



CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

“Wonder rather than doubt is the root of all knowledge.” — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Chicago: An Incubator for the American Dream

By Kathy Kurtzman Lawrence, PhD, Georgetown University

With his usual perspicacity, Chicagoan Arnold Jacob Wolf, the Yale Hillel Rabbi formerly of KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation, with whom I studied at Yale and who presided at my wedding, once told me that I would never be as rich as my father, nor as poor. We were about to walk down the two-acre lawn of my family’s house in Beverly Hills to the chuppah beside the swimming pool. This mansion, built by Dick Powell and Joan Blondell and later sold to Betty Grable and trumpeter Harry James, was a long way from Chicago’s Jewish West Side, where my father grew up, and even farther from Mława, Poland, where my father and his nine siblings were born to Joseph and Dwosche Kurtzman. In 1908, this paternal grandfather, at 48 years old, sailed out of Bremen on the S. S. Main bound for New York Harbor and Ellis Island to establish a foothold in the New World, in Chicago. Once in the Midwest, he found support from Jewish fraternal organizations, specifically the Progressive Order of the West and the local synagogue that had helped to settle other immigrants. The four oldest children Sarah, 20; Sam, 18; Jacob, 16; and Abe, 14, followed a year later, and they moved into a walk-up apartment at 1234 N. Leavitt Street. My paternal grandmother Dwosche finally came in 1911, on the S. S. Vaderland out of Antwerp, with Feige, 11; Ariel, 9; Chaim, 6; and my father, little Simcha, age 4. Joseph’s audacious heroism saved his descendants from the Nazi destruction of Mława’s Jewish inhabitants but blew to smithereens the Orthodox faith and practices that had sustained our ancestors for over a century. I have spent my life trying to piece back together these shards of tradition



The author’s father riding a donkey in Chicago, circa 1914

continued on page 4

Reflections on Learning About the Jewish History of Humboldt Park

By Sivan Spector

Every morning, I take a walk from my apartment to Humboldt Park, just one block west. I began performing this morning ritual when I moved to the neighborhood three years ago, knowing very little about it, other than that it reduced my commute to work and was quieter than my coop in Logan Square. Every morning on this walk, I pass by a big, beautiful church with gorgeous, old stained-glass windows. These windows happen to feature Stars of David. I always thought this odd and presumed that the church must be an old synagogue, but didn’t think much of it until I noticed that the building on the other side of the street also had Stars of David on the facade over each doorway. Besides pointing them out to friends and family if they joined me on the walk, I didn’t trouble myself often with speculations as to what the church and current senior home may have been. Until one day this past summer, that is.

continued on page 6

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

Pharmacy practice and ownership were attractive to Jewish men in the era from the 1920s through the 1980s. As I wrote in my first column on this subject in the Summer 2024 issue of *CJH*, pharmacy was desirable for several reasons: Training was open to Jews without restriction, unlike medicine; it was a respected health field and way to help and serve the community; and it provided opportunities for independence, business ownership, and a good living. I wrote about retired pharmacist Bradley Miller, the source for my interest in this subject. He is one of three siblings who all became pharmacists.

Talking with Bradley awakened pleasant childhood memories of neighborhood pharmacies and their Jewish pharmacist owners. I wanted to learn more—from the family members of those pharmacists and, if possible, from pharmacists themselves, about this nearly bygone era. Fortunately, several people responded to my request for information and were gracious in giving me their personal and family recollections.

I am grateful for the cooperation of Jacqueline Gerson, daughter of pharmacist Irving Paul; Sharon Seidler, daughter of pharmacist Larry Yablon; Barbara Weisman Morgenstern, a customer of Galler's Pharmacy; retired pharmacist Elliot Linsky; and pharmacists Steve Rosenberg, 40-year owner of Rosens Morseview Drugs, and his predecessor, Maurice (Maish) Rosen, second-generation former owner of Rosen Drugs.

Several common themes emerged from my conversations, reinforcing and expanding Bradley Miller's observations.

The pharmacy profession ran in families. A successful older male relative or professional mentor was often the role model and guide. Pharmacy was a business, and some owners had stores in several neighborhoods. The livelihood was good, but it demanded hard work and long hours. Family members helped out. The pharmacy, however, was much more than a business, for both customers and owners. For the community, it was a staple and gathering place where people of all ages found something they needed (a product; medicine; advice and care; food and treats at the soda fountain), a place to hang out, or their first work experience. The pharmacist was gratified to get to know his customers and become a trusted healer and helper. Even after having to close their businesses, pharmacists often continued to work in the field.

Jacqueline Gerson's father, Irving Paul (1911–1989), received his education in the 1930s at Valparaiso University. He opened his first pharmacy in 1936 in the Chatham area, followed by two others in South Shore and Lawn Manor (at 6200 S. Kedzie). The Lawn Manor pharmacy is part of my childhood history. My family lived in the area until I was 5 years old, and my parents, Jacob and Harriet Gold, became friends with the Pauls. Jacqueline's mother, Florence, helped in the store. Jacqueline noted that her father owned the only *shomer shabbos* (Sabbath-observant) pharmacy at the time. Irving sold his businesses in 1968 and went to work for another pharmacist. After his retirement, he spent his last 10 years as a volunteer in the pharmacy at The ARK, the Jewish community agency then located at 2341 W. Devon.

Sharon Seidler's late father, Robert Yablon, raised his family in the North Lawndale and Austin neighborhoods. Robert had first been interested in medical school, but a respected uncle, Harry Schwartz, a pharmacist and pharmacy owner, influenced Robert to pursue pharmacy. Robert was educated at the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy, the only pharmacy school in Illinois at that time. He owned Sharon Drugs, at 35th and Giles, named for his daughter (later sold); and Ridgeway Pharmacy, in a private psychiatric hospital, until the end of his working years. Sharon stated, "Independence was very important to him. The reason he became a pharmacist was to own a business." Likewise, she added, "He loved being a medical provider." Customers asked for medical advice and many called him "Dr. Bob." Sharon has fond memories of Sharon Drugs, "a fixture in the neighborhood." In her early teens, she "begged" to help out on weekends. Her workday started at 6 am. She ran the cashier, made shakes at the soda fountain, waited on customers, and helped fill prescriptions. "I put powder in a gelatin capsule, filled it halfway, put the cap on," she recalled. "When I filled 12, I put them in a bottle. My father typed the label."



2025 Officers and Board of Directors

Dr. Rachelle Gold
President

Rabbi Moshe Simkovich
Interim Vice President

Janet Iltis
Secretary

Debra Eisenstein
Treasurer

Patti Ray
Membership Chair

Raymond Asher

Eric Benjaminson

Rachel Heimovics Braun

Herbert Eiseman

Elise Ginsparg

Jacob M. Kaplan

Joy Kingsolver

Jerold Levin

Mark Mandle

Dr. Edward H. Mazur

Matthew Nickerson

Joan Pomaranc

Joel Rubin

Past Presidents

Muriel Rogers z"l
Founding President

Walter Roth z"l

Dr. Adele Hast z"l

Rachel Heimovics Braun

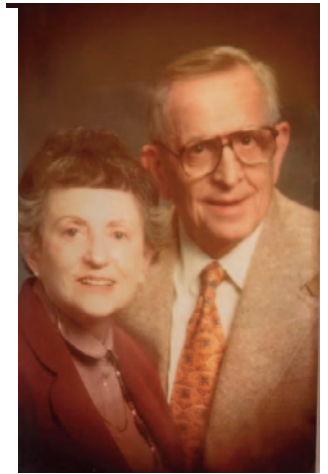
Norman D. Schwartz z"l

Dr. Edward H. Mazur

Chicago Jewish History

is published quarterly by the CJHS at
610 S. Michigan Ave., Room 803,
Chicago, IL 60605.
Phone (312) 663-5634
info@chicagojewishhistory.org.
Single copies \$8 postpaid
Editor/Designer Robert Nagler Miller
Submissions: Request guidelines at
info@chicagojewishhistory.org

As I recounted in my earlier column, helping out in the local or family pharmacy was a coveted experience for a young person. Bradley Miller worked at the popular Galler's Pharmacy, owned by Emanuel Galler, at 16th and Kolin (misstated as Koven in my earlier column), near Bradley's home at 4320 W. 16th. A memoir of Kolin Avenue, by Gordon Cohn ("Kolin Avenue: Fragment of a Lifetime's Memories," *CJH*, Winter, 2017), describes Galler's: "A soda fountain on your right...booth on the left in which to enjoy your seventeen-cent milk shake...or your malt, soda, or sundae for about a nickel more. You passed a glass case stocked with [gift items] before reaching the pharmacy at the back of the store... The corner boys filled the booths each night...For a few months early in my teens I did service as a soda jerk at Galler's earning something like fifty cents an hour."



Irving Paul, the owner of Paul's Drugstore, with his wife, Florence

photo courtesy of Jacqueline Gerson

Barbara Weisman Morgenstern shared her childhood memories of Galler's. She said, "There was a blue liquid bubbling in a glass container in the window identifying the store as a pharmacy. ...I loved pistachios. ...[There was] a machine that delivered pistachio nuts for a nickel ...Mr. Galler was considered a medical person. My mother took me to him when I cut my chin on the monkey bars at Mason School. ...I lived down the block and passed [Galler's] every day. [It] was a very important part of the neighborhood."

The pharmacy profession has changed dramatically. Interviewees testified to the changes and the ways they adapted.

Elliot Linsky received his pharmacy degree from the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy in 1970. He apprenticed to two pharmacist partners, Kirshenbaum and Kirschenbaum (unrelated), owners of an established pharmacy at its original location at 2337 W. Devon Avenue since the 1940s. The owners were soon ready to retire, and Elliot was able to enter a new partnership and buy the business. He stayed in business until 1995. "The business got harder, cut-throat. ...I had to raise prices to survive, but competitors wouldn't let you. ...I tried to sell [the business] but had to close it." Elliot remembers the many pharmacies along Devon, from east of Western to west of California, during the prosperous years. One of them was Miller's Pharmacy at 2032 W. Devon, owned from 1960 to the late 1980s by Sheldon (Shelly) Miller, Bradley's older brother whom I met in June 2024. (He died in November, 2024.) Elliot admired Shelly's work ethic. "He was the hardest working person I ever met," Elliot said.

After Elliot closed his business, he wanted to continue to practice his profession. The pharmacy he owned and The ARK had been on the same block of Devon, so it was natural for him to take a job as The ARK's pharmacist. Elliot worked at The ARK's new location, at 6450 N. California, until 2020. He said, "That was the best part of my career. ...It was a joy...helping people...figuring out how to get medications that were too expensive... keeping the pharmacy stocked." He is using his retirement years to volunteer and travel.

