Look to the rock from which you were hewn הביעו אל־עור העבתם



CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chicago's Unknown Jews: Story of Local Sephardim

Surprising Diversity Exists Within this Small Group by Walter P. Zenner

A s a youngster growing up on the North Side, I was barely aware of Sephardic Jews in Chicago. For a brief time, the principal of my Hebrew school was a Sephardi from Jerusalem, and I came to know that a regular member of the daily minyan at our synagogue was a Persian Jew. In the late 1950s, I interviewed a Lebanese Jew who had lived in Chicago. Still, it was only with the building of the Iran Hebrew Congregation in Skokie in the Sixties and the Sephardic synagogue in Evanston in 1970 that I became fully conscious of the Sephardic presence in Chicago.

Earlier investigations into the cultures and identity of Sephardic Jews in Israel, New York and England had piqued my curiosity concerning those closer to my former home. With assistance from Dolores Kohl Solovy, I undertook a brief exploration of local Jewish Sephardim. The term "Sephardim" is here used in its broad sense, encompassing most of the Jews of the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia, regardless of their heritage of living in Spain or their use of the Ladino language, although speakers of this Judeo-Spanish tongue form a significant portion of Chicago's Sephardim. This study is still exploratory in nature and all conclusions have to be seen as tentative.

The First Local Sephardim

While some Jews of Sephardic descent lived in Chicago prior to 1900 (such as the family of the novelist Vera Caspary, remembered today for movie versions of her *Laura* and *The Big Clock*) the present congregations had their origin in the period of mass Jewish migration between 1900 and 1924. Although one source mentions the presence of Moroccan Jews, the groups who first established a durable presence here were the Ladino-speakers from Turkey and the Balkans; the "Persians" or Aramaic-speakers, mainly from Iranian Azerbaijan and the Caucasian regions of Czarist Russia; and Arabic-speakers, primarily Syrian Jews from Aleppo.

So small a percentage of the larger Jewish community as to be virtually overlooked at times and quite unfamiliar to most, Chicago's Sephardic community has a history dating back almost a century with a few almost vanished families going back considerably further. Even scholars in local Jewish history are likely to be unaware of it surprisingly diverse origins. This exploratory look at local Sephardim was undertaken by a former Chicagoan who is professor of anthropology at the State University of New York at Albany. Dr. Zenner has a rabbinic degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary in addition to his doctorate from Columbia University. He has done considerable research in ethnicity, particularly with regard to Jews and Arabs.

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April 23rd Meeting Focuses on Jewish Politicians Since 1920

Ald. Leon Despres To Discuss An Era He Helped Create

Ithough Chicago has yet to have a Jewish mayor, its tradition of having other Jewish officials dates back to before the Civil War; and it has almost never had a shortage of Jews in politics, local, statewide, or national. The next Society meeting, to be held Sunday afternoon, April 23, will examine Chicago's Jewish politicians since 1920.

The speaker will be one whose firsthand continued on page 2

President's Message

Some Plans, Ideas, Needs for the Future

The change of name to Chicago Jewish History and the improved format and printing of the quarterly publication of our Society is indicative of steps we are taking, albeit small in nature, to improve the services offered by the Chicago Jewish Historical Society to the community. Our organization is a not-forprofit organization composed of volunteers who give of their time and services to assist in the preservation, in Chicago, of the heritage and history of our people.

To that end our members and friends responded splendidly some months back to a letter sent by Board Member Joseph Minsky to seek help in endowing the Doris Minsky Fund. As a result of that response, the Doris Minsky Fund Committee is now in the process of publicizing its decision to conduct an annual competition for the best manuscript dealing with an event or person of significance in Chicago Jewish history. The winning entry will be published by the Fund and made available to Society members and friends.

Preaching Preservation

We continue to explore avenues with which to impress upon the community the need to preserve archival material dealing with our local Jewish history. A few weeks ago Mark Mandle, one of our valued directors, and I visited KAM Isaiah Israel Congregation on Chicago's South Side to see firsthand the efforts being made by that congregation, the oldest in the Midwest, to preserve its archives. Jessica Young is not only the temple archivist, but on Sunday mornings she also teaches the confirmation class how to take oral histories of their elders and thus help to preserve the history of the Congregation. It is a great endeavor and an example for other congregations.

Need for an Adequate Archive

Much of Chicago's Jewish history lies hidden in the closets and basements of our local houses of worship. One of the tasks of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society will be to assist our congregations to organize this material, to preserve it and to make it available to future generations. A central archive with space enough to

President Walter Roth

properly preserve such material is still sadly lacking in our city. It is our hope that the future will see Chicago begin to channel some of its resources into financing such an archive. Several American cities are well ahead of us in this regard.

A Lost Resource

Before closing, we would like to extend heartfelt sympathy to the family of Arthur Weinberg, a Society member who passed away on January 28. Either alone or with his wife, Lila, Arthur wrote several books dealing with Chicago history, particularly ones about his great hero, Clarence Darrow. Many will recall his talk to the Society a few years ago.

His passing removes a voice that spoke with passion of the early immigrants to this city, their labor and achievements. We took an oral history from Arthur last year. It will now be both a treasured part of our archives and a remembrance from a good friend.

Walter Roth, President

Here It Is--What Do You Think?

his first issue of Chicago Jewish History represents the culmination of a cooperative effort on the parts of a great many people within and without the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Design of the all-new publication is the result of efforts by artists Leah Sosewitz and Jere Specks.

Layout and type composition were handled by CJHS member Alan Fox; his company, Continental Composition, Inc.; and his special projects director, Gary Riecke. Printing is by CJHS member Henry Straus, whose Econo-Print Corporation has made a much more attractive and readable quarterly financially feasible.

Editor Irwin Suloway has coordinated the

various efforts which have gone into the revised format. He wishes also to thank CJHS Board member Janet Hagerup as well as his editorial board (Marian Cutler, Mark Mandle, Norman Schwartz, Sidney Sorkin and Elaine Suloway) for their assistance, advice and support.

He, and they, will be interested in hearing readers' reactions to the new *Chicago Jewish History*. Tell us what you think.

