liberal arts and sciences.***

## Rabbi Wolf and Solel

continued from front page

I did ditch class once, leading a group across the highway to Howard Johnson's. We were feasting on the specialty, fried clams (not kosher!), when Solel's rabbi, Arnold Jacob Wolf, showed up to haul us back and call our parents.

Another memory: A friend switched the grape juice for wine at the 7th grade Seder, got drunk, and threw up in our car. My mom marched back to the temple and sternly told the education director, "I don't send my children to Sunday School to get drunk!"

I did learn about comparative religions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahá'í, and more—and visited some of the houses of worship. I also heard about the ego and the id from a Sunday School teacher who was a psychologist.

Though I disliked having to write papers every week, Confirmation class was incredibly meaningful. Wolf had written a book, "Challenge to Confirmands." Chapters were titled as questions: "What Must a Jew Believe?" "Is There a God?" "Why Do Good People Suffer?" "Why Aren't We Christians?" And more. At Confirmation, we were each asked, in front of a large audience, "Do you choose to get confirmed?" I said, "I do not think I deserve it." Now, I believe I've earned it.

At Solel, there surely were important life lessons I've never forgotten. When JFK was assassinated, people spontaneously showed up at temple. Rabbi Wolf was there. He provided comfort, beginning the healing process.

I recognized the importance of community. My mother felt called to join Rabbi Wolf for the second march to Selma in 1965. My father did not want her to go; he was fearful for her safety. I begged to go. But because I was only 15, my dad would not hear of it. I was left home to babysit my two younger sisters. My mother and my older brother went with the rabbi, other temple members, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. I could tell it was a life-changing experience.

I remember MLK Jr. speaking at the temple a year after the march, as well as Gloria Steinem. I was in college when the Chicago 7 came. I heard half the congregation quit, though that seems likely an exaggeration.

Back when I was still in high school, I sold bar-b-q sauce for Operation Breadbasket, Jackson's organization, and interviewed him for a local radio station. I was always busy demonstrating about something—against nuclear war, for civil rights and African-American and Women's Studies, to have sophomore dance—a skill I'm sure I learned at Solel.

When I was 20, I planned to marry an Episcopalian. Rabbi Wolf refused to perform the ceremony. Other than a funeral and a wedding that was my last contact with him for about 35 years.

To find out about my adulthood, during which I have actually lived out all I that was taught by Rabbi Wolf, Solel, and my folks, you'll have to read to the end. But first, you'll hear from scholars, writers, rabbis, interested parties, and some troublemakers like me.

### Reflections on Growing Up at Solel in the Early Days

By Rabbi Larry Edwards\*

The "early days" were the late 50s and the 60s. The suburbs might have been a refuge from the troubles of the city. Many families had moved in search of better schools and room for the kids to ride their bicycles. There was certainly a level of affluence that created a bubble of comfort. But at the same time, Solel did not seem to

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Martin Luther King, Jr. during his visit to Congregation Solel

## Rabbi Wolf and Solel

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be trying to hide from the world and its issues. There were still strong ties to the urban center. Civil Rights was making its way onto the national agenda, and then the war in Vietnam began to escalate.

Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf made very clear that religion, in general, and Judaism, in particular, had better have something to say in challenging times—or be reduced to irrelevance. It was not just that religion had to stay “relevant” in order to survive. It was that society needed a strong infusion of ancient wisdom and prophetic passion. We had something to offer.

The passion of Solel activism in those days was not just an outgrowth of Arnold Wolf’s energies. Solel had come from the city. It began as KAM North Shore and Rabbi Jacob Weinstein’s strong social justice orientation had had an influence on many of the Solel founders. (I remember when he traveled to Vietnam and was among the early voices speaking in opposition to the war.) Wolf was hired because members were in search of rabbinic leadership that would both reflect and activate their concerns.

I have made a list of some of what I remember. This list is not complete, and it may not be completely accurate. But it does give a fair picture of the kinds of things that were going on at Solel in its first decades:

Several members went to Selma, Alabama, for the big Civil Rights march; some of the same people, plus others, marched when the struggle came to Chicago.

The congregation debated whether, as an institution, to oppose the war in Vietnam. It was a narrow vote. A delegation traveled to Washington to lobby against the war.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke from the pulpit to a very crowded sanctuary.

The Chicago 7 spoke at Solel during the trial. (Rabbi Wolf introduced them by saying, “America is being raped, and these men are yelling.”) During the trial, an ad hoc group of Solel members staged some guerrilla theater on Friday night, carrying one of their number into the sanctuary bound and gagged à la Bobby Seale in the Federal courtroom.

During the Six-Day War, the congregation took out a mortgage on the building to support the Israel Emergency Fund. Until then, Solel had been without a mortgage.

Solel members were active in the Soviet Jewry movement.

Rabbi Robert Marx was a member and found support at Solel when he founded the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs.

Rabbi Wolf picketed with striking hospital workers at Mt. Sinai Hospital. My father was President then and got a call from someone saying, “Can’t you control your rabbi?” To which he responded, “We believe in freedom of the pulpit.”

A summer camp for inner-city kids was hosted at Solel.

While I was in the youth group, we helped organize what was perhaps the first weekend Shoah commemoration, sleeping at the synagogue and reading names of victims for 36 hours straight.





