



# Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes

Volume 13 November 2001 Number 3

# Rhode Island Jewish Historical NOTES

November, 2001  
Volume 13, Number 3



Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association  
130 Sessions Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02906-3444

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### Front Cover

*Commemorating the Dedication in 1925 of The Miriam Hospital. Photo 1968.  
From left: Benjamin Brier, Alexander Rumpler, Jerome Sapolsky (Executive  
Director), Max Grant, Paul Levinger, Isadore Paisner, Milton Sapinsley, Joseph  
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## Notes from the Editor

Recent events brutally remind us that global warfare and local terrorism have occupied much of world history, especially in the last hundred years. Once again, therefore, this issue contains articles that show how war has affected Rhode Island Jews. Rabbi Bohnen improvising a haggadah in order to arrange a historic Seder service for American soldiers fighting in Nazi Germany; Soviet Jews trying to survive the cruelty of both the German army and their own government, then adjusting to life in Rhode Island after World War II by following the example of Russian immigrants a hundred years earlier; and an almost unknown Jewish volunteer from Providence battling fascism in the Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War — these individuals attest to the physical and ethical durability of Jews under extreme stress.

The second half of this issue focuses on peacetime subjects — the revival of Jewish culture in mid-nineteenth-century Newport; the world of a perceptive boy brought up in the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island; the inspired career of Larry Spitz, the well-known labor organizer; and the light shed by demographic information on the collective life of Rhode Island Jews — these subjects too, if less dramatic than the ordeals of warfare, are a vital part of our history.

We are indebted to the authors of these articles for their insights and also to those who helped with prepublication chores, especially Stan Abrams, Judy Aaron, Anne Sherman, and Dick Dow. No journal of any substance can be put together without such cooperative effort: through the years, a small number of dedicated workers has consistently made publication of the *Notes* possible. We are grateful to them, but let me remind you that as our small cadre of authors grows older their work should be shared by others equally willing to devote some time and concern to the preservation of the Jewish historical record of Rhode Island. Only such volunteers, performing the *mitzvah* of writing articles and memoirs or conducting interviews, can ensure the health of the *Notes* — the first regional Jewish historical journal in the United States. If you believe, as I do, in the value of this enterprise, then as responsible members of this Association you may decide either to do an article yourself or to recruit someone else. On the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the *Notes* I do not wish to sound as woeful as Jeremiah, especially since so many excellent essays have been forthcoming during my

tenure as editor, but I must tell you that the continued vitality of this journal depends entirely on your participation.

One person who has been a model in this regard, Eleanor Horvitz, receives due recognition in this issue. Aaron Cohen has been another such model. Despite serious health problems, Aaron has offered not only wise guidance but also (what is even more helpful) practical help, not as an author but as one who has *found* authors. He has been invaluable, and I wish to publicly acknowledge my debt and gratitude. Now, if a few *more* folks will step forward to help, all will be well!

Leonard Moss

## An Appreciation of Eleanor

by Geraldine Foster

*On April 29, 2001 at the spring meeting of the RIJHA, Eleanor Horvitz, archivist-librarian of the Association for many years, was honored by a tribute written by Geraldine Foster, past president and longtime associate of Mrs. Horvitz, and delivered by Toby Rossner, executive director.*

This organization, like others, has had its ups and downs. Volume six, number four of the *Notes*, dated November 1974, reveals some of these swings in the history of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. The issue includes a paper entitled "Local Jewish History — the Rhode Island Experience," by Seebert J. Goldowsky, M.D. Dr. Goldowsky originally presented this paper at the invitation of the Academic Council of the American Jewish Historical Society at their meeting in October, 1974. It is a review of the first twenty-three years of the RIJHA. Dr. Goldowsky informs us that our Association, in its vigorous early years, once received modest subsidies from the Rhode Island Legislature and from the General Jewish Committee, the ancestor of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island. But by the 1960s, with the declining health of David Adelman, our founder, the Association faced the very real danger of dissolution. It was "resuscitated," however, and put on a sound financial basis by Louis Sweet taking charge of finance, its scholarly mission restored by Dr. Goldowsky's assuming the editorship of the *Notes*, its leadership assured by Beryl Segal becoming president, and its health as an organization reinvigorated by the valiant efforts of a cadre of devoted volunteers. After this close call, the Association was once again able to carry out its mission.

Then came another piece of good fortune, quietly recorded in that 1974 issue of the *Notes* among many other events. Those other events were duly announced as usual. From the secretary's report of the annual meeting, May 10, 1974, by Mrs. Seebert Goldowsky, we learn that a balanced budget of \$4,780 was projected for the coming year. The budget included the cost of publishing and mailing the *Notes* and the expenses of running the office. Erwin Strasmich was elected to his second term as President. And the David Charak Adelman Lecture was delivered by Bernard Wax, Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society.

But that same issue also records two other events in 1974 that were to be of longlasting importance to the RIJHA even though they were unheralded at the time. First, the name of Mrs. Abraham Horvitz, appointed the previous year as a member of the Executive Board, appears as librarian, signaling a bond between the Association and Eleanor that has so far resulted in twenty-nine years of devotion, respect, dedication, and — yes — love.

The second event is noted in the Table of Contents. The author of the lead article, "The Outlet Company Story," is Eleanor Horvitz. It marked Eleanor's debut as a contributor to the *Notes*, the first of those annual contributions that have covered a far-reaching range of topics. Those contributions tell the story of the Jews in Rhode Island — the neighborhoods, agencies, people, and events. Her work was a departure for the *Notes*. There had been articles that told of people in the past, or articles that were memoirs, or papers based solely on facts and materials from primary and secondary sources. But from the outset, Eleanor managed to combine all three strands into one opus through a distinctive style that has graced the pages of our publication for twenty-nine years. Her articles deal in facts; she delves into sources with great abandon; her tone is gracious, like Eleanor herself; and she brings a human dimension to our history by including the remembrances of those who lived that history, those who shaped that history in the first half of the past century. In ferreting out her information, Eleanor would say, she felt like a detective solving mysteries. For good reason she has been cited in other publications.

Eleanor and I have collaborated on articles for the *Notes* for the past ten years. Neither of us remembers how we became a team; it just happened. I suspect that the impetus for our partnership derived from our working together to plan the local component for the national conference of the American Jewish Historical Society held here in Providence in 1988, before Providence became the Renaissance City. We were bold, brave, and naive enough to undertake such a project. Once again, the efforts of a devoted cadre of volunteers, about eight in number, made certain that we could bring our part to a successful conclusion. If we could accomplish that, I thought, then we could go on to bigger and better things that required an equal boldness, bravery, and naivete — things like a pictorial portrayal of three hundred years of Jewish Rhode Island history, with a deadline of six months. During the frantic weeks before the deadline, that crazy time of checking captions, editing copy, and preparing photos for shipping, Eleanor remained



*Eleanor Horvitz (left), Librarian-Archivist, RIJHA, presented with flowers by Anne Sherman, Office Manager, in recognition of 29 years of service. May, 2001. RIJHA Archives.*

unflappable. It was a labor of love and our gift to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

But writing essays for the *Notes* and columns for the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* and the *Jewish Voice of Rhode Island* were only her avocation. Eleanor was also the librarian, then librarian-archivist of the Association, a part-time position. During a set number of hours per week, she was in residence in the office to respond to requests for information, assist researchers, give tours of our premises and archives, review newspapers for pertinent clippings, cull donations of materials, write thank-you letters, and keep records of our holdings — holdings that Anne Sherman says gave her an encyclopedic knowledge of Rhode Island Jewish people and places.

Not included in these formal duties were the hours spent in mounting and manning exhibits for community organizations or celebrations of Rhode Island history. Or talks given to groups as diverse as the Warwick Historical Society or the National Council of Jewish Women. Or lessons taught by request to Sunday School classes. Uncounted, furthermore, were the hours spent in investigating possible additions to our archives. A wild goose chase on a dirt road off a country lane in the hinterlands of Attleboro, a visit to a musty garage or up three flights of stairs sometimes yielded nothing more than clippings already held in our archives. But other times, a visit and a cup of tea with a lonely person yielded a rare treasure.

We thank you, Eleanor, for these twenty-nine years of devotion, dedication and love. We salute you. May you continue to go from strength to strength.





*Shabbat Service, Bavaria, May 1945. Left: Corp. Eli Heimberg; right: Chaplain Eli Bohnen. Photo courtesy of Eli Heimberg*

## Rabbi Bohnen and the Rainbow Haggadah

by Barry M. Sax

*Barry M. Sax is an administrative judge for the U.S. Department of Defense in Woodland Hills, California. In preparation for his belated Bar Mitzvah in October 2000 ("four decades late"), he became interested in the "Rainbow Haggadah" put together during World War II by Rabbi Eli Bohnen, Jewish chaplain of the 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division from 1943 to 1946, and by Corporal Eli Heimberg, the chaplain's assistant. Rabbi Bohnen, senior rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Providence from 1948 to 1973, described his wartime experiences as chaplain in the Notes, Vol. 8, No. 2 (1980), pages 81-90. But, perhaps because of modesty, he offered only a brief paragraph on the Passover service he arranged for his army division in 1945: "one of the highlights of our experience in Germany," he wrote, "was the Passover Seder in the town of Dahn." Judge Sax has reconstructed the story of that memorable celebration.*

In October of 1999, my wife and I were touring Europe by automobile and spent several days in Salzburg, Austria. At the base of the mountain called the *Monchsberg* is the city's Old Town, or *Altstadt*, and just below the great mountaintop castle called *Hohensalzburg* is a small but elegant cemetery, next to St. Peter's Church. In the cemetery, containing the graves of many of Salzburg's elite over the centuries, was a headstone bearing the name Harry J. Collins, identified as Major General, United States Army, Commanding General 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division in World War II. I took photographs of the headstone, and when we returned home and saw the developed pictures, I wondered how this American general came to be buried so far from his country and only a few feet from the graves of Mozart's mother and sister.

Curiosity led me to explore records of the 42nd Division, which carried on the heritage it established in World War I, when Colonel Douglas MacArthur, the Division's Chief of Staff, gave it the name "Rainbow" after seeing the massed flags of the twenty-six states whose National Guard units made up the division in 1917. In late 1944, the division entered combat in Alsace, France. As part of the U.S. 7th Army's final offensive of the war, in March 1945, the 42nd Division broke through the Siegfried Line, drove east

and then south across Germany, and took part in the liberation of Dachau Concentration Camp on April 29, 1945. The division took part in the capture of Wurzburg, Schweinfurt, Nuremberg, and Munich, after which it moved toward the Austrian border in the last days of the war.

My research turned up a great deal of information about General Collins; after the division was deactivated in 1946, he stayed behind as Commander of American Occupation Forces, finally retiring in 1950. He returned to Austria in the mid-1950s to write a report for the Secretary of the Army, then settled in Salzburg to live with his Austrian-born wife. He died in 1963 as the result of injuries suffered in an automobile accident.

My research on General Collins aroused a desire to write a book about the 42nd Division during its four months in combat, especially its involvement in the liberation of Dachau and in the American occupation of Austria. This research also led me, to my surprise, to Rabbi Eli Bohnen, the division's Jewish chaplain, to Corporal Eli Heimberg, his assistant, and to their "Rainbow Haggadah" of 1945, which the Rabbi and his corporal created in the midst of war and used in a Seder for the Division's Jewish troops. The Seder was held in a small town in Germany while combat still went on around that area. Rabbi Bohnen and Corporal Heimberg, representing the Jewish men and women who served, should be given credit for what they did so long ago.

Rabbi Bohnen was born in Toronto and came to the United States in the mid-thirties to study at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. After serving as Rabbi in Philadelphia and Buffalo, he joined the army in 1943, assigned to the newly activated 42nd Division. While most U.S. Army divisions did not have a full-time Jewish chaplain, the division's commander, General Collins (nicknamed "Hollywood Harry" by his men because of his strikingly good looks) was insistent that his division's Jewish soldiers have one available. At the time, the division had perhaps 700 to 800 Jewish troops out of a total of about 15,000 men, a higher percentage than in most other divisions.

The division was based at Camp Gruber, in northeastern Oklahoma. It was there that Rabbi Bohnen met the two men who made the biggest impact on his wartime service. The first was General Collins, who appointed him, against the wishes of some senior officers, as the division's Jewish chaplain. The second was Tec-5 (Corporal) Eli Heimberg, to whom Rabbi Bohnen offered the position of chaplain's assistant; the two Elises were to become

lifelong friends. From that point, the Rabbi's story is interlinked with that of the General and the Corporal.

When the bulk of the division was notified of its move to the port of embarkation in New York, it became obvious that the men would be on the train during the Chanukah and Christmas holidays of 1944. Rabbi Bohnen approached the Jewish community of nearby Tulsa, Oklahoma, and obtained gifts to be distributed to the division's Jewish soldiers. The Rabbi then returned to the community's leaders to receive additional gifts to be distributed to the much more numerous Christian soldiers on Christmas morning. General Collins was highly impressed with Rabbi Bohnen's efforts on behalf of *all* the Rainbow's soldiers. There is a photograph in the division's history, taken on the troop train, of Santa Claus, complete with red suit and white beard, singing carols when the gifts were handed out. Santa's face, despite the beard, is recognizable, even after the passage of almost sixty years. Eli Heimberg admits that the face behind the beard was indeed his.

On Passover, March 28, 1945, division headquarters was in the town of Dahn, Germany, in a picturesque valley known for several ruined medieval castles on the surrounding hills. The Rabbi continued to demonstrate his willingness and ability to go the extra mile for his fellow soldiers. It was his idea to conduct a Passover Seder, and he received the general's full support. General Collins authorized all Jewish soldiers not engaged in combat to leave their units to attend. Rabbi Bohnen and Corporal Heimberg found an undamaged auditorium in a schoolhouse in Dahn. Eli Heimberg, now in his 80s, recalls that he and the Rabbi made many trips back to the huge supply base at Luneville in northeastern France in order to persuade the supply command to provide everything needed. Rainbow soldiers drove trucks to Luneville to complete the provisioning, transporting chickens, eggs, vegetables, and anything else that came close to what the Rabbi wanted. They were even able to obtain Matzoh sent to Europe by the Jewish Welfare Board in New York. Division cooks, described by one surviving veteran as mostly "not Jewish," prepared the Seder meal under the Rabbi's supervision.

But the one essential they lacked was a Haggadah; copies had been sent by the JWB, but they did not arrive in time. Instead, the chaplain and his aide improvised, using material from Hebrew prayer books supplied by the Jewish Welfare Board to compose a Haggadah that they had printed on the photo-offset press normally used to print the division newsletter. That

Haggadah was the first Hebrew publication in Germany since before the beginning of the war, in 1938. The printers used Nazi flags and banners to clean the presses! One thousand copies were made of what became known as the "Rainbow Haggadah"; now only a few copies are known to exist. The auditorium was filled to overflowing. An estimated 750 soldiers and army nurses attended, mostly Jews but including some Christian friends, many of whom had never heard of a Seder but were intrigued when they learned that the Last Supper was also a Seder. Eli Heimberg remembers seeing German civilians peering in through the windows, watching a ceremony that had not been celebrated in freedom in their country for many years. Christian Rainbow troops guarded the outside of the building while their comrades enjoyed the service and the Seder meal inside: there were still enemy soldiers in the area.

With a sense of history, Chaplain Bohnen sent a copy of the Haggadah to his family and to the Jewish Theological Seminary in America. Eli Heimberg kept another, and graciously provided me with a copy. In turn, I have enlarged it and distributed hundreds of copies at my temple in Thousand Oaks, California; at Jewish War Veterans posts, where I have spoken about Rabbi Bohnen; and even at services on a cruise ship in the Caribbean during a recent Passover holiday. The Haggadah was prominently mentioned in an article in the *New York Times* in April, 2000.