My final interviewees, Maish Rosen and Steven Rosenberg, represent a pharmacy tradition spanning almost 90 years. Maish and Steven both "grew up in

continued on page 16

Chicago: An Incubator for the American Dream

continued from front page

On the S. S. *Vaderland*, Dwosche carried a set of silver kiddush cups—one for each child in descending size, with my father’s the size of a thimble—and ornate silver Shabbat candlesticks made from melted Russian rubles. These precious heirlooms are the only proof that Joseph had once been a prosperous merchant in Mlawa, where he owned a tannery to process Siberian pelts of beaver, fox, and sable to sell wholesale to small shops in and beyond their shtetl. Joseph’s tannery abutted the dense and tangled Polish forest near Mlawa, called the Wrubliwo woods, and used water from the Mlawka River that extended for miles past the Prussian border. My father’s cousin, the novelist Joseph Opatoshu, who left Mlawa in 1903 to settle in New York, possibly spurred by the infamous Kishinev Pogrom of that year, used this region for the setting of his 1938 book *“In Polish Woods.”* I like to imagine that the love for literature that impelled me to become a professor of English derives from some common ancestral thread that Opatoshu and I inherited from the maternal side, for his mother and my maternal grandmother were sisters. My grandfather Joseph was 27 and already an experienced salesman when, during a visit to a small shop on the commercial street in Mlawa to sell his furs, he met a shy 18-year-old girl behind the counter named Dwosche Anyz, the daughter of the shopkeeper, who became his wife and the mother of 10 children, two of whom she left in Mlawa’s Jewish cemetery, where their headstones were turned to paving stones by the Nazis.

Joseph never returned to this level of financial comfort, nor did any of his children, except my father, who exceeded them beyond any imaginary vision formed as he plied his paper route on the mean streets of Chicago. As Joseph never mastered English, and was too old to learn a new trade, he was forced to take to Chicago’s streets as a ragman, calling out in Yiddish for old clothes and other detritus to manufacture pulp paper and cardboard. My father’s older brothers worked in Chicago’s clothing and shoe factories, and their sisters in milliners’ shops, forgoing high school and college education. The eldest, Sarah, left home in 1918 to marry her first cousin Isadore “Izzy” Kurtzman, a union arranged in the Old Country and consummated in Nebraska, where Izzy’s branch of the family ended up by the same random forces that placed his cousins in Illinois. When my husband was President of Brandeis, we learned from historian Jonathan Sarna that the prohibition against marriage to a first cousin was ignored by some Jewish families in Europe, a refutation of incest taboo commonly observed by the goyim. Sarah and Izzy followed the sun to the San Fernando Valley where they invested in a chicken ranch. When the Great Depression struck, and egg prices plummeted, they lost their ranch and moved into a rented apartment in downtown LA. Izzy went from independent farmer to factory laborer, the same life he had endured in Nebraska, although at least now he was comforted by perpetual sunshine. Sam married Pauline Berman, a transplant from Terespol, Poland, 125 miles east of Warsaw and just outside Brest, and the newlyweds set up their household at 1017 N. Rockwell Street.



Family photo, circa 1950. The author’s grandfather is seated center, and her father is standing far right.

Perhaps that is why, in the winter of 1920, 10 years into their American experiment, the family pooled their resources to secure a mortgage on a three-story walk-up apartment building of six units at 1025 N. Rockwell Street, near what is now called ‘Ukrainian Village.’ Joseph, now 60, and Dwosche, her name anglicized to Dora, now 51, still had six unmarried children under their roof. Jake, a 23-year-old tailor, would share one of the units with Abe, a 22-year-old cutter in a clothing factory, while Feige, now Faye, a 20-year-old milliner and Ariel, now Anna, an 18-year-old stenographer in a law office, would pair off as roommates in another. Dora and Joseph would keep Chaim, now Phil, age 15, and the littlest Ben, 12, in their downstairs unit. The nice-sized flats were arranged symmetrically on either side of an exterior stairwell that led from the street, leaving its bottom stairs exposed to the elements. The other tenants were immigrants from Poland or Russia who spoke Yiddish, including Jake Ordover, 34, a fruit peddler, who lived with his wife Yedda, 32, and their four children, and Max Schowel, a 35-year-old

tailor, who still lived with his mother Anna, 50. The Kurtzmans' plan was to slowly pay off the mortgage while collecting rents from the other apartments.

When they took ownership in March, Chicago was still reeling from the race riots of the previous July and August in which 38 died – 23 African Americans and 15 white people – and 527 were injured and 1,000 African Americans lost their homes from arson. My father never forgot the burning smell of the fire that carried through the summer air. He could see the ashes that darkened the skies, and it was then that he determined somehow to escape Chicago as Sarah and Izzy had. What followed was the bitter winter of 1919–1920, when 32 inches of snow clogged the streets and crashed through roofs, harsh conditions that held the city in a relentless grip. Snow blew into the stairwell of their building, melted and then refroze in an invisible layer of ice. Returning to their first-floor apartment from visiting an upstairs tenant, Dwosche tumbled down two flights of the ice-encrusted steps and lay in the freezing cold until another tenant found her shivering at the bottom of the steps, unable to move. Her large family were at work, school, and synagogue. My father returned home after dark to find the apartment eerily empty. He had been practicing chanting Torah for his upcoming June bar mitzvah, which was meant to be a joyous if rather frugal celebration. He learned of the accident from their upstairs neighbor Mrs. Schowel, who found him sitting on the stairs, also shivering. Dwosche lay immobile in her bed for months; her spinal cord had been severed, and she was paralyzed from the waist down. The intimate handling of her lifeless body fell to 18-year-old Anna, who suspended her position as a stenographer in a law office, while 20-year-old Faye curtailed her regular Saturdays at the milliner's shop to cover the weekends.



The author (second from right) with her family at their Betty Grable mansion, circa 1966

Joseph sought solace in the nearby Orthodox synagogue to pray for her recovery. As his older brothers and sisters huddled in the living room, speaking Yiddish in hushed tones that were sometimes punctuated by loud outbursts, my father felt the loneliness of the extra child whose meager contribution to the family pot from his paper route seemed inadequate. In the months before his bar mitzvah, returning alone in the dark from cheder, he walked quickly past the room where Dwosche lay, as if her accident were a curse that had followed them from Europe to ruin their chance of happiness. This disregard of Dwosche weighed on his conscience for the rest of his life. What saved his sanity was the basketball team at Northwest Division High School, now Roberto Clemente Community High School, two blocks from the former apartment on Leavitt Street. The family transferred Dwosche to a public hospital outside of Cook County, where she died alone in December 1925, another casualty of crossing the sea to an unknown land. Inserted in Dwosche's headstone at Waldheim Cemetery is a ceramic image in black and white showing an elegant lady wearing a black high-collared dress with appliqued lace flowers, her dark hair pulled back in a demure bun, and with a delicate gold rope chain at her neck, its strands gathered into a heart, with tiny gold hearts dangling from each ear.

My father never saw her again, nor did his brothers, for the previous June of 1925, when my father turned 18, the four remaining brothers left Joseph with Faye and Anna and lit out for Los Angeles, with a plan to open their own business. They traveled west by northwest, stopping to take in the majesty of Grand Tetons and the cerulean circle of Lake Tahoe. From there, they took the Sonora Pass through Tuolumne County and Yosemite, filling their souls with wonder at this sublime landscape. Then they understood the endowment their parents had given them unawares, when they abandoned their shtetl with its muddy streets and thatched-roof hovels.

Five years later, Joseph was again plunged into disaster as the Depression hit, and his tenants were delinquent on their rent. To make matters worse, 15 inches of snow fell in Chicago between December 15 and 17, 1929, followed by another 19 inches on March 25 and 26, 1930, resulting in massive damage to their building that required roof and pipe repairs, replastering and re-wallpapering. Joseph could not allow the building to deteriorate, for he did not want his tenants to suffer, but the costs mounted. He hoped to prevail upon his mortgage holders for mercy, but they themselves were victims of the Depression and forced him into court, where he was found to be in default. The building was sold for a fraction of its value, and Joseph, Faye, and Anna, by

continued on following page

Chicago: An Incubator for the American Dream

continued from preceding page

necessity, followed the family West. The brothers had had five years to get settled in Los Angeles, opening Kurtzman Brothers' Clothing Factory, where my father worked as a salesman. With his lithe athleticism and dark good looks, he made extra money by becoming a hooper in the Meglin Kiddies dance troupe, taking up the very profession of hoofers Dick Powell and Joan Blondell, who built the house he would one day inhabit. He danced and performed, and on days off, rode the streetcar to Santa Monica to stare at the ocean, the scent of orange blossoms filling his nostrils. He must have truly believed that he could slough off the past like a lizard slipping out of its skin, ditching not only Chicago and Poland, but also the weighty heritage of the Jewish people that went back 5,000 years. Splitting off from his brothers after the war, he opened textile and clothing factories in Japan to sell men's suits in bulk to a nation of vets returning to the office.



Ceramic photo of Dwoshke Kurtzman at Waldheim Cemetery

Sarah and Izzy had been among the 33 Jewish families in Los Angeles who had organized themselves with the intention of founding a new synagogue, and raised the funds for what became Beth Jacob Congregation, where men and women sat together in a less strict version of Jewish prayer. It was at Beth Jacob that Joseph Kurtzman found his final refuge, praying twice a day and studying Talmud with the rabbi and scholarly congregants. When Jewish families moved further west to the Pico–Robertson district, Beth Jacob built a new building on Olympic Blvd. and reasserted the strict Orthodox custom of separate sections for men and women. For the final time, Joseph transferred the sacred routine he learned as a boy in Zuromin, the Polish shtetl near the Prussian border where he was born in 1865 to Mosiek, a tradesman, and Haja, née Szostak, his wife. A living link to the old-world shtetl life of Europe, a reminder of the distance Jewish immigrants and refugees had traveled, Joseph was considered a tzaddik, a learned saint. When Joseph let go of his earthly incarnation in 1953, he was buried in a special place of honor in Agudath Achim, LA's first Jewish cemetery, adjacent to the Hasidic Clevelander Rebbe, the holiest of men, also a transplant from a world forever lost.

Reflections on Learning About the Jewish History of Humboldt Park

continued from front page

I was walking down a different street in the neighborhood and saw another gorgeous, old building with Hebrew writing on the front and old, broken stained-glass windows. This had to have been another synagogue. At this point, I realized it couldn't be a coincidence. I decided that I would get to the bottom of this, one way or another. So I asked a librarian friend how I could go about researching this. He helpfully suggested that I Google it. Fast forward several Google searches later: I found myself poring over a copy of *"The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb,"* by Irving Cutler, with a historical map of Jewish institutions in the Humboldt Park neighborhood. I was in awe, suddenly seeing history all around me. I realized there was another huge synagogue that I had never noticed but biked by every single day on my way to work. I noticed faded writing at the top of old buildings, such as Herzl Community Home, that I hadn't seen before.

