

THE JEWS OF PAWTUCKET AND CENTRAL FALLS PART II

BY ELEANOR F. HORVITZ

Part I of a history of the Jews who settled in Pawtucket and Central Falls was published in the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, Volume 9, No. 3. Through interviews with several people who grew up in this area a picture evolved of what life was like for these families in the early years of this century, why they settled in this region, how they made a living, where they shopped, and how they enjoyed their leisure time. The problem of anti-semitism was discussed. An account of the history of the Orthodox synagogue, Ohave Shalom, with its importance in the life of these Jews, was included. Although the synagogue was the center of the Pawtucket and Central Falls Jewish community, the organizations which arose to meet the needs of these people were also cited.

Part II of the history is concerned primarily with the occupations of the Jews who settled in the Pawtucket and Central Falls area.

Jewish-owned businesses, from a one man operation to the largest department store and to factories employing hundreds of workers, figure prominently in the history of Jews of Pawtucket and Central Falls.

OCCUPATIONS

Predominant in the 1875-1900 Pawtucket and Central Falls City Directories were the following occupations pursued by the newly-arrived Jew: dealers in clothing - 12; dealers in dry goods - 10; boot and shoe repairers, and dealers in boots and shoes - 12; tailors - 7; peddlers - 7; with a small number of variety and grocery store operators. The figures do not indicate that a man would be in that occupation each year of listing, but these were average occupational figures as listed over that period. By 1910 the variety of occupations had increased to include furniture dealers, more grocery store owners, junk and iron dealers. In 1910 alone, 19 were listed as in the shoes and boots business; 5 in dry goods. It is interesting to note that by 1910 several occupations listed no Jewish names, such as plumbers, printers, real estate dealers, dentists, doctors, public notaries, builders, and billiard and pool room operators.

In the 1923 Pawtucket and Central Falls City Directory not much change was noted in the occupations of the Jewish residents. Of 53 tailors, 16 were Jewish; 10 of the 48 meat market owners were Jewish; and 8 out of 11 Jews were listed as junk dealers. Another high percentage of Jews were found among the clothing dealers, 17 of 32. The shoe business still attracted many Jews, with 11 of 26 shoe dealers and 22 of 72, shoe repairers. In 1923, of 207 corporations, only 6 Jewish owned businesses had incorporated, with the earliest that of the American Curled Hair Company in 1880, founded by the Lewisohns of New York.

The above are just statistics from city directories, but what was life really like for the small businessman? A few excerpts from interviews may give some insight:

Father first worked in a market in Hartford as a meatcutter. Since my parents wanted to go where there was family, they moved to Central Falls and father opened his own Kosher butcher store on Central Street. There were other Jewish owned stores in the area.

Nathan Bogin, at 40 Central Street, was the other Kosher butcher; August Bakery was at 24 Central Street, David Vengerow was at 60 Central Street, and Max Perl had a pharmacy at 63 Central Street. My father's first store was where the railroad track was, but then he bought a cinder block building at 34 Central Street, and we lived upstairs. He always delivered his orders, first starting with a horse and wagon and graduating to a truck. My mother learned to cut meat (left-handed), and I used to make out the bills, for most of our customers called in their orders which were delivered.¹

RETAIL BUSINESSES

Central Street was the busiest shopping area. In addition to the stores mentioned in the above interview other businesses in existence at that time were: Louis Morgan's grocery store at 62 Central Street, Charles J. Sentler's soft drinks business at No. 17, Samuel Levin's grocery at No. 19, Solomon Raskin's grocery at No. 31. The block of 93 - 99 Central Street was called Brennan's block, and among its stores was Samuel Halpert's dry good store. On the other side of Central Street was Barry Mogilevkin's grocery at No. 48. Included on this long street were many Polish businesses and residences, the Young Men's Polish Club, the Polish German Speaking Society, and the Sons of Poland. At No. 205 was the Central Falls Public Library. It appears that Irish families lived in the higher numbered houses in this neighborhood. Peney Feital had his business at 403 Central Street.

Two cousins whose fathers were originally in the junk business were interviewed. To the question of what kind of junk her father collected, one answered, "Anything he could make a dime at — rags, metal,

paper. First he started with a pushcart, shouting, “rags, bottles” house to house. Then he got a horse and wagon which was easier for him. But that was only for a short time when he went into a shop. Then he was a dealer and people would bring him their stuff.”²

Her cousin, Jack Cokin, related: “My father wasn’t in the junk business very long. As a result of the junk business somehow he got involved in buying out people’s furnishings when they were breaking up their homes. This evolved into his being in the used furniture business, and then the furniture business.” The Cokin family was a large family in the Pawtucket and Central Falls area. The 1923 Pawtucket-Central Falls city directory listed Abraham Cokin still in the junk business at 478 Mill Street, Central Falls as was Harry Cokin, junk peddler residing at 45 Darrow Street. However, Isaac and Sam Cokin owned the American Furniture Company, and Leon and Sam were in the furniture business called the Broad Street Furniture Company.

Jacob Goodman described his father’s Tailoring business:

My father learned his trade in Europe. He came from a family of high-grade tailors. Even though they lived in a small town, the quality of their work was such that it was done for nobility. When he first started to work in Pawtucket, he took a job at Shartenberg’s Department Store in the alteration department. That department also made women’s clothes. Later he went into business for himself in the Boston Store building, which was across the street from Shartenberg’s. He made suits and clothes for the upper class women of Pawtucket. He was a tailor for many years, and then took in button making, hemstitching, and other side lines. Even in those days he ran into a problem getting proper help. When he could not get competent help, he eventually got out of the tailoring business and stayed in the button business.³

Peney Feital was first listed in the Pawtucket and Central Falls City Directory as being in the shoe and boot repair business. His shop and home were listed at 112 and 114 Main Street respectively. His daughter spoke about his business: “My father had a shoe repairing place, but he also made soles and did the finishing of shoes made by the large shoe companies. Originally shoes had all been made by hand, then gradually the machine came in. His machinery was leased from the companies. In Europe he said he had learned tailoring. He could sew beautifully.”⁴

An exception to the modest small businesses and services were those enterprises large enough to be listed in the 1906 “Pawtucket Times Special Anniversary and Industrial Edition”. Since this kind of detailed information about very early Jewish merchants is rarely documented, it is of value to reprint the graphic and often flowery descriptions (see Appendix). Among the businesses described were those of A. Feder & Son; the New England Tailoring Company; J. M. Levy; Isaac Nathanson; Thomas Rosenfield;

Samuel Needle, The Boston Tailoring Company; F. Leichter, The National Clothing Company; Issac Rose, The Rose Clothing Company; Samuel Zucker and Co.; The New England Wine and Liquor Company; and Shartenberg & Robinson.