The Rainbow Haggadah was not the end of the Rabbi's extraordinary army career. On April 29, 1945, the division's Assistant Commander, Brigadier General Henning Linden, accepted the surrender of the SS guards in the prisoner compound at Dachau Concentration Camp, which held some 32,000 prisoners. Rabbi Bohnen and Eli Heimberg entered the camp a few hours later. They gave encouragement to the Jewish survivors, conducted a service for the living and the dead, and took names of survivors to be sent back to the United States.

The Rabbi had to leave Dachau to rejoin his division, moving on to Munich. A few days later, while conducting services from the back of his jeep in a field between Dachau and Munich, several Dachau survivors, passing nearby, were attracted by the Hebrew chanting and stood at the rear of the small gathering. The Rabbi invited them forward to join the service and listened to their stories.

After the German surrender on May 8, the 42nd Division became part of the Army of Occupation in the Tyrol area, and then in Salzburg, where it



*Passover Service, Dahn, Germany, March 28, 1945. Standing, Chaplain Bohnen. Photo: Hugh C. Daly, Editor, 42nd "Rainbow" Infantry Division (U. S. Army, 1946).*

remained until deactivated in the summer of 1946. During the long months of occupation duty in Salzburg, the two Elis combined their talents to improve living conditions for the Jewish displaced persons, helping them begin the difficult journey over the Alps into Italy, then south to ports from which they could try to sail to the Holy Land. Everywhere they went in Austria, the Rabbi and his aide made the transition from slaves to free men and women a little easier. The two men stayed in Austria until the spring of 1946, when they were allowed to return home.

Their accomplishments were recognized. Rabbi Bohnen retired as a major and received the Bronze Star. After his return to the U.S., he became Rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in Providence, where he remained for twenty-five years. After receiving many awards for service and scholarship, he retired in the early 1980s after being named Rabbi Emeritus in 1973, with the thanks and praise of two generations of temple members as his greatest legacy. He "passed over the Rainbow" in 1992.

Tec-5 Heimberg, before his release from the army, was never promoted. He had been asked to work for the senior division chaplain, a Protestant, but

he declined the offer. Accepting that promotion meant that he would have to leave Chaplain Bohnen, something he would not wish to do. He received a Certificate of Merit, later upgraded to the Army Commendation Medal. I am now assisting him in an effort to obtain the Bronze Star, one level higher and more fitting for his accomplishments. Eli Heimberg came home from the war and rejoined the company in Boston that had kept his job open for him during the war. Now retired but still active, he and his wife spend the winter season in Florida, where he says "it's a lot warmer than it was in Germany during the winter of 1945." The rest of the year they are back in their family home in Massachusetts.

He and the Rabbi remained friends and kept in touch for many years. For both, over the decades, an initial reluctance to talk about the war was replaced by a growing recognition of an obligation to speak out about what they had seen in the war. They never forgot that special Passover Seder of March 28, 1945, and neither should we. On the back of their Haggadah's cover appears this letter, dated March 28, 1945, from the division commander:

To my Jewish soldiers:

The celebration of Passover should have unusual significance for you at this time, for like your ancestors of old, you too are now engaged in a battle for freedom against a modern Pharaoh. This Pharaoh has sought not only to enslave your people, but to make slaves of the whole world.

God grant that victory for us will make it possible for you to celebrate the next Passover with your loved ones at home, in a world you helped make free.

Harry J. Collins  
Major General, U.S. Army



## Appendix 1

HEADQUARTERS  
COMMUNICATIONS ZONE  
EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS  
UNITED STATES ARMY

(Censored)

RELEASE ON RECEIPT  
NUMBER: 40963

JEWES HOLD PASSOVER FESTIVAL IN NAZI MEETING HALL  
ON ADOLF HITLER STREET

WITH AN INFANTRY DIVISION IN GERMANY -- Passover services for hundreds of Jewish soldiers of an Infantry Division were held in a Nazi party meeting hall, No. 29 Adolf Hitler Strasse, in Dahn, Germany, it was disclosed today.

Pressing in the offensive deep into Germany, the soldiers halted only for the tradition religious ceremonies and Seder feast.

"I am sure this Passover will live in your memories forever," the division commander, told the men. "You celebrate it in Germany, in the land Hitler felt no Passovers would be celebrated for at least a thousand years. Fighting side by side with your Protestant and Catholic comrades, you broke into this stronghold of the tyrant, to give the lie to his rantings about the Herrenvolk. You have shown by your deeds what the American soldier can do when he fights for a cause in which he believes.

"We dedicate ourselves to continue this fight until we have smashed this enemy--smashed him so that he shall never be able again to rise against us."

Conducted by division Jewish chaplain Eli A. Bohnen, of Temple Emanuel, Buffalo, New York, the service had to be planned with the fineness of a military maneuver. Military intelligence selected the location, safe from enemy fire. Engineers cleared the area and the building of mines and booby-traps. Cooks were provided by G-1, transportation to bring the men from various parts of the front by G-4. Division quartermaster supplied the food, while G-5 (Military Government) provided necessary German civilian labor to clean the building of war debris.

Chaplain Bohnen's wife and daughter are now residing in Ellenville, New York.

- END -

## Lester Jacobs: Jewish Volunteer in the Spanish Civil War

*by George M. Goodwin*

*Rabbi Bohnen has been recognized for distinguished service in both war and peace. Many others have not been so blessed, living and dying in obscurity even though they participated in wartime causes they believed were honorable and justified. Lester Jacobs, a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, was one of those unknown soldiers; it was a real challenge, in fact, to resurrect even an outline of his life in Providence and his death in Spain. Yet, Dr. Goodwin insists, this almost unknown young Jewish volunteer in a foreign war deserves recognition too.*

*George Goodwin has taken on many difficult historical problems, often dealing with research and interviews that dig beneath the surface in order to uncover little-known aspects of local Jewish history. He has written essays for, among other journals, American Jewish Archives, Faith and Form, Modern Judaism, and Rhode Island History. He is a member of the Executive Committee and the Publications Committee of the RIJHA.*

Numerous oral histories of World War II and other reports on wartime service have been published in these pages.<sup>1</sup> Many more books and articles addressed to wider audiences have covered the same subject; for example, television anchor Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation*, praises the men and women who overcame the Depression and won World War II.<sup>2</sup> Though the celebrity journalist suggested that "the greatest generation" lived during the Spanish Civil War, however, he did not mention Spanish loyalists (democrats, socialists, and communists) who fought valiantly on the eve of World War II to defend their republic against insurgents (monarchists, conservatives, and fascists) led by General Francisco Franco. While understandable that Brokaw overlooked 70,000 Italian Black Shirts and more than 10,000 Nazis of the Condor Legion who fought with Franco, it seems unfortunate that he dismissed 40,000 volunteers from fifty-two nations who rushed to Spain's defense.<sup>3</sup> Was the television journalist even aware that a few thousand Americans — civilian volunteers, not mercenaries — took up arms in the Spanish struggle? Don't these courageous

individuals also belong to "the greatest generation?" Don't they merit some belated recognition?

### The "Lincolns"

Nobody now knows or will ever know precisely how many Americans went to Spain in 1937 and 1938 as members of the XVth International Brigade. Though commonly referred to as volunteers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, they were part of the Lincoln, George Washington, John Brown, Mackenzie-Papineau, and other battalions, which fought beside loyalist troops. In May, 1938, a *New York Times* reporter wrote that estimates of Americans in Spain ranged from 1,300 to 4,300 men and women.<sup>4</sup> This reporter also explained that the State Department had claimed the previous July that there were 1,000 to 2,000 American volunteers; the loyalist government believed, however, that there were never more than 2,000 Americans at one time.

Arthur H. Landis, a Lincoln veteran, proclaimed that there were 3,300 volunteers.<sup>5</sup> Sam Sills estimated that there were 2,800 Americans.<sup>6</sup> In the best recent study, Peter N. Carroll thought that there were 2,600 American volunteers "who took up arms" as well as 150 doctors, nurses, and drivers.<sup>7</sup>

Resulting from the second (of three) Neutrality Acts passed by Congress in 1936, Americans, beginning in January, 1937, were forbidden to sail to Spanish ports.<sup>8</sup> Further defying French prohibitions against travel to Spain, most Americans were smuggled across the frontier by hiking (in civilian shoes and clothes) across the Pyrenees. Some volunteers took noms de guerre, some were known only by nicknames, and other names may have been forever lost.

So too the number of American fatalities may never be known. Landis dedicated his second book to 1,600 comrades who died in Spain.<sup>9</sup> Maurice Isserman estimated that half of America's more than 3,000 volunteers were killed.<sup>10</sup> Carroll thought that nearly one-third of the Lincolns lost their lives and that "virtually every military survivor was wounded at least once."<sup>11</sup> Explaining that the casualty rate for Lincolns was far higher than for Americans in World War II, Sills estimated only 750 American fatalities.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, most volunteers were hastily buried where they fell. By contrast, their conquerors were entombed within an awesome mausoleum erected by slave labor in Spain's Valley of the Fallen.

Even for those Lincolns repatriated in late 1938 or early 1939 by order

of the Spanish foreign minister, there has never been a complete accounting.<sup>13</sup> Who would have benefitted from such a tally? Though many returnees received medical and dental treatment thanks to Lincoln "friends" organizations, veterans received about \$30 each and sometimes bus fare. Families of survivors received nothing. While some veterans were hounded even while serving in the American military during World War II, most were systematically harassed by the FBI during and after the McCarthy era (by members of "the greatest generation").<sup>14</sup> Though Lincolns had little reason to seek recognition, for decades many intensified their struggle for social justice.

Perhaps the legacy of the Spanish Civil War has been too quickly and easily measured in artistic terms: paintings by Picasso and Miro, a novel by Hemingway, memoirs by Orwell, photographs by Robert Capa, and poems by Langston Hughes and Stephen Spender.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, my own interest in the Spanish upheaval grew from an investigation of a Picasso masterpiece, "La Vie," painted in 1903 but acquired by the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in 1937 and mysteriously sold eight years later.<sup>16</sup> More recently, Frank Gehry's extraordinary design of the new Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao has now overshadowed and largely eclipsed the horrifying events that consumed the Basque homeland.

#### **How Many Rhode Islanders?**

How many Rhode Islanders served with the Lincolns? Once again, a definitive answer is not possible. Perhaps only one other historian has indirectly asked this question. In Appendix A of his meticulously researched book, Robert A. Rosenstone listed by state all the Lincolns he could find.<sup>17</sup> These 1,337 volunteers came from every state except Delaware, South Carolina, and Wyoming. New York, with 499 volunteers, produced by far the largest cadre. The next largest were California, 124; Illinois, 109; and Pennsylvania, 98.

According to Rosenstone, Rhode Island had 8 volunteers, a greater number than 22 states and the District of Columbia. Within New England, Rhode Island ranked fourth. Massachusetts had 61 volunteers; Connecticut, 19; New Hampshire, 9; Maine, 2; and Vermont, 1. A random sample of 11 New Englanders was found, for example, in a newspaper report of returning Lincolns.<sup>18</sup> Throughout his book, based on his 1965 doctoral dissertation at the University of California at Los Angeles, Rosenstone referred by name to several prominent and many little-known volunteers. Numerous Lincolns

were identified from American newspaper reports, particularly the *New York Times*. Rosenstone also benefitted from more than twenty personal interviews as well as veterans' scrapbooks. Individuals, however, were not named in his Appendix.

Like many historians of the Spanish Civil War, Rosenstone portrayed Lincolns partially in statistical terms. Based on a sample of 291 individuals, he determined that 68 percent were in their twenties (whether at the beginning or end of their enlistments).<sup>19</sup> About 21 percent were in their thirties. More volunteers were forty years or older than in their teens. The author of *Crusade of the Left* identified 447 Lincolns by occupation, from the highly skilled to the unskilled.<sup>20</sup> The largest number, 89, were seamen. These were followed by 79 students, 25 teachers, 15 miners, 14 longshoremen, and 14 steelworkers.

Though he had relatively little to say about ethnicity, Rosenstone hypothesized that "some 30 percent" of volunteers were Jews.<sup>21</sup> Carroll estimated that "an inordinate proportion," at least one-third of the Lincolns, were Jews.<sup>22</sup> He also determined that a majority of women volunteers, mostly nurses, were Jews. Their fluency in Yiddish, he explained, enabled them to easily communicate with patients and colleagues from other countries.<sup>23</sup> Henry L. Feingold, a distinguished scholar of American Jewish history, wrote that 35 to 40 per cent of Lincolns were Jews.<sup>24</sup>

Was Spain merely a pretext for Jews to strike back at Hitler? Given the facts that most Americans "could not have cared less"<sup>25</sup> about the Spanish conflagration and that Jewish communities had not been allowed in Spain since the Inquisition, the motivations of Jewish volunteers were exceptionally idealistic, perhaps quixotic. Out of admiration and sympathy for their motives and their efforts, however difficult to estimate, I took on the task of identifying Jewish Lincolns from Rhode Island.

#### **Needles in a Haystack**

During the 1980s, following an unsuccessful effort by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Goldfarb Library at Brandeis University became the official repository of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives. Victor A. Berch, librarian for special collections, was instrumental in developing this treasure. An index of the Lincoln Archives is still available on a Goldfarb website, even though the original materials have been transferred to the Tamiment Library at New York University.

In 1992, following the Soviet Union's downfall, Moscow's Russian Center for the Preservation and Study of Recent Historical Documents (KTsKhIDNI) was opened for the first time to foreign researchers. Peter Carroll, the Lincoln Brigade expert living in San Francisco, helped negotiate the transfer of microfilmed copies of key Spanish Communist Party documents to Brandeis' Goldfarb Library. With Victor Berch's assistance, I was able to examine some of these microfilmed records (in Spanish and English).

Also using personal notes made from American passport records in the Lincoln archive, Mr. Berch was able to help me identify four Rhode Islanders from a list of approximately 2,400 individuals (not all Americans). These Lincolns were Raymond Bell, Lester Jacobs, Henry McSoley, and Walter Strauss. Were any of them Jews? The abundance of Jewish surnames on the overall list quickly became quite obvious; consider, for example: Cohen, 12 individuals; Goldstein, 8; Shapiro, 7; and Berkowitz, 6. But what about the Rhode Islanders?

I also contacted Robert Rosenstone, who, since completing graduate studies, has taught history in the humanities and social sciences division of California Institute of Technology. Prof. Rosenstone kindly agreed to share the ingredients of his early research. Working with a student assistant, Sheryl Cobb, he sought to identify all eight Rhode Islanders mentioned in his book. Three of these volunteers — Raymond Bell, Henry McSoley, and Walter Strauss — had already been identified by Mr. Berch. Rosenstone provided four additional names: Michael Bagnaro, George Harvey, John Maparalian, and Blackie Maphralian. As a result of his reference to an article in the July 14, 1938 issue of the *New York Times*, I was able to identify a ninth volunteer, Frank Yilek, whom he had overlooked.

Having examined additional published sources, I was able to find a tenth Rhode Islander. In Table 6-2 of his book, Carl Geiser, a Lincoln veteran, listed Roger Braley, 34 years of age and a resident of Newport, as a survivor of the battle of Belchite in March, 1938.<sup>26</sup> Through further archival research, I gathered bits of biographical information to add to the names of the Rhode Islanders. In a most surprising development, I was also able to speak with the son of one survivor.

### **Lester Jacobs**

Among the ten Lincolns from Rhode Island, I discovered, perhaps only one was a Jew. But even Lester Jacob's Jewish background cannot be

established beyond question. Virtually all that is known about him comes from Victor Berch's notes. Jacobs was born around 1914. At one time he lived at 55 Warrington Street in Providence. He sailed to Spain on June 16, 1937 on the *S. S. Aquitania*. And he was killed on Iberian soil. Otherwise, Jacobs has totally disappeared from historical records. Indeed, except for these few words by Berch—and fading memories by those who knew and loved him—he just about vanished without a trace.<sup>27</sup>

That Jacobs was a Jew is based on two suppositions: his surname and his former residence. Jacobs, derived from the biblical patriarch, is of course a common Jewish name. In the 1937 Providence directory, 35 Jacobs were listed. (Perhaps the most prominent was Henry Loeb Jacobs, president of Bryant College of Business Administration.<sup>28</sup>) Warrington Street, which runs between Broad and Elmwood, fell within the matrix of the thriving south Providence Jewish community.<sup>29</sup> Willard Avenue was a beehive of Jewish shopping, and numerous mutual-aid societies were scattered throughout the ninth ward. Both the South Providence Hebrew Congregation and Tifereth Israel were located on Willard. Beth Israel Ansche Austria was on nearby Robinson Street; Temple Beth Israel was on Niagara; and Temple Beth-El was on Broad.