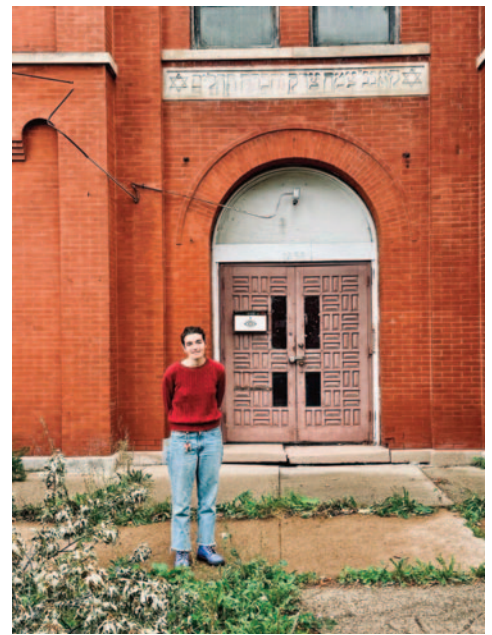
Between 1890 and the 1960s, Humboldt Park was a Jewish neighborhood, peaking in the 1930s with about 30,000 Jews, representing 30 to 40 percent of the total population. Unique compared to other Jewish neighborhoods, Humboldt Park was always very diverse: Poles, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Italians, and other immigrants lived alongside Jews, who were relatively less religious. The Jews of Humboldt Park were known to be Socialists, Communists, Bundists, Yiddishists, and anarchists, often spewing their takes on news and politics



The facade of Humboldt Park's now-defunct Austro-Galician synagogue, the first Jewish congregation in that neighborhood, erected in 1911 at 1357 N. California Ave.

from literal soapboxes on street corners. *Landshaftsmen* would picnic in the park, and the entire community would practice *taschlich*—the High Holiday ritual of casting one’s sins over the water—in the Humboldt Lagoon. As I learned more and more, I was struck by the ways in which my life in Humboldt Park followed their footsteps. My roommate was a union activist, and I, a peace activist. The last three years, we had hosted a Yom Kippur break fast in the park as the sun was setting over the lagoon. I knew of three other Jewish households just on my street. I suddenly felt the dizzying nostalgia of history repeating itself.

So where did all the Jews go? As I told my librarian friend about all the old synagogues I had been visiting, he commented that a synagogue-turned-church felt eerie to him. I understood; on my mom’s side, my great-grandparents survived the Holocaust, and on my dad’s side, they emigrated in the face of pogroms. The synagogues and community centers they had left behind were largely destroyed during World War II. Across history, synagogues have been turned into churches as part of the subjugation of Jews. But that was not the case in Humboldt Park. Many of the synagogues had been Lutheran churches before they were synagogues, purchased by congregations in the early 1900s. As the Jewish community shifted to Albany Park, Rogers Park, and the suburbs, these gorgeous buildings, while repurposed as churches, continue their life as centers for prayer and community. As a proud Diasporist, I see this evolution and constant transformation as beautiful, and as evidence that we make our homes everywhere, carrying on our diverse Jewish traditions. But in all my reading, I still wasn’t able to get to the bottom of why the Jewish community had left Humboldt Park. Luckily, through the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, I was able to get in touch with Ed Mazur, a retired historian who had been raised in Humboldt Park in the 1950s.



The author in front of Humboldt Park’s now-defunct Zemak Zedek congregation

On a sunny September day, Ed picked me up and took me around Humboldt Park as he remembered it. He showed me the spots where all the kids would play baseball, the types of brick apartment buildings that working-class Jews lived in, and a corner with a new development that used to house a corner store, famous for its five-cent “Mel Sandwich”: rye bread, mustard, and a thinly sliced onion. Ed’s memory and knowledge of the neighborhood are vast, and I learned so much from his lived experience. According to Ed, his family left Humboldt Park so he could attend a better high school and they could live in a neighborhood considered more middle class: Rogers Park. This seemed to be consistent with why many Jews left. Unlike other neighborhoods, such as Lawndale and East Garfield Park, which were redlined by racist lending policies and predatory contract buying (for a great book on this, check out “*Family Properties*” by Beryl Satter), Humboldt Park had a slower exodus; people moved out of the neighborhood to follow better job and education opportunities and as a burgeoning Puerto Rican community moved in. Contrary to the European history of Jews being forced out, Ed didn’t experience much antisemitism growing up in Chicago.

Nowadays, when I walk in the park on a warm fall afternoon, it’s being put to the same use I imagine it always has been. There are friend groups picnicking, Puerto Rican community groups playing free music, families out on swan boats, barbecues, food trucks, and events all summer long. At the same time, rather than families all coming out to sleep on the lawn on hot summer nights, as Ed said they used to do back in the day, there are people who live in tent encampments, evidence of the rapid gentrification that has inflated the cost of living to an unaffordable level. Yet I am proud to live in a neighborhood where Jesse Fuentes, our progressive Chicago Alderperson, works with grassroots organizations to try and find housing for these folks, and activists work on preserving Puerto Rican culture and history as resistance to gentrification, continuing the progressive culture that has always existed in Humboldt Park. The ruptures between Jews and other progressives that were created by McCarthyism, redlining, and economic divides are beginning to heal, and Jewish activism is becoming once again an integral part of the leftist landscape, especially as young Jews return to the city.

One evening, as I was coming home from retracing the steps of history in my neighborhood, I glanced up at our mezuzah, lovingly handmade by a friend. I suddenly noticed that above it were two holes in the doorframe at a diagonal slant, perfectly lined up with the mezuzah. Amazed, I looked in all the other doorways in the house and found evidence of two other “mezuzah scars” on bedroom doorways. Our house is an old greystone, probably built in the 1890s. And though I wasn’t able to find the building records, I now

continued on page 22

My Son, the Policeman: More Tales from the Shomrim Society. David Welbel Part I

CJH Editor Robert Nagler Miller continues the series in which he interviews local Jewish law enforcement officers—members of the Shomrim Society of Illinois—about their experiences in a profession not known to attract a large number of Jews. Founded in 1959, the Shomrim is a professional organization for Jewish first responders, including police, sheriffs, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and paramedics. The Illinois chapter is part of the National Conference of Shomrim Societies. In this issue, Nagler Miller speaks to retired Chicago Police Department Sergeant David Welbel. Part II of Mr. Welbel’s interview will appear in the spring 2025 issue of *CJH*.

How did you decide on a career in law enforcement?

I wanted to be a police officer from a young age. Before that, at the age of 6 or 7, I was spending endless hours with my dad, who owned a mom-and-pop laundromat. I would watch him take apart broken washers and somehow manage to fix them by cannibalizing other non-repairable washers and using them for spare parts. I helped where I could—by handing him the tools that he asked for as if I were a surgical nurse and he were the surgeon. When the operation was a success, we would both yell out and applaud each other and move on to the next surgery.

The other career I contemplated for a short time was being a songwriter. (It didn’t last very long). Again, when I was very young, about 8 years old, my father bought me a transistor radio. I recall getting a six-transistor radio while my older brother received the better, more expensive eight-transistor. I was a bit jealous, but, then again, he was five years older. I loved listening to my radio and, of course, the music of the early 60s. Hence, the vision of being a songwriter.

The laundromat was called the Marshfield Laundry, located at 3352 N. Marshfield in Chicago, just south of Roscoe Street. My parents were immigrants and Holocaust survivors; both had been interned in Auschwitz. I would spend an inordinate amount of time at the laundromat, as my parents either could not afford a babysitter or were unwilling to spend the money on one. I always said about my parents, “If they made a nickel, they somehow managed to put a dime in the bank.” Consequently, if, after school, I did not come straight home, where my older brother, Michael, would have the responsibility to keep an eye on me until my parents returned from work, I would be at the laundromat with them.



As a member of the Chicago Police Department’s intelligence unit, Welbel (second from left) served as a bodyguard to visiting dignitaries, including Princess Diana.

During the summers, I would go with them every day into the terrible heat of a non-air-conditioned, sweltering laundry. I mention all this, because it somewhat answers the question of why law enforcement. My parents only did laundry. It was a drop-off service: They washed customers’ dirty clothes and dried, folded, and bundled them for pick-up. They provided separate shirt and dry-cleaning services, which they farmed out. The shirt service was provided by a company called Perfect Shirt Service. The owner and driver of the small panel truck that picked up the shirts and delivered them was Al Edelstein.

Al was a very delightful character, always joking with my parents. He gave me so much attention that my favorite part of the day was when he would show up. His stories were always intriguing, especially when he spoke and told stories about his only child, a Chicago cop named Danny. I could never get enough of Al and his stories. There were days when he would

say, “Come on, kid. Want to go with me today?” There were even days when he would swing by our house early in the morning and I would spend the whole day with Al. The truck had only a driver’s seat so I would ride on the flat service of the passenger side dashboard or lie down behind him on the laundry sacks of dirty shirts he had picked up and sometimes fall asleep back there. The one thing I could never get enough of was when Al talked about his son. When Al would go on vacation, Danny would fill in for him, and then I got to meet the real deal. Danny was an impressive man. To me, at the time, he was big and strong, a jokester just like his dad. Little did I know at the time that I would become a cop and work alongside Danny in the same police district. Thinking back, I believe it was Al’s stories and Danny himself that influenced my decision to become a police officer.

Did your family support your decision; was there any pushback, or both?

My parents always wanted and expected me to go further with my education and become a professional. A doctor was there first choice, maybe a lawyer or a CPA. I had a hard time convincing them that it was not in the cards for me. I was never a great student. I managed to graduate with a bachelor’s degree and had a year of graduate studies under my belt before hitting a brick wall. I couldn’t pass a statistics course and dropped out of my master’s program in criminal justice. To use one of Danny Edelstein’s lines, “I graduated right at the top of my class. If you took the list and turned it upside down, I would be at the very top.”

I took the police exam in 1975—at the time, 35,000 applicants took it—but did not get hired until February 1982. Military and Vietnam veterans were getting preferential treatment for hiring at the time (as they should have). My college degree had no sway at all; I scored well enough on the exam to get on the eligibility list, but I had to wait my turn. I got married in 1979 to my lovely wife, Rita. At the time, I was selling real estate and going nowhere, since the market dried up when interest mortgage rates shot up to 21 percent. When I got the call from the police department, it could not have come at a better time. My wife, however, said, “I’m not going to be married to a cop.”

Long story short: I reported to the police academy on my assigned date and time and, while waiting in line, I heard her words kept ringing in my ear. Maybe she was right. Maybe my parents were right. It seemed like no one dear to me wanted me to become a cop. I do not think my in-laws were crazy about the idea either, but they kept that opinion to themselves. There I stood, having waited almost seven years to be there. I picked up my bag, stepped out of line, got in my car, and drove home. I decided the family was probably right, that being a cop was a kid’s pipe dream and not reality.