April 23 Meeting to Feature Leon Desperes

Continued from page 1

knowledge of the subject extends virtually through that entire period, former Alderman Leon M. Despres. The meeting will be held at Congregation B'nai Zion, 6759 North Greenview Avenue at Pratt Boulevard, to mark the seventieth anniversary of that synagogue, the first to be established in the Rogers Park community.

Free Bus Service Available

Ald. Despres' address will begin at 2:00 following a 1:00 PM social hour at which Passover refreshments will be served. The Society will once again provide free bus service to the meeting for members and friends. The chartered bus will leave the Rush Street entrance of the Marriott Hotel, just south of Ohio Street, at 12:30 PM and will return riders to the same location after the meeting.

Mr. Despres served as alderman from the Fifth Ward, known as the University of Chicago ward, for twenty years, retiring undefeated in 1975. Although always independent of party label, he also served Democratic mayors as City Council Parliamentarian 1979-1987 and has been on the Chicago Plan Commission since 1979

Considers Important Era

Inasmuch as his topic covers an era which featured such important Jewish political leaders and officials as Moe Rosenberg, Jake Arvey, Henry Horner, Barnett Hodes, Marshall Korshak and Sidney Yates to say nothing of the speaker himself, his presentation is being eagerly anticipated by the Society.

A native Chicagoan, educated in the Hyde Park area from elementary school through law school, Mr. Despres has had a distinguished career as a lawyer and civic leader apart from government service and has won several awards. --I.J.S.



Hidden Treasure Found In Congregational Archives

KAM Isaiah Israel Records Go Back Over a Century

By Jessica Young AM Isaiah Israel Congregation is the oldest Jewish congregation in the Midwest, founded in 1847, just ten years after the City of Chicago itself.

Our 140th anniversary in 1947 brought a renewed interest in the congregation's rich history, which in many ways illuminates the history of the entire Jewish community in Chicago

Several Activities Undertaken

In addition to beginning an oral history project, we rephotographed and remounted our eighty-plus years of confirmation class pictures and acquired the services of an archivist (the writer) to collect and catalog the box after box of archival material hiding in vaults, closets and basements both of the temple and of temple members. Doing history at KAM Isaiah Israel is rather like a cross between cleaning your closet and eavesdropping on your grandmother.

Our documents date from 1874, the year the second fire destroyed what the Great Fire of 1871 did not. Consequently, we lost much of whatever the founders of our constituent congregations KAM (founded in 1847) and B'nai Sholom (founded in 1852) might have left us. Luckily though, two of our other constituents, Isaiah (founded 1895) and Israel (founded 1896) left us lovely *complete* sets of minutes from board meetings and sisterhood meetings as well as auditors' reports, ledgers and box after box of cancelled checks.

Comparing Living Then and Now

We also have parallel sets of confirmation scripts and records for KAM and Isaiah Israel for the 1930's through to the present. Our current confirmation class is using these documents to understand better the meaning of confirmation and how it has changed over the years. Our teenagers find it easy and fun to compare their lives to those of the kids of "long ago" whose pictures they see and whose words they read. (I point out to them that most of the words were not written by the youngsters themselves: they were usually the work of the rabbi. Times are different now.) The most valuable part of our collection, in addition to the board minutes, may be the papers of Joseph Stolz, who was rabbi at Isaiah and then Isaiah Israel from 1895 until he became emeritus is 1927. Stolz kept careful records, and he never threw anything away.

While the larger part of his personal papers went to the American Jewish Archives at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati on his death in 1942, we have autograph letters, handwritten sermons and his ledgerbook of bar mitzvahs conducted and marriages performed, complete with pithy comments on the persons involved.

Spreading the Archival Message

In addition to poking through the secret places of the temple looking for historical treasure, I have spent some time propagandizing for the archive project among temple members and former temple members. (I guess that a large proportion of Reform Jews in the Chicago area have a tie to one of our four roots, or their offshoots, somewhere in their background.) Somehow, important papers often end up in someone's basement, file cabinets or desk drawers. Usually the owner of these papers does not even realize what he or she has or that it is of value to the Chicago Jewish historian. Sometimes an oral history interview will result in the discovery of a new cache of documents; sometimes just a casual remark will lead to a new find.

More than Congregational History

What is all this stuff good for? It is more than a personal or institutional record of a temple "family." It is the story of communities in formation, conflict, transition, success and decline. It is the story of urban decay and urban renewal, spiritual as well as physical. It is the story of the changing roles of women within the Jewish community, and really within society as a whole. It is the story of Reform Judaism, and its responses to the challenges of an urban environment in the twentieth century. Is there a moral to this story? Every day I bless Blanche Stolz, who kept the Isaiah and Isaiah Israel sisterhood minutes in readable, if florid, handwriting for over thirty years. With word-processors, photo-reproduction and other modern technology, there is no excuse for not having good records -- no excuse but carelessness or ignorance. And

I thank the historians of KAM Isaiah Israel before me who cared enough to collect and save our story for our children. And I bemoan the fact that so much has been lost by starting too late.

A Call to Action

Let your descendants bless you too. Leave them the priceless record of your temple's story. There is no substitute for the written record, and there is no better time to collect it than right now.

Minsky Fund Seeks Manuscripts for Publication

Competition Underway For Monograph Series

riters and would-be writers are reminded that the first annual Doris Minsky Memorial Fund competition for a monograph on an aspect of local Jewish history is currently underway. June 30, 1989, is the deadline for the submission of manuscripts.

A committee headed by Dr. Irving Cutler will consider manuscripts submitted, and the one judged most suitable will be published later this year by the fund, recently established to memorialize a founder and long-time leader of the Society. Copies of the monograph will be made available to all members and will be sold to others.

Submitting Manuscripts

Details regarding the procedure for submission of manuscripts are avalable from Dr. Cutler at 3217 Hill Lane, Wilmette IL 60091, telephone 251-8927.

The fund seeks to create an endowment, the income of which will finance the publication of a monograph yearly. It was started by Mrs. Minsky's husband Joseph and members of his family, and the public response has been gratifying.

