



chicago jewish history

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Ed Mazur to Speak on "Politics, Jews, and Elections, 1850-2004" *Save the Date: Sunday, Oct. 31*

Edward H. Mazur, Ph.D., nationally recognized authority on politics and the Jewish voter, will be the featured speaker at the next open meeting of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society on Sunday, October 31, at Temple Sholom, 3480 North Lake Shore Drive.

The program will begin at 2:30 p.m., following a social hour with refreshments at 1:30, a brief review of the year's activities by CJHS President Walter Roth, and the election of Board members.

Author of *Minyans for a Prairie City: The Politics of Chicago Jewry, 1850-1940*, and contributor to *Ethnic Chicago* and *The Dictionary of American Mayors*, Edward Mazur has written more than fifty articles on urban affairs, politics, ethnicity, and transportation. He is a native



(Left) Jacob Arvey and Abraham Lincoln Marovitz, important Jewish figures in Chicago politics.
Undated. Chicago Jewish Archives.

Chicagoan, born and raised in Humboldt Park, who has resided in Rogers Park, Hyde Park, New Town and the Gold Coast. He is a tour guide for the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs.

Admission to the meeting is, as always, free and open to the public.

Terra Museum to Close; Last Show Includes Six Chicago Jewish Painters

"Chicago Modern, 1893-1945: Pursuit of the New" is the final exhibition at the Terra Museum of American Art, 664 North Michigan Avenue. The show will continue until the Terra closes its doors on October 31. Admission is free.

Among the paintings are mild Midwestern attempts at Impressionism in landscapes and portraits, but the real treasures are the cityscapes.

The earliest of these spirited paintings are scenes of the Chicago River by James Bolivar Needham.

Six Chicago Jewish painters are represented: Emil Armin, Aaron Bohrod, Raymond Breinin, Fritz Brod, Samuel Himmelfarb, and William Schwartz. Their depictions of our city and of themselves are highlights of the exhibition, and echo "Engaging with the Present," the 75th anniversary retrospective of the American Jewish Artists Club recently at the Spertus Museum.

President's Column



Walter Roth

MY FIRST TRIP TO ISRAEL WAS IN 1952 after I graduated from law school. I participated in a year-long work and study program at Ma'ale Hachamisha, a kibbutz in the Judean Hills near Jerusalem. I have been to Israel many times since then, often with my family.

Earlier this summer, my wife Chaya and I spent three weeks in Israel. We were accompanying one of our daughters, Miriam, her husband Mark Raider, and their three young children. Miriam and Mark are professors at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Albany. They and the children would be spending the rest of the summer on sabbatical at Ben Gurion University in Beersheba.

Returning to Israel this time was somewhat different for Chaya and me. For the first time we were traveling with three of our grandchildren, so we were apprehensive about the grave political and security situation. We were surprised by what we encountered.

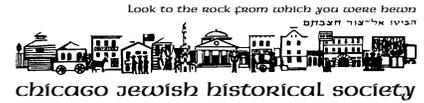
Our stay did not include visits to Gaza or the West Bank, so I do not have first hand observations about the situation there. We drove over 1400 kilometers, from north to south and all around, and except for the presence of the security fence (or "the wall" as some call it) in some areas, little military personnel or equipment was visible to us. The country looked superb, with an enormous amount of ongoing construction. Throughout Israel, the roads have been rebuilt, and are in extraordinarily good condition.

WE STAYED IN A GUEST HOUSE AT KIBBUTZ SASSA, located north of Safed, near the Lebanese border. Sassa was established by a group of young *chalutzim* (pioneers) from America after the 1948 War of Independence. We found that, by sheer coincidence, there was a reunion of *vatikim* (original settlers) in progress. Among the old-timers were a number of Chicagoans, some still living on the kibbutz, and others who had come from Chicago and elsewhere for the reunion.

Among the Sassa kibbutzniks was our friend, Lynn, a woman who, when she was a student almost 40 years ago, lived with us in Chicago, helping to care for our children. Lynn had taken our belief in Zionism seriously and had immigrated to Israel. She now has five grown children, some already married, and is a teacher and writer. We had a reunion on a grand scale, and toured together in the north of Israel—to the Banyas Waterfall, the Hula Valley, and of course, Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee), where, if you go to the right place, you can walk on water.

Sassa now faces a problem pervasive in the kibbutz community. The old communal way of life is undergoing privatization of both its social and economic life. Children live at home with their parents; the communal dining hall is available, but most families eat in their own houses. Sassa is economically prosperous today. Its

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Chicago Jewish History

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(Left) Chicago Tribute Marker of Distinction: Ben Hecht, 5210 South Kenwood Avenue.

Photo by Norman D. Schwartz.

(Right) Honorary Ben Hecht Way street sign, corner of West Walton and North Clark Streets, dedicated June 29, 2004.

Photo by Michael Zimmerman.



New Signs of Ben Hecht in Chicago

On Tuesday morning, June 29, about a hundred people gathered under the trees of Washington (Bughouse) Square Park to dedicate Honorary Ben Hecht Way, the block of West Walton Street, between Clark and Dearborn, in front of the Newberry Library.

Local politics determine the names that appear on the city's ubiquitous brown "honorary way" signs. In this case, Alderman Burton

Natarus initiated the required city council resolution, but the impetus came from Dr. Rafael Medoff of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Ben Hecht established his literary reputation in Chicago as a young newspaper reporter. His papers are housed at the Newberry Library, donated by his widow to this respected research institution in

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HYMIE WEISS—WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Dan Sharon, Senior Reference Librarian of the Asher Library at Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, asked CJHS President Walter Roth this question:

Why did a Polish American gangster in Chicago, who supposedly served as an altar boy in a Catholic church, change his name to the stereotypically Jewish one, "Hymie Weiss"? I've looked in book after book that mentions Weiss, and no one answers this question. Indeed, no one even raises it.

Walter Roth's answer is based in part on research by Norman D. Schwartz.