Several weeks went by. I was talking with a friend, Morris Kaplan, who was a dentist. Morris asked me if I regretted walking out of my physical at the academy, and I said, without hesitation, that I did. He told me that he played cards with the police superintendent, who was one of his patients. He asked, “Do you want me to ask him if he could have you get back in?” I said, “Absolutely.” A few days later, I receive a call from the police academy doctor: “Is this David Welbel?” “Yes, it is,” I responded. “I don’t know who you know,” he continued, “but if you still want to have your physical and get into the next class, you’ll have your ass down here tomorrow morning at 0800 hours.” I was there the next morning and met with the doctor, who happened to be Jewish. When I told him I was Jewish as well, he said, “Why would a Jew want to come on the police department?” Well, the rest is history.

What Jewish values led you to your career?

I believe the struggle that Jews have experienced throughout their history of persecution has led to what today’s Jew has become. We have been on the wrong side of that fence forever. I grew up in the shadow of the Holocaust. My mother survived 33 months in the hellhole of Auschwitz. She was only one of a handful of female survivors among thousands of single women to enter Auschwitz in March 1942. My father was a *Sonderkommando*



Welbel (left) with Chicago Police Department Chaplain Moshe Wolf (center) and fellow Shomrim officer Bruce Rottner at a Shomrim dinner

My Son, the Policeman

continued from preceding page

for 28 months; he entered Auschwitz in December 1942. His job was to remove the bodies from the gas chambers and then burn them in the crematoria.

Man's inhumanity to man was something that was always on my mind. I had learned early on that I had no grandparents and so few relatives because they were butchered by the bestiality and depravity of men. As Jews, we know all too well the negativity associated with the downside and hurtfulness of hate. Since we have experienced hate and great cruelty so often, we have come to appreciate compassion that much more.

Jewish people have a reputation for being kind, benevolent, charitable, and showing grace. I've always said that Jews are a giving people; we give to not only Jewish charities, but to all charities. I see myself as part of that description, and I believe I lived it during my career as a police officer. I was always there for my fellow officers and, later on, my subordinates, as well as our community.



Welbel (center), with his father, Eliezer, an Auschwitz survivor (right), and mentor Danny Edelstein

Early on in my career, I had the pleasure of meeting a man who greatly influenced my time on the CPD, our department Chaplain, Rabbi Moshe Wolf. When you look up the word *tzadik* in the Yiddish dictionary, you will find his picture (joking, of course). Rabbi Wolf continues to be the department Chaplain to this very day. Every officer knows who he is and wants him to conduct any and all of their affairs—whether it's a funeral, marriage, or whatever. They all say, "We want the Rabbi." Mind you, we have about a dozen chaplains of every denomination. The Rabbi is a righteous Chaplain who treats everyone the same, regardless of religious affiliation. He is also an imposing figure, standing at six feet and five inches and weighing in at 250 pounds. He is an eighth degree black belt, a kickboxer, and a marksman. Maybe that is why he relates so well with the troops. When you can't find the Rabbi, go to the nearest police range. He's probably there. At the annual Shomrim lox-and-bagel shoot, Rabbi Wolf always came in first place. He recently stopped competing because, as he put it, "I have no more room for the trophies."

Were there other members of your family who were law enforcement officers?

No, I was the first, but I believe that I was the impetus or, at least, an influence on my niece and nephew entering law enforcement. My nephew, Daniel, is a member of the Cook County Sheriff's office; my niece, Cheryl, is a detective with the Chicago Police Department, assigned to the bomb and arson unit as a bomb technician. They are my brother's two children.

Why did you join Shomrim, and what does being a Jewish law enforcement officer mean to you?

When I was in the police academy, I was approached by my traffic instructor, Louis Kane. He came up to me and said, "I hear you are Jewish." After I confirmed that I was, he said that he was, too, and that he wanted to introduce me to the Shomrim Society, which, until then, I had never heard of.

I cannot recall exactly when I went to my first Shomrim meeting; I believe it was at the Pickle Barrel restaurant on Howard Street and Western Avenue. It was a Jewish-style deli, and the food was great. There had to be about 25 to 30 people in attendance, including Howard Patinkin, who, at the time, was a District Commander. The crowd included Chicago, county, suburban, and state police law enforcement officials. I was introduced as a new member still in the academy and felt very welcomed and impressed by the camaraderie. Rank had little meaning at these meetings. We were friends first and all shared the Jewish faith, which was an extremely strong bond.

As it turns out, after my probationary period was over—at the time, it was one year—I was assigned to the 20th Police District. This is where Danny Edelstein worked as the warrant officer and Howard Patinkin as District



Welbel also served as a bodyguard to Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal during his stay in Chicago.

Commander. I knew that I had been assigned to that district thanks to Danny's influence with Howard.

So here I am, a full-fledged police officer, a member of the CPD, and a union member. By this time, I had a number of Shomrim meetings and events under my belt. Howard and I chatted as friends and Jewish brothers of law enforcement, not just as police officer and District Commander. The camaraderie, guidance of experienced officers, and bonds that I had built with these men and women of all ranks were undeniably so valuable that they set the path for the rest of my career. The unit secretary in the 20th was Bernie Schuman, who ran District operations and served as the right hand to the Commander, Anything getting done in the District had to go through Bernie, who was also a Shomrim member.

During my 29-year career, I served as Shomrim president for two terms. I retired 14 years ago from CPD as a Sergeant, having served directly under my dear friend and Shomrim member Bruce Rottner when he was a Commander and then Deputy Chief. Bruce had a tremendous reputation for being a good police officer and a highly regarded and respected boss. When I was promoted to Sergeant and had to leave my very desirable position as an investigator in the Intelligence Unit of the Organized Crime Division, I was assigned to the 24th District, where I had once served as a patrolman. After being in intelligence for 10 years, I had forgotten how to operate

back in the patrol division, but like riding a bike, it all came back to me. Bruce was more than helpful with my adjustment to my new role as a supervisor.

Welcome to New CJHS Board Member Raymond Asher

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society is pleased to welcome to its Board longtime Chicago attorney Raymond Asher. A graduate of Bradley University and the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law, Asher has specialized in worker's compensation litigation for almost four decades. He founded his own firm more than 30 years ago.

A sports aficionado, Asher is a former certified National Football League Players Association agent. He has represented professional hockey and football players, including members of the Chicago Blackhawks and Chicago Bears.

His involvement in youth athletics goes back for many years. He was a Little League President and coach, and he served as head baseball coach of the Ida Crown Jewish Academy High School team from 2009 to 2019 and as assistant baseball coach of the Holy Trinity High School team from 2019 to 2020. He wrote about his experiences as a coach for Chicago Jewish History in 2024.

For more than 20 years, he has been the President of the Little Heroes Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation, an affiliate of Lurie Children's Hospital and Comer Children's Hospital at the University of Chicago. Little Heroes has raised more than \$2 million since its inception.

Asher grew up in Calumet City in Chicago's southern suburbs. For many years, he has lived in Skokie, where he and his wife, Elaine, raised their two sons.



Asher (far left) and his wife, Elaine, with their sons Avi (left) and Yoni

How a Jewish Chicago Boy Created an 80-Day Sensation

By Joel Levin

The 1946 Broadway musical "*Around the World in 80 Days*" was a colossal failure. The adaptation of Jules Verne's beloved novel garnered mediocre reviews and few theatergoers. Despite music by Cole Porter, lavish scenery, and the presence of star actor Orson Welles, audiences were not impressed by this version of the 1872 tale of a "proper" Englishman who wagers his fortune to circumnavigate the globe in 80 days. Broadway producer Michael Todd lost his entire \$40,000 investment on the endeavor; total losses were over \$300,000. The play quietly closed after eight weeks at New York City's Adelphia Theater.

Todd, who loved classic literature, never abandoned his fascination with the Englishman, Phileas Fogg, and his trusted valet, Passepartout, as they race across the globe. Much later, Todd would remark, in the gambler's lingo he favored, "It took a giant three-horse parlay" to create his concept of Verne's saga. That parlay consumed 10 years and required the efforts of over 68,000 people throughout the world before it hit pay dirt.

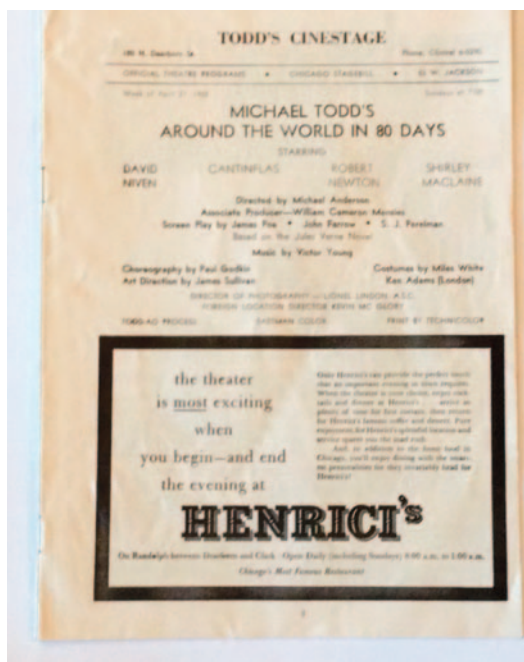
So began the journey of the movie version of the stage debacle.

With the advent of television in the 1950s, the movie industry needed to find inventive methods to attract and keep audiences. Scientific research and creativity would be marshaled to reach new heights to meet the challenge. In the middle of all this action were Todd and his adult son, Michael Todd, Jr.

The movie "*This Is Cinerama*" opened to box office success and critical acclaim on September 30, 1952, at the Broadway Theater in New York City, ushering in the era of wide, deeply curved screens that utilized original technology, including three cameras, three projectors, and "surround sound."

Michael Todd and Lowell Thomas, famous radio commentator and world traveler, were in a business partnership during these developments. They directed and produced "*This Is Cinerama*." Todd and his son filmed 11 of the 13 sequences for the movie.

"*This Is Cinerama*" grossed over \$20 million while playing at just 17 theaters during its two-and-a-half-year run. Despite its triumph, Todd predicted trouble. "Cinerama" essentially was a travelogue of interesting places to visit, but it lacked a real story or characters.



Todd envisioned filming his own plot-driven, heroic tale, just as soon as he created a brand-new camera system for the entire motion picture industry. After posing the question "Who is the Einstein of the optical racket?" to everyone he deemed helpful, he was finally referred to Dr. Brian O'Brien, director of the Institute of Optics at the University of Rochester.

Within a few months of their meeting in the fall of 1952, Dr. O'Brien, on leave of absence from Rochester, along with Todd and Walter Stewart, president of American Optical Company of Southbridge, Massachusetts, directed a team of over 150 research specialists and engineers. Their goal was simple, but immensely complicated: Correct all the technical problems of "*Cinerama*" by combining three cameras into one, unifying three projectors into one, and producing specially made 65 mm film that would accommodate the new equipment. The giant Dutch electrical manufacturing firm, Phillips, was employed to construct the projector.

