



chicago jewish history



The Romance of A People: **Society Reprints Program Book, Stages Pageant Commemoration**

On July 3, 1933, "Jewish Day" was celebrated at "A Century of Progress" with a spectacular pageant-drama. On October 29, 2000, CJHS presented a festive commemoration of that event in conjunction with our reprinting of the original pageant program book.

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Guest Speaker Professor Stephen J. Whitfield of Brandeis University and Actress-Vocal Soloist Renee Matthews at the Pageant Commemoration.

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Sonia Rockler**

Symbol of the Society

Save the Date! Sunday, January 14: **Open Meeting of the Society at Chicago Sinai Congregation**

"The Third Half-Century of Chicago Sinai Congregation: 1951-2000" will be the subject of a program at the next CJHS open meeting on Sunday, January 14, 2001, at Chicago Sinai Congregation, 15 East Delaware Place, Chicago. The program will begin at 2:15 p.m., following a reception and refreshments at 1:30 p.m. (Reduced rate validated parking is available at the One East Delaware Building Garage. Entrance is on Chestnut Street.) Admission is free and open to the public.

Chicago Sinai Congregation is one of Chicago's most venerable institutions, founded in 1861, and located on the South Side for over a century. In the 1980s, the congregation made a dramatic decision to move to the Near North Side, and constructed a beautiful new building on Delaware Place. James Deutelbaum, a long-time member of Sinai, will review its history from 1951 to 1991. Michael Sternfield, rabbi of Sinai, will discuss the congregation's life from 1995, when he arrived, until the present. The program will conclude with a tour of the building.

President's Column



Walter Roth

THE ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA) OF THE UNITED JEWISH COMMUNITIES of North America (Jewish Federations) was held at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Chicago's lakefront from Friday, November 10 through Wednesday, November 15, 2000. Thousands of VIPs, delegates, sponsors, speakers, and guests from various countries, including Israel, were in attendance. These annual meetings generally deal

with the many bureaucratic problems faced by the main fundraising organizations of the Jewish communities of North America and the allocations to be made to various institutions that are part of the Jewish communities. This is the first Assembly to be held in our city since 1984, and the Chicago community rose to the occasion.

From a historical perspective, this GA will be remembered for its special character because it coincided with the deepening crisis in the Middle East. Not only did Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak appear at the conference, but so did one of his chief rivals for political power, Ariel Sharon.

Barak's charismatic personality was, of course, a powerful force, and his speech at the UIC Pavilion before an audience of 6,000 was an emotional event. On the day that he spoke five Israeli soldiers had been killed. On the stage with Barak were the parents of a soldier who had been lynched at Ramallah and parents of three soldiers kidnapped at the Lebanese border some weeks ago.

Before the prime minister's official address, attention was called to the passing of Leah Rabin, the widow of Yitzhak Rabin, a few days earlier, and the audience rose for a moment of silence. The prime minister in his speech paid due homage to her memory and her work on behalf of the peace movement.

Political events almost completely dominated the mood of the GA. The conference was undoubtedly of great meaning to the State of Israel and the Jewish communities of North America as a show of unity in the face of harsh pressures.

Two weeks earlier, on November 2, a large crowd gathered at the Loop Synagogue for a noonday service to commemorate the fifth anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. His son Yuval was the principal speaker. Yuval Rabin reiterated that despite the conflict now engulfing Palestine, he was still committed to the peace movement. All in all, the events of past weeks have had a profound effect on the Chicago Jewish community.

Incidentally, there seem to have been no instances of violence by protesters outside any of the venues, as the Chicago Police Department outdid itself in monitoring the areas surrounding the Loop Synagogue, Hyatt Regency, and UIC Pavilion. To have the loudest applause of the audience at the GA afforded to the Chicago Police Department was definitely a unique event in the annals of our city—thus proving that history is full of ironies. ❖



chicago jewish historical society

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Chicago Jewish History

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Seeking Material for Maxwell Street Video

Do you have any vintage photos, ads or films of Maxwell Street? Do you know anyone who lived the Maxwell Street experience in the days before the street's decline? If you do, or know someone who does, please contact filmmaker Shuli Eshel of Cavalcade Communications Group, or former UIC Hillel director Elliot Zashin.

They are producing a documentary about Maxwell Street that focuses on the Jewish experience in the area, specifically about the lives of Jewish immigrants and entrepreneurs who built up the Maxwell Street commercial district.

What Eshel and Zashin need is access to private materials on the subject: photos and 8 mm or 16

mm films from the '20s, '30s, '40s, and '50s, and stories that can and should be shared. The production has already interviewed Federal Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz, Seymour Persky, Jerome and Sheldon Robinson, Leonard Genender and Seymour DeKoven. Dr. Irving Cutler has also been an important source. But there must be much more material out there—and that's what Eshel and Zashin are looking for.

Communicate your information by telephone to Shuli Eshel at (773) 868-4140 (eshelred@aol.com) or Elliot Zashin, working with the Maxwell Street Historic Preservation Coalition, at (847) 869-3599 (mmand.ez@gateway.net).

Corrections and Clarifications

In our summer issue we wrote that the department store located in the Rothschild Building (after it was sold by the Rothschild family), was the "Davis Store." The correct name was the Davis Company. In the program book for *The Romance of A People*, an advertisement invited visitors to the 1933 Century of Progress to shop at "The Davis Company—The Store of Service, Quality and Low Prices."

In the same article we wrote that the Rothschild building later became the "main branch" of the Goldblatt stores—and an oxymoron alert was promptly flashed to us by Society board member Charles B. Bernstein! The building contained the main Goldblatt store and the company's home office.

Also from Chuck Bernstein: in David H. Heller's article on Boy Scout Troop 38, in the list of members' Anglicized family names, Harold Bernstein's change was not to Berkey, but to Bernay.

CJH regrets the errors.

Welcome to New Members of CJHS

Howard Bernstein
 Marian Dapin
 Marilyn Gordon
 Norman & Eleanor Greenberg
 Linda Klutznick
 Alan Lessack
 Roslyn Lettvin
 Robert Mednick
 S. Nahmod
 Carole Pohn
 Lois Polakoff
 Jerrold & Bette Rosenberg
 H. Rubert
 Sue Samuels
 Jerome Siegan
 Bernadine Sperling
 Morton Stern
 Anita & Perry Toback
 Lyn & Steve Weil

It is through the generosity of our members that the Society is able to accomplish its goals. Thanks to all of our membership, new and continuing.