Hymie Weiss was machine-gunned to death on October 11, 1926. He was a notorious Chicago mobster, successor as gang leader to Dion O'Banion. He was shot down on almost the same spot where O'Banion had been killed—Schofield's Flower Shop, at 738 North State Street.

Although his nickname suggests a Jewish connection, there is no evidence of it. His death certificate states his name as "Earl J. Weiss". He is listed as "single" and "white." Date of birth is "unknown." Records indicate that his family members had changed their surname from Wojciekowski to Weiss. His tombstone in (Roman Catholic) Mount Carmel Cemetery bears the inscription: "In Loving Memory of Earl J. Weiss." Underworld nicknames are never subtle, clever, or kind. Since Weiss is usually a Jewish name, Earl was probably called "Hymie" only because that epithet matched his chosen surname.

3760

Q The address of Anshe Emet Synagogue is 3760 North Pine Grove Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

What is the relationship of the number 3760 to the secular and Jewish calendars?

A When you add the number 3760 to any secular year, the total equals the Jewish year.
2004 + 3760 = 5764.

(Remember, in the period between Rosh Hashanah and January 1, add 3761.)

— N.D.S

Isaac Van Grove—Chanukah, Romance, and The Eternal [Rail]Road

BY CURTIS L. KATZ

“...if music alone could stir the soul, what would it not do allied with drama and spectacle?...what could not one do with a heroic theme like that of Chanukah?”
—Meyer Weisgal, Zionist activist and pageant producer (from *So Far*)

“Here was it. Dramatic. Why should not *the theater* and its resources be brought to the rendition of the highly dramatic history of the American railroad?”—Edward Hungerford, railroad publicist and pageant producer (from *Setting History To Music*)

What do Jewish historical pageants have in common with American railroad and historical pageants? They both employ the “drama and spectacle” of large-scale theater to promote causes in a memorable way. And they both at times employed the versatile talents of the conductor, composer, arranger, and vocal coach—Isaac Van Grove.

Described by Meyer Weisgal as “an energetic Dutchman of Jewish descent,” Isaac Van Grove was born in Philadelphia on September 5, 1892. He graduated from the Chicago Musical College (now part of Roosevelt University) at age 17 in 1909, and the following year began his professional music career as accompanist, assistant, and/or vocal coach to a host of operatic luminaries, including Enrico Caruso and Mary Garden. It was during Ms. Garden’s brief, tumultuous tenure as general director of the Chicago Grand Opera Association (which soon became the Chicago Civic Opera) that Van Grove was hired by that company in 1921 as an assistant conductor, a position he held into 1925. He returned to the Civic as a conductor for the 1931-32 and 1933-34 seasons. Additionally, during this period Van Grove conducted summer opera at the Cincinnati Zoo (1926-1933), conducted the American Opera Company on their 1929-1930 tour, taught various disciplines at his alma mater (1924-1938), and conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra several summers at Ravinia – all this from “a musician who has never even been abroad,” as the *New York Times* remarked with astonishment in 1931.

It was in that year in connection with the Civic Opera that Isaac Van Grove became associated with Meyer Weisgal, the indefatigable Zionist activist who would later become secretary to Chaim Weizmann. Shortly after Weisgal returned to his boyhood home of Chicago in November 1931, a Civic Opera production of *Aida* inspired him to harness the power of opera-size music theater to promote the cause of Zionism. He obtained the use of the Civic Opera House, including the scenery and costumes from *Aida*, with which to produce a cast-of-hundreds Chanukah pageant relating the story of the Maccabees. Isaac Van Grove directed the production, and wrote and conducted the music for it. The success of this 1931 Chanukah Festival led to subsequent collaborations between Weisgal and Van Grove, including a Purim farce staged in March 1933 at the Aragon Ballroom featuring a cast of 180 and a villain billed as “Hittlarhaman (Nutzi),” an ominous sign of the times.

The culmination of the Weisgal/Van Grove theatrical collaboration in Chicago was *The Romance of A People*, the featured event of “Jewish Day,” July 3, 1933, at A Century of Progress, the Chicago world’s fair. Soldier Field could barely contain this stupendous spectacle of the history of the Jewish people and their quest for a homeland, with its cast of 35,000 performers and audience of 125,000. Isaac Van Grove, who scored the production, conducted the choral forces from the stage, while an orchestra conductor, soloists, and a narrator followed his baton from a room beneath the grandstand. The stadium was elaborately wired for sound. Such exotic conducting arrangements would become a recurring motif in Van Grove’s career.

Meanwhile, on the Century of Progress fairground itself, one had three opportunities a day to see “The Romance of Transportation”—*Wings of A Century*. This outdoor theatrical extravaganza was the brainchild of Edward Hungerford, an irrepressible railroad historian, author, and publicist who, like Meyer Weisgal, dared to think big while never counting the cost. Hungerford added pageantry to his public relations panoply in 1927 when, as centenary director for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, he produced the highly successful Fair of The Iron Horse at Halethorpe, Maryland, near Baltimore. Highlight of this celebration



Isaac Van Grove.

Newspaper rotogravure
insert about the February 1934
touring production of
*The Romance of A People in the
Philadelphia Convention Hall.*

was the daily *Parade of The Iron Horse*, a two-hour procession through 250 years of land transportation featuring 30 historic and modern locomotives and trains, 15 floats, numerous other conveyances, 63 horses, oxen, and mules, 500 costumed actors, rousing American music, and florid narration. In *Wings of A Century*, Hungerford adapted the pageant sensibilities of his Iron Horse parade to the confines of the stage—albeit one 250 feet wide—with a cast of “merely” 150 actors, a dozen trains, plus numerous other vehicles, including aircraft. After returning for the 1934 season of *A Century of Progress*, *Wings of A Century* was revised and, as *Parade of The Years*, taken to Cleveland for the 1936 season of the Great Lakes Exposition.

The Romance of A People went on the road as well, appearing for a six-week extended run under the baton of Isaac Van Grove at an armory in New York during the fall of 1933 before moving on to Philadelphia, Detroit, and Cleveland.