Contributions Still Possible

Names of all contributors to the Minsky Fund will appear in the first monograph; names of those donating \$100.00 or more will appear in each of the yearly monographs. It is still possible to contribute by sending a check addressed to the Society (at 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605) with the indication that it is to be used for the Doris Minsky Memorial Fund. ■

Adler Papers Reveal Efforts to Rescue German Jews in Thirties

Joy, Anguish Accompanied Affidavits from Chicago Family

by Walter Roth

Hereican Jews in the pre-holocaust decade of the Nineteen Thirties. Yet, with the rise to power of Hitler and his henchmen in Germany in 1933, many individual American Jews took extraordinary and, in hindsight, heroic steps to help rescue their brethren attempting to escape from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. These Jews did not yet don uniforms or hurl bombs at the Nazis, but they did the one thing they could do as individual American citizens: they rescued fellow Jews from Europe by furnishing them with affidavits of support, which were crucial to their escape to America.

One Chicago family in particular, the Max and Robert S. Adler family, was instrumental in furnishing hundreds of such affidavits to prospective immigrants. The Adler family in turn was a local satellite of a much more substantial rescue effort financed by the children of the Chicago industrialist and philanthropist, Julius Rosenwald, through their special office and staff in New York City.

Immigration Law Restrictive

By 1933, the United States had in effect a very restrictive immigration law. At the turn of the twentieth century, America's ports of entry were wide open to immigrants; and millions entered the United States, particularly from Eastern Europe. But World War I, the communist and anarchist scares that followed and a prospective "invasion by Asian hordes" caused Congress to pass legislation effectively closing the doors, except for a limited number of immigrants each year.

A law was enacted in 1924 limiting total immigration into the United States to 150,000 persons per year. The total was apportioned among countries in accordance with the distribution of national origins of the white population of the United States in 1920. The allocations were as follows: about 75,000 immigrants from Great Britain, 25,000 from Germany, 1,500 from Austria, 2,800 from Czechoslovakia, 2,700 from Russia, 6,000 from Poland and 100 each from China and Japan. These quotas obviously hit hardest persons whose place of origin was Eastern Europe or Asia.

Affidavit Rule Complicates Matters

While later events made the number totally inadequate, the relatively large quota for Germany did provide an escape hatch for German Jews rarely available to Jews from other countries. The quota restrictions were buttressed by an administrative regulation promulgated by President Herbert Hoover in 1930 instructing American consuls overseas to

deny a visa to anyone who might sooner or later become a candidate for public assistance. The American consuls responded with written rules setting forth the necessity of an "Affidavit of Support" from an American citizen for each person desiring to immigrate under the quota.

Rules governing these affidavits varied somewhat from consulate to consulate, but basically the American citizen had to promise under oath to be responsible for the immigrant, and he had to furnish two items: a financial statement, preferably accompanied by a copy of his latest income tax return and two letters of verification from a person or firm, such as a banker or an accountant, certifying as to the net worth of the affiant. Later, after Kristallnacht in November, 1938, and the huge influx of applications for visas to the American consuls, some consuls such as those in Vienna and Berlin enacted rules requiring the deposit of surety bonds or cash by the American citizen in support of his affidavit.

Organizations Unable To Help

From the beginning it was obvious that American Jewish organizations could not furnish the needed affidavits. In the first place, the law provided that only an individual could be the affiant. Secondly, the Jewish organizations kept a low profile with respect to the solicitation of persons for giving of affidavits and left that role in the hands of individuals. The organizations undoubtedly felt that given the prevailing American mood of isolationism and nativism with outbursts of anti-semitism, they could not take an active role in anything resulting in an increase of immigration to a country in the desperate throes of the Great Depression. And how was an organization to choose a particular few from among so many deserving applicants? It was in this context that a grass roots effort took place by individual Americans to supply the needed affidavits. The Chicago Adler family saga is but one of these efforts.

Adler Papers Given to Society

We know something of the Adler activity because last year, after the deaths of Robert S. Adler and his wife, Helen Loewenstein Adler, his long-time secretary, CJHS member Eve Levin, received permission from the Adler family to deliver files containing his correspondence pertaining to affidavits of support to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Papers such as these are extremely difficult to locate because the original affidavits were mailed to the American consulates, not to the immigrants; and, so far as can be determined, the files of the consulates then in Europe have been destroyed.

The starting point of the Robert S. Adler files is a copy of a Memorandum of Agreement prepared by the Chicago law firm of Sonnenschein, Berkson, Lautmann, Levinson & Morse, dated June 29, 1936, between Max Adler and his wife, Sophie Rosenwald Adler, on the one hand and Lessing J. Rosenwald, Edith A. Stern, Adale R. Levy, Marion R. Stern and William Rosenwald on the other hand. The latter were the children of Julius Rosenwald, who had died on January 6, 1932.

Agree To Fund Immigration

The agreement states that the Rosenwald children had previously agreed among themselves to provide a fund to assist in the immigration of individuals, primarily their relatives from Germany. In the Adler-Rosenwald agreement, the Adlers agreed to provide ten percent of any amounts expended by the Rosenwald children in any one year, not to exceed \$7,000 per year. The agreement was to last at least ten years.

The Rosenwald rescue effort took place in New York where the children, under the direction of William Rosenwald, opened an office, hired a social worker and ran a basically private rescue effort to assist the refugees. The office provided affidavits, paid for transportation when necessary and arranged for living quarters and places of employment for the immigrants, many with suppliers of Sears,Roebuck & Company.

A present South Side resident who later became a longtime public relations executive of the Chicago Jewish Federation, Max S. Perlman, headed this office in New York from 1936 to 1941. A number of immigrants now living in Chicago still recall the valiant efforts of Mr. Perlman to rescue them from Germany and to find jobs for them in America. Among German immigrants to Chicago assisted by the Rosenwald office and Max Perlman were the Lorsch, Reissner and Plaut families.