By examining the 1937 Providence directory, one finds numerous Jewish names on Warrington Street. Consider, for example, the block running from Broad to Elmwood: at 10, Israel Jampolsky; at 34, Simon Greenberg; at 35, Milton Blazar; at 37 Abraham Blazar; at 38, Irving Cohen; at 40, Abraham Goldstein; at 48, Charles Oelbaum; at 50, Jack Hassenfeld; and at 54, Myer Rudnick. In 1937, Max Potter, the proprietor of the Little Fur Shop at 212 Union Street, resided at 55 Warrington with his wife, Bessie. The Providence directory of 1940 shows most of the same families still residing there. At 55 Warrington, where Lester Jacobs once resided, Louis Mayberg was living with his wife, Beatrice.

Attempting to find a former resident of Warrington Street who might remember Lester or the Jacobs family, I contacted Sruel Oelbaum, a retired pharmacist living on the East Side. He pointed out that in 1937 his father's first cousin, Charles, lived on Warrington. So Sruel referred me to Charles' daughter, Edith Biener, who has numerous happy memories of the old neighborhood.<sup>30</sup> Having been born in 1931 and moving to Warrington in 1936, however, she was too young to have any recollection of Lester Jacobs. Living there until her marriage in 1955, Mrs. Biener could easily picture

each of the neighbors, how they were related to one another, and which congregations they attended (many Conservative and a few Orthodox but none Reform). Mrs. Biener also remembers Warrington as a mostly prosperous Jewish neighborhood, where families owned cars and wives stayed home to care for children. It was awkward living next door to James O'Neil, however, who was principal of Classical High School.

Edith Biener referred me to her childhood friend, Marilyn Kagan, who grew up at 108 Warrington but is also too young to have known Lester Jacobs or his family.<sup>31</sup> She remembers a "wonderful" neighborhood, where children performed in Red Cross plays during World War II. Economic status, ranging from lower- to upper-middle class, was reflected by single-family, two-family, and three-family homes. The Kagan home, originally belonging to her maternal grandparents, Harris and Esther Kenner, had apartments on the first and third floors. Though families helped each other with rent and groceries, Warrington Street was far more prosperous than Orms Street, in Providence's North End, where Ms. Kagan's uncle, Samuel, served as a state representative. Ms. Kagan, an artist, moved to Philadelphia in 1953, but her parents stayed in the same three-decker for another quarter-century.

Dr. Andrew Blazar, a prominent obstetrician-gynecologist, whose family resided at 35 Warrington, was also too young to have recollections of Lester or the Jacobs family.<sup>32</sup> Born in 1934, he relocated with his parents to Cole Avenue on the East Side in 1945. Yet, he too has vivid memories of a friendly and bustling neighborhood, whose many men ran family businesses.

#### **The Other "Lincolns"**

If so little can be documented about Lester Jacobs, more can be learned about some of his compatriots. I do not suggest that these volunteers were identical copies of each other: of course, they came from different backgrounds, led different lives, and nursed a variety of motives that led them to serve in Spain. But I believe that they had a common bond that united them and brought them to a foreign war, so in the absence of more concrete information about Lester Jacobs, perhaps compiling some relevant facts about his fellow volunteers from Rhode Island can give us a fuller picture of Lester. Perhaps this research can serve as a memorial to a young Jewish man who would otherwise disappear entirely from the historical record. Perhaps these men, mentioned below in alphabetical order, can add a bit of

flesh and bone to Jacobs' dim but haunting shadow.

### Bell

Robert Rosenstone's information about Raymond Bell was gleaned primarily from two newspaper articles,<sup>33</sup> but the greatest source of information about Bell comes from the records of the Spanish Communist Party housed in Moscow. Raymond Everett Bell was born in Providence on August 24, 1914. For seven months during 1935, Bell was a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps. He explained that while serving in Rhode Island and Maine he had "directed" two strikes for better food. Bell's previous social activities included membership in the YMCA (1933-35) and the Young Communist League (1937).<sup>34</sup> He joined the Communist Party in Boston in March, 1937. Comrades whom he knew, presumably from Rhode Island, were Dave Grant and Walter Strauss. He also claimed friendships in Pawtucket, Newport, and Boston.

For a reference, Bell listed Morris Kominsky, head of the Communist Party in Providence. City vital records show that Kominsky, born on August 25, 1919, was the son of Harry and Fanny. The elder Kominsky, a roofer, resided at 72 Moore Street. The 1950 edition of the *Rhode Island Manual* shows that since 1894, Rhode Island had a Socialist Labor candidate for governor. James P. Reid, the first Communist Party candidate, ran in 1932 and 1936, winning 549 votes and 481 votes, respectively.<sup>35</sup> Kominsky, the Communist Party's candidate in 1938, won 366 votes. Providence directories further indicate that in 1938 he was a salesman living at 47 Jefferson Street, but by 1940 he had left town. Indeed, a one-paragraph story in the October 1, 1938 issue of the *Providence Journal* reported that Kominsky, residing at 47 Jefferson Street, was one of five Communist Party candidates for statewide office. On June 25, 1944, moreover, the *Journal* reported that the Rhode Island Communist Party, reorganized as the Rhode Island Communist Political Association, was led by a committee of eighteen members. Kominsky was not among them, and his name does not appear elsewhere as an official or activist in another state.

It seems quite likely that Kominsky was a Jew. Though a large percentage of American Communists were Jews, there were only about 50,000 party members at its height during the 1930s and 1940s. In a still useful essay, the sociologist Nathan Glaser pointed out forty years ago that Jewish support for the party was relatively slim, for there were 4,500,000 American Jews.<sup>36</sup>

Raymond Bell explained to Spanish Communist Party superiors that among the periodicals he read were the *Daily Worker* and the *New Masses*. The books he had studied included: Brouder's *What Is Communism?*, Foster's *Towards Soviet America*, and *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels. His military experience consisted of four-and-a-half years (1930-34) as a volunteer in the National Guard's 243rd Coast Artillery. His trip to Spain, begun on April 15, 1937, was his first abroad. The purpose of his enlistment in the Lincolns was to "fight against fascism."

The Moscow files also include highlights of Bell's activities in Spain, where he served three months with the Washington Battalion. In the spring of 1937, for example, he fought near Madrid, in the battles of Jareme and Brunete. This could be confirmed by his friend, Walter Strauss. On July 12, during the battle of Brunete, however, Bell became a deserter. On August 14, refusing to return to the front, he asked to work in a hospital. By November 25, 1938, Bell was working as a hospital attendant with the 14th Battery of the John Brown Battalion. Finally, on February 26, 1939, Bell returned to New York on the *S. S. Roosevelt*.

That such a highly motivated volunteer as Bell might even briefly be considered a deserter might come as a shock.<sup>37</sup> Why did Bell desert? There are obvious explanations, such as poor training, poor food and clothing, poor arms and equipment, and poor leadership. By the spring of 1939, when the loyalists surrendered and America recognized the Franco regime, the bloodshed and suffering had become monstrous: more than 700,000 deaths in battle; 50,000 killed in air raids, executions, and murders; hundreds of thousands in foreign exile, and nearly a million in Franco's jails.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the question must be asked whether the demoralized and decimated Lincolns and others among the International Brigade were used primarily as ammunition in a propaganda war.

### Braley

Roger Lancaster Braley, mentioned in Carl Geiser's book as a survivor of the battle of Belchite, can be traced through various sources.<sup>39</sup> The Braley name, indicating a large, extended family, is found in Newport city directories beginning in the 1880s. In 1935, Roger Braley disappeared from Newport directories, having "removed" to Ayer, Massachusetts. Victor Berch determined that Braley sailed to Spain on January 12, 1938 on the *S. S. Aquitania*. He was captured on March 10, 1938 at the battle of Belchite, but he returned to the United States on October 18, 1938 on the *S. S. Queen*

**Mary.**

Having found Roger Braley, Jr. in the Newport phone book, I contacted him.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, Mr. Braley knew very little about his father, having met him only on a few occasions. Though not surprised to hear about a connection to the Spanish Civil War, Roger, Jr. could not provide any information or photographs.

**Harvey**

Very little is known about George Miller Harvey. He is identifiable through Providence school records. Born February 10, 1906 in Providence, he resided at 436 Brook Street. His father, N. D. Harvey, was a physician whose office was located at 112 Waterman Street. George attended sixth through eighth grades at John Howland School on the East Side. Providence city directories also list George M. Harvey, a student residing at 436 Brook Street, beginning in 1933. Though absent after 1936, this name reappeared in 1941 as a draftsman residing at 127 Pitman Street.

The only other information about him comes from Robert Rosenstone. His handwritten notes indicate that George Harvey came from Providence and that he was a "Negro" (as was Richard Johnson from Boston). Indeed, with more than eighty black volunteers (including a woman), the Lincolns were the first racially integrated military unit in American history and the first to be led by a black commander.<sup>41</sup>

**Labagnara**

Providence school records show that Michael Labagnara was born on November 24, 1908 in Providence. He resurfaced in Providence directories in 1948. Listed as a machinist, he was living with his wife, Josephine, at 184 Admiral Street. They remained there through 1950. Mike Bagnario, a resident of Providence and a World War I veteran, was also listed in Robert Rosenstone's handwritten notes. Victor Berch, the Brandeis librarian, found a Micheleno LaBagnaro, from Providence, in his notes.

The most disturbing information about Labagnara was provided by Robert Rosenstone's reference to the May, 1938 issue of *The Volunteer for Liberty* (volume I, number 4), the newsletter of Lincoln veterans. As explained in a story by Carl Bradley and Hy Roseman, the Providence native was expelled from the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade by unanimous vote of its membership (which may have numbered less than 100). Having tampered with his identification papers, Labagnara gave them

to a man named Herbert Schlesinger so he could collect money from the Friends of the Lincoln Brigade. During an investigation Labagnara admitted that he had already received more funds than most other veterans. The Lincolns concluded that the Providence native (along with others who had gone to Spain for "personal glory or subversive work") was "unworthy" of carrying their banner.

### McSoley

Information about Henry Carter McSoley can be gathered from several locations. Victor Berch at Brandeis determined that he once lived in Providence and was killed at the battle of Brunete in July, 1937. Robert Rosenstone found an article in the February 9, 1939 issue of the *Providence Journal*, reporting that Harry McSorely was "slain" at the battle of Brunete in June, 1937.<sup>42</sup>

Fortunately, Providence school records take up the slack. Born on May 14, 1908 in Providence, he was the son of William and Ellen J. McSoley, who resided at 41 Bridgham Street. At one time the family resided at 500 Prairie Avenue. Henry attended five Providence schools, beginning at Harriet Street and continuing at Niagara, Lexington Avenue, Warren, and Peace, where he completed seventh grade. More information was available at East Providence High School, where McSoley was enrolled from February through June, 1924.

Other facts about McSoley were found in the April, 1938 issue of *The Volunteer for Liberty* (volume I, number 3). Douglas Roach, writing about fallen Lincoln commander Douglas Earl Seacord, mentioned that he first met Seacord in Provincetown, Massachusetts, when he was a cod and haddock fisherman. His partner at the time was Harry McSorley, whom he later met in Spain. McSorley, who fought with Roach at the battle of Brunete, was killed when attacked by sixty planes (Spanish, German or Italian).

### Mapralian

Robert Rosenstone identified two Lincolns with similar sounding names: John Maparalian and Blackie Maphralian. The first came from a short article in the July 14, 1938 issue of the *New York Times* whose headline proclaimed "7 Americans Die in Spain." Maparalian was listed there as a Providence resident. Rosenstone identified Maphralian as a company commander whose body washed ashore near Tortosa (a town on the Ebro River

in Catalonia).

Victor Berch of Brandeis believes, as I do, that Maparalian and Maphralian were the same person. Berch's research indicates that Maparalian was a seaman whose nickname, "Blackie," was based on engine crew members known as "the black gang." Berch also reported that Maparalian went to Spain on August 11, 1937 on the *S. S. Queen Mary*.

John Mapralian can be found in Providence directories, beginning in 1919, when he was listed as serving in the Army and boarding at 3 Fillmore Street. His existence was also confirmed by Providence school records. He was born on April 4, 1900 in Providence. The "nationality" of both parents was listed as Armenian. Mapralian was also mentioned in both of Arthur Landis' books. In the second, "Blackie" Maphralian was described as a leader of the Lincoln Brigade's Second Company. He was again described as commander of the Third Company at the battle of Gandesa. When crossing the Ebro River, however, he drowned.<sup>43</sup>

### Strauss

Robert Rosenstone knew about Walter Strauss from a front-page story in the February 9, 1939 issue of the *Providence Journal*, entitled "Providence Man Back From War In Spain." This story, filed in New York City the previous day, explained that Strauss, who had fought for two years in Spain, was among a group of ninety-three Lincolns who arrived on the *S. S. President Harding* the previous Saturday. A graduate of Providence Technical High School, the "tall, slim, red-headed" man looked "much younger" than his twenty-nine years. Strauss proclaimed, "War is no fun. I'm not an adventurer but I went to Spain to fight for something I believe in. I'd do it again if I could, but as long as I can't, I'll be much happier in Providence."

Strauss believed that the loyalists were "far from surrendering." "The morale of the people," he observed, "was dauntless." He thought that if the loyalists received sufficient food and ammunition (by lifting the American, British, and French embargo), the war could continue indefinitely. Having served in a communications division of the artillery, Strauss had never been wounded, but he was hospitalized a few weeks for dysentery. While waiting to be evacuated from Spain, his battalion was sent to a concentration camp near Valencia, where he lived "very comfortably." To reach Le Havre, his unit traveled across France in a sealed, guarded train for twenty hours.

A more detailed portrait of Strauss emerges from Spanish Communist

Party records in Moscow. Strauss' father, Adolph, was a brewery worker and, like his mother, "an antifascist." In addition to DeMolay, Federick belonged to the American Turnbund and the Young Communist League, which he joined in Rhode Island in August, 1936. Bill Finklestein, of Providence, was a "comrade" in the Y.C.L.<sup>44</sup> Though he read the *Daily Worker*, Strauss knew "very little" of Lenin.

Strauss went to Spain on April 15, 1937 in order to "fight against fascism." At the time he completed a questionnaire, on December 17, 1938, he was a member of the Communist Party and had fought as a member of the 2nd Artillery Group in the battles of Brunete, Jarama, and Estramaduro. This Lincoln spent thirteen months and six days at the front. He thought of his brigade as "an efficient corps of conscious antifascists." His superiors thought, however, that his political profile was "weak," adding that "he didn't learn much in Spain." They noted his eagerness to return to New York City.

### Yilek

Information about Frank Yilek comes from a brief article, "7 Americans Die in Spain," from the July 14, 1938 issue of the *New York Times*. This reference had been found by Robert Rosenstone, but was cited in reference to John Mapralian. The *Times* story mentions only that Yilek, as reported by the Friends of the Lincoln Brigade, was from Pawtucket. Yilek first appeared in Pawtucket directories in 1919, when he was listed as a "loomfixer" living at 752 Weeden. In 1927 Yilek and his wife, Louisa, were "removed" to Scotland, Connecticut, but they returned to Pawtucket in the early 1930s. Not much else is known about the Yilek family, other than the likelihood that the surname is Bohemian or Austrian.