Emboldened by success to seek an even bigger theatrical palette for Zionism, Meyer Weisgal sought the services of the Viennese master of theatrical gigantism, Max Reinhardt. Learning that Reinhardt had fled Hitler’s Germany, Weisgal fired off his famous telegram, “To Max Reinhardt, Europe. If Hitler doesn’t want you I’ll take you.” Ultimately Weisgal caught up with Reinhardt in Paris. Rather than expanding upon Weisgal’s *Romance*, the impresario proposed a massive new biblical epoch about the hope for a Jewish homeland, for which he commissioned a libretto from Franz Werfel and music from Kurt Weill. Written in German and titled *Der Weg der Verheissung* (“The Road of Promise”), it was intended for production in Europe. But in September 1935, Max Reinhardt and Kurt Weill came to New York to supervise its production there. Meyer Weisgal secured Isaac Van Grove as music director, Ludwig Lewisohn translated the libretto into English, and the show was retitled *The Eternal Road*, a name that proved inauspicious.

The eternity it took to bring Meyer Weisgal’s Reinhardtian spectacle to the stage is part of Broadway legend. The show endured ten postponed openings due to technical and financial difficulties and fits of artistic temperament among its creators. (During one long hiatus, several production staffers went to moonlight on Ed Hungerford’s Cleveland show.)

One of *The Eternal Road* production difficulties involved the music. The orchestral music was recorded via a new sound-on-film system from RCA—literally, a soundtrack. Composer Kurt Weill was delighted (“Think of it! No worries with those musicians who play wrong notes.”), but the American Federation of Musicians was less pleased; contractually all Broadway shows were to have only live music. The compromise was to have Isaac Van Grove conduct a 16-piece orchestra accompanying the soundtrack. They were crammed into an improvised sound booth above the stage; industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes’s ponderous set left no room for an orchestra pit in the creaky old Manhattan Opera House.

It was chiefly by the considerable force of Meyer Weisgal’s determination that the curtain at last rose on *The Eternal Road* on January 7, 1937. With a cast of 200 and elaborate stage and lighting effects, it was the biggest show in Broadway history. Critics were effusive in their praise and audiences flocked to see it. But it would have required more than a Moses to part the sea of debt in which this spectacle was immersed, and on May 15, *The Eternal Road* folded after 150 performances.

It stands to reason that production talent from the biggest show on New York’s Broadway would be tapped for the biggest show at New York’s 1939-1940 world’s fair, that show being Edward Hungerford’s magnum opus, *Railroads On Parade*, presented at the fair’s largest pavilion, that of the Eastern Railroads Presidents Conference. Boasting 250 performers, 20 trains, and complex mechanical stage effects, Hungerford’s “Iron Horse Opera,” as the New York press quickly dubbed it, was presented (according to its advertising), “To do full honor to The American Railroad in more than one hundred years of its triumphant success.” In other words, the

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Isaac Van Grove

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railroad industry was seeking to shine up its public image after a decade of being ravaged by financial depression, bad press, government regulatory practices that favored competing modes of transport, and the threat of nationalization.

It is uncertain if Ed Hungerford deliberately sought out veterans from *The Eternal Road*, but several key artists who came from that show to the railroad pageant had worked on previous Hungerford productions. Kurt Weill and Isaac Van Grove came with them.

As the European political situation deteriorated, Kurt Weill decided to remain in the United States, and he began to study American folklore with an eye toward “Americanizing” his music. Early efforts in this line, *The Common Glory* and *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*, went unfinished. His music for *Railroads On Parade* was his first completed piece of Americana. Described by Weill as a “circus opera,” the score consisted of an arrangement of American folk tunes, spirituals, and patriotic airs, plus some original material.

Isaac Van Grove conducted the eclectic score, this time from a room beneath the grandstand in which he was ensconced with an orchestra of 25, an 18-voice chorus, an organist, several audio engineers, and five “sound actors” who spoke the dialogue that was lip-synced by actors on stage.

Initially *Railroads On Parade* was lightly attended, perhaps because it was one of the few attractions at the fair that charged



“Isaac Van Grove, production director, instructs electricians stationed throughout vast auditorium by means of a system of telephones operated from main switchboard.”

Newspaper rotogravure insert about the February 1934 touring production of The Romance of A People in the Philadelphia Convention Hall.

admission. But word of mouth eventually made the pageant the hit show of the fair, requiring a fifth performance to be added to the advertised four-a-day. It was a measure of the production’s success when one day Isaac Van Grove found a stranger among the musicians in his sound room; the stranger had been paid \$8.00 for the day by one of the regular musicians who was out in the audience watching the show!

Van Grove kept in touch with Kurt Weill for the remainder of that composer’s all too brief life (Weill died in 1950 at age 50), and during the 1940s was involved with him on two more projects. Both were sponsored by

the so-called Bergson group, which utilized the popular arts on behalf of Jewish causes, and both were written by Ben Hecht.

We Will Never Die (1943) was a monumental production with an all-star cast intended to raise public awareness of the Nazi slaughter of European Jews. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, *A Flag Is Born* (1946) delivered a searing indictment of all those who stood by while six million Jews perished in Europe, and offered a ringing call for the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine as a refuge for Holocaust survivors. Weill’s scores for both these shows were comprised largely of traditional Jewish melodies, borrowings from *The Eternal Road*, and patriotic American songs, hooked together in a manner similar to the score for *Railroads On Parade*. Isaac Van Grove conducted the music for both pageants; additionally he was entrusted by Weill to arrange the orchestrations for *A Flag Is Born*, as the composer was then immersed in the development of his “American opera,” *Street Scene*. Both *We Will Never Die* and *A Flag Is Born* opened in New York, then went on tour to Chicago and other cities. Both shows proved controversial—and influential.