Thomas Rosenfield was cited in Part I of this paper for opening his home to recently arrived immigrants. Isaac Rose, who had come to Providence in 1863, died on July 28, 1940. He had retired from the real estate business in 1939. He was an owner of the Strand Theatre in Providence and the National Realty Building. He had remained a member of the Ahavath Sholam Synagogue. As for the Zucker business one observer noted: "I remember that business on Main Street in Pawtucket right opposite the fire station. I recall as a kid my father would go there to buy liquor and I would go with him. There was both a retail store and next to it a barroom.⁵ Jacob Shartenberg was one of the early German-Jewish merchants in Pawtucket.

The Berick family had a boot and shoe business called Berick & Son (Abram and Louis). Their first business at 105 Broad Street was in boot and shoe repairing and evolved into the shoe business. Abram and his son built up the concern on Broad Street which was housed in the Berick Building (130-132 Broad Street).

JUNK AND MANUFACTURING

The 1900 Pawtucket and Central Falls City Directory lists the occupation of Junk and Iron Dealers for the first time. Three Jewish names appear in this category: Samuel Horvitz, 23 Cross Street, Central Falls; Morris Karlin, 416 Mill Street, Central Falls; and John Marks at 561 Mill Street, Central Falls. In addition there was Max Percelay, who also started a junk business early in the century. From these humble origins evolved some very prosperous businesses. The S. Horvitz & Son concern dealt in cotton and woolen rags and eventually became the manufacturers of upholstery and pillow padding and stuffing under the name of Firmtex. John Marks progressed from the junk business in the late 1920s to a dealer and converter of cotton and synthetic yarn, a business still managed by his son and grandsons. Morris Karlin dealt in cotton waste. The Percelay business became involved with textiles. Creating a tufted type rug, Abraham Percelay (son of Max) conducted his business with Joseph Percelay under the name of Grand Mars Rug Company. Later he operated Associated Textiles with plants in Central Falls and Woonsocket. Joseph Percelay founded Troy Yarn and Textiles in Pawtucket with his sons, Morris and Merrill, and also established the Fairlawn Spinning Company, which engaged in the spinning of woolen and worsted yarns.⁶

A review of the manufacturing companies located in the Pawtucket area reveals several successful businesses, primarily in some form of textile manufacturing, run by Jewish owners. Erwin Strasmich in his article, "Jews and the Textile Industry, Rhode Island, and Fall River, Massachusetts",

Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes, Volume 6, No. 2, November 1972, writes about the following enterprising merchants and their businesses — Milton C. Sapinsley, Isaac Miller, Sanford H. Cohen, Martin Lifland, H. B. Feldman, Hyman and Jacob Werner, Harry Schwartz, Harry Fine, Leo Grossman, David Dwares, Neil Pansy, Ralph R. Leveye, among others. In most cases their businesses were located in Pawtucket, but the managers and presidents were commonly residents of Providence and other communities.

What about the professions of the early Jews of Pawtucket and Central Falls, the doctors, dentists, and lawyers?

PROFESSIONS

The first Jewish physician in this area appears to have been Dr. Lionel L. Albert. In 1915 he lived and had his office at 518 Mill Street in Central Falls. In 1917 he moved to 50 Pacific Street, keeping his office at the Mill Street address, and by 1920 he had both his home and office at 50 Pacific Street. Again in 1923 he separated his home and office and had his residence at 62 Pacific Street. The story about how Dr. Lionel Albert happened to settle in Central Falls, is told by a patient: "He had come from the Boston area. He knew a Mrs. Hite from Malden, who had moved to Central Falls. When Dr. Albert finished medical school he went to the Central Falls area because of her. She introduced him up and down the street to all the Jewish and Polish people (she spoke Polish fluently), and he worked up a large practice."⁷

Another patient recalled Albert in this way: "He was the only Jewish doctor. People treated him like a God. I remember a story in which a man appearing for his citizenship papers answered the question of who was president of the United States with the answer, 'Dr. Lionel Albert'.⁸ Lionel Albert died September 6, 1942.

The only other Jewish physician listed in the early directories was Dr. Joseph Marks, who opened his office in 1921 at 368 Central Street, Central Falls. He lived in Warren, Rhode Island. His first office was in the John Marks house, and his sister, Rose Brown, and her family had a dry goods store on Dexter Street. Having family who lived in Central Falls probably influenced Marks to practice there. He died on August 19, 1981.

The only Jewish dentist was Dr. Archie Albert, who went to live with his brother, Lionel. He opened his office in a building at 84 Broad Street and was listed as living with his brother at 62 Pacific Street in Central Falls. Many kind remarks were made about him. "No Jew ever went to anybody else." "He went to Brown University, dental school, and became a marvelous dentist." "He was God with all the Jewish families." Archie Albert died on September 6, 1960.

In 1900 Frank Bellin was listed as a lawyer at 528 Broad Street in Central Falls, while boarding at 45 Fales Street. Lester Millman practiced law at 104

Masonic Building in Pawtucket in 1908. There were no other Jewish lawyers in this area for many years. In the 1923 Pawtucket and Central Falls Directory, Millman and Bellin were still listed among the lawyers. In that year Samson Nathanson of Central Falls is listed as Clerk in the 11th Judicial District Court. It was not until 1928 that another Jewish lawyer, Morris Berick, opened his office.

Jewish residents were concerned with other occupations and businesses than those described. Among those who took other directions are the following:

Sigmund Rand had a barroom on Cross Street in Central Falls.

In 1890 Harry Rosenhirsh was a brush maker and boarded at 322 Broad Street, Central Falls. Also listed in that directory was Moses Feinberg, who was a news dealer at the railroad depot.

By 1900 Louis H. Bellin had opened a photography studio at 219 Main Street in Pawtucket.

There were several Jewish families of Austrian birth who tended to fraternize among themselves. Celia Farber mentions that her family was friendly with the Jacob Berkelhammers, who owned the General Wine Company; the Goldenberg family, who were in the pickle packaging business; Jacob Schinagel in the soft drink business; and Samuel Rigelhaupt, who owned the Winsor Bar and Grill and the Pawtucket Wine Co.

Well known in Pawtucket was Morris Espo, who founded the Pawtucket News dealership which bore his name. Espo was active in religious, civic, fraternal, and philanthropic groups. He was founder and first president of both the Blackstone Valley Jewish Community Council and the Henry Friedman Lodge, B'nai B'rith of Pawtucket, a member of the board of directors of the Salvation Army in Pawtucket, and a director of the Pawtucket Boys' Club. Espo died on January 23, 1965.