### Characteristics in Common

Fewer men than a *minyán* or a jury, the nine Lincolns from Rhode Island were barely enough to field a baseball team. Though some may have traveled or fought together, all nine men were probably not acquainted with one another. Indeed, had they never ventured under extraordinary circumstances to a faraway land, would anybody ever noticed them?

What did these largely invisible men share other than a youthful restlessness and an idealistic yearning? More than half a generation apart, the eldest, John Mapralian, was born in 1900. The youngest (of seven known by age) was Raymond Bell, born in 1914. Those who lost their lives, Lester

Jacobs, Henry McSoley, Mapralian, and Frank Yilek, were probably in their twenties. By any estimation of the war's fatalities, Rhode Island gave far more than her fair share.

Long before any notion of affirmative action, these Lincolns from Newport, Pawtucket, and Providence represented sweeping ethnic diversity. Quite likely, George Harvey was a black man and Jacobs, a Jew. In addition to men with Anglo-Saxon names, such as Bell, Braley, and McSoley, there were Americans of Armenian, Austrian, German, and Italian descent. As is too often the case, war became their melting pot of opportunity.

Several of the Lincolns from Rhode Island came from large families (by today's standards) and moved frequently to find adequate housing or escape creditors. It would appear that these men came from working-class or poorer families, though Lester Jacobs, having lived at one time on Warrington Street, may have enjoyed at least a glimpse of material comfort. Both Rosenstone and Carroll point out a surprising demographic trend: a large number of Lincolns came from "broken" homes. McSoley and Mapralian were probably examples. It may have been difficult finding a listing for Jacobs on Warrington Street for the same reason. Explaining that many Lincolns grew up in foster homes and orphanages, Carroll (p. 17) notes that the Brooklyn Hebrew Orphan Asylum produced "at least ten alumni" who went to Spain.

While Bell and Strauss were high school graduates, many Lincolns probably spent far less time in classrooms. More than a few seemed inattentive students. Though lacking much vocational training, many men helped support themselves and their families. All depended on the strength of backs, hands, and feet. During the Depression, eager if not desperate for employment, many sought the stability and regimen of government sinecures: the Civilian Conservation Corps, the military, and the state police. City dwellers for the most part, they would have relished a day at the beach or ball park.

Fragmentary archival records indicate that two of the Lincolns, Braley and Yilek, were married. Only Braley was a father, but he evidently spurned that role. And a few of the men seem to have fallen short of heroic roles too. Having deceived his compatriots, Labagnara was expelled from the veterans' organization. Where documentary evidence exists from Spain, Bell was briefly a deserter and Strauss performed unimpressively.

The nine Lincolns from Rhode Island largely differed from their discouraged and downtrodden contemporaries by their radicalism. Where documentary evidence exists, at least two of the men, Bell and Strauss, were known to have joined the Communist Party. Most likely, so did many others.<sup>45</sup> They saw communism as a viable alternative, a mechanism for both protest and action. Even if eager to alleviate Spanish injustice and suffering, however, we do not know if these men were necessarily committed to overthrowing America's way of life. When American involvement in World War II brought a different set of imperatives, many Lincolns demonstrated once again not only their humanitarianism but their heartfelt patriotism.

Perhaps the most damning evidence invalidating the cause fought for by the Lincolns and their international brethren has just come to light. Another collection of documents from former Soviet archives has been published but is not yet available in a Rhode Island library.<sup>46</sup> This new volume charges that Spain's betrayal was caused neither by Mussolini and Hitler nor by the Western democracies. Rather, the accusation made by historian Ronald Radosh and his colleagues is that the Soviet Union had every intention of exploiting the Spanish Civil War to its own advantage. Supposedly, Stalin and his henchmen had less interest in rescuing Spain than establishing their own puppet state. Consequently, Lincolns and others can be seen both as self-deceiving ninnyes and as Soviet stooges. According to this thesis, Lester Jacobs, Henry McSoley, John Mapralian, and Frank Yilek died not for Spanish democracy but for Soviet conquest.

Whatever the causes and consequences of their service, the International Brigade is beginning to receive recognition. It has been memorialized in several European countries, and recent efforts — Seattle in 1998 and Madison, Wisconsin in 1999 — represent the first successful efforts in this country to honor the Lincoln Battalion.<sup>47</sup> A similar effort in nearby New Hampshire has not yet succeeded. A reminder of Rhode Island's nine Lincolns is surely desirable, if not long overdue. Then again, perhaps Lester Jacobs and his gallant-but-flawed comrades have already received their due. Aren't they among the men and women acknowledged in *Gates of Prayer*, the Reform movement's *siddur*, in a passage preceding the "Kaddish?" We praise God for "the martyrs of our people whose graves are unmarked, and those of every race and nation whose lives have been a blessing to humanity."



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Pearl F. Braude's five-part series in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, "Jewish Veterans of World War II: Oral Histories, beginning in XI (November, 1994), 493-503. For other wars, see: Eleanor F. Horvitz, "Philip Paige and the Jewish Legion," *Ibid.*, X (November, 1987), pp. 17-25; Joyce Blackman, "A Civil War Hero and His Rhode Island Family," *Ibid.*, XII (November, 1995), pp. 93-113; Ada Winston and Josie Toochin, "Two Jewish Girls in Wartime Shanghai," *Ibid.*, XIII (November, 1999), pp. 55-67; and Merrill Percelay, "Wartime Experiences of Russian Immigrants," Part 1, *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, XIII (November, 2000), pp. 208-19.
- <sup>2</sup> Brokaw quickly built on the popularity of *The Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 1998) with: *The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 1999) and *An Album of Memories: Personal Histories from the Greatest Generation* (New York: Random House, 2001). A generation earlier, Studs Terkel, a Jewish writer, radio, and television commentator, produced a slew of best-selling books on the same subject, including: *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) and *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Random House, 1985), a Pulitzer Prizewinner.
- <sup>3</sup> For the number of Italian and German troops, see: Eugen Weber, *A Modern History of Europe: Men, Cultures, and Societies from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), p. 958. The following books, though only a fraction, represent the rich variety of studies on the Spanish Civil War: Alvah Bessie and Albert Prago, eds., *Our Fight: Writings by Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987); Burnett Bolloten, *The Spanish Revolution: The Left and the Struggle for Power During the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); Tom Buchanan, *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); John Gerassi, *The Premature Antifascists: North American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War: An Oral History* (New York, 1986); Douglas Little, *Malevolent Neutrality: The United States, Great Britain, and the Origins of the Spanish Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Cary Nelson and Jefferson Hendricks, eds., *Madrid 1937: Letters of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade from the Spanish Civil War* (London: Routledge, 1996); Richard P. Traina, *American Diplomacy and the Spanish Civil War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968); Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); and Peter Wyden, *The Passionate War: A Narrative History of the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983).
- <sup>4</sup> See: "Spain's War a Lure to 3,000 from U.S.," *New York Times*, May 23, 1938, p. 10. *The Times* published stories about Spain on an almost daily basis, often presenting two stories per day. Herbert L. Matthews deserves special recognition for the scope and depth of his reporting. See his subsequent study, *Half of Spain Died: A Reappraisal of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1973). Though its coverage was far less extensive, the *Providence Journal* carried numerous stories about the war. Unfortunately, none was identifiable through the Providence Public Library's Rhode Island Index.
- <sup>5</sup> Arthur H. Landis, *The Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (New York: Citadel Press, 1967), p. xvii.
- <sup>6</sup> Sam Sills, "Abraham Lincoln Brigade," in *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, ed. by Mari Jo Buhle, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press; 2nd ed., 1998), pp. 2-4. See also Albert Prago's article, "North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy,"

*Ibid.*, p. 562. Buhle is a professor of American civilization and history at Brown University, where her husband, Paul, also a prolific writer, is a visiting professor of American civilization.

- 7 Peter N. Carroll, *The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade: Americans in the Spanish Civil War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 14.
- 8 The Neutrality Acts did not prevent American companies from selling (on credit) huge amounts of trucks and oil to Franco's forces, contributing substantially to their victory. After an early effort by France, the only countries that sold arms to loyalist Spain were the Soviet Union and Mexico.
- 9 Arthur H. Landis, *Death in the Olive Groves: American Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939*. (New York: Paragon House, 1988), dedication page (not numbered).
- 10 Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), p. 27.
- 11 Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 204.
- 12 Sills, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 13 The Jewish financier, Bernard Baruch, made one of the largest donations, \$10,000, for the return of wounded Lincolns. See: Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 212.
- 14 In 1950 a lengthy list of subversive organizations compiled by the U.S. Attorney General placed the Lincolns (alphabetically) at the top. See: William K. Klingman, *Encyclopedia of the McCarthy Era* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), Appendix IX, p. 433. Studying FBI files of former "Lincolns" presents a "Catch-22" predicament. As required by the Freedom of Information Act, a subject must give permission to a researcher or there must be proof of death. Additionally, the FBI claims that most files are routinely destroyed after 20 years. In the absence of a centralized filing system, each regional office must be approached for records.
- 15 A useful anthology of little-known essays, stories, and poems is: John Miller, ed., *Voices Against Tyranny: Writings of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Scribner's, 1986).
- 16 See: Carla Mathes Woodward and Franklin W. Robinson, *A Handbook of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design* (R.I.S.D., 1985), p. 38. For a reproduction and a thorough analysis of the painting, see: John Richardson with Marilyn McCully, *A Life of Picasso*, Vol. I: 1881-1906 (New York: Random House, 1991), pp. 208-79. The masterwork, acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art, has returned temporarily to New England. It is presently on display in "Picasso: the Artist's Studio" at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum.
- 17 Robert A. Rosenstone, *Crusade on the Left: The Lincoln Battalion in the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 371.
- 18 George Axelson, "326 Ex-Loyalists Stranded in Havre," *New York Times*, December 4, 1938, p. 38. All but one of these 11 volunteers were from Massachusetts: Boston (5), Brookline, Chelsea, Maynard, Springfield, and Worcester. The exception was a man from Hartford. Those with Jewish-sounding names included: Marcus Alper, Nathan Levin, Abraham J. Levine, Joseph Siegel, and Frank Zeldman.
- 19 Rosenstone, *Op. cit.*, p. 371. See chapter four, "Those Who Volunteered," for a more vivid discussion of individuals conforming to demographic trends.
- 20 Rosenstone, *Op. cit.*, pp. 368-9.
- 21 Rosenstone, *Op. cit.*, p. 370. This figure was based on the author's list of "371 obviously Jewish names, or approximately 21 per cent of the total roster of 1,804." Rosenstone also tried to factor in the number of Jews who took Anglo-Saxon sounding names. His interviewees estimated that between 25 to 40 per cent of Lincolns were Jews.

- <sup>22</sup> Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
- <sup>23</sup> Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
- <sup>24</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945*, Vol. IV of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. by Henry L. Feingold (5 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 209. Feingold incorrectly estimated that there 10,000 American volunteers.
- <sup>25</sup> See: David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, Vol. IX of *The Oxford History of the United States*, ed. by C. Vann Woodward (10 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 398. In contrast to Jews, American Catholics, courted by Democrats, were supportive of the insurgents. Somewhat ironically, Kennedy, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning history of nearly 1,000 pages, devoted about two pages to the Spanish war.
- <sup>26</sup> Carl Geiser, *Prisoners of the Good Fight: The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Westport, Connecticut: Laurence Hill & Co., 1986), p. 260. As I conclude later in this essay, Maparalian and Maphralian are simply alternate spellings of the same name, so the total number of Rhode Islanders is nine.
- <sup>27</sup> Between 1937 and 1938 there was virtually no mention of the Spanish Civil War in the pages of the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*. Given the calamities facing Jewish communities in most parts of the world, including central Europe, Palestine, and to a lesser extent America, the war in Spain seemed insignificant. In the absence of a Jewish Federation, the *Herald* was a voice if not a reflection of the organized Jewish community. A person like Lester Jacobs would have played a peripheral role at best.
- <sup>28</sup> See: Gertrude M. Hochberg, "Henry Loeb Jacobs and Bryant College," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, X (November, 1989), pp. 372-4. In 1952, eleven years before his death, Jacobs became a Congregationalist. In 1937, A. Gardner Jacobs, vice president of Bryant, succeeded his father.
- <sup>29</sup> For a comprehensive study of the south Providence community, emphasizing an earlier era, see: Eleanor F. Horvitz, "Old Bottles, Rags, Junk!" *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, VII (November, 1976), pp. 189-257.
- <sup>30</sup> Telephone interview on August 1, 2001.
- <sup>31</sup> Telephone interview on August 1, 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> Telephone interview on August 2, 2001.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Brooklyn Citizen*, January 30, 1939; and "Providence Man Back From War In Spain," *Providence Journal*, February 9, 1939, p. 1.
- <sup>34</sup> The Young Communist League was the youth division of the Communist Party, USA.
- <sup>35</sup> Reid was more influential as a leader of Rhode Island's Textile Workers Union. See: Paul Buhle, "Jews in Rhode Island Labor: An Introductory Investigation," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, X (November, 1988), p. 149.
- <sup>36</sup> Nathan Glaser, *The Social Basis of American Communism, in Communism in American Life*, ed. by Clinton Rossiter (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961). See chapter four, "Jews and Middle-Class Groups and the Party," pp. 130-68. Glaser addressed many important issues regarding Jewish identity. For a different perspective on Jews and communism, see: Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).
- <sup>37</sup> Harvey Klehr, et al., *The Secret World of American Communism in Annals of Communism*, ed. by Jonathan Brent (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- <sup>38</sup> Weber, *Op. cit.*, p. 960.

- <sup>39</sup> Geiser recorded that Braley's passport was issued on January 5, 1938. Like census records, American passport records are confidential, so cannot be released for 72 years.
- <sup>40</sup> Telephone interview on July 11, 2001.
- <sup>41</sup> Carroll, *Op. cit.*, p. 18; Sills, *Op. cit.*, p. 3. See also: Danny D. Collum and Victor A. Berch, eds., *African Americans in the Spanish Civil War: This Ain't Africa but It'll Do* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).
- <sup>42</sup> This is the same citation as for Raymond Bell.
- <sup>43</sup> Landis, *Death in the Olive Groves*, *Op. cit.*, pp. 139, 153.
- <sup>44</sup> Little can be learned about Finklestein. Providence vital records show that he was born on May 26, 1915, and that his parents were Abraham and Fanny. The 1935 Providence directory reveals that "Finkelstein," a clerk at 122 Orms Street, resided with his parents at 30 Pungansett.
- <sup>45</sup> Of 1,845 American Lincolns on duty on October 1, 1937, 65.6 per cent were members of the Communist Party. Additionally, 13.7 per cent were members of the Young Communist League. See: Klehr, *et al.*, *Op. cit.*, p. 153.
- <sup>46</sup> See Ronald Radosh, *et al.*, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War in Annals of Communism*, ed. by Jonathan Brent (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Richard Bernstein's review, "Aiding Dictatorship, Not Democracy," appeared in the *New York Times*, July 23, 2001, p. B, 6.
- <sup>47</sup> The memorial erected inside the Husky Student Union at the University of Washington honored nine students who joined the Lincoln Battalion. Madison's memorial, placed within James Madison Park, honored all 26 Lincolns from Wisconsin, only two of whom were killed in combat. For details, see recent issues of *The Volunteer for Liberty* on the Lincolns' website ([www.alba-valb.org](http://www.alba-valb.org)).

## Wartime Experiences of Russian Immigrants, Part II

by Merrill Percelay

*Here are another four interviews conducted by Merrill Percelay with Jewish immigrants who came to Rhode Island from the former Soviet Union. Mr. Percelay held these interviews with the assistance of Nina Ivanova, who translated and acted as project coordinator. A lifelong resident of Pawtucket, he is a retired businessman in textile manufacturing and real estate development. During World War II, he graduated from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy and served, first as a cadet and then as an officer, in wartime convoys crossing the North Atlantic.*

*Once again, the ordeals recalled by the individuals who were interviewed go beyond belief. As we said in the introduction to Part I, "these people, whether as soldiers or civilians, did more than merely survive: they demonstrated to the rest of us those human qualities that have always counterbalanced the brutality and injustice of aggression."*

### 1. Bertold Vilner

My father and mother came from a small Byelorussian city by the name of Gorky. They were born there, grew up there and married there. My father graduated from the Gorky Agricultural Institute. He did not specialize in agriculture, however, but rather in water-related subjects such as irrigation, power dams, and flood control. My mother only graduated from high school.