But for the most part during the 1940s, Isaac Van Grove devoted his talents to lighter, *uncontroversial* fare, including shows on Broadway, recordings of operetta excerpts with Wilbur Evans and Kitty Carlisle, and coaching operatic hopefuls and professionals, most notably America’s sweetheart of opera and cinema, Grace Moore. Tragically, Moore died in a plane crash at Copenhagen in 1947. The following year Isaac Van Grove returned to Chicago, and to pageantry.

In the summers of 1948 and '49, Chicago, the Railroad Capital of The World, played host to the Chicago Railroad Fair, held on part of the Century of Progress site, and occasioned by the centennial of the city's first railroads. The fête was nominally educational entertainment, but the railroad industry hoped it would help lure the public aboard its shiny new postwar streamliners, and gain public sympathy for its continuing campaign for balanced government regulation of the transportation business. The fair's principle attraction was Edward Hungerford's pageant, *Wheels a-Rolling*, featuring the usual colossal compliment of trains, people, animals, and vehicles. (This would be Hungerford's opus ultimum. One week after the fair opened in July 1948, he died in New York at age 72.)

Van Grove applied for the job of pageant production director, but settled for the post of music director. The top job had already gone to Helen Ticken Geraghty, a Goodman Theater School alumna who subsequently studied with Max Reinhardt and had directed Hungerford's *Wings of A Century* in 1933. Van Grove spent his first two weeks back in Chicago substantially revising the musical score that had been hastily prepared for Hungerford by folk musicologist Tom Scott. As delivered, that score consisted of a hand-written manuscript to which had been attached commercial copies of Fred Waring choral settings of traditional American tunes, and photostats of excerpts from Kurt Weill's *Railroads On Parade* music. Van Grove's rewrite dropped Waring but retained some of Scott's material, including some of his borrowings from Weill.

The success of *Wheels a-Rolling*, and the congenial working relationship that developed between Helen Ticken Geraghty and Isaac Van Grove, led to their collaboration on three more historical pageants in Chicago, for which Van Grove wrote and conducted the music: *Frontiers of Freedom* at Chicago Fair (1950), *Song of Mid-America* for the Illinois Central Railroad's centennial (1951), and *From Adam To Atom* for the centennial of the American Society of Civil Engineers (1952). These three shows were scripted by Ben Aronin, the noted author and multi-talented stalwart of the Chicago Jewish community. During this sojourn in Chicago, Van Grove returned to his pageantry roots, teaming with Aronin to create Chanukah pageants staged variously at the Civic Opera House and at the Chicago Stadium. Whereas Van Grove's earlier Jewish pageants expressed hope for a future homeland, these pageants rejoiced in the realization of that hope in the newly independent State of Israel.

American historical pageants would inform the rest of Isaac Van Grove's career. In 1953 he wrote the music for *The Seventeenth Star*, commemorating the sesquicentennial of Ohio's statehood. (He conducted that music in a tent located a half-mile from the action.) *The Seventeenth Star* was the creation of dramatist Paul Green, the success of whose 1937 pageant play *The Lost Colony* (still presented every summer at Manteo, North Carolina) turned his career to the production of large-scale outdoor historical drama, chiefly in the South. Ultimately Van Grove composed scores for a half-dozen Paul Green dramas. During this period Van Grove moved to Hollywood to work in the movie colony, and Paul Green enjoyed telling friends, "I have this arranger from Hollywood..." Van Grove's last Paul Green score was for *Louisiana Cavalier*, completed early in 1976, three and a half years before he died in Los Angeles in the autumn of 1979, at age 87.

Monumental pageants celebrating the achievements of our American homeland and the hope of a Jewish homeland may have been the most publicly prominent of Isaac Van Grove's accomplishments, but they are hardly the sum total of his long and wide-ranging artistic career. He conducted opera and operetta not only in Chicago and Cincinnati, but also in St. Louis, Boston, Cleveland, and other cities. He prepared nearly a dozen ballet scores for Chicago choreographer Ruth Page. He wrote several original operas and cantatas. He arranged film music. And at the latter end of his life he devoted 25 summers to training future generations of opera singers and to directing student opera productions as artistic director of the opera program at Inspiration Point (now Opera In The Ozarks) in Arkansas.

One wonders why a musician of such great accomplishment is not better known. Working in the shadow of more famous personalities, he was apparently too absorbed in his art to seek celebrity, willing to let his work speak for itself. As Paul Green's assistant Rhoda Wynn recalled of Van Grove, "His talent was his light." ❖

CURTIS L. KATZ is the author of several articles on railroads in popular culture, including "The Last Great Railroad Show," about the Chicago Railroad Fair (*Trains Magazine*, August 1998), and "Hail! The Baltimore & Ohio," about the B&O Fair of *The Iron Horse* (*Railfan & Railroad Magazine*, November 2003). *Railroader*, railroad historian, and lifelong railroad buff, Mr. Katz serves as "volunteer curator" of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad collection at Chicago's Newberry Library.

Adele Hast Addresses 2004 Biennial Scholars' Conference on American Jewish History

The Scholars' Conference was held on June 6-8 at American University and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

The event was organized by the Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History, comprised of scholars from the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the American Jewish Historical Society, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Library of Congress. Gary Zola of the Marcus Center heads the commission.

Professor Pamela S. Nadell, Director of the Jewish Studies Program at American University,



Adele Hast.

Photograph by David Rigg.

chaired the conference.

CJHS Past President Dr. Adele Hast, scholar-in-residence at the Newberry Library, spoke at the

session titled "Jewish Women Building Community." Her talk, *To Serve the Community Where Needed: Chicago Woman's Aid, 1925-1950*, drew on material gathered for her research fellowship from the Jewish Women's Archive in Brookline, MA.