Douglas/Douglass Branch Library: What's in a Name?

Society members who are former West Siders will remember the Douglas Branch of the Chicago Public Library, located at 3353 West 13th Street. Norman D. Schwartz looked into the history of this library during his research for a book on synagogues and other significant buildings of Lawndale.

He discovered that *Douglas* had become *Douglass*. On October 11, 1970, the Stephen A. Douglas Branch had been rededicated as the Frederick A. Douglass Branch. The new name honors the famous African-American abolitionist writer and speaker.

The library opened in 1910 as the Lawndale Branch at Millard Avenue and 23rd Street. In 1914, that branch closed and the Douglas Park Branch opened at 3527-29 West 12th Street. (The exact date of the opening is unknown, nor when the name was changed to honor Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, Abraham Lincoln's adversary.)

Distinguished Jewish names are also associated with the branch. On September 27, 1917, a temporary junior library assistant named Goldie was hired at a salary of \$480 per year. She lived at 1306 South Lawndale, and spent her free time working for the Labor Zionist movement. In later years, the world came to know her as Golda Meir.

When philanthropist Julius Rosenwald purchased a site at the corner of Homan and 13th Place and gave it to the library for the location of a new building, the board appropriated \$100,000 for the construction. The building opened on September 30, 1930, with Mr. Rosenwald in attendance.

REPRINT Report of the Committee on Awards of the World's Columbian Exposition.

Special Report upon Special Subjects or Groups

(Washington; Government Printing Office, 1901), Vol. II, pp. 1691-2.

Yom Kippur on The Midway**BY ISIDOR LEWI**

About four-fifths of the inhabitants of the Turkish village on the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago Exposition were Jews. Merchants, clerks, actors, servants, musicians, and even the dancing girls, were of the Mosaic faith, though their looks and garb would lead one to believe them Mohammedans. That their Judaism was not of the passive character was demonstrated by the closed booths, shops, and curio places, by the silence of the otherwise noisy theaters and the general Sabbath day air which pervaded the "Streets of Constantinople" on Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement.

A more unique observance of the day never occurred in this country, and to the few Americans who had the good fortune to be present it presented a picture of rare beauty and solemnity.

The Turkish mosque was so arranged that it could be used as a Jewish house of worship also—the paraphernalia was all there and the Moslem is liberal enough to allow religious services other than his own to take place in his houses of worship—a point which he thinks the Western people would do well to ponder. It was in this gorgeously equipped and dimly lighted mosque that the oriental Jews assembled on Tuesday evening, September 19, 1893, and read the Kol Nidra [sic] service. A screen of carved wood was placed across one corner of the mosque, and behind this the women, robed in white, with faces partially concealed behind white veils, worshipped. The men, gorgeous in varicolored silken garments, some wearing the simple fez and some the more elaborate turban, removed their shoes at the door before entering, and when they did not stand facing the East, where the cantor intoned the prayers, they sat cross-legged on the matted floor.

Each and every one had brought with him from his home the scarf which the orthodox Jew wears at prayer time and the Hebrew book of prayers. In the course of the ceremonial Mr. Robert Levy, the Ottoman concessionaire, approached the altar and asked a blessing on the President of the United States and on the Sultan of Turkey. The services lasted long

into the night, and when silence reigned all over the White City, when the robe of night and sleep covered the kaleidoscopic Midway, these Jews from the land of the Wise Men were still worshipping in the mosque.

On Wednesday, September 20, the mosque was too small to hold the worshippers, and a great bazaar, in which rugs and tapestries were on exhibition, was converted into a synagogue, and with its dark hangings, great banks of fantastic webs, its improvised altar and ark, against which the costumes of the Turks gained in brilliancy, looked even more picturesque than the mosque. Here again were the white-robed women, separated from the men by a man-high screen; here again the men, in rich oriental costume, and except the few who came in full evening dress—which is nothing unusual at a day function in Turkey—no two were clad alike.

They came from all parts of the Orient. Constantinople had the highest representation, though there were men from Adrianople, Tunis, Tripoli, Damascus, Smyrna, Bombay, Calcutta, from Algeria and other Eastern points, and two lone men from New York. And here it was seen how wise were those who made the Hebrew the language of prayer for the Jews. Coming from lands far apart, unfamiliar with one another's language, unable to converse with one another in many instances, still in prayer, by the use of the same language, they were united.

In one corner, bent over his book of prayers, dressed in a brown silken robe and ample turban, stood the white-bearded, venerable "Faraway Moses" whom Mark Twain introduced to his readers years ago; at every turn stood or reclined a figure which might have been a Doré model. The fakir's cries, the clang of cymbals, the din of tomtoms, the endless drone and buzz of hurrying thousands came from the wonderful street a few steps off; above these the strains of martial music from the German Village across the way, and above all rose the chant of these strangely habited men and women: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Follow-Up: Jewish Participants in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893

The *CJH* Summer 2000 issue featured an article by Walter Roth about Sol Bloom, manager of the Midway Plaisance concessions at the World's Columbian Exposition.

In October, we received a letter from Harvey M. Karlen, with which he enclosed a photocopy of the article reprinted here, on the facing page. We asked Dr. Karlen for some biographical notes about himself, and he responded by e-mail:

"University of Chicago, AB 1939, Ph.D. 1950. College professor, political science: CCNY; City Colleges of Chicago. Retired 1986. Family in western suburbs: grandparents in Melrose Park before WW I, a park and American Legion Post named after uncle Harold Sharp killed in WW I. Parents pioneers in Berkely in 1920. Have authored some eight books, three on Chicago postal history, the latest currently being published. Working on a volume on the postal history associated with the 1893 Columbian Exposition when I saw the article I sent to you. At age 82, writing and family life fill my days."

Many thanks to Dr. Karlen for sending this fascinating article to *CJH*, and for telling us something about himself. We cherish the contributions of our readers.