Many Jews migrated to and settled in the Pawtucket and Central Falls area where their children were born. Many chose to live out their lives in the same location.

ORGANIZATIONS

Within the Central Falls limits in the northwesterly corner of the city between Lonsdale Avenue and the Lincoln town line a cemetery was opened in 1868, called the Moshassuck Cemetery. This private corporation, owned the original seven acres.⁹ A plot of land was purchased by the Congregation Sons of David of Providence on December 31, 1870 in this interdenominational cemetery. Sons of David merged with Sons of Israel in 1874 and became the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David, which had its own cemetery on Reservoir Avenue in Providence.

Thereafter, they used this cemetery plot for the burial of non-members, relatives of members, and charitable cases. During the years 1870-1897 other congregations and organizations purchased plots in the northwest section of Moshassuck Cemetery — Congregation Sons of Zion, Congregation Sons of Abraham, Russian Congregation of Israel, Baron Hirsch Lodge O.B.A., Roumanian Agudath Zedeck, Rhode Island Hebrew Medical Association, and Maimonides Lodge No. 112, O.B.A. However, in the two sections reserved for Jewish burials only two Pawtucket-Central Falls Jews are listed: Pauline, wife of Adolph Feder, and Emma, wife of Max Feder, both dated 1894.

The Jews of Pawtucket and Central Falls were for the most part buried in the Jewish Lincoln Park Cemetery, which is located in Warwick, Rhode Island. There are four areas designated in this cemetery for Congregation Ohawe Sholam of Pawtucket. This land was purchased at various times.

SUMMARY

The Jews who settled in the Central Falls and Pawtucket area were like Jews who migrated to urban areas all over the United States, particularly in the latter part of the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. There were some who were Reform Jews, but for the most part they were Orthodox, some more observant than others. Congregation Ohawe Sholam played an important role in the life of many families. Some belonged to a Socialist-type group, who considered themselves of the intelligentsia and not concerned with the synagogue. They would often meet in discussion groups and listen to speakers on political and social issues.

Like most Jews of this period they were family oriented, and their recreational life centered about family, relatives, and close friends, their "landsleit".* They were interested in their children's education, both secular and religious. For the most part they were proprietors of businesses, small and large. They certainly had a significant impact on the growth of the economy of Pawtucket and Central Falls. They were dedicated to their beneficial societies and were conscientious in helping out their less fortunate fellow Jew, especially through organizations such as the Pawtucket-Central Falls Hebrew Free Loan Association (Gemilath Chesed). On a personal level they helped in times of sickness and distress, and on more joyous occasions they celebrated together. As recalled by old-time residents:

Our social life revolved around family, relatives, friends. In those days there was a great deal of visiting back and forth. My aunt lived on Jenks Street in Central Falls and she was not well. My mother would walk there practically every day, a distance of about two to three miles, taking us two boys with her.¹¹

*Fellow townsmen from the "old country".

We had a wonderful Jewish community. We were a very close community, a close-knit community. There were so many people who were true human beings. When it came to charity, any kind of charity, there never was a problem. We were always raising money for some cause.¹²

While the warm spirit of closeness and mutual concern that prevailed in the small immigrant Jewish community of Pawtucket and Central Falls could not of necessity survive amid the pressures of contemporary American life, yet many recall with affection and admiration those early pioneers who were their parents, relatives, and neighbors.

APPENDIX

LARGE JEWISH BUSINESSES AND ENTERPRISES PAWTUCKET-CENTRAL FALLS

A. FEDER & SON

If you would be a well groomed man, you might wear clothing which fits perfectly and expresses all that is smart in fashion. Next to knowing that the clothing you have made is in the correct style, you want absolute assurance that the quality of the material and the workmanship is completely good. Of all this you may be assured by patronizing A. Feder & Son, custom tailors whose establishment is located at No. 18 North Main Street. This store was established in 1883, and has held the public patronage all these years. It occupies a floor space of 25 x 60 feet, and a fine line of suitings is carried of the newest and most up-to-date fabrics and patterns and a perfect fit is guaranteed to customers, as Mr. Feder does all of his cutting personally, and none but skilled workmen are employed. Mr. M. Feder, the present proprietor, was born in Germany, is a young man and has lived here 24 years, being widely and favorably known.

NEW ENGLAND TAILORING COMPANY

Many of the well-dressed business men, if asked concerning their stylish appearance, would say they had their garments made at the New England Tailoring Company's establishment at 143 Broad Street. This company established their business here two years ago and have already acquired a high reputation for reliability and fine work. They carry a large stock of the best woolen goods from which to make a selection, and make suits to order in the latest styles and at the lowest prices, turning out garments that are perfect in fit, finish and workmanship. They also make ladies' suits to order, and do dyeing, cleaning, repairing and pressing. Five skilled and expert workmen are employed and first class work is guaranteed. The manager and proprietor of this business is Mr. David Levenson. He is a young man who came from Germany ten years ago. He came to this city from Worcester, Mass., where he was successfully employed.

J. M. LEVY

Anyone who has had the responsibility of arranging for fairs, balls and other public affairs can appreciate the advantage of placing the decorations in the hands of experienced, competent people whose taste and ability insure artistic design and attractive color schemes. Pawtucket is especially favored in being able to command the services of Mr. Julius M. Levy, decorator, who is prepared to furnish estimates and designs for balls, fairs, festivals and celebrations of any kind, and who, with a corps of six or more expert

*These graphic and often flowery descriptions, typical of the boosteristic spirit of the times, are reprinted here because such detailed information about early Jewish merchants is seldom documented. *Pawtucket Times Special Anniversary and Industrial Edition*, March 31, 1906.

PAWTUCKET FURNITURE CO.*General House Furnishers**"Meet Me At The Cottage"*39 NORTH MAIN STREET, PAWTUCKET, R. I.

PAWTUCKET'S LARGEST STORE

SHARTENBERG'S

Weeden and New Idea Buildings

260-270 Main Street

Corner Park Place

Telephone Pawtucket 2618

Abraham M. Percelay, Manager

JACOB PERCELAY

—DEALER IN—

Cotton and Woolen WasteCLOTH REMNANTS AND JOB LOTS OF EVERY
DESCRIPTION

COTTON AND MERCERIZED YARN

—ALSO—

IRON, METALS, PAPER STOCK, Etc.

BAGS AND BURLAP

Rear 302 North Main St.,

Pawtucket, R. I.

assistants will take entire charge of all arrangements pertaining to the decoration of the building, exterior or interior. Mr. Levy is a young man, born in Cincinnati, Ohio, lived for some time in New York City and came here in October 1900. One year ago he established his present business at 23 Harrison Street and has been very successful. He is also engaged in the manufacture of flags, banners, awnings, tents, canvas goods of all kinds in which line he has an extensive trade. Mr. Levy is enterprising and progressive and is very highly esteemed, and carries a stock of the newest and most up-to-date assortment of flags and decorative material to rent or for sale.