Other speakers included Aleisa Fishman, American University: *Consuming is Believing: Jewish Women Making Community in Suburbia, 1946-1960*, and Hollace Ava Weiner, University of Texas at Arlington: *The National Council of Jewish Women: Vanguard or Rear-guard? A Texas Section in the 1960s and 1970s*. Joyce Antler of Brandeis University chaired the session. ❖

1654-2004 Celebrate 350 Years

See calendar of events
at the official Web site:
www.celebrate350.org

Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington

701 Third Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 789-0900

OPENS SUNDAY, OCTOBER 17:
**Jewish Washington: Scrapbook
of An American Community**
City Museum, 801 K Street NW

An exhibit in celebration of 350 years of Jewish life in America: historic photographs, oral histories, Judaica, community scrapbooks, and archival material tell the story of Jewish life from 1795 to today.

—www.jhsgw.org

Arizona Jewish Historical Society

4710 North 16th Street
Phoenix, AZ 85016
(520) 621-6423

**MINYAN: 10 GREAT
AMERICAN JEWISH THINKERS
AND PERSONALITIES**

Fridays, 12:15 pm–1:30 pm
Sept 10, 24; Oct 15, 29; Nov 5, 19;
and Dec 3, 17 at the Bureau of
Jewish Education in the Ina Levine
Jewish Community Campus.

In celebration of America 350, this class will explore the lives and contributions of at least 10 Jews who impacted American Jewish life. For further information and registration, see Web site.

—www.azjhs.org

New Mexico Jewish Historical Society

Albuquerque Jewish
Community Center
5520 Wyoming Boulevard NE
Albuquerque, NM 87109
(505) 348-4471

"The New Mexico Jewish Historical Society was organized in 1985 to pursue the fascinating and often amazing story of the Jews of New Mexico.... Our efforts are focused on following the path from the 1600s when Sephardic Jews lived in secret to European Jews who moved to America and transformed the landscape of social and economic life in the Territory of New Mexico...."

—www.nmjewishhistory.org

Jewish Historical Society of New York

8 West 70th Street
New York, NY 10023
(212) 415-5544

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12:

Inaugural events in the 350th anniversary celebration of the arrival of Jews in New Amsterdam:

The Jewish Community Relations Council and its Jewish Heritage-New York 2004 Committee are coordinating major programs to be held in Battery Park and lower Manhattan. Save these dates for JHSNY programs:

OCTOBER 10, NOVEMBER 14, AND DECEMBER 12

—*JHSNY Newsletter, May 2004*

Western Jewish History Center/Judah L. Magnes Museum

2911 Russell Street
Berkeley, CA 94705
(510) 549-6932

OPENS SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12: Sephardic Horizons

The year-long exhibition will tell the story of Sephardic Jews as reflected in paintings, graphics, and artifacts from the Magnes collections. After their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1496-97, Iberian Jews fled south and east to the lands of the Ottoman Empire, then north to Italy and Amsterdam, and by the 17th century to the New World.

—Web site: www.magnes.org.

American Jewish Historical Society

Center for Jewish History
15 West 16th Street
New York, NY 10011
(212) 294-6160

TIME-LINE POSTER: 350 Years of Jewish People in America

Published by the American Jewish Historical Society in 2004, a full color poster with 45 images from the AJHS Collection. This 24" x 36" poster is available in two versions: museum quality, limited edition of 3,000, suitable for framing, shipped in a tube, \$20.00, or an open edition on lighter paper, shipped folded, \$14.00.

—Web site: www.ajhs.org.

To order: www.ajhs-store.com.

of Jewish Life in America!

Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest

4330 South Cedar Lake Road
Minneapolis, MN 55416
(952) 381-3360

ESSAY CONTEST:

Jews and American Freedom:

"How has freedom shaped the lives of Jewish families and/or Jewish communities in the Upper Midwest?" (Upper Midwest includes Minnesota, the Dakotas, Northern Wisconsin, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.)

Cash prizes up to \$500. Middle school, high school, and adult categories. Winning essays will be published. Entry deadline 12/1/04. See contest rules on Web site.

—www.jhsum.org.

Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina

Jewish Studies Program
College of Charleston
96 Wentworth Street
Charleston, SC 29424
(843) 953-39187

"South Carolina's most famous Jewish son, Bernard Mannes Baruch, was born in Camden in 1870. His father, Simon Baruch, had fled conscription in Prussia and arrived in Camden in 1855; he served as a surgeon in the Confederate Army...."

—*"Bernard Mannes Baruch: Financier, philanthropist, and presidential advisor,"*—*JHSSC quarterly journal, Winter 2004.*

—www.cofc.edu.

Washington State Jewish Historical Society

2031 Third Avenue
Seattle, WA 98121
(206) 774 2277

MAY 24–DECEMBER 12:

Family of Strangers: the First Century of Jewish Life in Washington, 1840-1940

Washington State History Museum
1911 Pacific Avenue, Tacoma.

NOVEMBER 18, 19, 20: Paul Taylor Dance Company

UW, Meany Hall, Seattle.

The company has been commissioned to create a new work celebrating the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America.

—www.wsjhs.org.

Keeping Faith in Skokie: Congregation Bnai Emunah, 1953-2004

By Joy Kingsolver



(Left) Bnai Emunah Board, 1962-63; (right) undated photomontage, 1970s. Chicago Jewish Archives.

The history of Jewish Chicago is a story of movement, of demographic change, and shifting populations. Congregation Bnai Emunah was founded during the post-WWII movement out of the city, and benefited from the surging Jewish population in the northern suburbs. A major presence in Skokie for a half-century, it closed this summer, a victim of declining Jewish population in the neighborhood. The archival records of the congregation have been brought to the Chicago Jewish Archives, Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

In August, 1953, 19 families from Niles Township Jewish Congregation, itself founded just a year earlier, left to form the Skokie Valley Conservative Congregation. Over the next two years, the new congregation kept up a hectic pace of development. By spring, 1954, property at 9131 Niles Center Road had been acquired; groundbreaking was held on August 22. Rabbi Melvin Goldstine, formerly assistant rabbi at Anshe Emet, was chosen to lead the new congregation in May 1954. At the same time, the congregation applied for membership in the United Synagogues of America (now called the United Synagogues of Conservative Judaism); in June this was granted. This affiliation was felt to be essential to the congregation's identity and prompted a name change to Bnai Emunah (Children of

Faith) in order to "retain the traditions of Conservative Judaism," as president Louis Weingart put it, and to signal a new phase in development.