Magna Theatre Corporation was formed in March 1953 to finance this \$20 million enterprise and reap its rewards. Distinguished people were recruited to serve on the board of directors, including Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II, America's preeminent composer and lyricist. Rodgers and Hammerstein promised Todd they would consider his new process for their stage musical "*Oklahoma*," which was soon to become a motion picture.

Dr. O'Brien completed his assignment in six months. The new camera was nicknamed "Bug Eye," with a lens nine inches in diameter. The system was called Todd-AO in honor of Michael Todd and American Optical Company.

"Bug Eye" and the Phillips projector were successfully demonstrated at a private screening for select millionaires at the Regent Theatre in Buffalo on August 14, 1953. Rodgers and Hammerstein immediately decided to film "Oklahoma" in Todd-AO, the first motion picture to use the new process. The Todd-AO Corporation was formed the following year to work in conjunction with Magna Theatre Corporation.

Todd had assumed he would produce and direct "Oklahoma." When Rodgers and Hammerstein refused to relinquish any artistic control to him, Todd's hand-picked board of directors agreed with the powerful musical team. The showman was now the stunned owner of a multimillion-dollar camera system without a show to film.

Rodgers and Hammerstein, however, would not have the last word on Todd's movie ambitions. After all, Todd was street-smart, tough, and endlessly resourceful. He learned from past mistakes.

Born Avrom Hirsch Goldbogen, on June 22, 1909, in Minneapolis, Todd was the son of a Polish rabbi. At 9, he moved with his parents, Chaim and Sophia, and seven siblings to the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago, where Chaim assumed a position at the small Beth Ahren Congregation on Crystal Street.

Avrom's limited formal education consisted of Wicker Park Grammar School and a brief stay at Tuley High School. At his elementary school's playground, young Avrom developed a fondness for gambling while shooting craps with his best friend, Leonard "Fat" Libitsky. (Libitsky was also destined for show business fame as comedian and entertainer Jack E. Leonard.)

Michael Todd, born Avrom Hirsch Goldbogen, was the son of a rabbi who led a small congregation—Beth Ahren—in Chicago's Wicker Park neighborhood. When Todd died, tragically, in a plane crash in 1958, at the age of 48, he was buried next to his father at Waldheim Cemetery. His gravestone includes his original Jewish name, with "Michael Todd" written beneath it.



Newsboy, soda jerk, carnival barker, and window-display assistant were only a few of Avrom's jobs. At 13, he became the youngest apprentice pharmacist in Illinois history. Florsheim Shoe Factory fired him for submitting so many suggestions that his supervisors felt threatened. He started and closed a bricklaying college after the Bricklayers Union refused to accept its graduates.

In 1927, Avrom and his brother Frank operated a \$2 million-a-year construction business, building new homes in Chicago. The Great Depression came and left Avrom penniless—but not out of ideas.

When Avrom's father died in 1931, he adopted his two-year-old son's first name, Michael, as a sign of devotion to the boy. The last name "Todd" was based upon his childhood nickname "Toat," a play on his youthful mispronunciation of the word "coat."

The Chicago World's Fair (1933–1934), also known as the Century of Progress Exposition, was the entry point for Todd's show business debut. He developed a risqué—and risky—act that replaced Sally Rand's infamous fan dance. The skit, called "The Moth and Flame," involved a dancing woman circling an open flame. It was immensely popular. By 1939, Todd had four crowd-pleasing attractions at the New York World's Fair, and he was well on his way to producing several Broadway hits (and some flops).

continued on following page

How a Jewish Chicago Boy Created an 80-Day Sensation

continued from preceding page

A partial résumé of Todd's Broadway productions included "*The Hot Mikado*," with Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and an all-Black cast (1939); "*Star and Garter*," with Gypsy Rose Lee (1941); "*Something for the Boys*," with Ethel Merman (1943); "*Mexican Hayride*," with June Havoc and songs by Cole Porter (1944); "*Up in Central Park*" (1945); and a modern version of "*Hamlet*," with Maurice Evans (1946).

The Michael Todd Theatre Cafe opened in Chicago on Christmas Day 1940 near the northwest corner of Clark Street and Lawrence Avenue in a building that once housed a jai alai fronton and the Rainbow Gardens Ballroom. In typical Todd extravagance, it boasted a 60-foot stage, 100 entertainers, reviews from the New York World's Fair, a 400-foot balcony bar with 25 bartenders, two dance bands, 190 waitresses, and seating for 3,700 patrons. The interior decor was a patriotic red, white and blue painted on a field of silver stars by 400 painters. It was an immediate success.

Shortly after it opened, Frank "The Enforcer" Nitti, Al Capone's worthy successor, and two associates visited Todd at his office in the Oriental Theatre building, 32 West Randolph. Nitti made a "partnership offer" for the cafe. Todd's immediate and simple reply was, "I'm walking." The mobster let him walk away unharmed. Nitti and his crew were now in control of the nightclub, minus Todd's name. A magnificent entertainment palace would close before its second Christmas, a victim of police raids for illegal activities. Todd maintained his independence and integrity.

On the eve of World War II, Todd was severely beaten in downtown Chicago by three Jewish attackers. They had gotten word that he was secretly helping Gerald L. K. Smith, a noted antisemite and leader of the America First Party, obtain an assembly hall for his followers. A few hours later, those same assailants were apologizing and giving a warm welcome to a badly bruised Todd at the Covenant Club, 10 North Dearborn. Todd had been secretly working for the FBI to procure incriminating information on Smith. He had just planted microphones in the curtains of the Masonic Hall before he was attacked. By no coincidence, the Masonic Hall that Todd provided Smith was located at 32 West Randolph, the Oriental Theatre building, where he knew every nook, cranny, and curtain fold.

Jump ahead 10 years—to 1954. Broadway theater impresario Todd was changing artistic fields with his newly built, multimillion dollar Todd-AO movie camera system. In searching for a timeless literary classic to film, he decided to visit London, where "*Around the World in 80 Days*" truly begins and ends.

Sir Alexander Korda, an old friend and the well-respected head of London Films Productions, owned the film rights to "*Around the World in 80 Days*." He cautioned Todd against the project, arguing that it was "too tough and too expensive," but Todd ignored his advice. A contract was finalized, with Korda accepting an upfront payment of \$100,000, plus 10 percent of the gross receipts.

Todd was now able to take his Todd-AO camera with a cast and crew to bring the pages of Jules Verne's book to life. Like Phileas Fogg, Verne's protagonist, the schoolyard gambler from Chicago was betting his fortune on successfully completing a journey around the world. The movie started production in March 1955.

David Niven, established Hollywood actor and British World War II veteran, jumped at the chance to play Phileas Fogg. He jokingly told Todd, "I'd play it for nothing." Internationally famous actor Cantiflas agreed to play Fogg's valet, Passepartout, so long as he could portray him as a Latin American. English actor Robert Newton was selected by Todd for the role of the bumbling Inspector Fix. Hundreds of actresses auditioned for the coveted role of the exotic Princess Aouda. It went to then-little-known actress/dancer Shirley MacLaine.

As Hollywood got word that "*Around the World in 80 Days*" was filming, a stampede of well-known personalities



tried to land cameo roles. In the end, Todd selected 42, including Frank Sinatra, Red Skelton, Marlene Dietrich, Noel Coward, and Edward R. Murrow.

Even in today's era of super-hero blockbuster movies, the task of completing this epic film was awe-inspiring. It was shot in 13 countries, with a total of 112 natural sets, 140 constructed sets, more than 74,000 costumes, and a \$3 million budget that doubled over production time (\$70 million in today's dollars). During the course of the filming, 68,894 people were photographed.

Todd completed the final editing of the movie during the summer of 1956. Victor Young, born in Chicago to a musically talented Jewish family, wrote the film's score.

"*Around the World in 80 Days*" premiered to critical acclaim on October 17, 1956, at the Rivoli Theatre in New York. Todd had strategically scheduled the movie's opening for late 1956 so that it would be eligible for the Academy Awards of 1957.

Todd had a box-office hit. The movie earned five Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Musical Score, which Young won posthumously. (He had died less than a month after the premiere.) Todd's acceptance speech for Best Picture was brief, humble, and heartfelt. He celebrated his honor with Elizabeth Taylor, whom he had married the previous month. Their union, the third for both, made them one of the most famous couples in the world.

Todd personally attended premieres for the movie in New York and Los Angeles. There was only one other city at that time where he wanted to showcase his masterpiece: Chicago, which he always thought of as home.

The Selwyn and Harris Theatres, located on the 100 block of North Dearborn, were home to live theatrical productions from the 1920s until the 1950s. Ethel Barrymore, Charles Laughton, Helen Hayes, and Mae West were among those who graced its stages. By 1956, Todd had purchased both theaters. His son, Michael Todd, Jr., supervised their renovation into first-run movie houses. Bertrand Goldberg, who would later gain fame as the designer of Marina City and other Chicago landmarks, was the Jewish architect in charge of the entire project. The Selwyn Theatre became Todd's Cinestage, while the Harris Theatre was renamed the Michael Todd Theatre.

Sol Polk, president of the Jewish-owned and -operated Polk Bros. appliance stores, purchased \$105,885 worth of tickets to "*Around the World in 80 Days*." He agreed not to use the word "free" in any advertising, since the tickets would be given only to customers purchasing the most expensive appliances.

The Chicago opening of "*Around the World in 80 Days*" took place on April 4, 1957, at Todd's Cinestage in a benefit performance for the English-Speaking Union, a charitable organization.

Eleanor Page reported extensively on the gala in the following day's *Chicago Tribune*: "Gaping onlookers even crowded every inch of the safety island on Dearborn Street, as they waited impatiently for Miss Taylor to arrive with her husband, Mr. Todd." The limousine carrying the prominent couple included Governor and Mrs. William G. Stratton and Mayor and Mrs. Richard J. Daley. Police officers were summoned to escort the distinguished guests into the theater because of the large crowds.

As the official celebration ended, the movie settled into what would be a 90-consecutive week engagement.

Less than one year after this triumphant Chicago premiere, Todd was dead at the age of 48. He had been killed when his private plane crashed in bad weather near Grants, New Mexico. Also killed in the crash were Todd's friend and biographer, Art Cohn, pilot Bill Verner and co-pilot, Tom Barclay. Todd was buried next to his father, Chaim, on March 25, 1958, in Waldheim Cemetery in Forest Park, Illinois.



Michael Todd in 1956, two years before his death in a fatal plane crash

How a Jewish Chicago Boy Created an 80-Day Sensation

continued from preceding page

Todd's legacy is enduring. His wondrous motion picture brought together countless families and loved ones for dazzling entertainment—not only here in Chicago, but in cities and towns around the world.