Our next issue will feature an article by Walter Roth, expanding further on the subject of Jewish involvement in entertainment and commerce on the Midway at the 1893 Exposition. ❖



Program Book Reprint

Response has been enthusiastic to the Society's reprint of the original 72-page program book for *The Romance of A People*. The book, containing an additional eight pages of new introductory material, was reprinted in a limited edition of 2000. The republication was made possible by contributions to the Society by the Benjamin J. Rosenthal Foundation, Banc One, and Sam Pfeffer as co-trustee of the Elizabeth L. Ferguson Charitable Trust.

Free copies have been sent to our membership. **Join the Society now—free copies of the book will be sent to NEW members during the year 2001.**

Additional copies are available from the CJHS office for \$15.00 each, plus \$3.50 shipping & handling. Books may also be purchased at local Judaica stores: The Bariff Shop at the Spertus Institute; Hamakor Gallery in Skokie; Rosenblum's; and also at the Chicago Historical Society gift shop.

Our *Romance*: Society Members and Their Relatives Remember the 1933 Pageant

In the Summer 2000 issue of *CJH* we asked our readers who had participated in or were audience members at *The Romance of A People* to share their recollections with us, by mail or phone or e-mail. Warmest thanks to all who responded!

MICHAEL MEYER DOLNICK communicated with us by e-mail: “On a recent visit to Chicago my son [Society member Bill Dolnick] showed me his copy of the program of the 1933 *Romance of A People*. I was a member of the chorus as a member of Young Judea. Our leader, Peter Tarrel, encouraged all of us to participate. I recall wearing a gray robe and following the direction of the conductor. Was it Isaac Van Grove? While reminiscing about the pageant, my wife, Sylvia Rothstein Dolnick, told me that she also had been a member of the chorus and might have been seated somewhere close to me. I didn't know her at that time. She commented that we were two 17-year-olds who didn't know each other, and even if we had dated, probably would never have gotten married. However, on March 2, 2001, we will celebrate our 60th wedding anniversary.” Mr. Dolnick lives in Silver Spring, MD.

GOLDIE DOLNICK BRANDHANDLER phoned us. She was a 15-year-old high school student and lived at Troy & Cullom, south of Albany Park, not a Jewish neighborhood. She attended Temple Beth Israel, about a mile away from home. and took part in the pageant with Young Judea. She remembers singing and doing hand movements (rather than actually dancing.) Each girl was to wear a long white dress with a red ribbon, but she couldn't find a red one, so she wore pink, and was chastised—but who could tell a pink ribbon from a red one in that huge crowd? Mrs. Brandhandler is the sister of Michael Meyer Dolnick. She heard of our inquiry from her nephew Bill Dolnick.

MILTON FIELDS phoned us. He was a 13-year-old student at Tuley High School who came to see the show with friends. The huge event made a great impact on him. *The Romance* instilled pride in so many Jews of Chicago when the times were so difficult and the community was so poor. To Mr. Fields and his teen-age friends the highlight of the pageant was the big statue of Moloch that gave off sparks! Mr. Fields is a Society member who lives in Highland Park, IL.

GRACE GARFINKEL phoned us. She was a student at Marshall High and was chosen to be a dancer in *The Romance* with three other girls from her Hebrew school or perhaps the JPI High School of Jewish Studies. The girls wore gray or black gowns. She remembers Avrum Matthews. She recalls that the cast members were served a kosher meal at the first performance, but that at the repeat show, sponsored by the *Chicago Tribune*, non-kosher sandwiches were served. Grace and her friends threw away the non-kosher sandwich meat—but thought it might be okay to eat the bread. Ms. Garfinkel is a Society member and lives in Chicago.

HARRIET GOLD was introduced to us at the Society's program on October 29 which she attended with her daughter. Mrs. Gold told us that she participated in activities at the Douglas Boulevard JPI—the swimming pool and the gym—and that it was probably through the “J” that she became a dancer in *The Romance*. Mrs. Gold is a member of the Society and lives in Chicago.

PEARL PODOROWSKY ROBBINS phoned us. She was a Marshall High School student, about 15 years old. Her Hebrew School group from Humboldt Blvd. Temple, B'nai David Ohavei Tzedek, sang in the choir at *The Romance*. She remembers Nathan Vizosky teaching the dance steps. Mrs. Robbins lives in Chicago and is a member of the Society.

THERESA GERSHMAN SCHNEIDER wrote: “I was about 14 years old. The Hebrew School where I studied had a choir under the direction of Hy Reznick and his wife Shaindel. (A girl named Laike Topin went to *cheder* with me, and she also sang in the choir.) We sang at many Jewish functions, and I can clearly visualize our singing at “Jewish Day” at the World's Fair in 1933. The girls were dressed in white blouses and black skirts, the boys in white shirts and black trousers. How excited we were! It is so vivid to me, it's as though I can still hear the music and the cheering of the thousands of people. As to Chaim Weizmann and his remarks: I remember the choir being shut up in a back room practicing our music with Hy Reznick, so we missed all the speeches. Little did the leaders dream that to this day we would still see political turmoil such as it is in Israel.” Mrs. Schneider resides in Los Angeles, CA. She is a cousin of *CJH* Editor Bev Chubat. ❖

Romance Commemoration *continued from page 1*

The CJHS commemorative program was presented in the auditorium of the Chicago Historical Society from 2 to 4 p.m., before an audience of almost 400 people. Our president, Walter Roth, introduced the afternoon's proceedings with a capsule history of the CJHS involvement with *The Romance*. Excerpts of his remarks follow:

"Several years ago a young Israeli scholar, Ati Citroen, who was interested in making a documentary film on the anti-Nazi pageants of the American Jews, asked my help in learning about any such pageants that had been staged in Chicago.

We located a short newsreel film clip of a pageant, *The Romance of A People*, that had been performed on "Jewish Day" at "A Century of Progress," the Chicago World's Fair of 1933. Ati Citroen also discovered an audiotape of the music performed in the show.

Best of all, we came across a well-preserved copy of the original program book for the event, containing 72 pages of program notes, the names of thousands of Chicagoans who took part in the pageant, and many pages of ads by businesses and organizations that supported *The Romance*.