During this period, services were being held in nearby schools and synagogues, and the religious school was formed before there was a building to house its classes. In December, 1954, Joanne Steiner became the first *bat mitzvah*; January brought the first *bar mitzvah*, Michael Bell.

In 1955 the building was completed, and in that year Cantor Allan Stearns began his long tenure with Bnai Emunah, and the sisterhood began its activities.

In spite of the outward signs of growth, these were years of some turmoil, recalls Rabbi Harold I. Stern in the 2004 *Book of Memories*. When he assumed the pulpit in 1959, he made a number of changes in structure and policy. One major change was the increased integration of the religious school and the synagogue; previously, the school had operated more or less independently. He instituted a daily *minyan*, which, he remembers, encountered some opposition at first. He also inaugurated an annual congregational trip to Israel; this was continued for 17 years and is now remembered fondly by many congregants. Six *chavurot* were founded, of which two remained in 2004.

Throughout these years, the congregation

continued to flourish. The building was expanded twice to accommodate the growing membership. In 1956 the land to the south was acquired for the religious school; in 1960 the land to the north was purchased and a permanent sanctuary constructed. The process of improving the synagogue building continued: the well-known mural on the front of the building, designed by Irene and Azriel Awret of Safed, Israel, was installed in 1975. In 1983, faceted stained glass windows, designed by John Bera and featuring brilliant colors, were installed in the sanctuary and in the Rabinowitz Memorial Chapel.

Rabbi Stern became emeritus in 1991, and two years later Rabbi Michael H. Laxmeter was hired as his replacement. Already the pressures of declining membership and finances were beginning to show; there was talk of merger with various congregations who were facing the same problems, including Ezra Habonim–Niles Township Jewish Congregation (in what would have been a historic full circle). At that point Bnai Emunah had about 300 families, down from 700-800. (According to the Jewish Federation, the Jewish population of Skokie declined 15-20% after 1975, when it numbered 40,000.) But this

merger did not take place; after a controversial plan to put condominiums on part of the property failed, the congregation reluctantly decided to sell the building and close. The property will become the Assyrian National Community Center, and the congregation has merged with Beth Hillel, 3220 Big Tree Lane, Wilmette, to become Beth Hillel Congregation Bnai Emunah. Rabbi Stern and Cantor Stearns are emeritus staff in the new congregation.

Fifty years of activity are treasured in many fond memories, and they are also preserved in the documents and photographs now being cataloged at the Chicago Jewish Archives. When organized and inventoried, this collection will be an invaluable record of a vital piece of Chicago Jewish history. The collection contains administrative records, membership and *yahrzeit* lists, bulletins, clippings, Sisterhood scrapbooks, and other documents. There are gaps in the historical record, so any additional material such as bulletins and minutes that may be held by members would be welcome. Bnai Emunah's story is important to remember and to tell to future historians. ❖

FROM THE CHICAGO JEWISH archives

**Opening October 10, 2004:
"My Kind of Town: Jewish
Immigration to Chicago
in the Twentieth Century."
6th Floor Gallery, Spertus Institute,
618 South Michigan Avenue.**

Two large waves of immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought thousands of German Jews, followed by Russian and Eastern European Jews, to Chicago. In the years that followed, Jewish immigrants continued to come to Chicago for many reasons. In the 1930s, Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe sought refuge here, and in the 1970s, many Soviet Jews settled in Chicago after activists pressed their government to allow them to leave. This exhibition will show the variety in immigrants' stories, illustrated with artifacts, photographs and documents. Anyone with items to loan for this exhibit please contact Joy Kingsolver at 312-322-1741.



(Left) Bnai Emunah bimah; (right) entrance, 2004. Photographs by Joy Kingsolver, Chicago Jewish Archives.

President's Column *continued from page 2*

factories manufacture and assemble military matériel for the Coalition Forces fighting in Iraq. This is rather ironic, since the kibbutz was built by peace-loving idealists. Sassa has an excellent elementary school that draws its students from the surrounding area. It has a vibrant cultural life—and tennis courts, too.

We left Lynn and drove south to Ma'ale Hachamisha. I had come to live at this kibbutz over fifty years ago at the urging of David Ron and his wife Batya, *shlichim* (emissaries) from Israel, whom I had met at an Intercollegiate Zionist Federation of America (IZFA) summer camp in Averill Park, in upstate New York where they were counselors and teachers. Good-looking, intelligent, and persuasive young *shlichim* like David and Batya were, and still are, sent abroad by the Jewish Agency to encourage and enable *aliyah*—immigration to Israel.

My stay at Ma'ale Hachamisha in 1952 had been a most gratifying experience; the kibbutz was a second home for me, and I had left with sadness. My friend David, a teacher at the kibbutz, died in 1977, and I kept in touch with Batya only infrequently over the years. But when I wrote to her of our planned visit this summer, she replied immediately. I was delighted to learn that she was still active and in good health. A former director of the guesthouse at the kibbutz, she was now working part-time at the new hotel that had been constructed at the edge of the kibbutz.

WE ARRIVED AT MA'ALE HACHAMISHA, and were given penthouse rooms at the hotel. Later that evening, we walked the short distance down to the kibbutz proper where Batya was waiting for us near her house. Now over 80 years of age, she stood as erect as ever, still lovely in all ways.

The next day we returned to Batya's house for coffee and Viennese pastry. As conscientious historians, Chaya and I took the opportunity to record Batya's oral history. We met her son, Shlomo, the *mazkir* (secretary) of the kibbutz. Ma'ale Hachamisha, like Sassa, is undergoing privatization. The communal dining hall is closed, replaced by a commissary where provisions can be purchased for home use. Shlomo told us that soon each kibbutz member will own his own home and some land. The hotel and other enterprises will be

owned by a legal entity, a kind of co-op arrangement in which the members will share.