Who the Adlers Were

Robert S. Adler, born on August 21, 1900, in Chicago, was the son of Sophie and Max Adler. Sophie was the sister of Julius Rosenwald and Max had been the vice-president and general merchandise manager of Sears, Roebuck & Company. Max was a noted violinist, had studied music at the Royal Conservatory in Berlin and had played at concerts and recitals in this country. Initially employed by Sears in its music department, he continued his interest in music and at one time weekly recitals were held at his palatial home at 4939 South Greenwood Avenue. In 1928, at the time he donated America's first planetarium to Chicago, he retired from Sears and began to spend a great deal of his time at his California home in Beverly Hills.

His son, Robert S. Adler, had not gone to work for Sears but instead had entered into a partnership dealing in investment trust shares and investment counseling. He also had moved from Chicago's South Side to a house in Highland Park. It was at his office in downtown Chicago that Robert Adler undertook his extended efforts on behalf of the immigrants.

Adlers Helped Strangers

Unlike the Rosenwald New York office, Adler did not have a staff, apart from his secretary. All the correspondence in the files is signed by him on behalf of himself or his father. His correspondence appears unrelated to the Rosenwald efforts, though at times there are references to Perlman and requests for his assistance. Also, while the Rosenwalds primarily helped relatives of either Julius Rosenwald or his wife, Adler's affidavits went in nearly every instance to That a good number of German Jews managed to escape the Nazis in the thirties was due to many American Jews who pledged their personal wealth and fought to overcome restrictions and red tape to assist immigrants. Prominent among these generous individuals was Robert S. Adler, whose efforts came to light when his papers were given to the Society after his death. From the study of these papers, Walter Roth has compiled a fascinating record of kindness and largess to strangers, of hopes and disappointments, of frustration and success. Through it all comes a partial but revealing portrait of a local prince in Israel. CJHS President Roth is familiar to our readers for his interesting and illuminating articles treating the unexplored crannies of local Jewish history.

non-relatives.

The Robert Adler files start in about 1937 and continue through 1942, when he entered the U.S. Army. There is some correspondence after the war with immigrants who had earlier come to the United States. Most of the letters are to persons then in Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and, in several instances, with families in Shanghai, where they had fled, often with Adler's assistance.

Some Typical Correspondence

Several examples will provide the tenor of this correspondence. The Krausz file commences with a letter under dateline "Vienna, November 27, 1938 (two weeks after Kristallnacht):

Dear Mr. Adler: Excuse us very much for bother you:. We got your address from the book: Jewish Charities of Chicago 1930, which was blissful to find between father's books. We are hurrying to write to you and asking you so much to help us. A young man and a lady, 33 and 28 years old, married. We hope you don't mind it Mr. Adler that we are writing you and that it will be possible for you to send us an affidavit what we need badly to go on from here to a better and free country. We are living in Vienna and what it means is awfully to say. It is much worther than it was in Germany and all what they've done there in five-six month. You really would do real good work When you would be kind and send an affidavit. All what the newspapers write is nothing what we really have to suffre. We promise not to bother or to be in the wunderfull free country. Our name is Krausz Eugene born Des 6th 1905 in Vienna wife's our: Krausz Berta born Brucknee Febr. 22nd 1910 Deutsch Kreutz, German Austria. My profession is fitter for gas and water-fittings, electrical engineer, and expert in the cornbusiness. My wife is a dressmaker seamstress for underclothes and an excellent sewer. If you need some information how to get an affidavit for us: the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America (HIAS) or the Cunard Line will tell you all about and what kind of papers are necessary to get an affidavit. But please be kind and send the affidavit directly to us. We hope that our prayer don't be in vain and that we succeed and get soon same good news

from you. We have got an order of expulsion and we must to be away from here by Desember 30th 1938. Every day living here means one year to every Jew here. If it is impossible for you so maybe you will have some good friends, who will be kind to help us. We remain with many, many thanks for all the troubles. We are making to you don't mind it. Gratefully and faithfully yours, Kraus Eugen.

On December 19, 1938, Robert S. Adler answered the Krausz letter as follows:

On November 27th you wrote to my father, Mr. Max Adler and asked him to send you. an affidavit which would aid you and your wife in obtaining a visa which would permit you to come to the United States. Since my father is not in Chicago just now and will not be here for some months, I am writing to let you know that we will make an affidavit for you and submit it as soon as we can.

In order however, to complete it, it will be necessary for you to send me some additional information.

We will have to have the name, date and place of birth of your Father and Mother and the same information for your wife's Father and Mother. Do you have any relatives in the United States, if so their names and addresses, also the names and addresses of any persons in Germany or Vienna who can give a letter of recommendation about you and your wife.

If you will send me the above information, printed so that it is easily read, I will see that some papers are prepared for you.

I would suggest that you make application immediately for a visa so that you will be at least assigned a number. We understand here that applications are so many that it will require many, many months, if not a year or more before a visa can be granted and the numbers will be taken in proper succession.

Please advise me of your condition when you send me the information above request.

On January 31, 1939, Adler sent his affidavit, accompanied by letters of recommendation to the American Consul in Vienna. (Note that barely two months had passed since the original request.) Berta and Eugen Krausz were able to leave Austria and arrived in the United States later that year. Adler's affidavit had enabled them to obtain the coveted visa. Without it the American Consul would not have processed the immigration papers.

Old People Present Problem

Eugen Krausz kept in contact with Robert Adler. On November 14, 1939, Eugen wrote Adler begging for an affidavit for his parents who were still in Vienna. "My dear parents wouldn't be to trouble you, never." On February 26, 1941, Adler received a letter from a Chicago family friend of the Krausz', a Mr. Strasser, stating that the parents were about to be deported to the Ghetto of Lublin if they could not show that they could get an American visa. But a



Robert S. Adler, pictured after World War II with Nelson Glueck (right), president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations

simple affidavit would not be enough; it would have to be accompanied by a deposit of \$8,000 in a U.S. bank in the name of the Krausz parents. By letter dated March 29, 1941, Robert Adler wrote to Eugen (now Eugene) of his dilemma with respect to the parents:

> Naturally I realize fully the keen desire which you have to bring your dear parents to the United States. On the other hand, I am sure that you recognize the fact that I have only a limited power to help people in distress and that this power should be applied to those cases which are most likely to produce the greatest benefits for the people involved. I have, as I told Mr. Strasser, a large number of people who are looking to me for help, and of course I should like to help all of them. This is not possible, however, and I must, therefore, use my help in the way which I feel is best. Frankly, I believe it will be much better to help bring to the United States young people, such as yourself, who have a life ahead of them and who can get along once they are here. You can see that your parents, being older people, would find it very difficult, to say nothing of the added burden which would be placed upon you to find means to support them.