I was born in Leningrad in 1931. Shortly after I was born my family moved to a small village in central Byelorussia where my father started a practice: his field was hydraulics. We were there only a couple of months and then went to Minsk, where my family lived in a government-owned apartment until the beginning of the war. There were thirteen families living on one floor with one bathroom and one kitchen. We had very little, but enough food and clothing to get by. My father and mother worked, I was in school, and my younger brother was in kindergarten. At that time things were okay. I was just a child and didn't realize what our living conditions really were. I felt it wasn't so bad. My parents were not religious. At that time it was dangerous to show that you were Jewish, but I cannot remember experiencing anti-Semitism as a boy.

Children usually started school at the age of eight but since I could read, write, and do arithmetic since the age of four, I entered school early and finished three grades before the war began. I was a studious child, preferring to stay home and read rather than play outside, and did not have many friends. I finished the third grade in May 1941, and in June the war began. I was ten years old.

Our city of Minsk was one of the first cities attacked by the Germans. It was attacked on the first night of the war. In less than ten days the city was destroyed. There was no real fighting: rather the city was simply bombed and destroyed. My father was drafted on the second or third day of the war and I did not see him for a long time. My mother, brother, and I tried to escape from the city but were not lucky in this. The roads were captured by the Germans and after about ten days we had to return. We went back to our house, which was still standing, but it was empty of everything. People had taken all of our belongings.

After we returned from trying to escape from Minsk, my mother started to work in a German hospital. She did cleaning and was given food. She could speak Yiddish and had studied German in school and so she could converse in German. She was a good worker and they liked her and gave her food so we had something to eat. I think that it was sometime in September that the Germans announced that all Jews had to go to the ghetto. I refused to go. I do not know why. Mother agreed with me. Because we had no German documents, she asked hospital officials if we could live on the hospital grounds. There nobody checked documents.

We were allowed to live on the grounds and moved there in the end of September or beginning of October and lived there until the beginning of April 1942. At that time I believe someone told the Germans we were Jews. The Germans came to my mother and we watched as they put her in a car shouting "Children, Children." After that we never saw her again. People told us they took her to the Gestapo and killed her. Soldiers took my brother and me and put us in the ghetto in Minsk, where we were placed in a house for children who had lost their parents. We lived there for a short time. We heard nothing from my father nor what was happening in the rest of the Soviet Union. The Germans moved through Minsk, past Smolensk, to approximately forty kilometers from Moscow.

I decided we had to escape from the ghetto. I found a Russian woman who helped us. She was not Jewish. She gave us some food and clothing. We

had met her after our first attempt to escape from the city. She occupied an apartment in our building because hers had been destroyed. Her daughter was my age and she had a son about my brother's age. She was the only one I knew with whom I could talk.

After a short time I decided my brother and I should leave Minsk. I was eleven and he was five. We walked and walked, trying to hide from people. We were afraid because we did not know who was who. We had a little food and the weather was warm, the middle of May. We slept outdoors, on the outskirts of villages. It was difficult but my goal was to escape from Minsk.

We had been traveling for about one week when we met some people who were armed but not German. They stopped us and asked different questions. We then realized they were partisans. They took us with them and we traveled to different villages. We lived under their protection in farmers' houses. I did what I could to help. I was a shepherd, picked potatoes, and did other things. They gave us food. I do not know if the farmers realized we were Jewish but because it was the partisan commander who had taken us on, we were fed and taken care of. There were two or three hundred in the smallest unit and a total of maybe 2,000 in the total group. They got their arms from fallen Germans and took their supplies. After 1942 the Soviet Government started to send the partisans some supplies, guns, ammunition, and food from somewhere near Moscow. But usually if the partisans needed food they got it from peasants.

The partisans helped to liberate villages and the peasants were usually (not always) friendly. The Germans at times tried to stop partisan activity and sent huge numbers of planes and troops to fight them. When this happened the partisans withdrew. They hid in the woods, sometimes for weeks and weeks, until the Germans left. Sometimes we had nothing to eat but we didn't want to be caught.

At the beginning of the war, 1941 and 1942, some Jews escaped the Germans and wanted to fight them. At that time partisan commanders did not accept Jews. So Jewish men organized their own group and fought independently of the others. But later something changed and Jews were incorporated into the regular groups. While I was living with the partisans, things were very difficult. At the beginning, there were food shortages and no medicine. The partisans did not fight in specific battles but rather harassed the Germans. They destroyed roads and bridges, blew up railroads and trains, fought collaborators who had been put into German army units,

used hit and run tactics against the regular army, and took or destroyed their arms and food when they could.

Being only eleven or twelve years old, I did not do any actual fighting but worked to help in any way I could. At the end of 1943, in the village where I then lived there was an underground printing setup and I started to work with them. I knew grammatically correct Russian. I became a typesetter and corrected the work. I was twelve at the time. We had a radio and received information from Moscow which we printed so that people in nearby villages knew what was going on. We at least now knew where the Soviet Army was, what it had liberated. We heard about the landings at Normandy.

We felt good to hear that the Russians were advancing in our direction and felt that we would eventually be liberated. By 1943-1944, they were able to give us information about liberated areas that included tens of cities, thousands of villages. It was happening every day and we were happy. We were still under the Germans but the Russians were now moving closer to us and we had information about the opening of the second front. We heard of American military aid to Russia, but as partisans fighting in German-occupied areas there was no way to get it to us. Occasionally we received some Russian support but generally we lived on our own. However, morale among us was good.

By this time the organization of the partisans was very good, although in the beginning everyone had fought on his own. By the later part of the war there were over 200,000 partisans in Byelorussia. The chief commander of the partisans was in Moscow. From there movements were coordinated. When the Russian Army advanced the partisans were directed to hinder German movements in coordination with the Russian advance. There were more than a million partisans in all of the Soviet Union.

On the third of July, 1944, Minsk and the surrounding territory was liberated. I left the partisans and returned to Minsk on the ninth of July. On that day my father was in Minsk. We were in the same city on the same day but I did not know this. The next day I found people whom he had met and with whom he left his address. But he had to leave with the army. We wrote back and forth and he sent us what he could. In thirty days he got a leave and came back. He took me and my brother by airplane, which, by the way, was a Douglas DC 3, to Moscow and left us with his sister, who lived there. We stayed with her until he got out of the army in 1946. My father was a captain

in the engineers and was responsible for building airports. He did not participate in specific battles, but since airports were many times near the front he was often bombed and fired upon by artillery.

I started my schooling again in Moscow. I had finished the first three grades in Minsk just before the war started. In Moscow I entered the fourth grade but because I had lost over three years I jumped from third to sixth grade. When my father returned from the army in 1946, and we returned to Minsk, I went from sixth to seventh grade. After that I skipped from the seventh to the ninth grade. All these grades are comparable to American school grades. I had learned much about life but I also needed to learn about history, mathematics, geography, etc., and had to pass all of the subjects in school. I was then fifteen years old. My father returned to the Polytechnical Institute and worked there as a professor. The city had been just about leveled so we lived where best we could. A new Polytechnic Institute was built. They rebuilt the city and life continued.

After high school, in 1949, I went to medical school. I graduated in 1955 and received my medical degree. The Russian system was such that after graduating from any college or university you were sent to work where the government wanted you to go. I was a psychiatrist and was sent to a big psychiatric hospital about 175 miles from Minsk, in the city of Mogolev. This was a large Byelorussian city. I was a good psychiatrist and did many interesting things but I started to feel a little different from the other people. I think my first experience along that line was when someone told false things about my mother. Before that, I encountered little anti-Semitism in school in Minsk and then in Moscow. But when I decided to work on my Ph.D., I should have gone to some special institution but was not allowed to do so. This was anti-Semitism sponsored by the government, not by individual people. At the Ministry of Medicine I was told I could not go to the particular medical institute of my choice because I was the only one who applied for the position; there was no competition. I saw that this was a stupid situation. I told a Russian friend that if she applied they most likely would accept her. She applied and was accepted. She graduated from that school. But I went to the Byelorussian Academy of Science and started to work in the Physiological Institute and completed my Ph.D. there.

When I was at the third level at the Institute I married a girl in my class. We lived in Mogolev and then moved to Minsk where my daughter was born. I started to work at the Physiological Institute and started to grow as

a scientist. I published and published, beginning with neurological disorders. I also worked as a neurosurgeon for a short time. After that I worked with patients and did research in multiple sclerosis. During this time I found it to be very interesting to work with cells, to grow cells and work with them outside the human body. This was thirty years ago and was the beginning of real work in this field. This was going on also in the United States and, in fact, all over the world. Today I am still doing related work now at Brown University, but of course the field has advanced greatly in the intervening thirty years. In Byelorussia there was not an even exchange of scientific papers. We received them from the rest of the world but could not send ours out of the country. I was invited to lecture in many foreign countries but was not allowed to do so.

I divorced and remarried in Byelorussia and had a son with my second wife. When I was in Byelorussia working at the Institute, I was a successful scientist and did not think of leaving the country. But what forced us to move was the treatment received by my son. He was the best student in his high school. He was awarded a gold medal for excellence. He applied to Minsk University and they did everything they could not to accept him. This was a prestigious institution. After a huge fight by my wife and me they accepted him, but as a night student, not a regular day student. In the Soviet Union students had to work while going to college, which wasn't so bad, but he was seventeen and the next year he was to go into the army. We know that he was the best student in his class and as such he should have been able to transfer to the day school. As a day school student he would have been exempted from the army. He applied and was rejected — anti-Semitism. We then felt we had to save our son and we started to think of where and how we could move. That is why we moved to the United States, and we arrived here in 1989.

My daughter is now forty-four and my son is twenty-eight. My son and second wife are both here now. My son graduated from Brown University and works in the computer science field. My wife works at Brown as a biologist with me and also for a private company in Rhode Island. Her field is related to cell research. My younger brother also lives in Rhode Island, actually next door to me. We always got along well and did not fight as children. There was a five-year age difference between us, and we really did not have any childhood. We were always preoccupied with how to survive.

## **2. Boris Gorbachevsky**

I was born November 24, 1922, in Novograd Wolinsky, Ukraine. My father was born in Chernobyl and my mother came from another town in the Ukraine. I do not have any brothers or sisters, but I was very close to one cousin. He was killed in the war.

At the beginning of the war I lived with my family in Moscow. I was nineteen years old when war broke out. Ordinary people had felt that there was the possibility of war, but the government, especially Stalin and Soviet propaganda, told the people there cannot be war. When Stalin and Hitler signed their pact people then believed that there would be no war. Stalin signed the pact because he felt Great Britain and France cheated the Soviet Union. Stalin was very upset that, although there were talks going on with Great Britain and France, they were proceeding very slowly, too slowly, and Stalin became suspicious of their motives. He then signed the pact with Hitler. Stalin felt more comfortable with Hitler than with the allies.

We moved to Moscow just before the war. My father was an industrial manager and we had moved to many cities in the Ukraine before Moscow. In August of 1937, in Harkov, Ukraine, my father had been arrested and sent to prison. We don't know exactly why, but we think he was falsely accused of leading a terrorist organization. In Russia there was a catch-all charge of which he was accused, being "an enemy of the people." It is difficult to explain why these things happened. Perhaps he had an enemy who said false things against him. He had been a well-known leader in the metal industry, the manager of a company connected with metal manufacturing plants.

When my father was arrested, times became very hard for my family. My mother was fired from her job and we were evicted from our apartment to a single small room. We did not have money. We were considered to be the family of an "enemy of the state." I went to work in a movie theater. There were two cinemas on opposite sides of a river with a bridge connecting the two sides. The theaters had only one film. As soon as one reel was shown in the first it was my job to immediately run with the reel to the second theater for immediate showing. Sometimes I also ran the projector. I was about fifteen or sixteen at the time.

My father was released from prison in 1939, after twenty-eight months. His release was the result of fortunate circumstances; Beria appeared on the political scene and some people were released. It was done for political

purposes. My father was able to go back to work and my mother got a job as a bookkeeper. The man who handled my father's case was a good man. He was like a lawyer and secured my father's release under Beria's edict. When he came home, my father insisted that I go further in school. I did not go to day school for children but I went to high school for adults. I graduated from this school in Moscow. I did not encounter anti-Semitism. From there I was drafted and was sent to an officers artillery school in Siberia.

People in Russia had no idea of what was going on in the rest of the world. Just before the war began, maybe two weeks before, I was called to the office of the military school and an officer offered me the opportunity of becoming a naval officer. But I told him that I cannot swim. He told me they would teach me. He told me further that you must come back to this office on the following Monday, June 23, 1939. When I returned I was told I could go home. People with military training were being released. Soon after, my father was sent to the Urals to establish a chemical plant to produce graphite for bombs. My mother and I accompanied him. I went to work in a military factory making artillery projectiles. My mother did not work. Living conditions were good for us. My father was responsible for 6,000 workers. We were far from Moscow and the war front. We lived in our own small house.

I worked twelve hours each day. Out of patriotic feeling I wanted to volunteer and went to the military office and volunteered for the front. However, the officer in charge knew of my father, who was prominent, and refused to send me. Instead I was sent to tank school but was not accepted because they found I was color blind. I was then sent to infantry school. The city where the school was located was Tyumen, where Lenin's coffin was sent for safety and all of the cadets spent time guarding it. No one knows what really was in the coffin. I was not able to complete the program because it was the time of Stalingrad and many of the cadets were sent to the western front near Moscow, maybe 200 kilometers from Moscow. This move was to relieve the pressure of Stalingrad. We then were made officers. The fighting was very heavy. Of the 138 men in my unit all but eight were killed. I was wounded in the neck. A paramedic said to me, you are not wounded in the legs, walk to the hospital. The hospital was about fifteen kilometers away. The bullet was lodged in my neck and it was only the clothing I was wearing that saved me. It deflected the bullet just enough to graze my neck instead of going deeper in my neck. In the hospital there was not enough medication.

There was only a type of liquid disinfectant. Many died from infection. Doctors and nurses were short of supplies and did not have time to treat everyone. Not only was there a shortage of medicine and equipment, but there were not enough hands to help. Some operating rooms were in the fields. We suffered also from lack of food. However, American help was starting to become evident. This was now 1943.

I remember that in May, 1943, we were located in the woods and received a box of food for eight soldiers that was American. It contained several spoons of sugar, several spoons of grain, two pieces of crackers, two cans of American meat, four eggs. We took water from a stream nearby. It wasn't too clean. But we built a fire and made a soup from all these ingredients. It was the best tasting soup I ever had in my life. We received American military boots, American communication equipment, trucks made by Studebaker and Dodge, and other equipment and supplies. This help was essential for victory. After I returned to my unit, I fought in Byelorussia, Gomel, Minsk, Poland, and Germany, all the way from Moscow to Germany. After Germany, my unit was sent to liberate Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was a hard nut. The Germans did not want to surrender there and the fighting was very difficult. Because of that it was only after Germany's surrender and signing of the peace documents that Prague surrendered. After May 9, 1945, the war ended but in reality it continued in Prague for some time and soldiers were still being killed. All resistance finally ended on May 13 in Czechoslovakia.

At the beginning of the war morale was not too good. Some soldiers tried to desert. But little by little, as the Nazis penetrated deeper into our country, people became more patriotic. During the war, about 200,000 deserted. Some officers who were accused of deserting were sent to the foremost parts of the battle and became human shields. Other soldiers injured themselves and were sent to the hospital.