The Solel Confirmation class of 1965

experience in wrestling toward a position. Nor was coming to a position enough: The *ikar* was the *ma'aseh*. The point was to take action.

*The writer is a member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. He was interviewed in the Summer 2023 issue about his post as spiritual leader of Chicago's Congregation Or Chadash, the now-defunct LGBTQ synagogue.*

### The Solel Way • Inclusion • Learning • Link to Jewish Wisdom

By Brian Bram

My mother and father, Lucile and Milt, were founding members of Congregation Solel in 1955 and part of the team that hired its first full-time rabbi, Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf, in 1957. Like most members of Solel, they felt they had a deeply personal relationship with Arnold. And, like most members, felt Rabbi Wolf's powerful delivery during services to be something "more" than his day-to-day presence.

I will never forget sitting in the Solel sanctuary and hearing Rabbi Wolf say, "...and many peoples shall go and say 'come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord; to the House of the God of Jacob, for He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.'" Then came that singular, booming voice that rivaled what I thought the Old Testament prophets must have sounded like (and, for me, invoked the actual Presence of God): "FOR OUT OF ZION SHALL GO FORTH THE LAW, AND THE WORD OF THE LORD FROM JERUSALEM." I still get chills when I think of it.

It should be no surprise to anyone familiar with Solel's history that these early years, in which progressive minds were teamed up with Arnold Wolf's guidance, resulted in Solel's profound activities in Jewish education and social action (Selma, Dr Martin Luther King's appearance in 1966, the Chicago 7 trial and their appearance at Solel in 1968, a summer day camp for inner city kids, etc.) which became a model for other organizations in the U.S. and around the world. I was in the sanctuary the night that a Solel congregant had himself gagged, tied to a chair, and carried into services to protest Judge Hoffman's silencing of Chicago 7 defendant Bobby Seale.

Both Milton and Lucile were often called up to the bimah to read various prayers from the liturgy or deliver original personal prayers. Lucile worked for decades in the temple office and as the secretary for Solel's Hebrew School program, taking care of business, dealing with problems, and letting some lucky kid push the button to ring the Hebrew School bell every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. Milton served on Solel's Board during the early years, and both of them were deeply committed to the vision, philosophy, and actions of Congregation Solel.

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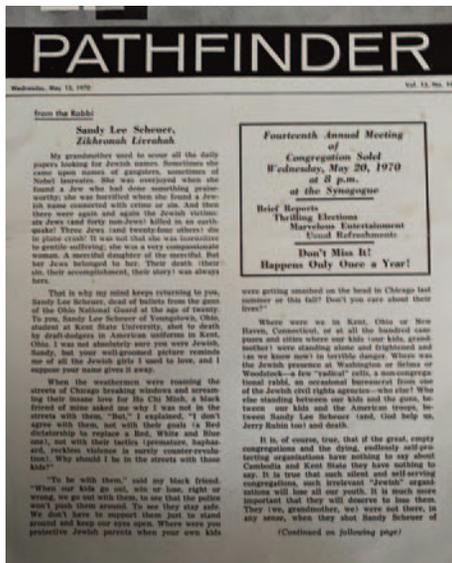
The youth group organized weekly tutoring on the South Side of Chicago. The congregation provided logistical support and a school bus to take us back and forth.

An officer of the youth group was a member of the congregational Board of Directors.

It was a little hard to be an adolescent rebel when the adults around you were arguing passionately about the same issues that you cared about. I don't want to over-idealize. I am sure that there were many who would just as soon have kept a low profile. But to join Solel in those days meant that you expected to engage the issues and bring to bear Jewish tradition and historical

## Rabbi Wolf and Solel

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A Solel newsletter from 1970

religious school was on Saturdays and I missed all the cartoons. I looked forward to turning 11 when I'd get to switch to Sundays. However, that year, they flipped the days and the older kids went on Saturdays, so I never got to be a Saturday morning cartoon kid. (I often wonder if my parents had something to do with that.)

In Hebrew School on Tuesdays and Thursdays, teachers like Mrs. Bender patiently taught us to read and speak this ancient language that was ours. In the summers, Eric and I continued our Jewish experience at Union Institute Camp in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, the first UAHC summer camp. Eric met his future wife, Debbie, there in 1973.

This, then, was what I have come to call, "The Solel Way."

In 2002 my mom called Rabbi Wolf to ask him to come back to Highland Park and officiate at my dad's funeral, and he was kind enough to come. During his eulogy for Milt, Arnold talked about my brother, Rabbi Eric Bram (ר"ב), who was sitting in the front row with Lucile and me. "Eric Bram is my greatest success," he said to the several hundred assembled mourners of my dad. Coming from Rabbi Wolf, who had a very, very clear sense of his successes, this was a significant statement. He was referring to Eric's life as a rabbi, as a Jew, and as a human being.

Influenced deeply by Rabbi Wolf, Eric began at an early age to teach and mentor friends and, perhaps inevitably, became a rabbi himself. As Rabbi Jim Bennett said at Eric's own funeral in 2010, Eric "was the quintessential congregational rabbi, creating the most remarkable relationships and communities wherever he served. Eric seemed to know intuitively how to be a rabbi [and] credited his own rabbis and teachers with helping him figure this out, especially Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf." Eric himself wrote, "A rabbi is a teacher, counselor, coach, link to Jewish wisdom, and companion on the road to a more joyous life. A good rabbi encourages others to seek the love of God and deepen their relationships with others." I hear some of Rabbi Wolf in those words.