The Krausz correspondence is illustrative of the Adler rescue effort. Adler replied instantly to a letter from a perfect stranger pleading for help. He, however, felt he could not handle the arbitrary demand for a substantial cash deposit. \$8,000 was a large amount at that time. And of course Adler had no way of knowing at that time the fate that awaited Jews who remained in Vienna. The problem was the system and the quotas of the American law coupled with the restrictive policy of the American consuls themselves. The tragedy of elderly parents is a repeated motif in the Adler correspondence.

Son Favored over Parents

In wrenching correspondence with a George Zoellner, then living in Berlin, he wrote to a father on April 14, 1941, that he could send an affidavit for his son but not for the father and mother, since transportation and cash deposits were required:

> I do hope that you will understand our feeling and that you will not think that we do not recognize how difficult your position is at the moment. We do, but there are so many problems that it is only possible to solve them a little at a time.

> If in the meantime the affidavit which I have just sent you is of some help to you, so much the better. When and if your son is here and is able to establish himself, then I shall again be in a position to help your children help you.

To the Zoellner daughter, Gerda, who was already in New York due to an earlier Adler affidavit, Adler wrote the following letter of encouragement on April 9, 1941:

One other word to you personally. I have been giving considerable thought to the manner in which you have forced yourself to get along during the last year or so. I realize that it is difficult for you to wish to do anything which might afford you pleasure and entertainment, but, as I told you, I do not believe that you should continue in this way all the time. It will be very important to you that you be in an optimistic frame of mind when your brother arrives, and this you cannot be if you do not, as I put it, "look up and not look down". I, therefore, want you to devote a little time each week to your own entertainment. You should go to a movie occasionally, should make an effort to meet other people through those whom you now know and through the opportunities which are afforded by the various groups which exist in New York. I am sending you herewith my check which I want you to use for this particular purpose during the next few weeks, and I hope you will write and tell me what you are doing.

There is extensive correspondence in the Adler files with a Dr. Emil and Marie Liefman of Frankfurt-on-Main, who received an affidavit from Robert Adler. On April 17, 1939, Adler received a letter from the National Council of Jewish Women telling them that the Liefmans had arrived in New York. In subsequent correspondence, Liefman requests and receives a loan for \$300 and then one for \$700 from Adler. Liefman eventually went to Albany for accreditation and became a licensed American physician.

Saga of an Artist

Another extensive file concerns a lady whose first name was Madeline and who received an affidavit from Robert Adler. Her father was from Russia and had lived in Berlin with Madeline, a young artist. Adler and she maintained a lengthy correspondence, as Madeline and her father managed to flee to Shanghai as the war started. Adler helped them with another affidavit and she came to the United States in 1941. She seems to be one of the few immigrants who actually came to Chicago to visit the Adlers, and she maintained a connection with Robert and Max Adler.

Several months ago I made some phone calls to New York looking for a person of her name and, lo and behold, I found her! She is now in her seventies and owns an art gallery in New York. For personal reasons she requested anonymity, hence I do not use her last name. She told me that the Adlers saved her life as well as the lives of many others. Max Adler, himself a musician, had been particularly helpful in aiding refugee musicians, one of them being Isaac Stern, whom Max assisted in many ways in his musical career.

American Consuls Not Helpful

As the number of requests grew, Robert Adler's frustration with the American consuls also increased. The files contain correspondence between Adler and the American Consul General in Hamburg, a Mr. Wilbur Keblinger. One of the arbitrary rules promulgated by the consuls was that an affidavit, once supplied to the American consul, was valid for only six months. The German national who had applied for a visa number had no way of knowing exactly when his number would be called. If it was called after the affidavit had expired, he would be passed over.

Adler wrote the American consul in a letter dated December 16, 1938, asking if this was really his policy. On January 14, 1939, the American consul replied in the affirmative and stated that it would be up to the applicant to keep the affidavit current by filing statements of renewal signed by the American affiant. Adler answered with another letter, dated February 19, 1939, posing two further questions: (1) does the possession of an affidavit by a prospective immigrant help this person while awaiting his turn, and (2) should Adler send such an affidavit to the person even though he may have to wait over two years for his visa. On March 6, 1939, the American consul answered that he could not answer the first question, and as to the second question he could not make any recommendation. This was the bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo given in answer to a question puzzling an American citizen trying to interpret American law and regulations.

The End of the Effort

Robert Adler joined the American armed forces in May, 1942, and these rescue efforts ceased. He returned after the war and for many years was an active member of the Chicago Jewish community as well as a trustee of the Adler Planetarium Trust, originally endowed by his father. The nature of the man, the help and succor that accompanied his heroic efforts are well illustrated by his correspondence, briefly reviewed in this article.

There were, of course, a great many Chicago Jews who, like Robert Adler, did not balk at supplying the affidavits needed to bring relatives, friends and strangers to America. Their willingness to help in difficult times has frequently been overlooked amidst the despair and guilt occasioned by the Holocaust. The Adler papers will help future generations to recall the heroic efforts of such individuals on behalf of those who needed their help in desperate times.■

Story of Chicago's Sephardic Jews

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While no figures are available, it is my guess that these groups numbered no more than 1,200 individuals at any one time during the first quarter of the century. Like their Ashkenazic co-religionists among whom most of them lived, these new Chicagoans were generally poor, working as peddlers, factory workers, salespeople and small businessmen. Because of their relative poverty and small proportion among local Jews (1 in 300), they remained obscure.