Our grandchildren were excited by many things they saw at the kibbutz, but their biggest thrill was witnessing hundreds of cows coming in from the fields to be milked by machines, while standing and feeding on a huge, rotating carousel contraption.

The next day, after dinner at a restaurant in the nearby friendly village of Abu Gosh, we continued our trip south to the guest house at Kibbutz Ein Gedi, located in a lush oasis near the Dead Sea.

If you like salt water and mud baths, there is a spa at the Dead Sea that will make you very happy. I myself was happier with our tram ride up Masada, the great fortress of Roman times, where we told our grandchildren of its significance.

WE THEN DROVE ON TO BEERSHEBA.

Miriam and Mark had rented a house for their family in suburban Omer. Quite miraculously, we found that their neighbors were an elderly couple from Antwerp, Belgium—Shimshon and Aviva Limon—whom we had last seen in 1969. They showed us their picture album that included a photograph of Chaya when she was a student teacher with Shimshon in Antwerp over 50 years ago. But that is another story.

Toward the end of our trip, a friend of Mark's asked us to accompany him on a visit to Lakia, a Bedouin settlement in the Negev, about twenty kilometers from Beersheba. The Bedouins are traditionally a nomadic people living in clans, of Islamic faith, but considered friendly to Israel. Over the centuries, the Negev has been their private campground. But now, with more and more Israelis moving there, the nomads are under pressure to establish permanent settlements of their own, and to claim ownership of the land on which they settle.

As we entered the settlement, we met several young women representing an organization called the Association for Improvement of Women's Status in Lakia. Two leaders of the group, young Bedouin women dressed in long, colorful dresses, explained to us that a woman's traditional role in their nomadic society is caring for her husband, children, and animals. She is not permitted to have a basic education of reading and writing.

The transition from nomadic to urban life means that a Bedouin woman can no longer contribute to the economic well-being of her family



Two leaders of the Association for Improvement of Women's Status in Lakia. (Left) Mary, head of the embroidery project; (right) Hadra, head of the weaving project.

Photographs courtesy of the Roth family.

in the traditional way. So the Association was formed to promote education and other benefits for themselves and their children. To do this and to provide employment for women, they established a weaving and embroidery workshop in Lakia, where Bedouin women create decorative dresses as well as carpets and other furnishings.

Over 160 women are said to be employed by the Association. Although at this point there is opposition to their efforts by the Bedouin male hierarchy, the women appear to have the approval of the Israeli government, and they receive some financial support from European sources. We were

served Turkish coffee as they presented some of their wares to us. We made some purchases and left enchanted by these inspired, lovely, and hard-working young women, beset by problems—internal and external—that will take great effort and patience to overcome.

Our visit concluded with several days in Beersheba, now a bustling city with Ben Gurion University as its hub. On a Saturday night we were asked by some friends to join them and scores of Israelis in a demonstration (held weekly) calling for the withdrawal of Israeli settlements from Gaza and the West Bank. It was a peaceful demonstration, and some Israelis passing by in vehicles or on foot seemed to agree with the demonstrators; others appeared indifferent to our presence.

This report is not meant as a commentary on country's geography or economy. It is just a glimpse of Israel as we saw it—inspiring as ever—but with continuing, challenging problems that will necessitate difficult solutions. Nevertheless I do say to you our members, your families, and friends: make a visit to Israel; it is a marvelous vehicle with which to identify with the Jewish State and *kol am yisrael* (the Jewish People).

In conclusion, I want to send you my very hearty greetings on the Rosh Hashana holiday, and wish you all good health and happiness throughout the coming year. *Shana tova.* ❖

Signs of Ben Hecht

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the city Hecht loved most. The Newberry Library co-sponsored the dedication ceremony, and its president, Charles T. Cullen, commented on the growing interest in the Hecht papers and expressed his pleasure in the street naming.

The ceremony honored Ben Hecht's public activism in the years before, during, and immediately after World War II, when he put his writing genius into the effort to save Europe's Jews, to form an army of Palestinian and stateless Jews for this purpose, and to bring Holocaust

survivors to the nascent State of Israel. (Walter Roth, in his book *Looking Backward*, and Curtis Katz, in his article in this issue of *CJH*, treat this time in Hecht's life.)

Chicago has commemorated Hecht's early career here with a marker at the South Kenwood Avenue address where he resided and published his short-lived newspaper, the *Chicago Literary Times*. The marker states that Hecht had been dismissed from his job as a columnist for the *Chicago Daily News* on an obscenity charge after the publication of his 1922 novel *Fantazius Mallare*, and that he soon left for New York and Hollywood.

The Ben Hecht of Hollywood was portrayed on the Goodman Theatre stage this spring in *Moonlight and Magnolias*, a new play by Ron Hutchinson, based on events recorded in Hecht's memoir, *A Child of the Century*. The play is set in the office of producer David O. Selznick in February 1939. He has hired screenwriter Ben Hecht and director Victor Fleming to save his troubled production of *Gone With the Wind*. In a marathon work session, they succeed in reshaping the script. Hecht's strong Jewish consciousness is introduced, but the play is weak. If only Ben Hecht were here to punch up the script. ❖

June 27 Meeting: Marshall Krolick Speaks on the History of Congregation BJBE and on American Jewry in the Civil War

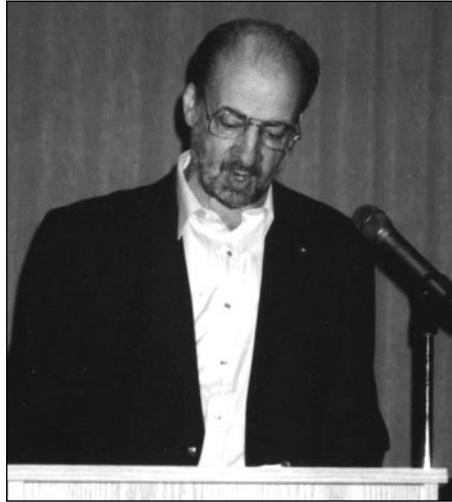
Program Chair Charles B. Bernstein introduced our featured speaker, Marshall D. Krolick, saying he would “pitch a double-header,” despite recently undergoing shoulder surgery.