Rabbi Wolf and "The Solel Way" deeply influenced Eric in countless ways. Like Rabbi Wolf, Rabbi Bram had a profound effect on his congregants. He led three major congregations during his career; leaders from all three congregations talk about him in much the same way Solelites talk about Rabbi Wolf. Barbara Feldman, president of Eric's final congregation in Solon, Ohio, said, "We can't easily put into words how deeply we feel about Rabbi Bram and his family. His legacy is one we will build on long into the future. He embodied tolerance, inclusion, learning, and especially a spirit of close community. He has forever changed who we are." Rabbi Mark Shook of St. Louis said of Eric, "He was a warm, caring, funny, and very lovable Rabbi, teacher, colleague, and friend who made Judaism very accessible to people. He was a gifted teacher who had an almost magical connection with his students."

Throughout his career, Rabbi Bram taught at universities and local schools, served on boards of many organizations, counseled interfaith couples, acted as chaplain for maximum security federal prisoners (as well as local fire

Solel's weekly religious school and Hebrew school were a big part of my and my younger brother Eric's experiences from early ages. I have clear memories of a Rosh HaShanah assembly in the late 50s (when Solel was still borrowing space in a local grammar school) of Rabbi Wolf and Irv Kaplan singing "A-Room Zoom Zoom," the theme song to the Chicago television show, "The Magic Door," which starred Kaplan.

After the new building was built on Clavey Road in Highland Park, music and art were important programmatic parts of our weekly religious school experience. For example, to commemorate the Shoah, art coordinator Billie Hanig would give each grade cohort blank forms. The kids then researched the names of European towns and the corresponding death counts for each town, entering that information on the forms and posting those thousands of forms on every wall in the building. We were also the first to see 6 million grass seeds in a large pile in the sanctuary, a sobering way to demonstrate the magnitude of that number.

In music class, Mrs. Magad taught us songs of the Holocaust, like "The Partisan Song" by Hirsch Glik. I can still sing it and hear her playing the piano. In the sanctuary, Max Janowski's incredible music came to Solel from KAM Isaiah Israel and touched us deeply. When I was younger,

departments), and was active in many Jewish and interdenominational causes and those relating to diversity, equity, and inclusion (before that was a term). As a faculty member at St. Louis University, Rabbi Bram taught "Jewish Life and Thought" for the Philosophy Department and "Working with Dying Patients and Their Families" at the medical school.

The direct legacy of Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf and Congregation Solel, as well the UAHC camp experience and our parents' Solel-inspired approach to life and parenting, is clearly evident in Rabbi Eric Bram's career and life, as he often said himself. "The Solel Way" touched his life profoundly, as well as those of all the kids exposed to it. From Eric and the rest of us, it has gone forth out of Solel and touched, in ways small and large, an uncountable number of people around the world.

### **Wolf: Iconoclastic • Scolding • Self-Critical**

By R. D. Rosen

Rabbi Arnold Jacob Wolf was not only Congregation Solel's rabbi during my entire adolescence, but—a fact gradually revealed to me in adulthood—one of the great influences on me as a writer. Since I've always been averse to organized religion, Rabbi Wolf was a secular godsend. He didn't believe in bar mitzvahs, so I don't read a word of the Hebrew I happily chant at High Holidays. He had nice things to say about my Sunday school essay on the non-existence of God. His sermons tried to heal the world and his prosperous suburban congregants as well. I really worshipped at the feet of Rabbi Wolf's sermons, which, although occasionally long-winded, were the most thrilling spiritual performances of my formative years. Writers as disparate as Sholem Aleichem, Graham Greene, and Edith Wharton might have become my stylistic gurus, but it is Rabbi Wolf's iconoclastic, scolding, self-critical sermonizing that I hear most often in my writing.

He alarmed us all by inviting Martin Luther King and members of the Chicago 7 into the sanctuary, but his skepticism about privilege mirrored my own ambivalence about Highland Park's materialism and hypocrisy. He could be Marxist in his rebukes: "As an American rabbi," he wrote in 1964, "I am inevitably and incurably bourgeois. I live off men who live off workingmen's work: entrepreneurs, admen, promoters, small manufacturers, salesmen, tax experts whose function in American society is to grease the wheels of capitalism—that very capitalism that first fires and last hires Negro workers, that very capitalism whose profits are squeezed from machines destined to displace the Negro as America's muscle....The American Jew lives by his superiority to and distance from the American Negro and the American poor."

Needless to say, this kind of rhetoric made him many enemies among the North Shore's righteous Reform Jews ("Judaism has become violent non-action, a principled inactivity..." Wolf lamented during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.), but it inspired me, who had just begun to think of himself as a writer, to achieve a similar poetic intensity. Unfortunately, I have too rarely managed, as he did, to put my money where my metaphors are. My subject matter has only occasionally ventured into Jewish issues. I didn't truly connect with the Holocaust until meeting a Polish child survivor in my 60s and writing "Such Good Girls," and then confronted American antisemitism in my book about the trailblazing Jewish quarterback, Sid Luckman, in "Tough Luck." But Wolf's spiritual fingerprints are on everything I've done.

Rabbi Wolf, forgive me for not taking more advantage of you when I was a kid. When I was 40, I wrote and asked you to send me some of your old sermons, which you did, with a note that said, "From the author of Theo-babble to the inventor of Psychobabble." But I never followed up, as I wish I could now, if only to say how you've been with me always.