An Unusual Group Appears

The appearance of a congregation of Targum (a form of Aramaic) speaking Jews in Chicago early in the Twentieth Century is remarkable. The presence of Syrian (Arabic-speaking) Jews in New York and other American cities has been noted elsewhere, and we find a string of Ladino-speaking congregations, including very early ones in the East and others in Rochester (New York), Cincinnati and Indianapolis as well as the South and the Pacific Northwest. But speakers of Targum, the language spoken throughout the Middle East prior to the dominance of Arabic and still used by Jews in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, are much rarer.

This becomes more interesting because Chicago is also a major center for the Assyrian Christian population in the United States. This Christian ethnic group is also Aramaic-speaking. It consists of present or former adherents to the Nestorian church, a splinter group of the early Byzantine church. Many of the original Assyrians in Chicago, like the Persian Jews, came from Urmia in Iranian Azerbaijan during the same period.

An Assyrian Connection?

I looked for a connection between these two groups of immigrants and why both ended up here but could not find any direct reason for their coming here. It is possible that we will never know because relations between Assyrians and Jews in Urmia worsened in the course of the heavy fighting and massacres which engulfed that region during World War I and its aftermath. My Jewish interviewees indicated only casual contacts with Assyrians, although an acquaintance of Assyrian origin noted that some Jews would attend Assyrian church picnics as late as the 1940s. Such relations may have been fairly rare since the two groups lived in different parts of the city.

It seems that the Targum-speaking (or Persian) Jews lived on the West Side among their co-religionists, as indicated by the location of their synagogue. It was formed in 1920 and its first location was on Sangamon Street. Later a building was bought on Troy Avenue and Roosevelt Road. The occupational structure of members was similar to that of the other Jewish groups. Some Persians specialized in ladies' wear both in manufacturing and in sales. Other Persians were employed as doormen and in other capacities at hotels. No doubt, like their Ashkenazic and other Sephardic co-religionists, some began their American careers as peddlers before establishing themselves in shopkeeping and manufacturing.

The Arabic-Speaking Jews of Chicago

The Arabic-speaking or "Syrian" Jews did have a congregation in Chicago, at least into the Depression era and perhaps until World War II. Their congregation, probably in rented quarters, was on Douglas Boulevard and Homan Avenue. Most families of this group came from Aleppo, the major city of North Syria. One Syrian thought that there had been as many as fifty families in Chicago, although it is difficult to verify this.

Some Syrian entrepreneurs in Chicago started factories making ladies' undergarments. Later others, using contacts with New York Aleppine wholesalers, sold imported household linens, infants' wear and the like. Some Syrian-owned shops in these lines continue to exist today. Others have moved into other businesses. There are Syrian-Jewish-owned car dealerships in the Chicago area, including King Nissan.

The reasons for the disappearance of the Syrian congregation are unclear, although several families may have moved out of Chicago early on, thus denying the Syrian group a critical mass. Even without emigration, the small size of the Syrian group, intermarriage and dispersal throughout the area may explain its disappearance. Another explanation given has been that the Syrian congregation had a very favorable location, but because they accepted Ashkenazi members, the congregation ceased to have a distinct identity. Some of the old Syrian families remain, however, such as the Haras, the Seruyas, the Hazens and the Beydas.

Ladino-Speaking Peddlers

The third of the original Sephardic groups are the "Spanish," speakers of Ladino (a form of Spanish written in Hebrew script). Most came from Turkey and the Balkans and they may have had ancestral roots in pre-Inquisition Spain.

Members of this group found employment in a variety of occupations. "Spanish" girls and married women, especially during the Depression, found jobs as salespersons and in factories. Men from the group also worked in factories, while some became installment dealers, peddlers selling on credit. In this they were like many of their Ashkenazi co-religionists. It seems that many of the Sephardim had Italian clienteles since they either knew some Italian or found it easy to learn. Despite the decline of this line of trade, a few installment dealers continued to sell in the 1980s.

More Known about Ladino Sephardim

The institutional history of the Spanish group is the best documented of the three. Reports in the Ladino language newspaper, La America, organizational account and minute books and the like exist in addition to oral testimonies. Marc Angel's book La America (Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society, 1982) summarizes material from the paper. Sorting out several organizations, such as the Portuguese Israelite Fraternity, Ozar Dalim (the Fund for the Poor) and the Ladino American Club as to their inter-relationships and how they contributed to their present heir, the Sephardic Congregation of the Israelite Portuguese Fraternity, remains as a task for some future historian of the Sephardic communities in Chicago. What seems clear at this time is that the Spanish Jews formed landsmanschaft-type organizations which provided help for the needy, burial aid including cemetery plots and, in 1910, a synagogue. Unlike the Persians, the Spanish Sephardim did not have a building of their own until recently, although they did have a cemetery.

Cooperation, Friction among Groups

There was some cooperation among the Persians, the Syrians and the Spanish in trying to establish a talmud torah for their children. The various rabbis and teachers who served the communities did at times serve more than one. This was especially true of Rabbi Shalom Nadoff, a Yemenite who worked as a silversmith at the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 and did not retire until the 1970s.

Relations between the various Middle Eastern groups and the Ashkenazim were complicated by the fact that Ashkenazim of that period found it difficult to recognize non-Yiddish speakers as full Jews and by the constant assumption that Yiddish was the only legitimate *lingua franca*. One old Sephardic man recalled taking

English classes at the Jewish Peoples Institute in which the teacher spoke and joked in Yiddish. Still, the various Sephardic groups did receive assistance from the Jewish Peoples Institute and other Jewish agencies.

Considering the different languages spoken by these three groups, and the cultural differences among their countries of origin, it is not surprising that there was some friction, occasional animosity and denigrating stereotypes among them. Still, there was also cooperation. One rabbi went from the Syrian synagogue to the Spanish one when the latter had no one to read the Torah. A full history would doubtless present the comedy, the conflicts and the cooperation among these Jewish groups and also indicate their uncompromising orthodox nature.

Distribution Through the City

While the Sephardim were concentrated on the West Side, there were some who lived on the North and South Sides in the 1910s, the 1920s and the 1930s. Around 1920 some families lived near Belmont and Clark. Some Sephardic families had stores on 47th Street around South Park Boulevard (now King Drive) and lived near their shops until that neighborhood changed.