I received thirteen orders and medals. In 1948 the government wanted veterans to forgo some benefits. No one did. If the government and Stalin personally asked veterans to help the country we would have accepted this, but no one was asked and it was just handed down as a ruling. We felt the government was wrong in doing this to us who had done so much and risked so much. I felt humiliated and since that time I never wore any of my orders or medals. I couldn't openly refuse these, but I kept them in a box and brought only one of them to America — the Soldiers Medal for Bravery.

Later in the war, my father was called to Moscow where he participated in the building industry. But when I left the army in 1946, to return to my family in Moscow, I was not allowed to go because I didn't have the documents required to live there. The rule was I could only go back to the town where I was drafted. Without a Moscow passport I could not get a job or a ration book for food. I fought in the whole war but still did not have the right to live in Moscow with my family. I could only get to live there with a bribe, but I would not pay a bribe. When I complained to an official he told his secretary that there already too many Jews in Moscow. However, unknown to me, my mother did pay a bribe that allowed me to live in that city.

I enrolled in the Communication University, where publishing, radio, TV, and newspaper work were taught. After graduation I became a lecturer there, then a professor, and wrote twenty books on related subjects. Some books were published in a million copies. I was also a member of the editorial staff of magazines and newspapers. Even though I published twenty books, all the time I experienced the oppression of censorship; many times I was forced to exclude my thoughts and opinions in order to be published. Finally, I became my own censor because I knew very well what I could publish and what I could not.

### **3. Anna Shaposhnik**

I was born May 25, 1932 in a small village in the Ukraine, the same village where my husband was born. It was called Giovoran, in the district of Odessa. We lived in a big house with several other families. It was surrounded by orchards. I had one brother who was five years younger than I. At that time we were reasonably well off. That is, we were not suffering and were getting by. I was nine when the war began.

My mother was a housewife and my father was a politician. He was in the Communist party, in the propaganda section. I was too young to remember, but I heard from my parents that before the war there was anti-Semitism in our area. At the time we knew of the existence of other major countries, the United States, Great Britain, etc., but we knew nothing about them. We did not talk about other countries. Everyone was afraid to talk about them: 1937, 1938, and 1939 were scary times in Russia.

In our town no one expected that we would be involved in the war. I can remember that it was said it would not happen for a long time. "Do not be

afraid, Germany will not touch us," and so on. My mother refused to leave until one day a soldier came and said, "Why are you staying? Leave now. The Nazis are only ten kilometers from here." My father was gone by this time. He had left for the army reserves. He was drafted in August 1941, just before the war began in September 1941. We were able to escape but it was done very hurriedly. We were able to leave in a freight train, but many who wanted to leave were not able to get on the train and were left behind. However, some, not knowing what was going to happen, did not choose to leave. Most of the Jews left behind were killed later.

We went to Siberia. The trip took two months. We went to the Urals. We were bombed many times. At one station the bombs fell very close to our train. I was covered with dirt. My mother jumped from the freight car and she ran with me, maybe one half mile. Many people were killed. It was so frightening. I can remember it like it was yesterday.

The trip was very difficult. One time my mother left the train to get some water and a little bread for us. The train started before she returned and she ran after it. A young Czechoslovakian man jumped out of the car and pushed her onto the train and then jumped back. My mother tried to find the young man afterwards to thank him but was not able to find him.

We did not hear from my father for two years, until 1943. In the Urals my mother worked in a vegetable processing factory. I went to school. My brother was in kindergarten. Life was difficult but we had enough to eat — vegetables, particularly potatoes, but not enough bread. My mother could bring some vegetables home and she was paid, so we had a little money. My mother worked from early morning until late at night. Our landlady looked in on us, and when she saw we were hungry she brought us something to eat. She was a kind woman.

I do not know why we were sent to a particular town in the Urals, a small town in an agricultural area near a large river, a branch of the White River, the Biella River. We were there for three years. We were not bombed in the Urals. We had a radio with a large dish antenna in the center of the town and people listened to the news. The main commentator was Ury Levitan. We felt at the time the news was accurate but we now realize it was not fully true. We knew what was happening in St. Petersburg because a boat arrived with people from St. Petersburg. It was a terrible sight. The people were emaciated and empty-eyed. We were told not to give them food because, in their condition, it could make them very sick and they could die. They were

sent to hospitals that were prepared for them.

At that time there was not anti-Semitism. The people in that small and remote town did not know what anti-Semitism was. When they were told we were Jews they said, "what is the difference, people are people."

There was a shortage of medicine. My brother had pneumonia and nearly died. But my mother somehow got penicillin, I don't know how, and he survived. Everything was short. We had ration coupons and were able to get bread and milk for the children. No butter, no sugar. A little flour. There were different coupons for children, those who worked, for the elderly, for families whose father was in the army. It was a reasonable, fair system. We were unable to take any money when we were evacuated, but my mother took a suitcase of clothes. There were schools with good teachers who were also evacuated. There were teachers from Kiev and Moscow. We had hospitals, and children were examined by the doctors. For us as children these were not bad years, but they were very difficult for my mother. She was worried for her parents, for my father, for my brother when he was very ill. At that time we did not think about happy or unhappy, only about survival.

In 1942, we had a letter from the Ukraine telling us that our grandparents had been killed by the Germans. They had stayed in our village and had not wanted to leave. We were told that 900 people, mostly Jewish, were killed. Among them, besides my grandmother and grandfather, were many relatives, aunts, uncles, and cousins. We were not able to communicate with our village but my mother received this letter from someone. All our relatives were gone. When we saw everyone in our family was killed we were happy to have escaped from the Nazis and to still be alive. We lived in one small room with no electricity. We had a kerosene lamp. We had wood for heat. The winters were very cold. We melted snow and ice for water. Kerosene was in short supply and often we had none. In the winter, nights were very long. Summers were beautiful, not too hot.

As soon as our village in the Ukraine was liberated, sometime in 1944, my mother, brother, and I returned, although the war was not yet over. The trip home took two weeks. We were free to leave and were given all the necessary documents. This was September 1944. But when we arrived we could still hear bombing close to our town. The retreating Germans blasted everything they could. Our town was sixty percent destroyed. The shtetl where my grandparents had lived was maybe ninety percent destroyed. Their village was four or five miles from ours. The Germans destroyed the

area just to ruin everything they could. It was very difficult to get by. My father returned in 1944 from the army and he went to work. My mother stayed at home caring for us. We received some coupons. My father then operated a small government restaurant in the train station.

In 1947, we suffered greatly from hunger. We did not have bread and ate anything we could get, potato peels, plants, anything. It was not due to a bad harvest. The Ukraine produced much food, but we did not get any. The shortages were political. We do not know why. Perhaps to cripple the population. Many died.

I finished high school in my town and then went to Odessa because we did not have universities at home. I wanted to go to medical school but I was not accepted because I was Jewish. I then wanted to go to the university to study foreign languages but was not admitted for the same reason. I had gotten very high marks in the exams. Then I went to college to study refrigeration engineering. There was much anti-Semitism, both in my student days and when I worked. It continued until we left in 1993 for America.

I am happy that we left Russia and came to the United States. But I must admit that I miss some parts of life in my former country. My brother still lives Moscow. He is retired and lives reasonably well on his pension. He worked for many years in Norilsk, a prison town in the far North. There were many important minerals mined in the area, aluminum, copper, and many others. The town was very secret and travel there was prohibited. He was a miner at first, and then a supervisory assistant. He had reasonably good experiences in Norilsk and was well paid. People who worked in that area could retire early because conditions were so difficult. He retired when he was fifty-five and his wife was fifty. The climate was very severe. They say that ten months of the year it is winter and the rest of the year is summer, for half of the year it is dark all day and half of the year it is light all night.

What most stays in my mind of the events of this whole period was the bombing during our evacuation to Urals and the time that a bomb exploded so close to me. The explosion blew soil into my mouth and I almost was killed. I can still to this day remember the taste of the soil in my mouth. The second event I cannot forget was the hunger in 1947.

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#### 4. Izya Shaposhnik

I was born in 1932, in Hoshtevato, in the Ukraine. This town was about ten miles from the town where my wife Anna was born. It had a population of approximately 2,500, of whom maybe 2,000 were Jewish. It was a shtetl right out of Sholom Aleichem. My father was a tailor and my mother was a housewife. I have an older brother who now lives in Pawtucket. I sponsored them.

Before the war we had a good house in the shtetl near a theater. My father liked to act as a hobby. His favorite role was Herschel in Sholem Aleichem. I remember after the performance everybody went to our house for a party. In his youth my father had acted as a cantor. He did not have formal training but picked it up on his own. He had a good voice and knew all of the melodies. This was before the war and it was a reasonably happy time. We didn't have many problems. I remember the first day of the war. It was a nice, bright summer day. At twelve o'clock we heard about the war on the radio. My father did not go into the army because he had heart disease all his life. When the war started he and a friend bought a horse and wagon and both families left the shtetl together. I remember that before we left, my father's sister came to him and asked him to take her family also. But the wagon was so small he could not take them. She then asked if he would take her son. My father did so. He is now in Israel. My father left behind two sisters, their families, his mother and father, and two brothers. One brother went into the army. All of the rest of the families remained in the shtetl, and all were killed there in 1942 by the Germans.

We traveled with the horse and wagon for two months. We came to a railroad station in a town in the Ukraine called Artiz. During the two-month trip to Artiz by horse and wagon we subsisted by slowly selling the clothing we took along and using the money to buy food. We grazed the horse in the fields at night. In Artiz the Nazis bombed our wagon and everyone jumped off except me. I was asleep and didn't wake up. After, I opened my eyes and I didn't know what happened. I only saw where the bombs had landed. In Artiz we sold the horses to a worker in the railroad station and he gave us places in a railroad coal car. We all became black from the coal dust. We went in the coal car to Budenovsk in the Northern Caucasus, near present-day Chechnya. We went there because it was the end of the line. The military took us from the car and told us to go out.

We lived in this town for maybe a year. My father got a job as a tailor. He was given an old house for us to live in. When the war came close to town, we were forced to leave. It was the second evacuation in my young life. When we went to the railroad station, we were told that the last group would leave in one half hour. This was another chance to escape the Nazis and thank God, we were able to save our lives. We went far away from this town to central Asia, to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. We lived there for two and one half years. In July 1944 we returned to the shtetl. We were horrified at what we found. We saw only maybe ten percent of the buildings left, ninety percent destroyed. Our house and the theater were gone. We met a neighbor who survived and he told us nine hundred people were murdered. He said that in March, 1942, the Germans took the Jews into the theater and then took the adults to a place about a mile from the shtetl and killed them. But with the children they didn't want to use their bullets so they took them by the feet and smashed them against the walls to kill them. When we came back to the town, we could see the red walls where this took place. This neighbor now lives in Boston.

In another incident there was a very pretty Jewish girl in the shtetl. She had a Ukranian boy friend. When the Nazis came to the Ukraine, he became a collaborator. When the process of killing Jews was taking place, the Nazis told him to kill this girl. He refused and they told him, we will kill you if you do not. He then killed her. Her name was Sarah Katz. She was so beautiful. She was young, in the tenth grade at the beginning of the war.

After the war we did not have a house to live in so we went to Gaivoron, the same town where Anna, my future wife, lived. We had family there. I lived there until I finished high school. I had very good grades and I really wanted to enroll in the university in Kiev, but was not accepted because I was Jewish. Then I went to Nikolaiv and enrolled in a shipbuilding college. I did not finish because I was drafted into the navy in 1951. I spent three and one half years in the navy and then returned to Nikoliav and graduated from the shipbuilding college. After I finished there I worked in a large shipyard. That was in 1955. In 1956, Anna and I married. I had met Anna in the sixth grade and we graduated from high school together.

I think I had a somewhat better time of it during the war than Anna. My father, mother, brother, and I were together. My father had work and we had food coupons. But I remember the day that bread coupons were no longer needed. It was in 1948. That day I ate bread like there was no tomorrow.

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After the war things were very bad for Jews. We were able to observe Jewish traditions but had to do so underground. We had to bake our Pesach matzos in secret. When Stalin died in 1952, it was Purim. Quite a coincidence. Stalin had, before he died, prepared concentration camps in Siberia for the Jews. But because he died, the deportations were canceled and the Jews were saved.

When I think of what were the worst times in my life, I think of being shown the wall where the children were murdered and the hard times after the death of Stalin. There was terrible anti-Semitism in the navy. During and after the war we did not mind the shortages and hunger so much because we were so used to going without anyway. We didn't have great needs. If we had one pair of shoes it was OK. In fact, sometimes we had one pair for two people.

We came to America in 1993.



## The First Russian Jews in Rhode Island

by Stephanie Miller

*What happened to Russian-Jewish immigrants and their values after their arrival in Rhode Island? Complementing Merrill Percelay's interviews with immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Stephanie Miller has studied the experiences of Russian immigrants not only in the "old country" but also in the new one. In the next issue she will discuss recent arrivals in Providence; here she comments on Jewish immigrants coming to Rhode Island a century ago. This essay is taken from Ms. Miller's senior honors thesis, accepted by the Department of Slavic Studies at Brown University this year to satisfy her graduation requirement for the B.A. The interviews cited were drawn from the RIJHA archives or from articles in the Notes by Eleanor Horvitz, and were held mostly with elderly individuals recalling their childhood in the Jewish immigrant neighborhoods of Providence after they or their parents came there from the Russian Empire around 1900. Ms. Miller is currently engaged in the Amitim Program, an American-Israeli volunteer project working with Jewish communities in the former Soviet Union to teach Jewish traditions and the Hebrew language.*

The first wave of Russian Jewish immigration to the United States occurred between 1880 and 1920. Two million Russian and East European Jews immigrated to the United States during this time, approximately one third of the Jewish population in western Russia, Tsarist-ruled Poland, and the Baltic provinces.<sup>1</sup> While many settled in Manhattan's Lower East Side, Providence, too, saw an influx of these immigrants. By the turn of the twentieth century, both South Providence and the city's North End had well-established Russian-Jewish communities.

Logically it would follow that these immigrants, who fled around 1900, and their Soviet counterparts, who came approximately ninety or a hundred years later would share very few similarities. These two waves of immigration occurred at very different points in Russia's history and the groups differed tremendously with regard to geographic origin, education, and involvement in Russian society. However, the groups share some striking similarities linked to their experiences as Russian Jewish immigrants. Despite tremendous differences in expressions of religious belief and

cultural practices, their reasons for leaving and the assimilation processes resemble each other. Moreover, for both groups immigration both preserved and changed aspects of their Jewishness.

### **A Jewish Life in Russia and Motivations for Leaving**

Almost all the Jews who came to Rhode Island from the Russian Empire had lived in the Pale of Settlement. Within the Pale, Jews tended to be concentrated in particular villages (*shtetls*) or towns, and formed a distinct community apart from the Russian and Ukrainian nationals living in the area. Shtetl life defined the Russian Jews' expressions of their Jewishness and included "powerful spiritual ties, through the common language of Yiddish and the sacred language of Hebrew, and through a sense of shared history, [that] had firmly molded Jewish values and behavior."<sup>2</sup> Despite Jewish migration from shtetls to towns and cities in the late 1800s, shtetl culture persisted and Jews continued to live separately. Jewish communities had their own schools and leadership, both religious and secular. Harry Krasnow, who came to Providence with his family in 1905, recalls his childhood education in Russia:

I remember the town of Yelizavetgrad where I was born. Each city had its own дума (parliament). There was a Jewish school for which we had to pay. I went to different schools for about 7 years. I was taught Russian, arithmetic, etc. I later went to a government school supported by Jews. You were expected to pay unless you were very poor, and Jewish organizations aided the school.... Most of those from the Russian neighborhood did not go to school. They disliked the Jews and tried to persecute us, throwing stones at us. One Jewish boy I remember was beaten up. We had to go around several blocks to get away. When I graduated my father wanted me to go to college although only a very small percentage of Jews ever went to college. Jews could become doctors. To become a lawyer we would have to change our religion. Jews were permitted only in Southern Russia unless they were an important businessman or merchant.<sup>3</sup>

Krasnow's account reveals a great deal about his family's Jewishness in Russia. His vivid description about schooling recalls an important Jewish value: education. In the Pale of Settlement, there had long been a history of Talmudic scholarship among Jews, and religious education was respected as a path to God. This value later came to be applied to secular education as well: "study ... was also a form of cultural differentiation: scholarship set

Jews apart from surrounding peoples and enabled them to maintain a high opinion of themselves, despite their tribulations.”<sup>4</sup> Krasnow’s claim that few Russians went to school supports this. He places the Jewish commitment to education above that of the surrounding society. Moreover, Krasnow’s father’s desire that he go to college and the Jewish organization’s financial support for the school reveals the importance of education to the broader Jewish community. Later, this Jewish valuation on learning existed among Soviet Jews as well. Both groups applied this value to their new lives in the United States.