*R. D. Rosen is the author of many books, including a series of mystery novels starring a Jewish former major-league outfielder named Harvey Blissberg. And, yes, he did invent the world "psychobabble" in 1975.*

*Editor's Note: In 2019, Congregation Solel, first called KAM North—since much of its early membership had been affiliated with KAM on Chicago's Southside—merged with another synagogue, Lakeside Congregation for Reform Judaism, to become Makom Solel Lakeside. A former past president, Michael Ebner, is a CJHS member.*



Rabbi Wolf's book for confirmands

## Remembering Dr. Irving Cutler: 100 Years of Caring and Contributions



*Editor's Note:* The Chicago Jewish Historical Society profoundly mourns the passing of Dr. Irving Cutler, the foremost authority on the history of Jews of Chicago and its environs. As befits a man devoted to history, Dr. Cutler lived a good, long life. He was 100 at his death this past July. He continued working—writing and attending professional functions—almost to the very end.

An author, academic, demographer, tour guide, bibliophile, highly engaged community member in civic and Jewish affairs, and a lifelong lover of learning, Dr. Cutler inspired countless individuals who had the pleasure and good fortune of meeting, working, or studying with him. He was the antidote to 21st century hype, glitz, and self-aggrandizement. His ways were kind, gentle, dignified, thoughtful, and unflashy, and he demonstrated leadership through his moral backbone, modesty, and a quiet but deep and abiding desire for truth and justice.

As much as we sorely miss Dr. Cutler, *CJH* takes comfort in cherishing his memory and good works by publishing Dr. Rachele Gold's homage to him in this issue's Co-President's column, along with other tributes printed below.

If readers would like to share their memories of Dr. Cutler, they are encouraged to email them to *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller at [robertnaglermiller@gmail.com](mailto:robertnaglermiller@gmail.com).

### A Hundred Years of *Menschlichkeit*

Dr. Irving Cutler was a mensch in every meaning of the word. Literally, *mensch* means human. Irv was so much more than that—he was an erudite individual, a scholar of our Jewish communities of Chicagoland, an intellectual, a colleague, and true friend. He was a person of integrity and morality, always displaying a sense of what was correct and responsible to his family, friends, those of us in the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and to his academic and non-academic colleagues. He was a practitioner of significant and not-so-significant acts that made our society better.

Over many decades, since 1977 and the founding of the CJHS, Irv was a mentor to many including myself. We both loved trains. As a young man, and then as an adult and scholar and tour guide, Irv rode trains with his family everywhere. He always asked about my love for Lionel model trains. I think that with four sisters, he never had a toy train as a young boy and always wanted one.

He told me that he joined the U.S. Navy at the outset of World War II because, in addition to it being the correct way to be a patriotic American, it allowed him to see the world faster than any other way. Irv was a Lieutenant junior grade. He served on a destroyer escort ship and made 12 crossings of the North Atlantic during the most dangerous times during the war.

We had lengthy and spirited discussions about the making, growth, and meaning of our Jewish communities of Chicagoland—especially over the relationship between so-called German and non-German Jews.

Finally, we both loved the Chicago White Sox. Of course, being broad-minded, he always cheered for the Cubs, as well as the White Sox.

I will always remember Irv Cutler for his tremendous knowledges, spirit, and that seaman's cap that he often wore. Irv was truly a *moreh* (teacher) and a *chochum gadol* (wise human being).

*Edward Mazur, Ph.D.*  
*Past President, CJHS*

## A Scholar for Life

In the mid-1990s, Walter Roth, z"l, then-President of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, asked me to work with the Society to direct a documentary about Chicago Jewish history. Though a lifelong resident, I had only vague knowledge of the subject, but Walter fixed that. He armed me with a mammoth tome by H.L. Meitis, originally published in 1924, "*The History of the Jews of Chicago*," a stack of back issues of the Society's journal, and phone numbers of experts in various sub-topics, including, of course, Irv Cutler's.

The show, "*Romance of a People: The First 100 Years of Jewish History in Chicago, 1833 - 1933*," became for me more than a learning experience in broad themes and precise details. It turned into a time-travel adventure, revealing, on city streets and in public buildings, windows to the past framing glimpses of Chicago's Jewish story.

Like the bend in the Brown Line at Lake and Wells. For me, it inevitably evokes Chicago's first Yom Kippur minyan, held in 1845, squeaking by with the minimum requisite 10 men in a room above a store on the unpaved street below.

Like the domed ceiling of the Chicago Cultural Center, which was originally Chicago's first public library. Inscribed in Hebrew with words of the prophet Isaiah, it conjures for me the influence of Temple Sinai's Rabbi Dr. Emil Hirsch, a leading advocate for the creation of a publicly funded library to uplift the booming city's labor force through the power of books.