By the end of World War II, Jewish movement out of Lawndale and the rest of the West Side began in earnest. It included the small Sephardic communities. They were part of the migration of West Side Jews into Albany Park, West Rogers Park, Skokie and, in more recent years, to the various suburbs to the north and west of Chicago.

Shifts to the North

After World War II, the Rumanian shul which had been host to the weekly minyan and other activities of the Sephardic (Spanish) Congregation closed. It is unclear as to how long the Sephardic congregation maintained a Sabbath minyan, but High Holiday services were now held on the North Side. First they were conducted in various locations in Albany Park and later in West Rogers Park.

The Persian congregation sold its westside synagogue about this time and subsequently rented space for services on the North Side before opening their present synagogue on Main Street in Skokie in 1960.

Generational Differences

The postwar period also saw the emergence of a new generation. The Portuguese Israelite Fraternity sponsored a Young Sephardic League which held social affairs. There was an effort to form a young couples club. The Ladies Aid Society continued to meet and to encourage new members to join. Since the community was increasingly dispersed, meetings were now held in Loop hotels.

The Sephardic Congregation of the Portuguese Israelite Fraternity did not complete its building on the North Side until 1970. This was on Howard Street and Dodge Avenue just across the city limits in Evanston. By the 1970s even the oldtimers had become more dispersed than ever. Many had intermarried with Ashkenazim. Younger couples moved beyond the city and the inner suburbs. Today many of the oldtimer families living within the metropolitan area are in Northbrook, Deerfield and other outer suburbs.

Dispersal Creates Problems

Dispersal has made the job of maintaining synagogue membership problematic. The two surviving synagogues have responded to this problem in different ways. The Iran Hebrew Congregation in Skokie has opened its membership rolls to all Jews, including Ashkenazim. The Sephardic Congregation in Evanston, on the other hand, views



In a Sephardic synagogue the Torah scroll is stored in the ark upright in its own container Iran Hebrew Congregation

its mission as that of maintaining its Sephardic heritage. Full membership is given only to those of Sephardic descent and their spouses. Sephardic is broadly defined. Today the Spanish, the Ladino-speakers and their descendants, are no longer the majority. The congregation includes Jews from Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Lebanon and Iran. Indicative of this change is the fact that Torah study-groups are held in the Persian language of Farsi, in modern Hebrew and in English.

In 1987 a third congregation or minyan was formed in West Rogers Park. It is also oriented toward the new immigrants of Sephardi background from the Middle East. This small group, which calls itself Shaare Mizrah, rents a room at another Orthodox synagogue, Anshe Motele, on California Avenue. This group is thus recapitulating the history of an earlier group for the new immigrants of Middle Eastern origin. But history is never completely duplicated, since most of these new immigrants are more affluent than their predecessors of the early Twentieth Century

Patterns Are Familiar

The Sephardim have been but a tiny part of Chicago's Jewish population. Yet this microcosm is instructive of general trends within the Jewry of the city. The way in which many Jews began their way up the economic ladder; the boundaries which Jews drew around their world, based on language as much as religion; and the dispersal and suburbanization of the city's Jews are demonstrated in the history of the local Sephardim as well as that of the Ashkenazim.

Through new immigration from the Mediterranean, from Israel and from Iran, it is likely that the Sephardic segment in Chicago, as elsewhere in North America, will grow. Like other immigrants, they will probably build on the institutional foundations of their predecessors.

December Meeting Recalls Local Aftermaths of Kristallnacht

t the December meeting the Chicago Jewish Historical Society was privileged to hear the personal Kristallnacht remembrances of Martin Mainzer, who had recently arrived in Chicago from Germany at that time. The Society had arranged his appearance so that the response to that event fifty years ago could be evaluated from a current perspective.

Mr. Mainzer had come to Chicago in February, 1938, and recalls vividly the service at Temple Emanuel (then on Buckingham Place) on the first Friday following Kristallnacht. It was fitting, therefore, that the Society's meeting was held at that same Temple Emanuel, although at a new location. His presentation considered three aspects to illustrate his topic.

Havens Not Available

The first aspect concerned the difficulty of finding a place to which a refugee might migrate. The results of the Evian Conference and the Munich Agreement convinced him of the importance of immediately preparing affidavits for his family. He elaborated on the difficulties with quotas in every country in the world. The message was clear: The world did not want to provide a haven for the Jews.

The next aspect revolved around his efforts to bring to the United States a Jew who had gone to Shanghai. He enlisted the help of some non-Jewish Germans in Chicago. After these Germans finally realized that people they had known and grown up with were actually committing the atrocities they were hearing about, they helped Mr. Mainzer with funds to get his friend out of Shanghai.

Fatal Consequences of Failure

The last aspect related to an unsuccessful attempt to rescue an Adolph Goldberg. Mr. Mainzer tried to raise the necessary funds by writing to all the Goldbergs in the American Jewish Year Book and the Chicago telephone directory. He received both positive and negative responses to his project from individuals and from Jewish organizations, but Mr. Goldberg ultimately perished in the Holocaust.

In summary Mr. Mainzer said, "Now I have



given you various examples of the attitudes of people at that time. And I think you will agree with the conclusion which Walter Roth [in his recent article] also came to: namely, that there were a lot of helping hands that helped us, both Jewish and non-Jewish, but that the help was severely restricted by the immigration laws of the United States, and...the overwhelming majority of the American people [who] were unwilling to change the exclusion laws because they were heavily committed to the idea of isolationism, which was very strong, particularly in the Midwest. And don't forget, it was shortly after the greatest depression this country had, and people were afraid of every newcomer; they were afraid of loss of jobs, and the change in immigration laws was just not possible regardless of what many of the latter-day writers and thinkers tried to tell us. And thereby hundreds of thousands of Jews perished."