The purpose of the 1933 pageant was to present a history of the Jewish People from Creation to 1933, and to display their unity in the face of the ominous news coming from Europe. Meyer Weisgal, Chicago executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, was the producer of the pageant.

The Romance was staged on July 3, 1933, in Soldier Field, at

8:15 p.m., and lasted about 90 minutes. Chaim Weizmann came from London to address the audience before the show, drawn to Chicago by Weisgal's promise of a \$100,000 fee to be used for the rescue of German Jews and their settlement in Palestine.

Thousands of performers took part in the pageant: 60 cantors, hundreds of singers and dancers, and 3,500 members of Jewish youth groups. That afternoon there had been a Youth Field Day.

Over 125,000 people were in attendance, the largest gathering of Jews ever held in Chicago. The success of the spectacle inspired the *Chicago Tribune* to sponsor a second performance on July 6.

Our event—presented 67 years later—is divided into two parts. First, Professor Stephen A. Whitfield of Brandeis University will speak on "Staging Jewish History." Then, a number of our members who were present at the original performance will offer a synopsis of *The Romance* through readings from the program book, to the accompaniment of the audiotaped music from the historic 1933 recording."

[A thrilling feature of our commemorative event was Renee Matthews singing *A Dudele* along with the recorded voice of her late father, Avrum Matthews, who had been the 28-year-old lead singer in *The Romance*.]

At the conclusion of his introductory remarks, Mr. Roth thanked the Benjamin J. Rosenthal Foundation, Banc One, and Sam Pfeffer, Trustee of the Elizabeth Ferguson Charitable Trust, for their generous grants to make the program possible, and

Bev Chubak for preparing the program book for republication. He applauded Chicago playwright James Sherman for coordinating the readings and music, Renee Matthews for her enthusiastic inspiration, and our readers for taking part. He thanked Morene Dunn and Janet Iltis for making the arrangements, and members of the Society's board of directors and their spouses for their encouragement and help on the project.

Professor Whitfield spoke to us about Jewish pageants in the years after *The Romance*. Following are some very brief excerpts from his talk:

"How does a weak and often despised minority petition the public for a redress of grievances? Occasionally the answer is: through spectacle. For among the curios of American Jewish culture was an effort to quicken ethnic and political consciousness and to inspire moral support from the general community through the presentation of pageants.

Three were staged in New York City during the most exigent crisis facing Jewry since its emancipation. Nazism had propelled into exile figures who collaborated on *The Eternal Road* (1937), a biblical extravaganza that also encapsulated the history of the Diaspora as a saga of oppression... The organizers of *We Will Never Die* (1943) sought to fortify the hopes of other American Jews while their brethren were being massacred, and joined with other artists in working on *A Flag is Born* (1946), a play designed to validate the fight for Jewish sovereignty in Palestine...

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Romance

continued from page 7

It asks too much of art to expect it to halt the juggernaut of despotism. Nazism and Fascism were too powerful for that... Neither masterpieces nor spectacles could influence geopolitics; and the obvious lesson that many Jews learned is that, while art can enhance and illumine and expose power, only countervailing force can be effective.

The Zionism that mobilized some participants in these dramas thus adopted the armed vision, and accepted the task of violent resistance so that Jews could reduce their vulnerability and start defining their own destiny. That realization meant consolidating a sense of peoplehood, instilling in American Jewish audiences a sense of trans-Atlantic solidarity.

The first of these pageants had been conceived in Salzburg; the last ended by appealing for the birth of a nation in the Near East. In effect they discredited Tip O'Neill's dictum that "all politics is local" and invoked another ideal: *Kol Yisroel arevim zeh lazeh* (all of Israel are responsible for one another)." ❖

Professor Whitfield's speech was excerpted from his article, "The Politics of Pageantry, 1936-1946," which appeared in American Jewish History, vol. 84 (September 1996).

Onstage

Walter Roth, Society President, was the moving force behind the realization of the pageant program reprint and commemorative event.

Dr. Joe Kraus introduced the speakers. Joe is a member of the board of the Society and past editor of *CJH*. He is a teacher and writer.

Dr. Stephen J. Whitfield was our guest speaker and author of the foreword to the program reprint.

Dr. Adele Hast is a historian and a past president of CJHS. Dr. Hast is the editor of the forthcoming book "Women Building Chicago," a collection of over 400 biographies.

Renee Matthews, noted Chicago actress and singer, is the daughter of pageant soloist Avrum Matthews.

Pageant Participants & Spectators

Herman Draznin took part in the 1933 pageant with the Deborah Boys Club, performing gymnastics. He was nine years old, and was accompanied by an older cousin. Herman is treasurer of the Society.

Gayola Epstein was a spectator at the pageant. She is the daughter of Rabbi Solomon Goldman of blessed memory, who was one of the writers of *The Romance* and author of the original program book's foreword.

Dr. David H. Heller was 12 years old, and as a Boy Scout he took part in the Jewish Day wand drill. He wrote a delightful article in the Summer 2000 issue of *CJH* about his experiences at the 1933-34 fair.

Celia Levinson was a teenager when she attended with her mother, whom she remembers talking about "a vast, vast pageantry" and who took obvious pride in being there.

Esther Zackler took part in the pageant as a teenage member of the Zionist youth movement. She sang in a choir of 3,500 young people.

Backstage

James Sherman, the popular Chicago playwright, contributed his services as dramaturge. As no script of *The Romance* could be found, Jim arranged the synopses of the scenes, as printed in the program book, into a narrative. He couldn't attend our event because he was staging his play *Door to Door* out of town.

Dr. Chaya Roth participated greatly in planning and publicizing the event. Chaya directed the performance, first rehearsing the participants onstage; then cueing the recorded music and sound effects from the control booth.

Janet Iltis arranged for the event's refreshments and then acted as lighting technician. Janet is a CJHS board member and co-chairs the Membership Committee.

Out Front

Suzanne Robin assisted Chaya in the control booth, and then pitched in to sell program books and videos in the lobby with...

Dr. Carolyn Eastwood, diligent CJHS Recording Secretary, and...

Eve Levin, long-time office manager for the Society.