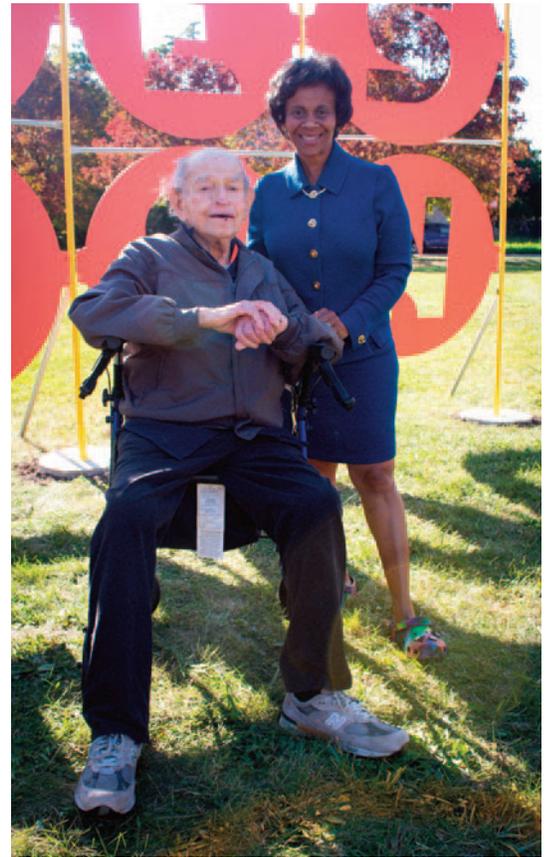
Like leafy Douglas Boulevard on Chicago's West Side.

"I've never had a problem here," said Irv, who had visited the neighborhood countless times as both scholar and tour guide. We stood chatting near the corner of Douglas and Homan, the video crew eager to roll, as we eyed the weathered hulk of the former Anshe Knesseth Israel, known as the Russische Shul, across the parkway. Irv began to describe the scene on Jewish holidays in the 1930s, when the Russische was the biggest of the area's nearly 60 synagogues. Chicago was the third largest Jewish city in the world, and close to half the Jews of Chicago lived on the West Side. "The expressions of Jewish life were everywhere, people in their best outfits strolling down the boulevard, congregating in front of the synagogues, almost all traffic ceased," he recalled.

Despite the cameraman's decision to hire a martial arts teacher as a production assistant, to guard the expensive equipment, Irv seemed oblivious to a sense of risk. "Lawndale was a big step up from Maxwell Street," he said admiringly, along streets that still vaunted gorgeous grey stone residences. Taping Irv as we cruised those streets with him behind the wheel of his car was like being transported back to the neighborhood in a bygone era. "The 24th Ward earned the title of 'best Democratic ward in the nation,'" he said, betraying some amusement, "for turning out a 97% return in 1936 for FDR." He added reflectively, "with such a concentration of numbers here, Jews achieved a degree of political strength and cohesiveness that has never been repeated."

Some 25 years later, at the Chicago Public Library Northtown branch - October 2022 - for the opening of a photo retrospective celebrating 100 years of Jewish community in West Rogers Park, Irv, a few months shy of his 100th birthday and physically frail, attended with his daughter. He came not just to see the exhibit, which was produced by the Society and Jewish Neighborhood Development Council of Chicago, but to hear the remarks

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**Dr. Irving Cutler, then 99, at Chicago's first annual Sukkah Project Festival, with Pastor Reshorna Fitzpatrick of the Stone Temple Missionary Baptist Church.**

photo credit: Dion Turner for the Chicago Sukkah Design Festival.

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## Dr. Irving Cutler: 100 Years of Caring and Contributions

continued from preceding page

of author Joseph Epstein, who would speak on growing up Jewish in the neighborhood. As if Irv Cutler hadn't already heard it all!

But that was Irv.

I'll remember him for his curiosity – his insatiable appetite for new information, a new insight, a new story. I'll remember him for his generosity and for his unlimited store of details, which he shared with me for other documentary projects. And I'll remember him for taking me back to a very different time that I'll never forget.

*Beverly Siegel is president of Jewish Neighborhood Development Council of Chicago. She directed "From Sears to Eternity: The Julius Rosenwald Story" for WTTW Channel 11 and "Driving West Rogers Park: Chicago's Once and Future Jewish Neighborhood."*

### A Healer of the World

Irv was the eternal optimist, with a simple world view. We needed to beat back evil; social ills could be solved by applying humanitarian principles, not by diminishing others, or allowing racial prejudice, or equally vile antisemitic political strains, to gain any foothold in our contemporary politics. This really disturbed him, and his record of donations proves it. He normally read *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Chicago Tribune* every day. And he remained connected to the news of the world, with Susie and Danny (Irv's daughter and son) reading articles to him nearly right up to the day he died. He wanted to know how Ukraine was faring in its war against Russia.

I think that I can fairly say that Irv was not a very religious person, but he was a firm believer in the concept of *tikkun olam*, the healing or repairing of the world. For example, when he brought a Jewish tour group to a Black church that once was one of Lawndale's synagogues, replete with Jewish iconography both in and on the building, the visit was obtained out of mutual respect, with the pastor giving a brief presentation. ... [I]f Sunday services were ongoing, the group would tiptoe in and tiptoe out. Irv always presented it as a shared space and now a shared history, with the unspoken message that different peoples were not so different, and that the television news was not the only, and definitely not the best, source of information about any neighborhood.

*Joab Silverglade, Irving Cutler's son-in-law (excerpt from eulogy)*

### A Capturer of Proustian Moments

It had always been normal for me to have a Grampa like Grampa. A Grampa who walked through the house with history in his heart, who knew Chicago like one of his own stories and was eager to share it, who could tell you what Douglass Park smelled like one summer night when everyone decided to sleep outside together, or who would recall the first and last names of his Depression Era classmates, eyes glistening with nostalgia, while you sat there firing off more and more questions about what it was like.