During his research for this article, author Joel Levin relied upon the following sources:

Books

"*The Nine Lives of Michael Todd*," by Art Cohn, Random House, October, 1958

"*A Valuable Property—The Life Story of Michael Todd*," by Michael Todd, Jr. and Susan McCarthy Todd, Arbor House Publishing Company, 1983

"*Michael Todd's Around the World in 80 Days Almanac*," edited by Art Cohn, Random House, 1956. (promotional book sold only in theaters)

Online

"The Theater: Mantle of Barnum" *Time* magazine, January 6, 1941 (time.com/archive)

"Elizabeth Taylor in Chicago", *Chicago Tribune*, March 23, 2011 (chicagotribune.com)

"Crowds Wait, but Get Peek at Liz Taylor," by Eleanor Page (newspapers.com, *Chicago Tribune*, April 5, 1957)

"Cinestage Theater" (cinematreasures.org/theaters)

"Around the World in 60 Years :Remembering Around the World in 80 Days on its 60th Anniversary by Michael Coate (thedigitalbits.com)

bertrandgoldberg.org

Bertrand Goldberg Project Name Index R&B Archives Revised 01/02/08 [PDF]

"TODD- AO" (widescreen.museum.com)

"The Passing of Mike Todd, Jr." (in70mm.com)

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

continued from page 3

pharmacy" and became pharmacists because of their family experiences. Maish is the son of Abe Rosen ("my biggest influence," he said), the founding owner of Rosen Drugs, opened in 1936 in North Lawndale at Douglas Boulevard and Kedzie Avenue. The Rosen family lived nearby at 3160 Douglas Boulevard and later at Albany and Douglas, near the Marks Nathan Home at 1548 S. Albany. Steven's father owned several drugstores in Rogers Park ("Morseview Drugs") and Albany Park; two of these stores were later sold to chain retailers. During their youth, Maish and Steven both helped at their fathers' stores. They mentioned doing deliveries and getting to know the customers. Maish said, "Everybody worked at the store," including his mother and three sisters.

As most of the Jewish population had left North Lawndale following post-World War II demographic changes, Abe Rosen bought empty property on the 2900 block of West Devon Avenue in 1955 and built four stores. The one at 2958 W. Devon became the reestablished Rosens Pharmacy. Maish worked alongside his father. After Abe retired in 1971, Maish ran the store, with the assistance of his wife, Bette, who worked as secretary, and backup help from Abe. Maish stated what he loved about the work: "[First of all] helping people...the science, understanding people. ...When someone came to see me, not feeling well, I let them talk. ...Customers regarded the pharmacist as a doctor." He provided services that met the needs of the Jewish community. The store was closed on Jewish holidays. He extended credit to Sabbath observers who needed medicine but couldn't pay on the Sabbath, and sold his chametz before Passover so that observant customers could shop in the store immediately after the holiday. Holocaust survivors brought him reparations documents that he notarized.

In 1985, a year after Abe's death, the store was sold to Steven Rosenberg. The sale was prompted by competition from chain stores and by changing demographics in the neighborhood. Similar to other former pharmacy owners, Abe wanted to stay in the practice of pharmacy. He worked for another pharmacist and in medical facilities before retiring at age 75.

continued on page 22

Oak Park-River Forest's Jewish Community: 1945 - Present. Part II

By Michael Zmora

Returning GIs brought new Jewish families to Chicago's western suburbs at the end of World War II. A 1946 religious census counted approximately 1,000 Jews in Oak Park and 125 in River Forest, representing a bit more than 1 percent of the population in both municipalities.¹ The West Suburban Jewish Community Center (WSJCC or The Center), the Jewish community's sole congregation in Oak Park and River Forest, was therefore responsible for taking stock of the new arrivals. Now was time to build a synagogue large enough to accommodate the growing community. Oak Park thwarted WSJCC in prior attempts to acquire a site for a synagogue in 1940 and 1941. Beginning in 1946, the Center therefore decided to build its new synagogue in River Forest. Compared to Oak Park, River Forest was sparse, numbering 9,500 people in 1940, compared to Oak Park's 66,000. Crucially, it had large undeveloped parcels of land. The Center's leaders, wary of anti-Jewish feeling, took steps to ensure no community backlash against the erection of a synagogue.² On December 8, 1946, David Gottlieb, a Center member and owner of a national pinball manufacturing company, donated \$25,000 to the Center, dubbing it "an investment in the future of Judaism in the West Suburbs."³ The WSJCC purchased two parcels of land with that money at the eastern border with Oak Park—at the corner of Harlem and Thomas avenues. The Center completed the purchase on New Year's Eve 1946, and title passed to the Center through a straw buyer so that the sellers did not know they were selling the land to a synagogue. Another three years passed before the synagogue would be built.

War changed America. More crucially, these years changed Jews. The Holocaust gave American Jews an all-too-accurate assessment of the consequences of antisemitism. The Center's bulletins reflected Jews' new preoccupation with antisemitism: The shul hosted ADL speakers, who addressed their battles against print media antisemitism and housing discrimination in the suburbs.⁴ In 1947, The Center established a social action committee "so that we would be able to constantly combat anti-Semitism as a group. If each one of us becomes an active and courageous person of good will in his home, neighborhood, business and community, we will make definite progress toward establishing a brotherhood of men on this earth."⁵

The fight against antisemitism was not distant. Periodic real estate listings in Oak Park and River Forest indicated "No Jews" or "Gentiles Only."⁶ Oak Park Country Club remained restricted to Jews into the 1970s. More alarmingly, one of the most rabid antisemitic broadsheets—*The Gentile News*—was published out of Oak Park by local publisher and failed political candidate Eugene Flitcraft from 1944 until 1946, when defamation lawsuits and organized political pressure drove the publication out of business. Flitcraft, undeterred, published a different monthly periodical in 1947—*The Anti-Communist*—that trafficked in the same antisemitic tropes.⁷

It was not wholly surprising when the plan for the new synagogue in River Forest encountered antisemitic resistance from the village. In October 1947, 10 months after the Center bought its land parcels there, the Village of River Forest passed two ordinances: The first was identical to the 400-foot frontage consent ordinance in Oak Park that defeated the Center's expansion plans back in 1940. The second required any new church or temple to provide one parking spot for every 10 seats in its sanctuary, a significant obstacle to constructing any house of worship intended for 500 people. Undeterred by new ordinances, the WSJCC continued to fund-raise into 1948, and at the end of that year, hired the famous Jewish architecture firm of Loebel, Schlossman and Bennett to design the large synagogue with space for a social hall. In 1947, the West Suburban Jewish Community Center changed its name to the West Suburban Temple (WST), reflecting its formal affiliation with the Conservative Jewish movement.



The sanctuary of the West Suburban Temple

In December 1948, the WST hired a new rabbi, Moshe Babin. Babin, 32 years old, replaced the departing Rabbi Monroe Levens, who served as the rabbi since 1946. Babin, fresh from his first two-year placement as rabbi in a Philadelphia synagogue, quickly jumped into the effort to build the new synagogue in River Forest. The WST leader—

continued on following page

Oak Park-River Forest's Jewish Community

continued from preceding page

ship prepared to fight the village to get the synagogue built, but it preferred to “co-operate with the village authorities rather than attempt to force proceedings through action.”⁸ To that end, Rabbi Babin embarked on a letter-writing and visiting campaign with other clergy within River Forest over the spring of 1949. In April, prominent synagogue member John L. Keeshin volunteered to help secure the building permit. Keeshin was perhaps the most prominent member of the West Suburban Jewish community. By 1949, Keeshin founded the largest freight trucking company in the United States and helped build the Burma Road in China. Keeshin earned the confidence of Franklin Roosevelt, whose third inauguration he attended in 1941. He also purchased a football team and a racetrack and founded a second freight company the previous year.⁹ In short, one can imagine he was able to gain an audience with the River Forest's board members.

The WST board also included two capable attorneys: Sam Schmetterer, a real estate attorney, and Louis Shapiro, a law professor at DePaul University. By April 1949, Shapiro met with the River Forest Village Attorney several times. The following month, he appeared before the Village Board to “express his views regarding the [frontage consent] ordinance” intended to prevent construction of the synagogue.¹⁰ The board pushed off that discussion for months. Four months later, WST's leaders appeared again before the board members.

This time, Mr. Shapiro was accompanied by the shul president, a co-chair of the building committee, and Rabbi Babin. Per the Village Board minutes, the group “requested information concerning their desire previously expressed for the erection of a synagogue” at Thomas and Harlem.¹¹ In response, the Village Board appointed a commission of three of its members to hold a public hearing about the ordinances. They set a hearing date of October 3, 1949. That date just so happened to be Yom Kippur.

Undeterred, Rabbi Babin appeared at this commission hearing, which would have coincided with the beginning of *Neilah* services. After a long day of fasting and leading services, he walked from northeast Oak Park to River Forest Village Hall—a distance of two miles. The congregation was nearly 10 years into its search for a permanent home. It had grown from 75 to over 200 families, with more members joining every year. By this point, River Forest had nine churches. What harm was the addition of one synagogue?

An account of Rabbi Babin's arguments to the Village Board cannot be found, although they certainly can be conjectured. The Village Board meeting minutes describe, however, the Village attorney's report back to the Board. The attorney indicated that the commission hearing “failed to develop sufficient evidence to justify any opinion as to whether the ordinances were in the public interest or reasonable” and stated that “the Board should be guided by its legal advisor as to the legal aspect of the ordinances.”¹² Moments later, no doubt heeding its lawyer's advice, the River Forest Village Board voted to repeal the discriminatory ordinances.

What had caused the Village Board to change its mind? One reason is that the Village Board of 1949 was not the Village Board of 1947. Three of its six most recent members were newly elected in April 1949, including the Village President Walter Gabel. Gabel may have been concerned that River Forest would gain a reputation for intolerance. Two years later, during the infamous race riots in nearby Cicero, Gabel would publicly quarrel with Cicero's Chief of Police, who was reported to say that 80 percent of the rioters who attacked racial integration of an apartment building in Cicero were from River Forest. After successfully obtaining a retraction, Gabel remarked, “There's no man, sheriff's office or not, that's going to say 80 per cent of a rioting mob comes from River Forest.”¹³ Gabel's concern for River Forest's reputation may have extended to a perception of its intolerance towards Jews.