Members of the CJHS Board of Directors offered assistance to our guests and helped in many ways.

Printing and Publicity

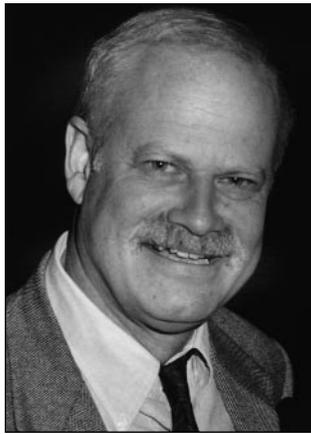
Bev Chubat, editor of *CJH*, prepared the *Romance* program book for republication and created print advertising for the show.

Morene Dunn of the River North Association worked with CJHS in planning the event and provided expert public relations services.

David Rigg, of David Rigg Photography, Inc., volunteered his services for the event. His pictures illustrate this report. ❖



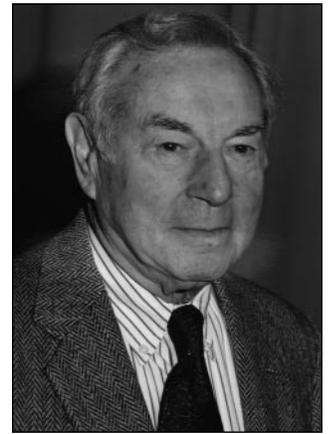
Chaya Roth



Stephen Whitfield



Bev Chubat and Janet Iltis



David Heller



**Standing, from left: Esther Zackler, Walter Roth, Herman Draznin, Joe Kraus.
Seated: Adele Hast, Celia Levinson, Renee Matthews, Gayola Epstein. (Photographs by David Rigg)**

Living Waters... A Tour of Jewish History in North Central Illinois

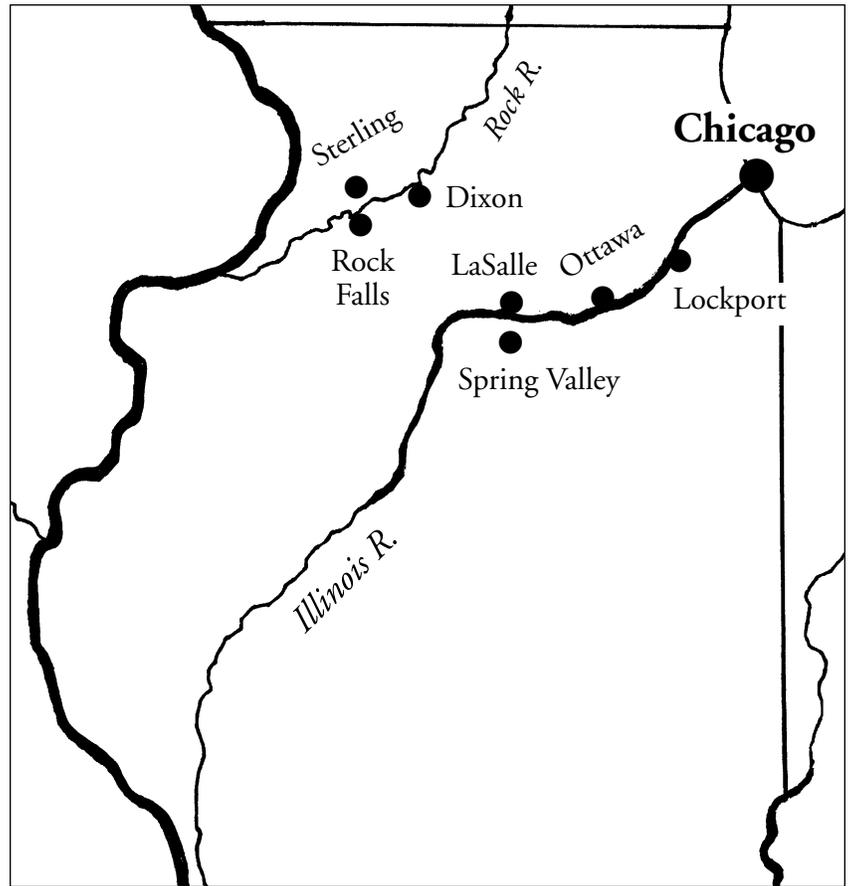
BY ALLEN H. MEYER

On Sunday, August 27, 2000, the Society conducted an all-day bus tour of Illinois river towns. Our guide, Allen H. Meyer, prepared a detailed narrative which we have excerpted.

The title of this trip could be *mai'im chai'im*—"living waters"—a phrase which appears frequently in the bible. Then, it had to do with living in arid lands, a constant need for water, even to the point where Moses struck a rock to miraculously extract water and quench the thirst of his people.

Our travels today carry us through communities where Jews settled in the 19th century in order to be near *mai'im chai'im*—river towns where they could survive in commerce by virtue of proximity to water.

The picture seen by most of us is one where our forbears settled in larger urban communities to achieve the riches of the *goldene medinah* in a thriving melting pot with other immigrants pursuing similar goals. But others, like a small group of Jews sent out from New York, settled briefly in Schaumburg Township in the 1840s to engage in farming. Perhaps that attempt failed due to an absence of living water. However, in Sterling,



Illinois we find dairy farms flourishing under Jewish management. Some immigrants, like my grandfather, survived (and raised four children) as a junk yard dealer—but he also had a 30-acre farm in Dixon.

Our initial visits will be to Dixon, Sterling, and Rock Falls—all on the Rock River (which runs to Moline where it merges with the Mississippi).

We will then head south to the towns of Spring Valley, LaSalle, and Ottawa, where the life force is the Illinois River (which meets the Mississippi near Alton).

Enroute to Dixon, CJHS Tour Director Leah Axelrod offered historical notes on the region. The first European inhabitants were the French, whose "black laws" prohibited entry by Jews under penalty of death.

Illinois gained statehood in 1818, but it was with the end of the Blackhawk War in 1833, and the removal of the Native Americans, that settlement would begin. That year also marked the founding of Chicago.