When he told you these stories, it was as if he was a mosaic artist, setting small tiles into place one at a time. And if you sat at that kitchen table long enough, you could see a much bigger picture coming into focus—a picture of a childhood that only he held in his memory.

*Rahm Silverglade, one of Irving Cutler's grandsons (excerpt from eulogy)*

***"Irv was the eternal optimist, with a simple world view. We needed to beat back evil; social ills could be solved by applying humanitarian principles, not by diminishing others, or allowing racial prejudice, or equally vile antisemitic political strains, to gain a foothold in contemporary politics."***



**Dr. Irving Cutler with his family on one of his popular tours**

when responding to the question, “How did you decide to pursue a career in foreign affairs?” In response, he always mentions my dad as one of his key early mentors who put him on this path. I don’t think my dad realized how many lives he has touched.”

*Susie Cutler, daughter of Irving Cutler (excerpt from eulogy)*

### **A Purveyor of Principles**

I’ll never forget a valuable lesson he taught me when I was very young. I think I was about 5. In Skokie, Grampa and I were getting on the Skokie Swift L train to just ride the train to the Howard Street stop and back. He knew that I really enjoyed riding the train. In a moment of regrettable impulsiveness and ignorance, I mistakenly and assertively asked people to vacate their seats, even though there were plenty of other seats available in the train car. He very quickly and sternly corrected my behavior and made me realize the inappropriateness and insensitivity of my actions.

*Sam Silverglade, one of Irving Cutler’s grandsons (excerpt from eulogy)*

### **Opening the World and Inspiring Minds**

A couple of years ago, one of his former students, Aaron Williams, contacted him. He had taken geography classes from my dad in the late 1960s. He wrote that thanks to my dad’s outstanding geography courses, he learned about and developed a “great appreciation for the world outside of the south side of Chicago, and gained a global perspective that has guided” his career for some 50 years since he graduated. He went on to become the Director of the Peace Corps under President Obama. He said that he’s often thought of my dad

## **Correspondence**

The Summer 2023 issue of *Chicago Jewish History* was not only informative, but well written and entertaining. From the suspenseful saga of Marek Szwarc’s artwork, to the frank comments of Rep. Jan Schakowsky, to the reminiscences of childhood in Michigan’s summer Jewish communities, every article was well worth reading.

Your newsletter gets better and better – keep it up!

Gitelle Rapoport  
Chicago

I have fond memories of studying at the National Library (Spring 2023 Co-President’s column) during my junior year abroad at Hebrew University. This was the 1974-1975 school year, and I was an exchange student from Indiana University in Bloomington. The National Library was my introduction to a “closed stack” library. I was not a happy camper!

An enduring memory from that library is from one of my first days there, sitting in the Judaica reading room, studying, when I noticed a young man,

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## **Welcome New Members**

Michael Chorpash  
Buffalo Grove, IL

Penny Fisher  
Wilmette, IL

Mark Guarino  
Chicago, IL

Barbara Mayers  
Evanston, IL

Rose Shoshana Seidman  
Skokie, IL

Linda Verin  
Birmingham, Alabama

## Revisiting Albany Park

By Joel Levin

July 11, 2023, was "Albany Park Night" at Max and Benny's restaurant in Northbrook. Many 1950's and 1960's graduates of Von Steuben and Roosevelt high schools gathered for an evening of nostalgia. Memories of growing up in the then predominantly Jewish community were shared, and typical comfort food – chopped liver and onions, hotdogs, cheeseburgers, and barbeque beef sandwiches – was served. I attended the event with my brother, Mitch.

Without any formal presentations or handouts, diners easily recalled friends, classmates, schools, movie theaters, bowling alleys, stores, and restaurants from more than 50 years ago. With dozens in attendance enjoying Max and Benny's hospitality in our own meeting room, the reunion was a success. But there was one unintended consequence.

"Albany Park Night" had piqued my interest in returning home. Home, in my case, meant the five apartments our family lived in from 1943 to 1977. A new visit might offer fresh insights into the more than 30 years we resided there. If I were lucky on this journey, I might even catch a glimpse into Albany Park's future.

A studio was our first apartment as a family of four in Albany Park. Located at 4942 North Kedzie Avenue, it featured a pull-down bed, ice box, and coal heat. Ray's toy and candy store, which consumed most of my attention, was on the ground floor.

My father, Benjamin, drove a Yellow cab, while my mother, Toby, was just beginning to waitress at a new restaurant called The Bagel, barely one and a half blocks from the studio.<sup>1</sup>

Mitch, two years older, and I were well supervised. To support the family, while ensuring continuous parental care, Mom and Dad worked different shifts. Dad drove his cab during the day; Mom worked at The Bagel in the evening.

Happiness for the Levin family was simple—frequent visits to a nearby speck of a park called Kiwanis. It offered everything youngsters could dream of: swings, a sandbox, slides, and, of course, a teeter-totter.

The studio building is still intact, now owned by North Park University and used as on-campus housing for its students. (My daughter, Victoria, was an NPU nursing student in 2010 assigned to housing near the corner of Kedzie and Carmen. She lived one block away in distance and 60 years away in time from my family's first Albany Park apartment.)