ISAAC NATHANSON

A well-conducted general store in this city which because of its diversified stock is a favorite gathering place is that owned and managed by Isaac Nathanson. This store is located at 617 Broad Street where it occupies a floor space of 25 x 45 feet where it carries a large and varied stock including dry goods, shoes, gent's furnishings, cookery, and all kinds of remnants. The stock is well chosen and sold at extremely reasonable prices. Mr. Nathanson was born in Russia, is a man of middle age, and has been in this country 25 years. During his residency in this city he has become widely respected for his business ability and progressiveness and is one of our successful merchants. Mr. Nathanson differs from the average merchant in that from the first he believes strongly in the honest respectability never making a great 'hullabaloo' over special sales yet always giving the people of Central Falls who know his worth the benefit of his own buying at wholesale and the result is that Nathanson's is well known as 'the honest store of bargains.' Such is the reputation of the owner of the steadily growing busy store at 617 Broad Street, Central Falls.

THOMAS ROSENFELD

At the corner of High and Cross Streets the observer will find a busy retail enterprise. This store is owned and run by Mr. Thomas Rosenfield who handles a line of German and Armenian groceries, vegetables, baked goods, candy, cigars, etc. This business was established in 1892. The store occupies a floor space of 30 X 80 feet, is well stocked and the proprietor takes all precaution to see that the lines are kept unbroken by a frequent replenishing of the goods sold. One wagon is kept busy distributing the goods ordered and to any part of the city.

Mr. Rosenfield is a native of Russia and came to America in 1886 and has been a resident of this city for seven years. He is a gentleman of about 40. He owns real estate and is diligent in his efforts to still further build up his mercantile establishment.

SAMUEL NEEDLE -- BOSTON TAILORING COMPANY

One of the best and up-to-date tailoring establishments in the city is that

conducted by the Boston Tailoring Company at 498 Main Street, corner of Pine Street. This has been established nine years and during that time has built up a large and exclusive patronage. They have a well-equipped shop, 30 x 40 feet in dimensions and employ three skilled assistants. The stock carried is very large, including all the newest and latest fabrics, weaves and colorings and the garments sent out from here are perfect in fit, finish and workmanship. They are of the latest and best design and retain their shape and style. Mr. S. Needle, the proprietor, was born in Russia about 35 years ago and has lived here nine years. He is an expert at his trade and has a high reputation. This company also does cleaning, pressing and repairing at reasonable rates.

F. LEICHTER — NATIONAL CLOTHING COMPANY

Two years ago the National Clothing Company opened their store at 530 Dexter Street, since which there has been a steady increase of customers and consequent satisfaction among traders. This store is 20 X 40 feet in 'floor' area, is well kept and conveniently arranged, being modern and up-to-date in every particular. The stock consists of ready made clothing for men, hats, gent's furnishings, shoes, millinery, ladies' and children's garments. This stock is well chosen, is of the latest and the best on the market, and prices are as low as is consistent with good quality. One clerk is employed and customers are shown every courtesy and attention. The proprietor, Mr. F. Leichter, was born in Austria 41 years ago. He came to this country in 1888 and for the past two years has made his home in Central Falls. He is favorably known, and has a well merited patronage.

ISAAC ROSE — THE ROSE CLOTHING COMPANY

A neat and attractive stock of ladies' and gentlemen's furnishings of every description is to be found at the Rose Clothing Company's store, 192 Main Street, where everything is first-class and up-to-date in style and fashion and of the best quality. Mr. Isaac Rose, the proprietor, is a native of Russia and is a well and favorably known merchant. He resides in Providence where he conducts a similar store. The Pawtucket store is under the capable management of Morris Dolberg. The store is 26 X 75 feet in dimensions and carries an extensive and up-to-date stock. It is patronized by the best people who know that many fine bargains are constantly being featured here. The line of ladies' garments is very complete. They do a good business in this department. Ten clerks are employed. Mr. Rose also conducts the Union Clothing Store in Central Falls.*

*Rose, who had come to Providence in 1863, died on July 28, 1940. He had retired from the real estate business in 1939. He was an owner of the Strand Theatre and the National Realty Building. He had remained a member of the Ohawe Sholam Synagogue.

NEW ENGLAND WINE AND LIQUOR COMPANY
Samuel Zucker and Co.

New England Wine and Liquor Company located at 21-23 Railroad Avenue has a well-known reputation as being one of the best and most reliable places for the purchase of pure family wine and liquor. It is the policy of this house to treat their customers fairly and liberally and to sell first class goods at reasonable prices. Mr. Samuel H. Zucker for the past eight years was engaged in this same business in Providence where he conducted three similar stores, coming here three years ago to take charge of this store, which has developed a large trade. Last year this was incorporated as Samuel H. Zucker & Company, his partner being Mr. Jack Goldberg, a native of Newark, New Jersey, and a bright, honorable young man. This firm has many patrons, to whom they wish to express their thanks. A fine stock is carried and the store is run on a strictly union basis. Mr. Zucker is a member of the Eagles, and Mr. Goldberg belongs to the Masons and the Pawtucket Eagles. Both are widely esteemed and are to be congratulated upon the success they have achieved.

SHARTENBERG & ROBINSON

A feature in the business history of the city has been the splendid showing made by the dry goods stores of Pawtucket during recent years. They, in common with other places of trade have felt the prosperity permeate all branches, and with the growth of the city have shown a corresponding development of trade. Pawtucket can boast of as handsome retail goods establishments and department stores as any city in the state. Some of the finest buildings in the city are devoted to this important branch of industry and a trip through these various stores will convince anyone that in this respect the wants of shoppers are fully met. The well known and enterprising firm of Shartenberg & Robinson, who conduct the 'New Idea' Store on Main Street, are proprietors of the largest and most up-to-date department store in the city dealing in an extensive combination of dry goods, furniture, carpets, notions, furnishings, clothing, shoes and a miscellany of things too numerous to classify in detail.

This business was established 24 years ago by Mr. J. Shartenberg and was formed under the present firm name 18 years ago. This store is the largest in the city and one of the largest in the New England States. It occupies a six story building with basement, covering a ground area of 10,000 square feet, and employing over 200 people. They also have a New York office. This firm is comprised of Mr. Jacob Shartenberg, a native of Germany, a man in the prime of life, and a prominent citizen; also Mr. H. Robinson, a young man, born in Russia. Both are residents of Pawtucket, energetic, progressive and among the most prominent businessmen of the city.