In addition to stressing education as a component of his pre-immigration Jewishness, Krasnow discusses experiences with anti-Semitism. He details government restrictions and the wanton acts of individuals. For Krasnow, a distinct feature of being Jewish in the Russian Empire meant education and vocational restrictions in addition to encounters with physical violence. Similar experiences with anti-Semitism are echoed in the testimonies of Soviet Jews. For both groups, anti-Semitism proved a motivating factor behind their departures. For Krasnow’s generation, anti-Semitism reached its peak during the pogroms around the turn of the last century.

Often cited as a motivational factor behind the first wave of Russian Jewish immigration, the psychological fear inspired by the pogroms provoked Jews to leave. This fear, intertwined with previous encounters with anti-Semitism, became a component in the Jewishness of Russian Empire Jews. A member of the Krasnow family recalls a pogrom in Yelizavetgrad:

I remember so well what I was doing the day the pogrom started. I had gone to the hospital with a sore foot but was told the doctor was not in because of the trouble. I had gone with my sister Fannie. On the way home my father met us and said that the massacre had started and we should run home. The doctor I was supposed to see was killed in it. We climbed into the attic that connected our store to the house where we hid. The hoodlums broke into Ruth’s (Krasnow’s future wife’s) father’s store. One well-dressed man yelled, ‘Kill the Jews. Jews are worth killing.’ They broke everything. The Cossacks finally came and broke up the gang of hoodlums. In our particular section they didn’t kill Jews at the time, only plundered the stores. The younger Jews tried to fight back, especially in big cities like Odessa, and quite a few Jews were lost. They only had clubs to defend themselves whereas the Cossacks and soldiers on horseback had guns to kill them with.<sup>5</sup>

Krasnow's description captures the emotional cost the pogroms had on his family and other Jews. He details the fear inspired in him and his sister in addition to the outrage of "younger Jews" who tried to fight back. These two emotions affected Jewishness following the pogroms. Being Jewish became associated with fear and outrage. In fact, this effect on Jewishness was universal, regardless of personal contact with pogroms. The Krasnows' encounter is actually atypical, as most of the immigrants in Providence did not have a direct experience with pogroms. However, the pogroms' atrocities resonated with the broader Jewish community. Irving Mittleman, for example, recalls learning, during his childhood in Providence, of a pogrom in the Russian area of Poland. He explains, "When we heard about this, a group of my friends and I beat up the Polish boys in the neighborhood."<sup>6</sup>

While the Soviet Jews did not leave because of pogroms, they did share another reason for their departure with the Russian Empire Jews. Compulsory military service played a major role in the lives of Russian Jewish males around 1900 and was another reason in the decision to emigrate. Despite Alexander II's relaxation of conscription efforts instituted by Nicholas I, many Jewish males were still required to serve in the army. Membership in the army provided a serious challenge to one's Jewishness because it necessitated living without the cultural and religious comforts common in the Pale of Settlement. New recruits were subject to Russification efforts, denied the freedom to practice the Jewish religion, and afforded little, if any, contact with other Jews. Moreover, fighting in the Russian army was also undesirable because of dangerous conditions at this time. From 1904-1905 Russia was engaged in heavy combat against Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 marked the commencement of desperate fighting against Germany and Austria. For many, migration seemed the best way to avoid army service. Irving Mittleman recalls how the members of his family came to the United States to escape the Russian army:

My two uncles had served in the Russian Army and came to America at the start of the Second Russo-Japanese War. Both had escaped from the Army. In fact they had an uncle here who also ran away from the Russo-Japanese ... and chopped off a finger so he wouldn't have to serve. There was another Mittleman family here that very few people know, named Winograd. The Winograds were Mittlemans. What happened was that a Mittleman was drafted to go in the army, so he ran away and changed his name to Winograd so they wouldn't catch him.<sup>7</sup>

This fear of military service and the solution of migration are duplicated in Soviet immigrants. Given recent altercations in Afghanistan and Chechnya, Soviet immigrants have expressed a similar concern about their sons' possible service in the Russian Army.

While the Soviet Jews share many facets of life in their native country with the Russian Empire Jews (namely a value on education, encounters with anti-Semitism, and the fear of military service), the groups differ considerably in community and religious life. Russian Empire Jews lived in a close-knit Jewish community with religion and culture at its center. Both shtetls and Jewish-inhabited urban areas supported synagogues, *mikvahs* (Jewish ritual baths), *shokets* (ritual slaughterers) and schools for Talmudic and secular studies.<sup>8</sup> Virtually all Jewish inhabitants of the Pale practiced Orthodox Judaism, adhering to such customs as not working on the Sabbath, eating kosher foods, and praying daily. Lou Rubenstein's description of his father's rabbinical pursuits indicates the deep religious component of this group's Jewishness. He states, "My father was a rabbi ordained at age sixteen in Polish Lithuania. At that time it belonged to Russia. At age seventeen he along with Rabbi Rhinus of Leda started the first modern Yeshiva with specific courses.... He later became the chief Rabbi of Ostrow [in the Polish area of the Russian Empire]."<sup>9</sup> Religion and Jewish culture were key aspects of the Russian Empire Jews' Jewish identity. Both these components would be subject to some modifications in the United States.

#### **The Two Jewish Neighborhoods: South Providence and the North End, circa 1900**

The Russian Jewish immigrants settled in two areas of Providence: South Providence and the city's North End. These regions were populated by a mixture of many immigrant groups, such as Irish and Italian Catholics, but both had Jewish sections. The Jewish areas were home not only to Russian Jews, but also to families from Austria, Galicia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, there were German Jewish families in the area. However, this group had migrated some fifty years earlier and was better established, more assimilated, and practiced Reform Judaism.

Despite the proximity to Irish and Italian Catholics, and also to German Jewish immigrants, there were areas of South Providence and the North End that were distinctly East European Jewish. These areas became centers for Jewish culture and religious expression. While the immigrants' expression of their Jewishness would change somewhat from its former modes in the

Russian Empire, there were many traditions that remained the same following immigration. This establishment of a distinct Jewish community parallels Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement. Most Russian Jews, for example, lived in close proximity to one another in Providence and were surrounded by Jewish service organizations.

The Jewish immigrant neighborhood of South Providence was centered around Willard Avenue, not far from Rhode Island Hospital. The majority of Jewish-owned shops and businesses were located on this street. Other streets that formed this Jewish neighborhood were Robinson Street, Taylor Street, Gay Street, Prairie Avenue, Hilton Street, Staniford Street, Plain Street and Blackstone Street. For example, of the 172 occupants on Robinson Street in 1909, 102 had Jewish surnames.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the North End Jewish community was focused on Chalkstone Avenue and Shawmut Street. Jewish businesses, markets, and synagogues could be found in these areas. Chalkstone Avenue and Shawmut Street comprised the shopping center for the North End. One immigrant describes the distinct Jewish expression of this community:

Starting on a Thursday or before a Jewish holiday—pushcarts, people buying chickens right off the wagons and taking them to the *shoket*. There was Kessler's bakery shop and the people would knead their own challah and Kessler would allow the Jewish women to come with their challah and bake it so they would have it for Shabbos. People would sell all sorts of things, and even fish, out of pushcarts. On a Thursday all day until night the pushcarts would be lined up, one behind the other. The women would shop. They would buy their vegetables that way.<sup>12</sup>

This description typifies the communities of both the North End and South Providence and recalls Russian Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement. The reference to Jewish shops and a *shoket* suggests aspects of life in the Old World. Similar to the Russian Jewish immigrants who settled in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, the Jews in Providence struggled to recreate the Jewish communal existence and culture that was present in their lives in Russia.<sup>13</sup>

While the Russian Empire immigrants established individual Jewish communities reminiscent of life in their native country, the Soviet Jewish immigrants did not. Most Soviet Jews did not arrive with a tradition of Jewish community and were largely disconnected from Jewish religious and

cultural practices. In fact, for many Soviet Jews, involvement in a Jewish community was a change in their Jewishness that occurred following immigration. This involvement was encouraged and supported by the pre-existing Jewish community. Ironically, many of those who welcomed and introduced Soviet Jews to Jewish life in Rhode Island were descendents of the Russian Empire Jews.

### **Occupations and Habits Carried Over from Life in Russia**

The establishment of a Russian Jewish community was supplemented by many immigrants who brought with them Jewish professional and cultural knowledge. While life in Providence differed greatly from that in Russia, many of the immigrants sought to continue in a similar vocation, particularly if the profession was vital to the maintenance of a traditional Jewish community. Irving Mittleman explains that his father and two uncles worked as kosher butchers in Providence, stating that "... their father had a slaughterhouse in Russia."<sup>14</sup> Louis Rubenstein's father, Rabbi Israel S. Rubenstein, who was ordained as a rabbi in Russia, became known as the "Chief Rabbi of Rhode Island." He practiced in many synagogues in both South Providence and the North End and served as a spiritual guide to other Jewish congregations throughout the state.<sup>15</sup>

It was not only the men who brought Jewish skills and wisdom learned in Russia with them to Rhode Island. While Jewish women had been denied participation in public religious and civic life, they worked to maintain the family's economic position and private religious rituals in the Pale of Settlement.<sup>16</sup> Russian Jewish women, therefore, came over with a methodology of running a Jewish home and caring for children and a husband. This expression of Jewishness persisted following immigration. For example, Beatrice Goldstein recalls how her mother used to shop for meat:

If she got a bad piece of meat, she used to call him (the butcher) on the telephone. Oh, we used to have so much fun with her. She'd say "You're sending me *higa fleish*" [local meat]. You know there were farms in South County and she said the meat you'd get from there was impossible to chew and she said, "You know that we can't eat meat like that. You've got to get us meat from New York or Boston." See, she knew meats and she taught me. She was brought up on a cattle ranch in Russia. There were either seven or eight brothers in her father's family and they all had. ... they were never bothered by the pogroms or anything like that. And so she knew meats ...<sup>17</sup>

Goldstein, Mittleman, and Rubenstein all recount that their parents brought specific Jewish knowledge with them from Russia and applied it to Jewish life in the United States. Moreover, these comments, when taken collectively, indicate that the gender divide expressed in Jewish life in Russia persisted in some forms in the United States. Goldstein's mother took care of the preservation of Judaism in the home (the purchasing of kosher meats), whereas Rubenstein's father, as a rabbi, was a community spiritual leader.

This expression of cultural Jewishness, learned in Russia, is unduplicated in Soviet immigrants. The lack of a well-established Jewish community limited Soviet Jews' knowledge about Jewish customs and traditions.

### **Language and Educational Opportunities**

Location in an all-Jewish community, while leading to a preservation of Jewish expression, slowed the assimilation process for many immigrants. Surrounded by other Jewish immigrants, there was a preservation of Yiddish as the language of interaction and communication among the Russian Jewish population. All the Russian Jewish immigrants spoke a dialect of Yiddish, which varied slightly depending on the shtetls and cities from which they came.<sup>18</sup> This language could also be used for interaction with other East European and German Jews, who also spoke various dialects of Yiddish. In the homes of Russian immigrants Yiddish was generally spoken, although children schooled in Rhode Island and parents who worked outside of the Jewish community also learned to speak English. The large selection of Yiddish language newspapers available for purchase in Rhode Island indicates the popularity of this language. Most members of the Russian Jewish community read these papers regularly. Irving Mittleman recalls the Yiddish newspaper in his home: "My family read *Der Tag*. My father did not like the *Tageblatt* or the *Forward*. The *Forward* he considered a Socialist paper. He and his family enjoyed the Friday-Saturday issue as it would interpret the portion of the Torah for that week as well as contain stories. No English paper came into my house."<sup>19</sup> Because of the large population of Yiddish speakers and possibility of living within the confines of a Jewish community, many older immigrants, in particular, did not learn English. This lack of English knowledge impeded assimilation as it precluded contacts with Americans. However, the use of Yiddish meant a preservation of Jewish expression both culturally and linguistically.

For younger individuals, on the other hand, there was a drive to learn

English, which facilitated assimilation. Most attended either night classes or public school. Fannie Krasnow Horvitz came from Russia to South Providence when she was in her late teens. She recalls her work experience and her study of English as an adolescent:

I used to work 10 hours a day in Silverman Brothers [jewelers] for three dollars. You started at seven o'clock. I got up early in the morning. I wasn't used to it. In Russia I had just gone to school. My father didn't like it. There it was a shame to work. But my uncle said, "You know who don't work? The sick ones." So I didn't mind. I worked. I went to the library right away. They had Russian books, like Tolstoy. I took the books and could read, but didn't understand half of them, but knew the stories from having read them in Russian. So it [learning English] didn't take me long.<sup>20</sup>

Horvitz's comments reveal her assimilation, both in her language knowledge and work position. Horvitz's position in the jewelry factory represents a break from the traditional Jewish expression of gender roles in the Pale of Settlement. While women in the Pale often played a key role in the economics of the household, at-home tasks such as artisan work and assistance in family businesses were considered more appropriate for Jewish women than factory labor.<sup>21</sup> Horvitz, and many young individuals like her, sacrificed traditional Jewish gender vocational roles and language for assimilation.

Despite the older immigrants' inability to speak English, most still imparted to their children the Jewish value of education. Young children attended public school, and their involvement there quickened the assimilation process. Those living in the North End went from State Street School or Chalkstone Avenue School to Candace Street School to Hope High School.<sup>22</sup> South Providence had several primary schools (K-2) including Willard Avenue School and Chester Avenue School. From there the students went to Point Street or Peace Street School and on to English or Classical High School.<sup>23</sup> Some students went on to college, the ultimate expression of assimilation. Immigrants' children attended Brown University, Pembroke College, and the Rhode Island School of Design.

Jews venerated not only secular learning but religious learning as well. Many children also received a religious education in the form of Hebrew School. The first Talmud Torah (Hebrew School) was opened in the North End in 1892. It "... was virtually a community school where the Hebrew

language and Jewish studies were taught to all who wished to attend. ... It was a six-day-a-week school and for the particularly receptive pupils the teachers provided special instruction on Saturdays as well."<sup>24</sup> Assimilation and lack of Jewish education among the young was therefore not quite as prominent as secular school attendance might suggest. Most of the immigrants' children were raised with both knowledge of the Yiddish language and religious education.

The Russian Empire Jews differed sharply from Soviet immigrants with respect to education and assimilation tendencies. While both shared the Jewish value for education, Soviet Jews were more dedicated to learning English and less committed to religious education. Moreover, the Soviet Jews' areas of residence were spread out; separation from other immigrants facilitated their assimilation. In addition, while the Russian Empire Jews had several daily Yiddish language newspapers, the Soviet Jews have only one monthly Russian publication. So assimilation proceeded at a faster pace for Soviet Jews, partially because of their lack of deep-rooted pre-immigration Jewish community and culture.