TEMPLE SHOLOM

510 East 10th Street, Sterling IL

(Photograph by Norman D. Schwartz)

**TEMPLE B'NAI MOSHE****428 Gooding Street, LaSalle, IL***(Photograph by Norman D. Schwartz)*

Guest rabbis are invited to conduct services at Temple Sholom on the High Holy Days . For many years the visiting cantorial soloist has been a Chicagoan, Lori Schwaber.

In Spring Valley, resident Charles Steinberg greeted us. Congregation Share Tsedek, built in 1910, is now undergoing restoration. Spring Valley had once been a brawling coal mining boom town where broad streets were laid out for a

prosperous future that didn't materialize. Mr. Steinberg's merchant grandfather had been able to communicate with the Eastern European immigrant miners in their native languages.

We met Roy Pollack in LaSalle's Temple B'nai Moshe. There were once many trappers in the LaSalle area. They sold mink and other pelts to furrier Moses Romanovsky, who donated the land for the Temple (built in 1924), where restoration is now underway.

Sidney Stiefel and Boyd Palmer met us at the Ottawa Jewish Cemetery, provided information, and graciously answered our questions about its history.

Our tour concluded in Lockport, with dinner at the Public Landing Restaurant in the historic Gaylord Building. There we learned a bit about the Illinois & Michigan Canal, which runs from LaSalle to Joliet, parallel to the Illinois River. ❖

Our visit to Dixon coincided with the dedication of the "Reagan Trail" from the former President's birthplace in Dixon to Eureka College, his alma mater. Our guides expertly planned our route to avoid any traffic tie-up.

We did encounter another President—Abraham Lincoln—in Dixon. A statue depicting him as a young soldier during the Blackhawk War stands on the north bank of the Rock River, where Fort Dixon once stood.

The Northwestern Steel & Wire Company, owned by the Dillon family, was located in Sterling. The firm owned patents on barbed wire and manufactured "Sterling nails." It was the presence of this important metal business that drew many Jews to open scrap metal junkyards in the area.

In 1910, when the Jewish house of worship in Sterling was simply called The Synagogue, the congregants engaged Rabbi Barnett Kaplan who served all of north central Illinois until 1919 and became known as "The Sterling Rabbi." Today, Sterling's renovated Temple Sholom is located in what was once the Sterling Steam Bakery.

Our tour group was greeted warmly at Temple Sholom by the its president, Ruth Bittner; Wally and Shirley Feldman, long-time leaders of the congregation; and members of the Jakobs family, (owners of Jakobs Bros Farms, Inc., one of the largest feed lots, or beef cattle farms, in Illinois). We were addressed by a young and articulate mother and teacher, Nicole Wolf-Camplin.

**CONGREGATION SHARE TSEDEK****231 West Erie Street, Spring Valley, IL***(Photograph by Norman D. Schwartz)*

FROM THE
CHICAGO JEWISH
archives

Sam Shapiro and Illinois Politics in the 1960s

By Joy Kingsolver



Sam Shapiro in an undated photograph.

Samuel H. Shapiro was born in Estonia, his mother's native land, in 1907. His father, a Polish cobbler, had already emigrated to the United States. He brought his family to live in Kankakee, Illinois as soon as he had established himself there. Samuel grew up in Kankakee, attended St. Viator's College, and in 1929 earned a law degree from the University of Illinois. He became city attorney of Kankakee in 1933 and district attorney in 1936. In 1941 he enlisted in the Navy, serving in the Anti-Submarine Warfare Unit. After the war he was elected

to the Illinois House of Representatives, where he made a name for himself as a sponsor of progressive mental health legislation and as a foe of corruption in the state hospital system. Among his admirers, he earned the nickname "Mr. Mental Health."

In 1960, he ran for lieutenant governor alongside Otto Kerner on the Democratic ticket. After a contentious campaign, during which Kerner was accused of being a pawn of Mayor Richard Daley, they won the election, and Kerner became Illinois' 35th governor. They were reelected in 1964, and Sam Shapiro was elevated to governor in the spring of 1968, when Kerner resigned to become a judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals (his career there was later cut short by his indictment on federal charges).

This was an election year, and Shapiro's big chance to make it as governor on his own. He secured the Democratic nomination, but his opponent, Richard B. Ogilvie, mounted a vigorous campaign, helped by Richard Nixon's strong showing in Illinois that year. The campaign was bitter; Shapiro's camp raised questions about Ogilvie's previous service as Cook County Sheriff and his hiring of Richard Cain, who was later indicted for bank robbery conspiracy.

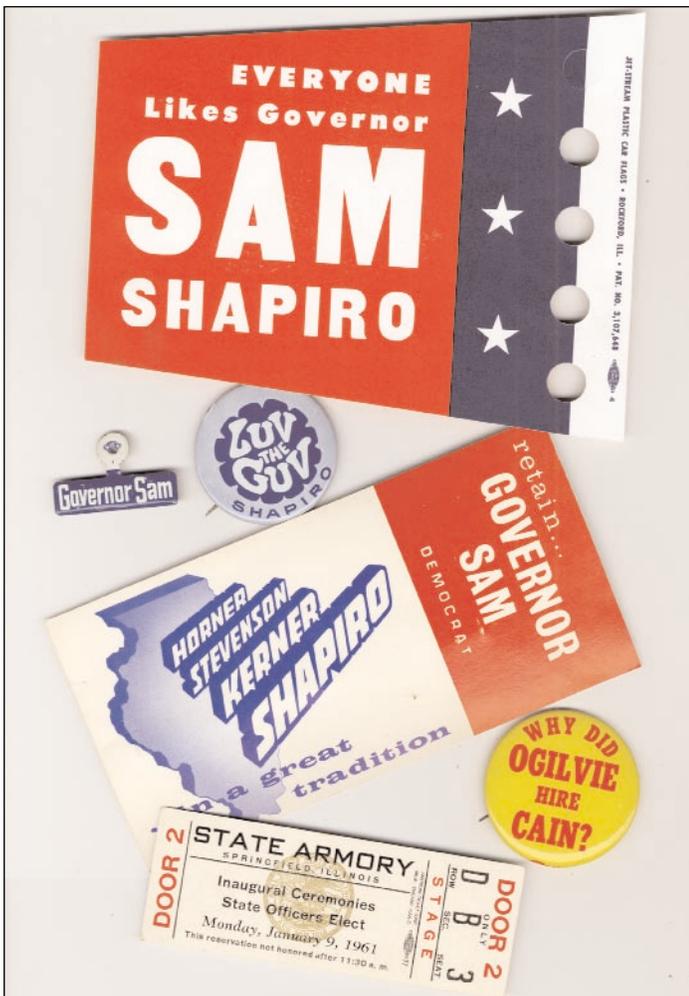
The Jewish community seemed divided that year; in the presidential race, many supported Hubert Humphrey, the Democratic nominee, but there was also support for Richard Nixon, who took a strong pro-Israel stance. Shapiro was active in the Jewish community and had always been held in high esteem; in 1967 he was honored by the Jewish National Fund with a Keter Shem Tov, "Crown of a Good Name" award, celebrated by a dinner at the Palmer House and speeches by Eugene McCarthy and others. He was a member of B'nai B'rith and the Covenant Club, and he and his wife Gertrude belonged to Temple B'nai Israel in Kankakee.