This store compares favorably with the numerous immense emporiums of the metropolitan cities, having a branch post office station, savings bank,

photograph gallery, optical, and hair dressing departments. The entire store is lighted from its own electric plant.

NOTES

¹ Interview with Tillie Vine Vascovitz on July 12, 1984.

² Interview with Gertrude Goldberg Hak by Geraldine Foster, 1983.

³ Interview with Jacob Goodman on July 10, 1984.

⁴ Interview with Diana Feital Goldstein on July 15, 1984.

⁵ See note (3).

⁶ *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, Vol. 6, No. 2, P. 255.

⁷ See Note (4).

⁸ Telephone interview with Madeline Bogin Sanek, July 5, 1984.

⁹ *History of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Lincoln and Cumberland, R.I.* by John William Haley, P. 86.

¹⁰ Interview with Jack Cokin by Geraldine Foster, 1983.

¹¹ See note (3).

¹² Interview with Sam Shlevin on July 11, 1984.

SPECIAL FEATURE

LIMA*

BY MICHAEL FINK

FOREWORD

The Jewish people keeps its historical notes: Judaism seeks meaning in memory. The Ashkenazic custom of naming a baby after a relative who has died expresses the wish to hand down a living tradition both personal and social.

The generation that settled in Rhode Island in the early decades of the 20th century moved from a world of Yiddish into a world of English, from community and extended family toward a more particularized world. Perhaps we try to decipher in the adventures and dilemmas of their lives a hidden message, as we tell their stories to the children to whom we give their names.

The western world has translated religion into art, to some extent. Just so, the following memoir suggests how design and craft sustain spiritual ritual. We hope our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren may re-enact and transmit the lives of the "pioneers" who carried Jewish "lares and penates" from Eastern Europe into Providence, Rhode Island. Here, another Jewish world has been created. Certainly, it has been influenced by the tragedy of the destruction of European Jewry, and by the foundation of the state of Israel. But the local Jewish community has been primarily based upon the energies of one particular generation. American Jewish literature grew from its tragicomedy. Often, in this literature, the figure of the mother was mocked. BLIMA suggests the poignancy, vitality, individuality, and nobility of a generation of women born in the Europe of pre-World War I and brought to an America of hope and optimism.

It is written as a story read to my daughter, but it is set forth here as a historical, as well as singular narrative.

*The gothic B comes from a monogram signet used to stamp letters sealed with colored wax.



Blima, Montreal, 1926.



Moe and Betty C. Fink, Providence, 1926.



Michael, Betty C. and Charles B. Fink, Camp Arundel, Raymond, Maine, 1942.



Emily Blima and Michael Fink, Providence, 1982.

THE STORY

Dear Emily Blima: In the Rumania of small farms and Gypsy music, my mother's name was Blima — meaning Blossom. In America she was Betty. Blima spent her early girlhood with her older sisters on land which their father managed. Fruit trees bore delicious plums, apples and cherries. Cows and horses munched grasses. It was like country childhood everywhere before the First War. Of her house in those years, she remembered, a gilded mirror. They passed through Paris on their way west to another Paris. Montreal, in Quebec, in Canada, up in the New World.

There snow lay thick and deep through long, dark winters. Father kept a horse and sleigh in their stable. He would take the little horse and sleigh out over the snow to deliver coal to houses. People needed coal for their stoves to keep cozy in those dim days before towns could stay bright all night. We have no photos of these scenes. Only words to go on.

Blima-Ruchel could write, draw, and dress up. But her sisters teased her and called her "Bok." That meant "Dummy." They all had nicknames. They knew how to fight with words. She didn't hit back with words. She didn't mind being teased. She just read or drew. So they thought she was silly. But she got a scholarship to go to high school. In those days girls didn't usually go on to school. Often, even boys didn't go.

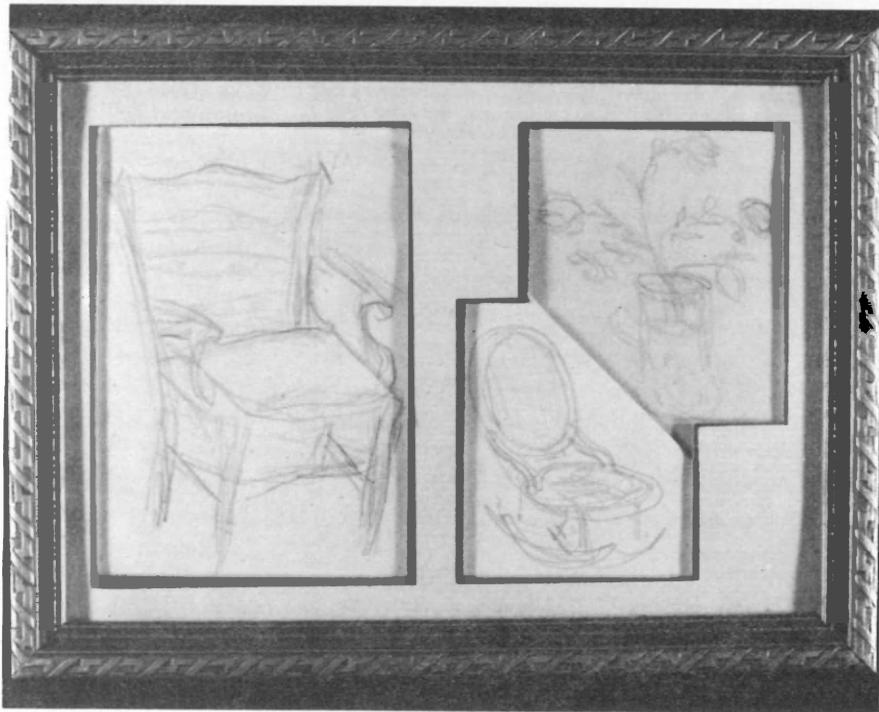
She got a job as a hat model in a good shop. And became buyer for the store too. It was called "Darwin's." That's also the name of the scientist who wrote about Evolution — nature's design for the human face. That's what they called her at Darwin's — the Face.

They had a widowed Auntie, a fine, formal lady. She married a widower in Providence, Rhode Island, in the States. He was an expert upholsterer with a growing studio. When Blima went to her Aunt's wedding, she met her new Uncle's son, now her cousin. This serious-looking young man with glasses — who had no mother of his own — fell in love with her kindly beauty, eager smile, her hope and strength. She chose him to marry. This is how my family began.