A large, yellow three-story courtyard building, at 3159 West Ainslie Street, dominated the southeast corner of Kedzie and Ainslie. Our family's second home, it boasted five entrances, landscaping, one-bedroom units, refrigerators, and well-worn linoleum floors. Rent was \$65 per month, payable to De Mar Realty. (That building has been replaced by a strip mall.)

William G. Hibbard, less than one block from home, was the neighborhood elementary school. Patrol boys were on duty to protect the young Baby Boomers as we crossed the busy Kedzie-Ainslie intersection for morning and afternoon classes.

Lunch was usually at home, except for the few times Mom would treat Mitch and me to hotdogs at nearby Mutt and Jeff's.



The Levin family's first apartment, at 4942 North Kedzie Avenue, which is now owned by North Park University

Because most of the students were Jewish, religious holidays completely stopped formal instruction at Hibbard. The few students who did attend enjoyed all-day gym and art.

Hibbard influenced me more than I ever realized. My first published writing was in the Hibbard Herald on a long-forgotten history topic.

As an eighth grader in 1959, I volunteered for the school's mimeograph squad. Our job was to duplicate instructional materials for the entire faculty. In 1969, I would use my "Hibbard expertise" in duplicating lessons for my own eighth grade students.

Recreation in Albany Park was synonymous with River Park and its beloved supervisor, Manny Schwartz. In addition to swimming and summer day camp, there were trips to Riverview and the Museum of Science and Industry. In the winter, kids enjoyed basketball, ping-pong, and programs in the fieldhouse at 5100 North Francisco Avenue.



The author, left, with his family in a 1950s photo

A 1974 boxing film program at River Park fieldhouse piqued Mitch's interest in the sport and its history. His formal appointment as a boxing commissioner for the State of Illinois in 2005 was the culmination of that decades-ago River Park event.

Our third Albany Park residence was above a laundrette at 4840 North Kedzie. Our family had limited income, but we needed more living space, and it was the only two-bedroom unit we could afford. The location, between The Bagel, a few doors south, and Mutt and Jeff's, a few doors north, proved to be a game changer, with far-reaching consequences for our entire family.

My father's first heart attack in 1960 was at this apartment. Dr. Abraham Rosenblum, eating dinner at The Bagel, rushed over within minutes to save Dad's life.

In 1962, a casual, unplanned 25-cent hotdog lunch at Mutt and Jeff's resulted in two free passes to Wrigley Field.<sup>2</sup> By week's end, Mitch and I were ballpark vendors. Our baseball earnings shored up the household's finances and paid for our college educations as well.

(Moo Goong Terrace, a senior housing development for Korean-Americans, now occupies the block where the laundrette building, Mutt and Jeff's, and other Jewish owned stores once stood.)

Standing in front of Von Steuben more than 60 years after my June 1963 graduation, I had an unusual thought. I realized that Dr. Herbert J. Fink, the principal of Von, who handed me my diploma, and I would become "equals" in the five years it took me to graduate from college. We would both be employees of the Chicago Board of Education.

The top floor of a still-standing two-flat at 4914 North Troy Avenue was the family's fourth Albany Park apartment.

We were close to River Park, but we didn't have the time to enjoy the location. Only the "Great Chicago Blizzard" in 1967 brought all four of us together for a welcome respite from our hectic work schedules. Mom, trudging through enormous mounds of snow to The Bagel, was the first to resume her regular routine.

It was around this time, in the late 1960s, that a distinctly Albany Park cultural phenomenon started: "Huddle House Nights." Drove of young adult Jewish baseball vendors assembled inside and outside the Huddle House grill, near the northeast corner of Kimball and Lawrence avenues.

After working White Sox games on hot summer nights, vendors faced that "awkward" time of evening—it was too early to go home, but too late to go anywhere else. With money in our pockets and no particular

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## Revisiting Albany Park

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place to go, enter Huddle House, open 24 hours, unofficial Jewish social center extraordinaire.

With burger-eating well into the early morning hours, our conversations covered a wide terrain: ballpark gossip, sports, LBJ, Vietnam, dating, Nixon, draft status, college and business opportunities, i.e., get-rich-quick schemes.

Also on the menu were frequent arguments, bragging, betting, illegally parked cars, phone number exchanges of eligible women written on Huddle House napkins, and the joyful camaraderie and exuberance of youth.

Marriage and full-time professional careers brought an end to "Huddle House Nights" by the mid-1970s.

A new Huddle House now stands near the southwest corner of Kimball and Lawrence, in the same location the Cooper and Cooper restaurant occupied in the 1950s.

We moved to our last Albany Park home in the summer of 1969. I will always recall it as the apartment that had the nicest amenities and the saddest memories.

The apartment, at 4946 North Christiana Avenue, was a six-unit building on a quiet suburban-like street near Von Steuben. It boasted two bedrooms, an enclosed porch, modern appliances, new flooring, and a decorative fireplace.

It was from this apartment that my father literally "opened the door" to my new teaching assignment. I had no idea how to get to Roentgen Educational and Guidance Center at 15 South Homan Avenue. His directions are as clear to me today as they were 54 years ago.



The author's father, Ben, is his cabbie uniform, circa mid-1950s.



The author's brother, Mitch, on the steps of the River Park Fieldhouse

"Joel," he said, "just remember that Homan Avenue is the same street as Kimball. It changes its name after North Avenue. When you cross North Avenue, you're exactly two miles from the school. Cross Madison Street, and the building will be on the left. You'll do fine."