The synagogue was now free of any legal impediment to its construction. The next month, the Village Building Commission approved the architect's plan and granted the permit for construction. In May 1950, the synagogue laid its cornerstone for the new building. It was 15 years after the congregation first came together in the darkest days of the Depression.¹⁴

The new West Suburban Temple officially opened its doors to much fanfare in the fall of 1951. Local suburban newspapers, as well as the *Chicago Tribune*, provided widespread news coverage. At the dedication service,



Rabbi Moshe Babin and Eleanor Roosevelt

first-term U.S. Representative Sidney Yates of Chicago, who would go on to become the *éminence grise* among Jewish members of the House, as well as a major force on both the state and federal levels, spoke, as did Vice-Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary Dr. Max Arzst.¹⁵ The synagogue took out a half-page ad in the local River Forest periodical, the *Forest Leaves*, with the words “Visitors Welcome.” A full-page article in the same issue offered tours of the new building and described the congregation’s ethos: “The temple and its members consider Judaism the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. This means that the Jewish faith is an all-inclusive faith, much more than a set of creed or doctrine – rather an inclusive civilization having within it all the elements that make for the good life.”¹⁶ The pride the community took in the erection of the synagogue can be found in the commemorative book it published for the occasion, which included well-wishes from political dignitaries across the country, including from the Office of President Truman, letters that Rabbi Babin had solicited personally.¹⁷

In its first decade, WST grew tremendously, as the Jewish community living on the West Side of Chicago, in the neighborhoods of Austin, Douglas Park, and North Lawndale, beat a path west to the suburbs. By decade’s end, the shul had doubled in size to 500 members. A community hall named for early benefactors, the Gottlieb family, was installed in 1954.¹⁸

The building boasted a number of unique features. The *bimah* was set on tracks hidden under removable floorboards that allowed it to be moved back, allowing the sanctuary to accommodate nearly 600 people for the High Holidays. The architects also recommended a sculpture for the building’s exterior and a sculptor, Milton Horn, to provide it. Consulting with Rabbi Babin, Horn sculpted a 12-by-10-foot 20-ton limestone relief of multi-faced cherubim overcoming a Behemoth while holding up the Ten Commandments, symbolizing the laws of Moses. An inscription from the Book of Zechariah, selected by Rabbi Babin, was placed in block letters beneath it: “Not by Might nor by Power, So Saith the Lord of Hosts.” The sculpture was placed on the external on the synagogue’s eastern wall, visible to drivers on busy Harlem Avenue, which had expanded from a two- to four-lane highway in 1950. Perhaps more relevantly, the stern cherubim stared down Oak Park to the east. The sculpture generated an enormous amount of press, as the shul’s leadership and Horn himself noted that this was the first representational art incorporating human features on a synagogue since Late Antiquity.¹⁹ Sensational press accounts went out over the wires, and Rabbi Babin received clippings about the synagogue’s sculpture from as far away as Australia.



Milton Horn’s sculpture on the synagogue’s exterior

Unlike his predecessors, Rabbi Babin accepted his pulpit with an understanding that he would need to exercise some religious discipline upon his congregation. While nominally associated with a Conservative style worship, the Center functioned as a Jewish gathering place as much as a synagogue. Photographs taken of dances hosted at the 414 Lake Street location suggest festive hootenannies, and the Center’s multiple bowling trophies underscored a commitment to social activities equal to religious services. The Center’s 1946 membership guide even advertised a “Gun Club” marketed as “something unique, something unusual” that “underscores sportsmanship among its members” and would include a “Lox and Bagel” interlude during Sunday morning shoots. Shortly upon his arrival in 1948, Babin, writing to his more senior rabbinical counterpart at Congregation Anshe Emet in Lakeview, expressed that the synagogue needed some discipline and an understanding that the rabbi was not a hired hand.²⁰

In 1949, Babin convened a religious committee to standardize Bar Mitzvahs, which were also to include Bat Mitzvot for the first time, a newer egalitarian practice by no means common in the Conservative movement. The synagogue tightened its standards of observance, and the WST Bulletins in these years bear an admonishing tone to encourage more regular synagogue attendance on Friday nights, as well as Saturday mornings.²¹ Before the cornerstone on WST was laid, Babin made clear that the new building was not to host social dances unrelated to religious celebrations.²² The new tone at the top led to a schism within the membership.

In early 1949, a group of 30 prominent families left WST. These resigned members chartered an organization they called Oak Park Temple. At that time, they approached Gunther Plaut, Associate Rabbi at Washington Boulevard Temple, a Reform congregation on the West Side of Chicago, to see if they could establish what Plaut described as a “more liberal though conservatively oriented community.” Plaut held long talks with them to persuade them to join Washington Boulevard Temple as a unit and still “preserve their identity.”²³ At the same time, in July 1949, dis-

continued on following page

Oak Park-River Forest's Jewish Community

continued from preceding page

cussions were held “off the record” to see if there was “some common ground” to be found to “merge” the newly split Oak Park Temple and West Suburban Temple’s congregations.²⁴ A committee from WST investigated this possibility, but a merger eluded them. Instead, the Oak Park Temple group and Washington Boulevard Temple signed a merger agreement, and as a first step to integrating the congregations, opened branch classes of the Temple’s Hebrew school at Oak Park’s Oliver Wendell Holmes public school in 1951 with 45 students. The next year, the Oak Park class size nearly doubled to 75 students. In June 1952, encouraged by the Hebrew school expansion, Washington Boulevard Temple’s membership voted to relocate their temple to a new building in Oak Park. The synagogue traced its origin as the fourth synagogue in Chicago, established in 1864 as Temple Zion. By the late 1940s, its West Side membership, drawn primarily from East Garfield Park and Austin, was increasingly moving to suburbia. With the example set by West Suburban Temple, the Western suburbs appeared welcoming to Jewish families. Nevertheless, leaving nothing to chance, and having studied the example of WST, Oak Park Temple would acquire the land for its synagogue in Oak Park through the help of a straw buyer. In June 1956, the newly renamed Oak Park Temple (OPT) laid the cornerstone on a new building at an intersection in the northwest corner of Oak Park, two blocks north of West Suburban Temple, which had renamed itself West Suburban Temple Har Zion in March.²⁵ Boasting 450 members, the building, like WST, housed a large social hall, classrooms, and a sanctuary with a moving wall to accommodate larger High Holiday crowds.



Despite these rosier times, latent antisemitism continued in Oak Park and River Forest. In 1954, the ADL investigated a listing in the Chicago Tribune for a new townhome rental in northwest Oak Park advertising itself as “restricted,” meaning restricted against Jews. ADL representatives consulted with Rabbi Babin, as WST was located across the street from the townhome in question, to ask whether he would be willing to help their efforts to change the practice of the Realtor. Babin offered full cooperation and admitted he had heard rumors that Jews sometimes struggled to find apartments and homes in Oak Park and River Forest. The ADL representative then posed as a prospective renter of the townhomes, and after an hour with the Realtor, identified himself as Jewish. He was told the “premises were restricted and they were not interested in selling to Jews.” The Realtor even identified another

townhome complex two blocks north that was similarly “Restricted.” It was located a block from the OPT, then under construction. The ADL representative, following organization protocol, then paid a visit to the building’s owner, its mortgage bank, and, after many unanswered phone calls and letters, the realty company itself. Shortly after these visits, which took place over a year, the realty company agreed not to list any more restricted properties, terminated the offending Realtor, and averred that no similar antisemitic discrimination would be permitted in the future.²⁶

As the 1950s progressed, the two congregations stayed on friendly terms and regularly partnered for community events. Rabbi Babin and his counterpart at OPT, Rabbi Leonard Mervis, introduced a speaker series they dubbed “The Forum.” During the 1950s, The Forum speakers included Senator Hubert Humphrey, actor Vincent Price, and former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Three months after the conclusion of the 1956 Suez War, the President of OPT, a major contributor to Israel Bonds, announced that the two congregations would host Abba Eban, Israel’s Ambassador to the U.S. and the U.N. To commemorate the occasion, Oak Park Village President Russ Christianson proclaimed the day of Eban’s speech to be Israel Day in the Village of Oak Park and presented a proclamation to that effect to the two congregations’ presidents.²⁷

As the 1950s wore on, Chicago’s Jewish West Side continued its exodus to suburbia, now joined by its Gentile neighbors seeking cheaper and more abundant housing newly accessible by highway. New housing in Oak Park was very limited when compared to the new housing development in the North Shore suburbs. Oak Park

and River Forest couldn't compete. While the Jewish communities in Oak Park and River Forest stabilized, they did not enjoy the same growth they experienced in the years immediately after World War II.

In May 1968, Oak Park adopted a first-of-its-kind Fair Housing ordinance to manage racial integration into the Village and prevent panic peddling by unscrupulous real estate agents promoting white flight. By the late 1970s, this liberal approach, coupled with demographic changes in the area, allowed Oak Park to present itself as a model for racial integration. In 1976, Oak Park was named an "All American City" showcased in a documentary for its enlightened approach to tackling social change. Oak Park's liberal reputation followed, attracting another generation of Jews to the western suburbs.

In 2003, the community welcomed the Secular Jewish Community and School, a non-denominational, secular Jewish community organization emphasizing "the secular, humanistic Jewish values of love of learning, ethical action, tzedakah, social justice, personal responsibility for our actions, pluralism and a rational basis for thought and action."²⁸ Three years later, the Chabad Jewish Center of Oak Park–River Forest opened its doors, providing a home for traditional Orthodox worship in the community.

Today, four congregations make up the Jewish community of Oak Park and River Forest.

Endnotes

¹1946 Religious Census, Oak Park and River Forest, Illinois (Chicago Theological Seminary)

²Story of Nathan Shure informed this most likely.

³WSJCC Bulletin, December 1946

⁴See West Suburban Temple Bulletin, "Mr. Ben Zion Emanuel, Director, Metropolitan Area of the ADL, Subject 'The Sentinel Case.'" (Feb. 27, 1948). Beyond this, the Temple Bulletin of those years contained appeals for food and clothes for the Displaced Persons in Europe and for efforts to help push for the creation of the State of Israel.

⁵West Suburban Temple Bulletin (April 1948)

⁶Author's review of real estate multi-list index cards (1920–1960s), available for inspection at Oak Park River Forest History Museum (129 Lake Street, Oak Park), upon request

⁷Flitcraft emerged as a professional anti-Jewish propagandist in early 1944 and was quickly targeted by the ADL and others. An ad and print man and member of a prominent Oak Park family, he had unsuccessfully run for office in the Village in 1935. See "Flitcraft Files as Co-Op Owner," *Chicago Sun-Times*, p.1 (Jan. 31, 1945). Several years later, federal prosecutors netted him as part of a mail fraud scheme involving a coin-slot TV device and he served several years in jail. See Indict 14 in \$2 Million Fraud Here, *Chicago Sun-Times*, p. 5 (Apr. 28, 1954).

⁸Annual Report of New Building Committee, WST Board Meeting Minutes (Apr. 6, 1949)

⁹See "John L. Keeshin," in Ira Berkow, *Maxwell Street: Survival in a Bazaar*, pp. 157–166 (Doubleday 1977).