They built a little house on a hillside. It looked like an English country cottage with tapestry-brick gables. They had three sons. She liked to dress up. She told me once, a Gypsy in Rumania had foretold this house and family. She dressed up the windows of the front room in long maroon drapes with soft gold-braid tie-backs. They flowed along the floor and carpet in pools of light and shade. Around the tapestry-brick fireplace, with a wood or coal fire always lit at twilight, bookshelves held the Harvard Classics in red and gold bindings. The book she always took down to read to us was the Fairytale. The stories seemed to be about her childhood. Magic trees and royal houses did not seem far away.



Miniature furniture models of furnishings at 12 Creston Way, c. 1940.



Drawings of furniture and objects at Creston Way, 1965.

With a jackknife and some wood cigar boxes, she copied the furniture of the house in doll size. With little colored pencils, she drew pictures of the birds that came to our yard that blended into an empty lot, once a farm. They were softer and more charming than the pictures in real books. When we went to the movies, the stars, lovely as they were, were not more wonderful than the face of our own mother. It was the Depression. Time had stopped. Whatever fears or tears I later knew, that early childhood time was enchantment, under the spell of a human flower.

Yet she was down to earth. She answered questions with reason. When I asked her why we die, she talked about how we live. She quoted proverbs from all the languages of her past. She kept the Sabbath, with bread she baked, and linens she ironed. Her cakes were famous. Light and delicate as her features. The bowls and wood spoons were cracked and smoothed down.

War came. She worked. We listened to radio, saw headlines. War closed. Years moved along. Grey hairs came to the part in her chestnut hair. Her hands were worn, because she used them. Sometimes, to watch t.v., she would wear her old, broken, owl-shaped spectacles. But her eyes were ever friendly and lively. Glimmers of green and gold shone in calm brown. Even without rouge, her cheeks stayed rosy as a girl's. As she walked, briskly and a little heavily in her shoes, wearing business suits and small hats, people would greet her with special smiles. Everybody was proud of her, because she was filled with love of life, love of work.

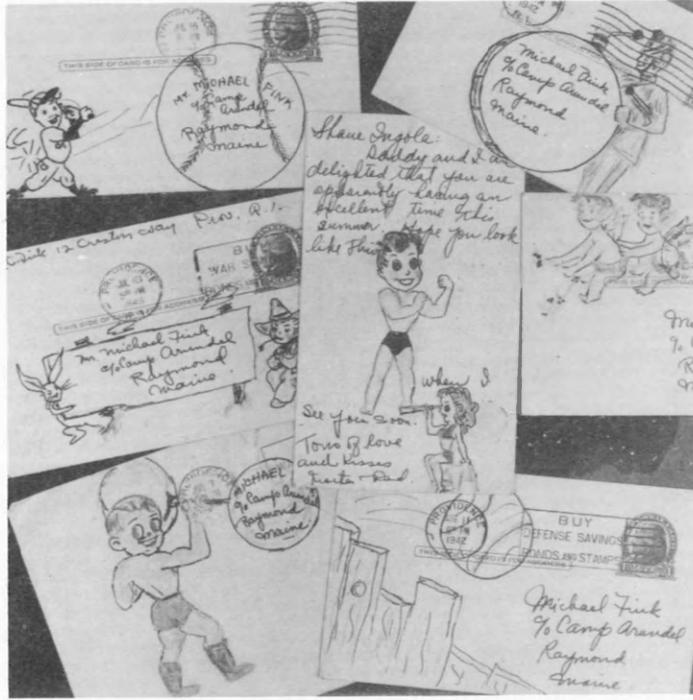
I was sure she would live forever like an oak. Yet I worried about her too. Life is very long for some people. They go on almost forever. They become great grandmas and great grandpas. Others leave us too soon. We remember them like figures in myth, in museums. That was to be her story.

She liked her work in the family furniture store. The studio had closed. One afternoon she came home early. I was living at home. For the first time she asked me to fix supper. She was tired. Next day, for the first time, she went to visit a doctor. He told us she would not live. Only once, then, I cried. When I knew she was lost. She took me around the house and showed me how to do some of her chores. How my Dad liked his supper. Even, how to sweep up and polish the hearth after a fire. I was busy setting her things in order.

At first, in her illness, she looked as ever. Even profile lifted up to the sun. Fine nostrils, neat mouth, curved forehead, good bearing.

She wrote thank you notes to nurses, to friends, even to Dad. She drew — flowers, chairs. Then, she became too sick. She lay down. She died.

Blima-Ruchel, daughter of Meyer Cohen, had left. We placed her not only in the good earth, but within the wise traditions of her people and mine. We covered the mirrors. We lit the candle. We followed all the ancient



customs. To me they seemed straight and true. The rabbi commented, "I've never seen a family care so much."

People came to see us in her house. They brought us their stories about her. People said, "She loved us." Her sisters, my aunts, told me about her youth. How they would give her their pennies to pay for her ticket to a new movie in town. She could make the story of the matinee so lively. It was more fun to hear her than to see the film for themselves. How, when they had boyfriends, they would hide her in the cellar. That was so the boys wouldn't like her best, for her face, her grace.

Our neighbor next door, Miss Church, had always been a New Englander. Her family had come over on the Mayflower. A retired schoolteacher, alone and crippled by arthritis, she came across our cobbled driveway to visit us during this memorial week. So bowlegged from the arthritis that she could scarcely walk, she half crept to us, as we watched in awe from our windows. She crawled up our brick steps. She entered the parlor to tell us her version. She had watched Blima hang out the shirts and sheets, shovel snow, tend the roses and peonies, go off to work with my father. "A pioneer woman of the 18th century," she declared. Her words stunned us all.

I said the prayers with my father and brothers. I hoped she might know of our thanks. I hoped her soul might find some form to stay with us. In the words. In the candlelight. I gave away her fanciful costume jewelry. But I wanted to save something. I framed the sketches she had done in the last days.

Sometimes a house falls away as we part paths. I kept house for my father. For my mother, for the house, for myself. I could make my father laugh. Or cry. Sometimes we said nothing. The Kaddish prayer each dawn and dusk, summer fall winter spring, pulled us into the community. Others also had lost. Yet people started marriages. Babies began. Their names were said around the Torah. People danced with palm branches and etrogs in the autumn. The shape of the Jewish year carried us from grief back to life.

I will never accept her illness. I am still haunted by images of her radiant life. This is how it must be. But I know that Blima left a message within me. She wrote the message in my lunch box in grammar school. I saved it. "From your mother who adores and admires you." I knew that I would love with the love she gave me. This is the Jewish way. I am sad she is gone. I am glad she was here.

I wanted to love. I wanted to have a daughter. I met a girl with a quiet face and bright eyes. We had a wedding in my father's house, my mother's house, my house. The house sparkled as at the start. We broke a fine pink champagne glass brought from Rumania. We had our baby girl.