--Norman D. Schwartz

More Become Involved In Society's Efforts

mong the many membership renewals which, happily, fill our mailbox at this time of year, we were pleased to receive new membership from the following individuals and organizations. We welcome them as they join our efforts to preserve and to disseminate information concerning Chicago's Jewish past. December Speaker Martin Mainzer with President Walter Roth (right)

Photo by Moselle Schwartz

Steve Barnett Lowell & Helen Dittmer S. Friedman Morton Gerber Rabbi Elliot Gertel Frances Black Hedlund Lillian Katz Lori Lippitz Mr. & Mrs. Herbert Lowenstein Mr. & Mrs. Louis Mandle Ceil Margulies Adele Miller Millard Oscherwitz M. Primack Congregation Rodfei Zedek Natalie Rousman Harold Sampson Charles Sandelman Joyce Schrager Gus Schwartz Eleanor & Milton Shadur Ethel Sheffey Daila Shefner Dr. & Mrs. Gary Tobak Prof. Sheldon Wagner

> --Marion Cutler Membership Chairman

Former Society President Becomes Head of Southern Group

O nce a Jewish historian always a Jewish historian, at least in the case of Rachel Heimovics, a founder and twice president of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Rachel moved to central

Florida five years ago when her late husband's career took him there. Although continuing her interest in Chicago Jewry, she soon become interested in the Southland Jewish history as well and was recently inaugurated as president of the Southern Jewish HIstorical Society.

In addition to her leadership of CJHS, members will remember her as a speaker, tour leader and author of The Chicago Jewish Source Book, a popular reference guide still available in Jewish bookstores.

Chicago's loss has indeed proved a valuable gain to our Southern co-religionists. We wish her well in her new position.

--I. J. S.

February Meeting Learns Of Rose **Alschuler's Many Achievements**

surprisingly large audience gathered despite severe winter weather to learn about the contributions of Rose Haas Alschuler to Chicago and the nation. They were amply rewarded by the biography and analysis provided by the speaker of the day, Norma Spungen.

Addressing the Society at its February 5 meeting at Spertus College of Judaica, Mrs. Spungen, director of the Chicago Jewish Archives, vividly portrayed a vanished Chicago in which Mrs. Alschuler, a member of the city's German-Jewish elite, spent her long life working for the betterment of early childhood education and, in her later years, for Israel as well.

Founder of Local Nursery Schools

Mrs. Spungen traced Rose Alschuler's distinguished family background, her marriage to outstanding architect Alfred S. Alschuler and her success as a mother of five before turning to her interest and activities as a pioneer in nursery school education. These included starting and subsidizing the city's first nursery school on Lincoln Avenue, serving as staff director of the experimental nursery school sponsored in the twenties and thirties at the Franklin School and at Chicago Teachers College and later starting a similar school for the Winnetka system.

She also established the nursery school at the Rosenwald Fund's Michigan Avenue

February Speaker Norma Spungen

Garden Apartments and directed the Works Progress Administration's nursery school program in the Chicago area.

Later Interest in Israel

As her achievements and fame in early childhood education became national and even international in scope, Rose Alschuler, in a departure from the pattern of the group she grew up with, became a staunch advocate of Israel. Well into her advanced years (she died at age 92) she was active as a star salesperson of Israel bonds.

The audience was further enlightened concerning Mrs. Alschuler by comments made by her children and a grandchild, who were present. The speaker was introduced by the program chairman, Vice-President Burt Robin.

--I. J. S. 🔳

Members Now Get Additional Benefits

rewly added benefits make membership in the Society a better bargain than ever, according to Membership Chairman Marian Cutler, and renewal is still possible at the old membership rates until June 1. After that date, however, a new dues structure, dictated by rising costs, will take effect.

Those joining or renewing will now be entitled to receive the first monograph published by the Minsky Fund without charge as well as quarterly copies of the new Chicago Jewish History. All current benefits, including meeting notices, attendance at the annual members brunch and exhibit openings, tour notices and discounts will of course continue.

The names of those whose memberships have expired wihtout renewal by June 30

Photo by Moselle Schwartz

must be

removed from the Society rolls to save mailing costs, according to Membership Chairman Marian Cutler.

Membership may be renewed for as little as \$15.00 for an individual or couple or \$10.00 for seniors and students. The full dues schedule appears on the back page of this issue.

Society Plans Major Exhibit For Next Fall

he Society will mount a major exhibit at Spertus College next Fall and is seeking materials concerning landsmanschaften for it. The exhibit, which will trreat the history of literally scores of these mutual aid organizations created by landsmen-persons from the same stetl or region in the Old Country-is scheduled to open October 1 and is expected to remain on display through the end of the year.

A committee headed by Janet Hagerup with Sidney Sorkin and Adele Hast as major historical resource persons is preparing the exhibit and welcomes items which might be included in the planned display. Others actively at work on plans include Cecile Margulies, Mark Mandle and David Passman as well as Olga Weiss of Spertus College of Judaica.

The committee seeks photographs, publications and memorabilia from the heyday of landsmanschaften, in the preand post-World War I years when Jewish immigrants were arriving in large numbers from Eastern Europe. CJHS members who have items to contribute or lend are requested to call Ms. Hagerup at 675-3602 or contact the Society office.



About the Society

What We Are

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

What We Do

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

Minsky Fund

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

Membership

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

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations. Membership runs by the calendar year, but non-members may join at any time.

Dues Structure

The following annual dues structure is in effect until June 1, 1989, at which time rising costs will mandate a modest increase in most categories:

Regular Membership	\$15.00
Senior Citizens and Students	\$10.00
Sustaining Membership	\$25.00
Patron Membership	\$50.00

Look to the rock from which you were hewn הביעו אל־עור העבתם



CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY 618 SOUTH MICHIGAN, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS. 60605

Sponsoring Membership	\$100.00
	and up
Organizational Membership	\$25.00
	and up
Life Membership	\$1,000.00

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

Chicago Jewish History

Chicago Jewish History is published quarterly by the Chicago Jewish Historical Society at 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60605. Telephone (312) 663-5634. Appropriate manuscripts are invited and should be directed to the editor at 3500 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60657. Single copies: \$1.50 postpaid. Successor to *Society News*.

PresidentWalter Roth EditorIrwin J. Suloway

> Editorial Board Marian Cutler, Mark Mandle Norman Schwartz, Sidney Sorkin, Elaine Suloway



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