In the election of 1968, Shapiro was endorsed by many Jewish leaders such as Marshall Korshak, Jacob Arvey, and Philip Klutznick, who wrote articles and took out ads in the *Sentinel*. Ogilvie also worked hard

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for the Jewish vote, taking out full page ads in the *Sentinel* just before the election. In the end, the race was close: Ogilvie won, 2,307,295 to 2,279,501. Shapiro had carried Cook County, but lost most of the downstate counties. Interestingly, Shapiro's running mate, Paul Simon, won the race for lieutenant governor, and for the next four years men of opposite parties held the two top state positions.

After his defeat, Samuel Shapiro returned to the practice of law, commuting from Kankakee to his office in Chicago. He died in 1987. Thanks to the generosity of Sandi Goldsher Elkins, niece of the governor, and the assistance of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, a collection of campaign memorabilia, correspondence, photographs, and newspaper stories has been placed in the Chicago Jewish Archives. The Samuel H. Shapiro Collection, which offers a revealing first-hand look at his years of public service, is available for use by researchers and scholars. ❖



Top: flag for car antenna, 1968.
Campaign buttons, 1968. Campaign flyer, 1968. Ticket to inauguration ceremonies, 1960.

Chad Gadya... Latke-Hamentash Debate Echoes 2000 Presidential Election

Eminent University of Chicago scholars annually debate the merits of two Jewish holiday delicacies: the Chanukkah potato pancake (*latke*) and the fruit or poppyseed-filled pastry (*hamentash*) eaten during Purim.

In 1946, the late Rabbi Morris Pekarsky, the founding director of Hillel at the U of C, and the late Professors Sol Tax and Louis Gottschalk held the first debate on a street corner in Hyde Park. From that simple beginning, the debate has evolved into a hugely popular event held in Mandel Hall, under the auspices of the Newberger Hillel Center at the University of Chicago.

This year, the 54th annual debate was held on November 21 before a full house. The mood of the evening was established when the speakers entered the hall in a mock-solemn procession led by Rabbi David M. Rosenberg, Director of the Hillel Center, wearing a *kittel* and baseball cap. He was followed by the moderator, Professor Ted Cohen, and the panelists, each dressed in a comically embellished cap and gown.

Saul Levmore, Professor of Law, wore a necklace made of election punch cards that drew laughter and groans from the audience. His zany presentation was about voting practices in biblical times. Professor Levmore embellished his talk with Hebrew "election-related" words and phrases, the most outrageous of which was *chad gadya*.

Ingrid B. Rowland, Associate Professor of Art History, discussed the results of her "research" on an obscure Scandinavian philosopher and herring merchant (thus introducing a third Jewish food item into the debate). Thomas R. Trabasso, Professor of Psychology & Education, got back to the relevant pancake and pastry. His audio-visual presentation consisted of a series of pseudo-scientific "tests" of preference for either food.

The evening concluded with most audience members marking their ballots in favor of latke or hamentash, while a few gathered intently around Professor Levmore to inspect his chads. *B.C.*

Sonia Rockler: Yiddish Language and Culture Activist

“GIRL REFUGEE TELLS OF WOE LEFT BEHIND.” This is the headline of a story by reporter Meyer Zolotareff in the *Chicago Herald & Examiner* on Sunday, February 3, 1929.

He begins: “This is a story of broken hearts and wounded souls impoverished by the world war. It was told by Sonia Kagan, 19-year-old daughter of Abraham Kagan of Bialystok, now in Poland, but formerly in Russia, who after years of struggle have [sic] finally arrived here as the guest of her uncle, Ben Sostrin of 4201 West Adams St.”

Readers of *CJH* were introduced to Meyer Zolotareff in our last issue. We reprinted a vintage 1921 column about Zolly by Ben Hecht from his *Chicago Daily News* “A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago” series. Hecht masterfully conveys the personality of the Russian-born West Side journalist.

After our summer issue was published, *CJH* received a letter from Betty Brandes, suggesting that her late mother, Sonia Kagan Rockler, would make a good subject for an article in our publication. Enclosed with the letter was a photocopy of Zolly’s 1929 interview.

From Mrs. Brandes *CJH* learned that Sonia Rockler was involved in Yiddish language and cultural activities in Chicago from the time of her arrival here.



Sonia at age 19.

This photograph appeared with Meyer Zolotaroff’s 1929 newspaper story. (Courtesy Betty Brandes)

Young Sonia had been a member of a mandolin orchestra at the I.L. Peretz secular Yiddish primary school in Bialystok, and in Chicago she began to perform regularly on “The Jewish Hour” Yiddish language program on radio stations WSBC and WEDC, singing and accompanying herself on the mandolin. For more than 20 years Mrs. Rockler performed with the Jewish Folklore Mandolin Ensemble.