His “innings” were “pitched” on Sunday afternoon, June 27, at the social hall podium of Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim, 901 Milwaukee Avenue, Glenview, the co-sponsor of the open meeting.

Mr. Krolick is an attorney, a past president of BJBE and the temple’s historian, a member of the Civil War Round Table, and a Board member of our Society. The first part of his presentation was a brief history of BJBE.

In the late summer of 1893 a small group of Bohemian Jews living on the southwest side of Chicago gave their fledgling organization a name in their native German tongue: *Erster Israelitischer Vorbildungs Und Unterstirtzungs Verein* (First Hebrew Educational and Charitable Association). In the incorporation application filed with the State of Illinois two years later, the organization stated that its purpose was “social and pleasure.” No mention was made of any religious activities.

By 1896 the organization had moved from its original meeting place, a hall located at Brown (now Sangamon) and 20th (now Cullerton) Streets, to a new location, in the Methodist church at Halsted and 20th, where services were conducted by a cantor. That same year the Ladies’ Society was organized. By 1902 the congregation had acquired its first rabbi, Moritz Weil, and moved to the site that would be its home for the next sixty-three years, the northwest



Marshall D. Krolick.

Photo by Norman D. Schwartz.

corner of 20th Street and Ashland Avenue. English replaced German as the language of the growing congregation, and in 1907 the corporate charter was amended to change the purpose of the organization from “social and pleasure” to “religious and charitable.” The congregational name, debated over the years, was officially changed to Congregation B’nai Jehoshua in 1917.

In 1927 it was decided to demolish the existing sanctuary. Construction began on a new temple building, which was dedicated in 1928. But by the 1940s, B’nai Jehoshua faced the same dilemma as the rest of Chicago’s Jewish institutions: the Jewish population was shifting to the suburbs. Plans for mergers or moves were debated, but the majority of the membership wanted to remain at 20th and Ashland.

By 1964 the lay leadership and Rabbi Mark Shapiro realized that their inner city location was no longer viable. As they explored the alternatives, the existence of a new congregation in the northern suburbs came to their attention.

On February 3, 1963, six families met to discuss the possibility of forming a Reform congregation in the Des Plaines-Morton Grove-Glenview area. Each succeeding meeting drew more young Jewish families. Beth Elohim was created, and the new organization expanded rapidly. The first High Holy Days services were held at the Sahara Motel, and subsequently in churches. Religious school and Hebrew school classes were held in public schools.

In the winter of 1964-65 two Reform congregations—one that had been in existence for over seventy years, and the other just two years old—decided to merge. Rabbi Mark Shapiro would assume the pulpit of the new Congregation B’nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim.

The temple property at 20th and Ashland was sold to the Dominican Fathers and Brothers of St. Pius Parish for \$75,000.00. This money would provide the down payment when BJBE purchased the land at 901 Milwaukee Avenue in Glenview for its new home. Precious artifacts from the 20th and Ashland temple were incorporated in the new building.

Today congregation membership numbers 850 families. Rabbi Shapiro, who offered leadership and inspiration to all generations, is retired, but remains as emeritus. Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar and Assistant Rabbi John A. Linder have served BJBE since 2003.

What was the Jewish attitude toward slavery on the eve of the Civil War? Mr. Krolick read us the opposing views of two learned Judaic scholars, written in 1861.

The issue of slavery was not the reason why the common man, Jew or gentile, went to war, he told us. Most Southerners wanted to protect the doctrine of State's Rights. Most Northerners joined the army to preserve the Union. Almost all of them were volunteers. In 1861 and 1862, in every city and town, North and South, public meetings were held where speeches were given to fan the flames of patriotism—and men signed up.

Mr. Krolick told us of one such meeting held on the night of August 13, 1862 at the Concordia Club on Dearborn Street in Chicago. The speeches were in German because the audience was made up of immigrants from Bavaria, Prussia,

and Hesse. More importantly, the meeting was sponsored by Ramah Lodge #33 of B'nai B'rith, and in attendance were members of the city's Jewish community. By the end of the evening, ninety-six men had volunteered, \$10,000.00 had been pledged to provide a reward (or bounty, as it was called) to the enlistees, and a uniquely Jewish resolution had been passed.

You will shortly find the wording of the Chicago resolution and more of Mr. Krolick's remarks posted on our Web site—on Abraham Lincoln and Jewish chaplaincy in the Federal Army, Ulysses S. Grant and General Order No. 11, and an anecdote about a Jewish soldier's Passover seder. ❖

CJHS Welcomes New Members

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Calling All CJHS Writers, Artists, and Performers!

November is Jewish Book Month. Every year the fall issue of *Chicago Jewish History* features a complete list of the Society's own publications as well as other published works by our members. Each year the list grows longer, as our historians produce new works. If you have published a book, or illustrated one, or have published a music or spoken word recording, send us the details on the form below. If your work has been listed in a previous *CJH* fall issue, rest assured that it will appear again this year. But if you wish to inform us of any updates—in price, format, description, or ordering—please do so on this form.

Please mail the original form or a photocopy directly to our editor. Mailing it to the CJHS office will only delay it.

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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 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 invite you to take part. Please contact any of the committee chairpersons listed here.

■ Membership Committee

Dr. Rachelle Gold
(773) 338-6975 and
Mark Mandle
(773) 929-2853, Co-Chairs

■ Oral History Committee

Dr. N. Sue Weiler, Chair
(312) 922-2294

■ Program Committee

Charles Bernstein, Chair
(773) 324-6362

■ Tour Committee

Leah Axelrod, Chair
(847) 432-7003

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
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Make checks payable to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and mail to our office at 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605. Dues are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

www.chicagojewishhistory.org

The Society is now online! Browse our Web site for information about our upcoming programs. Read past issues of our quarterly journal.

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