Three months after giving me these directions, my father succumbed to the heart disease that had plagued him throughout the 1960s. Our family was forever shattered, along with our hearts.

In June 1976, the Chicago Board of Education closed all schools 16 days early. Teachers were instructed to report to their nearest unemployment office. My office was in the former Hollywood Roller rink; I had skated there many times in the 1950s.

As I stood in line with fellow CPS teachers, the chaos of the current educational situation was overshadowed by one thought: It was time to leave Albany Park. A few months later, The Bagel announced plans to move to West Rogers Park. The family decision to relocate was final.

As years turned into decades, my only contact with Albany Park was watching it go by through the windows of a Brown Line train on my trips downtown.

April 25, 2023, was "Albany Park Night" at Noon O Kabab Restaurant, 4701 North Kedzie Avenue. The evening was sponsored by the *Chicago Sun-Times* as an outreach program for its readers. All residents of Albany Park, past and present, were invited.

We dined on Persian salad, hummus, and large platters of saffron rice that surrounded skewers of beef, chicken, and shrimp. Afterwards, the informal discussion, led by *Sun-Times* reporters and Executive Editor, Jennifer Kho, focused on whether the paper's news coverage was addressing the needs of Albany Park.

The *Sun-Times* chose Albany Park for this meeting because it is home to thousands of hard-working, forward-thinking, civic-minded people who value education and family, give back to their community, and make personal sacrifices so that their children may succeed.

Just as Albany Park has always been.

<sup>1</sup>Read about Toby's experiences at The Bagel in the Winter 2023 edition of *CJH*.

<sup>2</sup>"The Stories of Chicago's Jewish Vendors" appears in the Winter 2021 edition of *CJH*.

## CJHS members... YASHER KOACH!

*The Hebrew phrase means  
"More Power to You."*

CJHS member **Raymond Asher** was among those carrying the Israeli flag at this past spring's World Baseball Classic.

CJHS member **William Choslovsky** had a letter published this past month in the *Chicago Tribune* on the war between Israel and Hamas, the very day that CJHS Co-President **Dr. Rachele Gold** had a letter published on that subject in the same paper.

CJHS member **Erez Cohen**, Executive Director of Hillel at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, organized a history talk about his Hillel's first 100 years. It was co-hosted by the Champaign County History Museum. The Illinois flagship campus boasts the first - and, therefore, the oldest - Hillel chapter in the country.

CJHS member **Judy Dach** wrote an article about Chicago artist Eve Garrison (1903-2003), which was published in the September-October 2023 *Illinois Heritage*, the magazine of the Illinois Historical Society. Garrison was the grandmother of Judy's husband, Jeff.

CJHS member and *CJH* Editor **Robert Nagler Miller** helped organized the Pride service at his congregation, Community Synagogue of Rye (New York), this past June. Robert selected a half dozen readings by LGBTQ writers, and he compiled a list of more than 100 gay, lesbian, and transgender Jews of note, past and present, which was scrolled on the synagogue's wall during the Amidah portion of the service. In addition to his work at CJHS, Robert writes widely for a number of local and national publications, including *Jewish Chicago: JUF News* and *Hadassah* magazine.

CJHS member **Michael Soffer** is the author of a book about Reinhold Kulle, an Oak Park-River Forest High School janitor who was exposed as a former Nazi with an active fascist past. His book will be published by the University of Chicago Press in 2024. He writes, "Almost two years ago, the Chicago Jewish Historical Society's journal published a two-part piece on the Kulle story, which reflected my initial research and thoughts on the case....I cannot help but reflect on my deep gratitude to you all for being the first place to give this important history its light."

## Correspondence

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obviously another student, walking up and down between the rows, whispering something to selected students. What was he saying? And, why only selected students? He quickly walked by and muttered something to me that I could barely make out. I asked him what he had said. "Mincha." Mincha! To sit in a university library and be given the announcement of afternoon mincha - what a difference from a Midwest university campus in the middle of the Bible Belt. At I.U., on a campus of 40,000 students, we often failed to get a minyan on Shabbat mornings at the Hillel. And, now, at a university library, a daily mincha minyan was standard. And, there were two minyanim: one Sephardi, one Ashkenazi.

What was also striking to me was the eclectic nature of those in the room: scruffy students from the States, in their blue jeans and T-shirts; Israelis just back from Army service; young men wearing dark slacks and a white shirt, with and without a jacket, topped with a black velvet *kipa*; and much older men and women who could have been professors. The diversity was striking. During my time on Givat Ram, that reading room was my favorite place to study.

Avram L. Sacks  
Skokie

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור חצבתכם



## chicago jewish historical society

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- Remembering Dr. Irving Cutler: 100 Years of Caring and Commitment
- Revisiting Albany Park
- The Yeshiva: A Century of Torah and Leadership
- Meet CJHS Author Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch
- “Arrested Development: The Secret Life of Nathan Leopold”

#### Our History and Mission

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1977, is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the United States Bicentennial Celebration of 1976. Forty-five years later, our mission remains the discovery, collection, and

#### ABOUT THE SOCIETY

dissemination of information about the Jewish experience in the Chicago area through publications, open programs, tours, and outreach to youth and others interested in the preservation of Chicago Jewish history.

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- Free admission to Society public programs. General admission is \$10 per person.
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