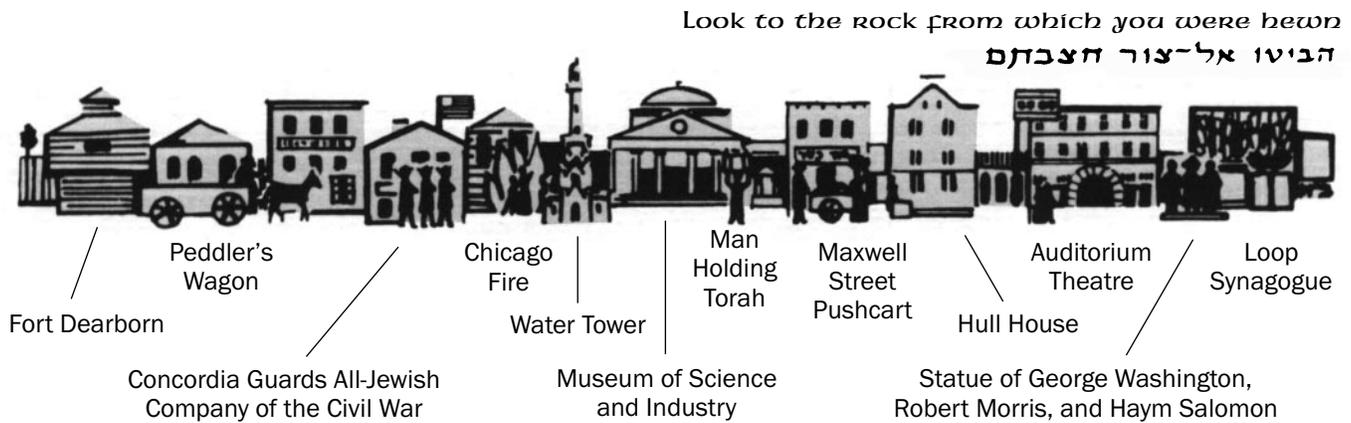
In the decade of the 1960s she was a production associate with the Chicago Yiddish Theatre Association’s annual stage productions, receiving a golden “Best Prompter” award in 1969.

For more than half a century Sonia was an activist with the Chicago YIVO Society (local affiliate of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research). She conducted Yiddish study classes and lectured at local colleges. In the 1990s she took part in planning the Society’s annual Summer Festival of Yiddish Culture at the Harold Washington Library Center of the Chicago Public Library.

Sonia Rockler died in 1995. In a Chicago YIVO Society memorial tribute she was described as “our guardian of standards, the keeper of the gate of quality...” The Chicago Jewish Archives has among its holdings Mrs. Rockler’s taped oral history as well as tapes of her singing and Yiddish poetry readings. ❖



The Jewish Folklore Mandolin Ensemble in an undated photograph. Sonia Rockler is standing, third from left. (Photograph courtesy Chicago Jewish Archives)



Symbol of the Society: Illustration

Very early in its history the Chicago Jewish Historical Society was fortunate enough to acquire as its logo an eye-catching graphic illustration.

The work of Roseann Chasman, a local artist well-known for her creativity with Jewish themes, the logo contains an illustrated running history of the city with emphasis on its Jewish aspects.

Included are drawings of such completely secular elements as Fort Dearborn, the Water Tower, the Chicago Fire, and the City flag. Most of the representations, however, are either of secular historical elements with a distinctive Jewish flavor or of specific aspects of local Jewish history.

Drawings combining general and Jewish elements are of the Concordia Guards all-Jewish Company of the Civil War, Julius Rosenwald's Museum of Science and Industry, the old West Side's Hull House, and the statue of George Washington, Robert Morris, and Haym Salomon.

Also depicted are such essentially Jewish elements as early and modern synagogues, storefronts, a peddler's wagon, and a pushcart.

The logo aptly symbolizes the Society's historical concerns. We are proud of it and the accompanying quotation from Isaiah: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn."

Adapted from "The Chicago Jewish Historical Society: A Ten-Year History 1977-1987" by Irwin J. Suloway.

chicago jewish historical society

Symbol of the Society: Typography

Upon beginning work as editor/designer of *Chicago Jewish History*, I decided to use the same type font for the publication that Roseann Chasman had chosen for the Society logo. Happily, I found the exact font, *Neue Hammer Unziale*, in an online catalog and downloaded it to my Mac.

The font is named for its designer, Austrian-born Victor Hammer (1882-1967), a distinguished printer who devoted a great deal of his life to the design and development of the letterform known as the uncial, the handwriting used by medieval scribes. He used his uncial designs for all his books, which were printed on a hand press, and greatly

admired. *Hammer Unziale* was produced in 1921 by the Klingspor foundry at Offenbach.

In 1939 Hammer fled the Nazis, leaving all his cutting and casting tools and most of his fonts in Austria, and came to the U.S. where he had been offered a post teaching art and lettering at Wells College in New York. It was here that he began work on his best-known type, *American Uncial*. With the help of the Society of Typographical Arts in Chicago, sufficient money was raised to complete the project. B.C.

Biographical reference: "Rookledge's International Directory of Type Designers" (New York, 1994).

About the Society

What We Are

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

What We Do

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

Volunteer Opportunities

Would you like to become more involved in the activities of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society? We'd love to have you! Following are the various committees on which you can serve. Contact the Society at (312)663-5634 or any of the Chairpersons listed here.

■ PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Do you have a great idea for a meeting topic? If you are organized and creative, friendly and outgoing, the Program Committee would welcome your help in planning and implementing our bi-monthly and annual meetings. Call Charles Bernstein (773)324-6362.

■ MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Society's membership continues to grow, and you could help us introduce Chicago Jewish history to even more people. Share your ideas and energy! Contact Janet Iltis (773)761-1224 or Clare Greenberg (773)725-7330.

■ TOUR COMMITTEE

Bring your creativity and organization to planning and promoting our popular roster of tours on Jewish history. Contact Leah Axelrod (847)432-7003.

■ EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Do you like to write? Are you a great proofreader? You can contribute to our quarterly publication, *Chicago Jewish History*. Contact our editor, Bev Chubat (773)525-4888.

Membership

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations and includes a subscription to *Chicago Jewish History*, discounts on Society tours and at the Spertus Museum store, and the opportunity to learn and inform others about Chicago Jewish history and its preservation.

Dues Structure

Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year.

Life Membership	\$1000
Historian	500
Scholar	250
Sponsor	100
Patron or Family	50
Senior Family or Individual	35
Synagogue or Organization	25
Senior Individual or Student	20

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