The baby was you, Emily Blima. You are not that Blima. But you have part of her name. Her story is part of me. Her story is part of you. Her story is the story of our family, of our people. People came here from far away.

They brought with them their jokes and their skills, their love and a few trinkets. They gave them to us, here. I am sad that her story is done, melted into nature and memory. I am glad you are here. You are the Blossom on a flowering tree. The tree of life of our family and our people.

POSTSCRIPT

Betty C. Fink of 12 Creston Way, Providence, was born in Podul Iloiaie, near Jassy, Rumania in 1905 on August 2. She emigrated with her family to Montreal, Quebec in 1913. Her name was Blima-Ruchel Cohen. In 1926 she married Moe Fink and moved to Providence. They lived first on Sumter Street, then on Verndale Avenue, and moved to Creston Way in 1936. She worked at their business, Wayside Furniture Co., of East Providence, until her death on August 2, 1965. Moe Fink, born in London in 1904, died in 1977.

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
THIRTY-FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

April 28, 1985

The Thirty-first Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association was held at the Rhode Island Jewish Community Center on Sunday, April 28, 1985. Dr. Seebert J. Goldowsky, president, called the meeting to order at 2:40 P.M. In deference to the main speaker, Dr. Goldowsky allowed him to speak before the business meeting because of a schedule conflict. Dr. Stephen J. Whitfield, Associate Professor of American Studies at Brandeis University, was the guest speaker. His topic was "Prophecies of Jewish Destiny."

He listed six prophecies which can be identified by historians that have envisioned the end of the Jewish people. The first was medieval, the viewpoint of Christian triumphalism to be finalized in the Second Coming. The second was the perspective of the Enlightenment, destroying corporate Jewish existence in the Diaspora. The third was the Marxist anticipation of a classless society devoid of other distinctions as well. The fourth was Nazism. The fifth, never associated with policy or political action, represented the difficulty that metahistorians have encountered with the peculiarity of the Jews. The sixth is American and Jewish, fearing the effects of assimilation, eroding the will of the Jewish minority to thrive and even endure. So far all such prophecies have failed, allowing some measure of optimism for Jewish survival.

A brief question and answer period followed his address. Dr. Goldowsky then proceeded to conduct the business of the annual meeting. He stated that in the interest of expediency he would forgo an annual message, since it was published in the Newsletter, Vol. II, No. 4 dated January 1985. He thanked the officers and membership for their cooperation during his three year stewardship.

The membership granted the President's request to waive the reading of the minutes of the last Annual Meeting.

Mrs. Bertha Kasper, Treasurer, reported a total income of \$19,780.02 for

the year. Total expenses were \$15,895.21 leaving a balance of \$3,884.81 as of December 31, 1984. This balance, added to all the other reserve funds, makes the total net worth of the Association for the year ending December 31, 1984 \$25,771.99.

Louis I. Sweet, Budget Chairman, reported that the financial records of the Association were in good order. The 1985 budget, adopted at the Mid-winter Meeting, projected expenditures of \$12,800.00.

Melvin L. Zurier, Membership Chairman, reported 503 annual dues-paying members, 20 Life Members, and 20 subscribers to the *Notes*.

Eleanor Horvitz, Librarian and Archivist, highlighted her report by citing how the Jewish community, both locally and nationally, called upon the resources of the Association.

Dr. Goldowsky informed the membership that the Association had participated in the Rhode Island History Day observance by awarding a prize of \$25.00 to high school student Peter L. Lewiss of Westerly for his essay titled "Columbus and the Jews".

Jerome B. Spunt, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, presented the following slate of officers and Executive Committee members in accordance with the amendments to the Constitution of March 3, 1983: Geraldine S. Foster, President; Jeremiah J. Gorin, Vice President; Ruth Page, Secretary; and Bernard E. Bell, Treasurer. Members of the Executive Committee to serve until 1987 are Stanley B. Abrams, Ruth Fixler, and Sidney D. Long. Those who have been on the Executive Committee who will serve an additional term to 1987 are Sidney Goldstein, Ph.D., Louis I. Sweet, and Melvin L. Zurier. Executive Committee members who have one more year to serve until 1986 are Bonnie N. Goldowsky, Zelda F. Gourse, Eleanor F. Horvitz, Sanford Kroll, Bernard Kusnitz, and Barbara Long. Rabbis Eli A. Bohnen and William G. Braude are honorary members of the Executive Committee, as are the Past Presidents Seebert J. Goldowsky, M.D., Marvin Pitterman, Ph.D., Benton H. Rosen, Jerome B. Spunt, and Erwin E. Strasmich.

There being no counter-nominations, the slate was elected unanimously. Geraldine Foster accepted the gavel from Dr. Goldowsky and spoke of her family's long association with the Association. She asked for community participation and expressed the hope that families and businesses would donate their papers to the Association so that it might become the major archive of the local Jewish community.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 P.M. A collation followed.

Respectfully submitted,

Sidney D. Long
Recording Secretary

NECROLOGY

BRAUNSTEIN JEANNETTE, born in Rutherford, New Jersey, a daughter of the late J. Samuel and Hattie (Schulman) Dressler. For many years she was associated with her husband in Harold's Inc., a women's retail chain. Previous to that association she was a buyer for Macy's and Hecht's department stores in New York City. She had also taught elementary school for three years after graduating from Newark (New Jersey) State College.

She was a member of the Temple Beth-El, Hadassah, ORT, and the National Council of Jewish Women. She was a past secretary of the Jewish Community Center of Rhode Island, and a past vice-president of its Parents' and Women's Association.

Died on May 5, 1985.

GOLDMAN, MILDRED G., widow of Rabbi Israel M. Goldman, who had been Rabbi of Congregation Chizuk Amuno in Baltimore, Maryland for many years following the many years he was the Rabbi of Temple Emanuel of Providence, Rhode Island.

Died in Baltimore on April 20, 1985.

GOLDMAN, SIDNEY, born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a son of the late Myer and Anna (Yogel) Goldman. A real estate developer and broker, he served as chairman of the Providence Tax Assessment Board of Review under Mayors Joseph A. Doorley, Jr., and Vincent A. Cianci, Jr.

He was a member of the Rhode Island Board of Realtors, Temple Beth-El, the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, the Jewish Home for the Aged, and the Ledgemont Country Club.

Died on January 23, 1985, at the age of 66.

KLITZNER, WILLIAM S., born in Providence, Rhode Island, a son of the late Harry and Frances (Pockar) Klitzner. He was the former president of Roberts Motors in Taunton, Massachusetts and chairman of the board of directors of Klitzner Industries in Providence from 1956 to 1969 when he retired.