¹⁰Village of River Forest Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, May 9, 1949, available for inspection at the Village Hall, River Forest.

¹¹Village of River Forest Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, September 12, 1949, available for inspection at the Village Hall, River Forest.

¹²Village of River Forest Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1949, available for inspection at the Village Hall, River Forest.

¹³"River Forest's Chief Teaches Lesson in Loyalty," *Forest Leaves*, p. 3 (Aug. 23, 1951)

¹⁴"Temple Corner Stone to Be Set on Sunday," *Oak Leaves*, p. 10 (May 25, 1950)

¹⁵"New Suburban Temple," *Chicago Sun-Times*, p. 24 (March 22, 1954).

¹⁶"West Suburban Temple," *Forest Leaves*, p. 80 (June 21, 1951)

¹⁷See Letter from Rabbi Moshe Babin to President Harry S. Truman (Nov. 20, 1950) ("With world conditions as they are, we believe that true religious faith and devout belief in God can help bring peace and properties to all Mankind. On this great occasion in the life of our Temple, we would be most happy to receive greetings from the Chief Executive of our nation.")

¹⁸The social hall itself held a stage for religious school functions and Purim plays. The fundraiser for this expansion was headlined by comedian and performer Jimmy Durante. Irv Kupcinec, "Kup's Column," p. 34, *Chicago Sun-Times* (June 12, 1953).

¹⁹Ruth Moore, "Rabbi Re-Interprets Rule: Art in Suburban Temple Ends 2,000-Yr. Tradition," *Chicago Sunday Sun-Times* at 4 (Dec. 2, 1951); "Temple Art Flies In Face Of Tradition," *Chicago Daily Sun Times*, at 27 (July 2, 1951)

²⁰Letter from Rabbi Moshe Babin to Rabbi Solomon Goldman, Jan. 24, 1949, WSTHZ Archives

²¹Saturday morning services for Shabbat were not yet standardized even as late as 1951, in part due to the preferred attendance of the Congregation on Friday nights. Many congregants worked in retail industries and stores were opened on Saturday mornings, making family attendance difficult. See Minutes of Joint Meeting of the Officers and Directors of WST, Its Sisterhood and Men's Club (May 17, 1951).

²²Letter of Rabbi Moshe Babin to A.I. Newman, President of WST (Apr. 21, 1950)

²³W. Gunther Plaut, *Unfinished Business: An Autobiography*, at 155–56 (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981)

²⁴WST Board Meeting Minutes, Report of Membership Committee, July 6, 1949.

²⁵The name was changed to "better identify the Temple as a Jewish House of Worship, and express the ideals for which the Congregation exists." "Congregants Of West Suburban Temple Affix 'Har Zion' To Their Original Name." *The Sentinel* at p. 38 (Mar. 15, 1956).

²⁶See Folder 13, Series B.83, "Oak Park Town Homes, Oak Park, Ill." in Anti-Defamation League, Chicago Office archival materials (Chicago Jewish Archives, Collection No. 37).

²⁷Gala Ambassador's Ball June 29th, *The Sentinel* at p. 28 (June 6, 1957)

²⁸Secular Jewish Community and School, Our Community | Secular Jewish Community & School

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

continued from page 16

Steven earned his pharmacy degree at Drake University. He knew the value of owning a business with an established reputation, so he added the Rosens name to the name of his family's pharmacy. In the early 1990s, he moved Rosens Morseview Pharmacy across the street to its present location at 2955 W. Devon. Steven and Maish both remarked that many pharmacy owners were Jewish. Maish said, "All the pharmacists knew each other. We were all Jewish." I asked him about Cal-Touhy Drugs at 2801 W. Touhy Avenue, in my childhood neighborhood. Sure enough, Maish knew the owner, Chuck Ecanow, who had worked for Maish's father before opening his own business. Many of the wholesalers and pharmacy suppliers were Jewish, too. Maish cited Louis Zahn Drug Company and Reliable.

Times have changed. Now, said Maish, "The family pharmacy doesn't exist anymore." This stands in stark contrast to his assessment when he was interviewed in 1985 by the *Chicago Tribune*. Nevertheless, Steven Rosenberg and Rosens Morseview Pharmacy are staying the course. Like Maish, he decries the changes that have beset pharmacies in recent decades. He said, "The work is getting harder." To survive as an independent, he has had to expand the traditional business model. However, he is determined to stay in business until he retires.

I end these glimpses with a feeling of longing for the past—even though I remind myself that there were hardships, too, in days gone by. Time will tell whether modern ways are not just inevitable and different, but better.

If you haven't contacted us to tell your Jewish pharmacy stories, we still want to hear from you. Contact me at info@chicagojewishhistory.org.

Reflections on Learning About the Jewish History of Humboldt Park

continued from page 7

had evidence that another Jewish family once lived here, the way I do now with my chosen family. The more I learn about the history around me, the more I feel myself coming home.

Sivan Spector is a Jewish theater-maker, performer, puppeteer, and writer based in Chicago. Her work involves themes of home, Diasporism, history, Judaism, and chosen family. Recent credits include "SWITCHBOARD: Missed Connections from the SS Eastland," produced by The Steppenwolf Lookout Series and The Neo-Futurists, and forthcoming work includes an immersive, queer Purimspiel coming in March 2025 through Tzedek Chicago. When not at the theater, she can be found gazing in awe at old buildings and identifying native trees. Sivan can be contacted at sivan.spector@gmail.com.



The interior of the Austro-Galician synagogue

Thank You for Your Support

The Society wants to thank our friends and supporters who have renewed their memberships for the 2025 year. Many of you have contributed above the \$54 basic membership fee, and we are very grateful for your generosity. We will continue to endeavor earning your support, and we look forward to providing you with dynamic programs and compelling issues of *CJH* in this, our 48th year, and in years to come.

Grateful Reader

The CJHS recently received this correspondence from an appreciative member:

"Thank you for mentioning my mother, Adele Hast z"l in your latest President's Column (*CJH*, Fall 2024). She would have loved reading an article like yours, in which three of her most beloved institutions — the CJHS, the Newberry, and the Caxton Club — all are featured."

David Hast

CJHS members . . .

YASHER KOACH!

The Hebrew phrase means "More Power to You."

Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch's book "*Gendering Antifascism: Women's Activism in Argentina and the World, 1918 - 1947*," won a prize for best monograph in modern Latin American history from the Rocky Mountain Council on Latin American Studies. The book will soon be published in Argentina for Spanish readers.

Dr. Malka Simkovich, Editor-in-Chief of the Jewish Publication Society and Visiting Professor at Yeshiva University's Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, is the author, most recently, of "*Letters from Home: The Creation of Diaspora in Jewish Antiquity*" (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2024), which she talked about during her tenure as a scholar-in-residence at Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob Synagogue this past December.

Alice Solovy's letter to the *Chicago Tribune*, entitled "Counter Hate with Education," was published in the November 21, 2024, edition.

Programs for You

The CJHS is excited to let our members and friends know about several dynamic programs coming up in late February and March.

On Sunday, February 23, 2 p.m., veteran journalist Mark Jacob will talk about his latest book, "*Globetrotter: How Abe Saperstein Shook Up the World of Sports*" (Rowman & Littlefield 2024), which he co-wrote with his brother, Matthew.

Abe Saperstein was the Chicago founder, owner, and promoter of the world-famous Harlem Globetrotters, the showboating basketball team that won countless fans worldwide—as much for its antics as for its agility on the court. In their engrossing biography of Saperstein, Mark and Matthew Jacob paint Saperstein as a brilliant and complex figure: courageous in the face of racial discrimination, imperious of temperament, tireless in his championing of his players, and undyingly loyal to his team. "The Jacob brothers provide a fast-paced narrative of an under-appreciated game changer," wrote Kirkus Reviews.

Jacob will be in conversation with one of Saperstein's granddaughters, Abra Berkley.

This free in-person program will take place at the Evanston Public Main Library, located at 1703 Orrington Avenue. Ample free parking is available—at the library, as well as on nearby streets.

Following Jacob's presentation, he will be pleased to sign copies of his book, which will be available for purchase.

For those who cannot attend in person, a Zoom option is available. To sign up for the virtual program, go to the Upcoming Programs section of the CJHS website: www.chicagojewishhistory.org.

On Sunday, March 23, the CJHS, in partnership with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, will welcome Dr. Tobias Brinkmann, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Pennsylvania State University, who will present two lectures: "Retracing Jewish Journeys: Moving from Lithuania and Galicia to America Before 1914," at 1 p.m., and "Closing Doors and Permanent Transit: Migrant Journeys After 1914," at 2:30 p.m. These talks will take place at Temple Beth El, 3610 Dundee Road, Northbrook.

Dr. Brinkmann is a preeminent scholar whose books include "*Sundays at Sinai: A Jewish Congregation in Chicago*" (University of Chicago Press, 2012), which was a finalist for a National Jewish Book Award.

Both talks are free, but those interested in attending are asked to RSVP in advance. To do so, go to the events page of the Genealogical Society's website: www.jgsi.org. When registering, please indicate whether attendance is in-person or virtual, as a Zoom option is available. For those attending in person, synagogue doors will open at 12:30 p.m. on March 23.

In addition, longtime CJHS member Robb Packer, who has written and presented extensively on Chicago synagogues, returns with a new Zoom program on that subject on Sunday, May 4, 7 p.m. Be on the lookout for details.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור חצבתכם



chicago jewish historical society

610 SOUTH MICHIGAN AVENUE • ROOM 803 • CHICAGO, IL 60605-1901 • 312-663-5634

IN THIS ISSUE

- Chicago: An Incubator for the American Dream
- Reflections on the Jewish History of Humboldt Park
- More on Chicago's Jewish Pharmacies
- My Son, the Jewish Policeman. More Tales from the Shomrim Society
- CJHS Welcomes Ray Asher to the Board
- Mike Todd and the 80-Day Sensation
- Oak Park-River Forest's Jewish Community: 1945-Present. Part II

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-eight 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.

Tribute Cards for Celebrations or Memorials The card design features the Society's handsome logo. Pack of five cards and envelopes \$36. Individual cards can be mailed for you from our office at \$5 per card, postage included. Mail your order and check to CJHS, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659-7004. You may also order online at our website.

Back issues of *Chicago Jewish History* cost \$8 apiece. To request back issues, please email the Society at www.chicagojewishhistory.org

Visit our website www.chicagojewishhistory.org

Pay your membership dues online via PayPal or credit card, or use the printable membership application.

Inquiries: info@chicagojewishhistory.org

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations, and includes

- A subscription to our award-winning quarterly journal, *Chicago Jewish History*.
- Free admission to Society public programs. General admission is \$10 per person.
- Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year.

Life Membership \$1,000

Annual Dues

Historian \$500

Scholar \$250

Sponsor \$108

Member \$54

Student (with I.D.) \$18



Like us on Facebook