He was a 32nd degree Mason and a member of Jenckes Lodge 24 AF & AM, the Tall Cedars of Lebanon, the Grotto, and the

Palestine Temple of Shriners. He was also a member of the Kirkbrae Country Club and the Adventure Country Club of North Miami, Florida. He was associated with the Manufacturing Jewelers & Silversmiths of America, Inc.

Died on July 20, 1985 at the age of 63.

LEVINE, PHILIP B., born in New York, a son of the late Morris and Bessie Levine. Owner of Morris Metal Co., he retired two years ago. He was a member of Temple Emanuel. He also was a member of Friedman Lodge, B'nai B'rith, Jewish Home for the Aged, Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, the Roosevelt Masonic Lodge, and the Wickford Yacht Club. He was a member of the United States Navy Reserve, and served in the Navy in World War II.

Died on July 8, 1985 at the age of 73.

MILLMAN, MAX I., born in Providence, Rhode Island, a son of the late Samuel and Etta (Pollock) Millman. He was a teacher in the Providence School System for many years and a principal of Mount Pleasant High School until retiring in 1977. He had been principal of the Oliver Hazard Perry Junior High School and the Nathan Bishop Junior High School. A 1932 Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Brown University, he also received his Master's degree at the college. He was a member of Temple Beth-El and was a religious teacher at the temple for 40 years. He was a member of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, the Jewish Home for the Aged, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, the Bureau of Jewish Education, the Israel Bonds Committee, the Rhode Island Association of School Principals, and the Brown University Alumni Association.

Died on May 23, 1985 at the age of 74.

SAVAL, MEYER, born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, a son of the late Joseph and Eva Saval. He was executive vice-president of the American Universal Insurance Company for 30 years, retiring four years ago. He attended Harvard University and Boston University. He was a member of the board of directors of Temple Emanuel and a member of its Men's Club. He was also a member

of the board of trustees of the Jewish Home for the Aged, and a member of the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Died on September 13, 1985 at the age of 79.

SCHAFFER, DR. ISADORE GEORGE, born in Brooklyn, New York, a son of the late Bessie and Harry Schaffer. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Providence College in 1931 and his doctor of dental surgery degree from Columbia University's School of Dentistry in 1935.

Active in a variety of charitable and civic organizations, he was past president of the Newport Council of the Navy League, and a past national director of the Navy League of the United States. In 1966 he received the Navy's highest civilian award, the Distinguished Public Service Award.

Dr. Schaffer was a past president of Touro Synagogue and B'nai B'rith, and also a past president of the Henderson Home for Men in Newport, longtime trustee of Salve Regina College in Newport, a member of the Newport County Dental Society, and a 22nd degree member of St. Paul's Lodge of Masons.

Died on October 21, 1985 at the age of 76.

SCHIFF, DR. BENDEL I., born in Lithuania, a son of the late Ber and Esther (Kwait) Schiff. He was a practicing dermatologist in Pawtucket for 53 years, and served as chief of dermatology at the United States Veterans Administration Regional Medical Center in Providence for 30 years. He was a graduate of the University of Montpellier Medical School in France, clinical professor of dermatology emeritus at the Brown University Medical School, and associate clinical professor of dermatology at Boston University Medical School. A Fellow of the American College of Physicians and a member of the American Academy of Dermatology, he was a past president of the New England and Rhode Island Dermatological Societies, and a member of the American Medical Association. He was a member of Temple Beth-El and the Roosevelt Lodge of Masons.

Died on November 15, 1985 at the age of 76.

SOLOMON, ELIOT M., born in Providence, a son of the late John A. and Eva (Robbins) Solomon. Owner with his wife, Anita, of Lloyd's Restaurant for the past 25 years, he was an Army veteran of the Korean War. He was a member of Temple Beth-El and its Brotherhood, Plantations Lodge, B'nai B'rith, Roosevelt Lodge, F & AM, and the Touro Fraternal Association.

Died on May 26, 1985 at the age of 56.

ERRATA

RIJHN Volume 9, Number 2

November 1985

Page 124. Under Executive Committee, "Zelda Gourse" should read "Zelda F. Gourse."

Pages 125 and 180. the author of "Masonry and the Colonial Jews of Newport," "Bernard Kusnitz, M.D." should read "Bernard Kusnitz, M.A."

Page 135. Caption of illustration: "drafted" should read "volunteered." Louis's sister, Ruby Winnerman, states that his mother had to sign for him to enter service since he was underage.

Page 142. End of second paragraph. "Elmwood Avenue" should read "Broad Street."

Page 193. First paragraph, third line. "130 Sessions Street" should read "401 Elmgrove Avenue."

Inside back cover. In life membership listing "Mr. and Mrs. Donald Salmonson" should read "Mr. Donald Salmanson."

Inside back cover, caption for back cover. "Jacob," not "Joseph" was professor of mathematics at Rutgers University. Joseph Goodman died December 9, 1968. The law firm, named as "Semonoff, Gorin," should read "Levy Goodman Semonoff & Gorin." Jacob later became an attorney and practices with the firm.

FUNDS AND BEQUESTS OF THE RHODE ISLAND
JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

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SEEBERT J. AND GERTRUDE N. GOLDOWSKY

Research Scholarship Fund

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Book Fund

ERWIN E. AND PAULINE E. STRASMICH

General Fund

BEQUESTS

JEANNETTE S. NATHANS

LIFE MEMBERSHIP OF THE RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

MR. AND MRS. BENJAMIN BRIER
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MR. AND MRS. ERWIN E. STRASMICH

For information on becoming a Life Member or establishing a Fund, write to the Association at 130 Sessions Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906.

BACK COVER

Jews came to Rhode Island from Europe both before and after World War II. The earlier group formed the Self-Help Association, which put up a commemorative plaque in 1953 at 99 Hillside Avenue and meets there each November to recall *Krystallnacht*.

Currently, Self-Help has joined with Holocaust Survivors of Rhode Island, which was originally a sub-committee of the Rhode Island Governor's Heritage Commission. Together these Jews, whose reason for becoming Rhode Islanders — Americans — was to escape Nazi persecution, have been seeking to create a memorial and educational archive to record their losses and experiences as a generation. The *Notes* will follow the

process of this historic task in future issues

לזכרון עולם



TO THE EVERLASTING MEMORY OF OUR
LOVED ONES WHO LOST THEIR LIVES
DURING THE PERSECUTION OF THE
JEWISH PEOPLE IN EUROPE 1933-1945

DEDICATED BY
MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF
RHODE ISLAND SELFHELP
NOVEMBER 1955