### **Practicing Judaism**

The Russian Jews' dedication to religious life persisted following immigration. Shortly after Jewish immigrants first settled in the area they began building synagogues. Many Russian Jews had membership in two or three temples. While virtually all were of the Orthodox denomination, the temples were segregated based upon their members' European origins; there existed in Providence synagogues for Romanians, Russians, Lithuanians, and others.<sup>25</sup>

Both the North End and South Providence had many synagogues, several of which had a significant Russian Jewish membership. For example, in the North End, the Congregation Sons of Jacob had a strong Russian connection, and some recall the synagogue as being named the Russische Shul. Built in 1896, the temple was founded by immigrants from Russia, Poland, and Austria who wanted a strong religious center in Providence's North End.<sup>26</sup> Bill Torgan explains the quantity of synagogues that existed and the importance of the Sons of Jacob:

We belonged to the Sons of Jacob on Douglas Avenue. There were three synagogues and a number of small ones. But the two largest ones were the Sons of Zion which was on Orms Street called the Lititsche Shul and the Sons of Jacob called the Russische Shul.

On Chalkstone Avenue was the little Russian shul. It seems as though in those days and even today when a few Jews get together everyone wants to be president ....<sup>27</sup>

The Russian *Shul* referred to here by Torgan was separate from the Russische *Shul* (Sons of Jacob). It was smaller, but had a distinctly Russian congregation. Beatrice Goldstein (whose mother was raised on the cattle ranch in Russia) remembers the synagogue from her childhood:

Have you seen the Touro Synagogue in Newport? Well this was made exactly like that. It has the bema in the center, and then in the upstairs there was a beautiful railing for the women's side. It was really a beautiful little synagogue. And of course my uncle was ... the chairman ... the president of the *shul* for life. And then his son Louis succeeded him and he was president until they tore the *shul* down.<sup>28</sup>

As evidenced by both Goldstein and Torgan's comments about synagogues in the North End, it is clear that at least some Russian Jews continued their practice of Orthodox Judaism. However, this does not mean that immigration to America did not present some challenges to the immigrants' expression of their faith.

While most Russian Jews continued to keep kosher homes and attend synagogue, certain religious practices fell by the wayside. For example, while both the North End and South Providence had *mikvahs*, Eleanor Horvitz notes in her essay on Rhode Island Jews in the North End that "among those interviewed no one recalled anyone in his family having attended it [the mikvah] as a ritual on Fridays."<sup>29</sup> Additionally, there appears to be a relaxation in Sabbath observance as many recall going out on Friday evenings to movie night or dancing at Rhodes on the Pawtuxet. A member of the Krasnow family even explains, "Jew night was Friday night at Rhodes."<sup>30</sup> Therefore there appears to have been some assimilation and modification of Jewish religious practices following immigration.

Despite this lessening of religious adherence, the Soviet Jews still differ tremendously from the Russian Empire Jews. Most Soviet Jews had very little contact with religious Judaism prior to departure and only learned about Jewish religion and ritual following immigration. Therefore, for some Soviet Jews the assimilation process actually afforded an increase in religious and cultural practices, whereas for Russian Empire Jews it did the reverse.

### Philanthropic Organizations

The Russian Jewish immigrants, in addition to education, brought with them another Jewish value: *tzedakah*, or philanthropic acts. Those who had already been living in Providence for some time established organizations to help out others in need, either in Rhode Island or in Russia. Robert Hochberg, whose family came from Southern Russia, explains this phenomenon: "It so happened that the people who came from a certain location in Russia, they gravitated around as landsmen. And most of them came from the same place ... well the Litvacs all settled on Orms Street ... and the Ansche Kovno group came from Lithuania."<sup>31</sup> These small organizations would loan money to those who were struggling in Providence, or to relatives or friends trying to amass capital to leave Russia and settle in the United States. Bill Torgan explains that they were "... organizations trying to help out their clans. The largest was known as the Yelizavetgrad Organization."<sup>32</sup> Providence had a large number of Russian immigrants from Yelizavetgrad, Russia, including the Krasnow family. These landsmen formed their own philanthropic organization to help out those who came from their area of Russia.

In addition to organizations that were landsmen-specific, there were other institutions that served the entire Jewish communities of South Providence and the North End, regardless of European ancestry. The most notable was Gemilath Chesed Association ("Deeds of Loving Kindness"), also known as the Hebrew Free Loan Association. A chapter was established in South Providence in 1906 and in the North End in 1903.<sup>33</sup> The group lent out money interest-free to immigrants for various purposes. Some used the money to purchase business supplies, whereas others used it to pay for college tuition. Joseph Jagolinzer, whose family emigrated from Russia to South America to Providence recalls his father's experience with Gemilath Chesed:

Here poor people could go to borrow, pay no interest, and paying back as little as one dollar per week. Was that a busy place! Just like a bank. My father would go to Bazar's Hall, where they were located, to borrow fifty dollars every time, say if he needed equipment in the blacksmith shop, or if he needed money for something that would come up. The hard part was finding someone who would guarantee the loan, but eventually he would find someone who had enough faith in him to be a guarantor.<sup>34</sup>

The Hebrew Free Loan Society played a pivotal role in the lives of many immigrants. It allowed for possibilities such as business expansion and educational opportunities.

The Russian Empire Jews' establishment of philanthropic organizations to help other Jews indicates the preservation of their pre-immigration Jewish value on charity. Many Soviet Jews would later be the recipients of aid from these organizations. For example, several Soviet immigrants have borrowed money from the Hebrew Free Loan Society to pay for higher education. Soviet Jews, too, share this respect for charity, as many have tried to give something back to the philanthropic organizations that helped them in the immigration process. However, whether this was a Soviet Jewish value is quite dubious as Jewish philanthropic organizations did not exist in the Soviet Union.

### **A Longing for Russia / A Hatred for Russia**

Although most Russian Jewish immigrants came over with the hopes of building a new life in Rhode Island, others dreamed of earning money and going back to Russia to live. Irving Mittleman explains that his father shunned assimilation and hoped to return to Russia:

See my father wanted to go back, you know. Oh yes, my father didn't want to stay here. It wasn't religious enough for him. He wanted to go back, he had dreams to go back. But then when he picked up the paper (1914), it said that war was declared. He knew at that moment, he was never going back. So he knew that was it.<sup>35</sup>

While Mittleman's father was dissatisfied with the religious climate of Rhode Island, Rose Krasnow's sister disliked Providence for different reasons: "Ettie, the oldest was for Russia all her life. No matter what it was she complained about it. 'Ah, the bread. Ah, the ice cream.'"<sup>36</sup> Life in Providence was far from perfect, and many could not or did not want to make the adjustment to life in this country. However, with the outbreak of World War I and the Russian Revolution soon after, hopes of a return to Russia were quickly dispelled.

Others desired to break all ties with Russia, and spoke only ill of their former homeland. Natalie Percelay recalls the bitterness in her friend's family towards Russia:

As for my family, I never recall them saying that they had difficulties in Russia. And I used to wonder ... I was very friendly with a girl by the name of Bea, for example. They hated Russia and

the Czar. And when I questioned my father, they didn't have [the same feelings]. ... One set came from Vilna and one came from Kovno.<sup>37</sup>

There were, therefore, mixed feelings in the immigrant community towards Russia: both viewpoints were extreme. But the majority of those who settled here were content with their new life. Understandably, there were aspects of life in Russia that were missed in Providence, yet opportunities for success appeared more plausible in the United States.

These Russian Jewish immigrants, then, brought with them Jewish culture, values, and religion to the United States. While some cultural and religious practices were dropped as many strove to assimilate, others remained. Many of the Russian Empire Jews' descendents would continue to follow in their religious and cultural paths, although with some modifications. Similarly, the persistence of Jewish cultural values and philanthropic organizations has eased the assimilation of Soviet Jews. While the two groups do not totally share a religious and cultural identity, their common values and ethnicity have accelerated the interaction between the Russian Empire Jews' descendents and the Soviet Jews in this country.



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## **A Population in Transition: The Role of Demographic Data**

*by Stanley M. Aronson, MD, and Betty E. Aronson, MD*

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Jews have lived in the Rhode Island community since 1678 when a small group of Sephardic origin settled in Newport. In 1838 a native of the Netherlands, Solomon Pareira, established a home and a clothing store in Providence. And by 1855 there were sufficient numbers of resident Jews, mainly from western Europe, to form a synagogue in Providence. While small numbers of German Jews had settled in the greater Providence region early in the nineteenth century, however, the significant expansion of the Jewish population within the state occurred only after 1880, when large numbers of Jews from Russia, Poland and Rumania emigrated to the state. That generation of Jews, born between 1870 and 1930, represents the largest number of immigrants to undertake the hazardous transatlantic passage to an unknown polity called Rhode Island. They, too, were pioneers, and the socioeconomic health and the achievements of the present Rhode Island community are derived, in some measure, from the toil of these men and women.

Sadly, most people of that generation, who formed the first meaningful Jewish presence in Rhode Island, have died, leaving few to tell their story. Census information covering that generation is generally not indexed to religion; nor is there a central government repository for reliable information describing the lives of Jews generations back. From what sources, then, can data concerning this and other generations be retrieved? Beyond the retelling of family stories told around the dinner table, how do we preserve the collective happenings of the Jewish past? A newspaper obituary gives us only a reasonable framework of one person's life. The death notice tells us,

for example, that a certain shopkeeper was born in eastern Europe, obtained American citizenship, managed a small children's clothing store, was married, had three children, lived to age eighty-three and died in a local nursing home.

A more compelling biography might have added a further dimension. We might have learned, additionally, that this Russian-born storekeeper had never graduated from high school but had nonetheless owned his own clothing store supporting three employees, had become president of his synagogue, had served honorably in World War II, had contributed materially to an orphanage in Israel, and had provided all of his children with a comprehensive college education (so comprehensive, in fact, that they all sought occupations in anything but children's garments). For those who knew him intimately, his was a life richly filled with challenge, opportunity, and accomplishment, as well as a share of tragedy. He left behind an honorable legacy.

This is how we can reconstruct an individual life. The best source, of course, remains the personal interview. How often each of us has said: "I wish that my father were still alive so that I might ask him about life in the old country, or his perilous voyage to America, or what merchandising was like before his store became firmly established." In addition to interviews, there are treatises on Jewish life, personal biographies of prominent coreligionists, and countless stories treasured by each Jewish family.

But anecdotes, no matter how burnished, are not history; nor are Jews particularly famous for keeping diaries. For a community to preserve its identity, therefore, it becomes necessary to explore alternate sources of records which may illuminate their past. Each personal story would tell us much, but no matter how richly detailed, we would still be left with only one individual's history. Only if we had interviewed every person in the Jewish community, an impractical undertaking, could we have possibly assembled a collective history of what the preceding generation had experienced. Obviously, collective information is required to supplement personal data.

Yet when the demographic framework of a person's life is merged with the details of thousands of other lives, a fear arises that these lives will be deprived of their individuality and will have been reduced to bloodless percentages and impersonal numbers. Statistics, it could be argued, tend to define the lives of people but with their identities erased and their tears of struggle wiped away. And it is certainly true that statistics can be deceptive,

at times even dehumanizing. But if dry, numerical information can yield even a small insight into the lives of those who preceded us, the effort should be made even when the amount of extracted information remains incomplete. Collective biography-gathering retains value for the Jewish community, if for no other reason than to see what those in the prior generation endured, where they had been located, and how they made their living.

The painstaking and comprehensive social and demographic studies of the Rhode Island Jewish community undertaken by Professors Sidney Goldstein, Calvin Goldscheider, and their social scientist colleagues stands as our major source of Jewish community information [see references]. Besides research published by these professors, there is a source of objective information capable of yielding a modest amount of additional information, namely, death certificates. Death certificates are public documents, as are birth and marriage certificates. But to retrieve a significant number of Jewish death certificates would represent an immense task were it not for the fact that virtually all Jewish families of this region have used either one of two funeral homes in Providence; and these two establishments have kindly shared some of their collective records with the authors. Based on those records, this study provides some demographic information on those Jews who were born between 1870 and 1930, especially those born between 1880 and 1920—the Rhode Island Jewish generation in transition from Eastern Europe to Rhode Island.

The information summarized below was derived from 9,319 death certificates of Jews of Rhode Island born between 1870 and 1930 and dying between 1953 and 1988: only those twenty-three years of age or older were included in this survey. These certificates yielded data defining the generation of Jews in transition from the shtetls of Eastern Europe to the middle class communities of Rhode Island. Data include date of birth, date of death, place of birth, place of death, marital status and occupation. If read carefully, there are many success stories incorporated in these scraps of paper. But there are many tragedies, as well. Not all the Jews from the tsarist pale advanced from running a family grocery to the ownership of a chain of supermarkets; or from a pushcart gathering scrap metal to the presidency of a metals reclamation industry.

#### **Life Expectancy**

Table 1 summarizes the ages at death of the 9,319 Jews twenty-three years of age or older, who make up the basis for this review. A few

observations need to be stressed. First, the average age at death of Jewish women invariably exceeded those of Jewish males by an average of 3.7 years. Second, the average age at death has steadily risen in both females and males during the 1953–1988 interval of observation. On average during this thirty-five year interval, women have gained 12.7 years of added life, and males 13.3 years of added life.

There are a number of reasons accounting for this steady rise in life expectancy during this period: the economic status of the Jewish population has significantly improved; housing has become healthier and less crowded; medical care has advanced dramatically, if not in social amenities then certainly in lifesaving interventions; such federal agencies as Medicare and Medicaid beginning in the 1960s have brought better medical care to the aged and infirm; inpatient medical facilities, both acute and rehabilitative, have become better adapted to human needs; assisted living facilities for the elderly have become more common; and the general public is much more medically educated and oriented, more acutely aware of the role of diet, smoking, exercise and life-style in human health and survival.

In addition, marital status, probably as a surrogate for other social forces, plays a substantial role in determining life expectancy. Married individuals in this series of 9,319 Jews, on average, live the longest and those never married have the shortest life expectancy, with the widowed and divorced somewhere between [see table 3]. Place of birth also seems to exert some influence on life expectancy. With those born in the same decade, native-born live longer, on average, than those born overseas, perhaps because the latter had been subjected to the many stresses of immigration [see table 2].

#### **Place of Birth**

Table 2 summarizes the places of birth as indicated on the death certificates. These data, to some degree, are suspect since they were provided by distraught next of kin. Nonetheless, a few cautious conclusions may be offered. First, the Jewish community of Rhode Island is increasingly native-born. For those Rhode Island Jews born prior to 1880, 88.9% were foreign-born, overwhelmingly from Eastern Europe [86.4%] while the remaining 2.5% were from Western Europe. Migration of Jews to America diminished after World War I, reflecting the enactment of more stringent immigration laws. The majority of those born after 1920, accordingly, were native-born [92.0%].

Second, the extent of postnatal migration, even within the United States, diminished appreciably in the early decades of the twentieth century. Thus, only 29.0% of United States-born individuals living in Rhode Island [and born prior to 1880] were born in Rhode Island. This frequency rose progressively and reached 68.8% for those Rhode Island Jews born after 1920.

### **Marital Status**

The marital status of Rhode Island Jews, as noted in these death certificates, is summarized in table 3. These data verify that women, far more than men, live on, as widows. Among those born between 1880 and 1900, 15.1% of men were widowed at the time of their death while 88.8% of women in this category were without a spouse when they died. Thus, while women live longer, the majority of them must then endure the burdens of widowhood.

The rate of those who never married rose, reaching 13.3% in males born in 1920 or later, and 18.2% in females born in 1920 or later. Those listed as divorced never exceeded 4.9%. These data indicate that divorce, particularly in native-born Rhode Island Jews, was more common than in their foreign-born coreligionists.

### **Occupations [male]**

Table 4 lists occupations of male Rhode Island Jews. It must be interpreted with some caution since this question concerning occupation was left unanswered in about 1% of male death certificates, and was answered ambiguously in another 3% of certificates. For example, an answer might be "salesman", without specifying what was being sold or whether this salesman was the owner or merely an employee; or the answer might be "merchant" without indicating the nature of the merchandise.

To convey the dynamic nature of the Rhode Island Jews in their efforts to obtain a living, the data were divided into those born prior to 1900 and those born on or after 1900. And while the numbers represent a faithful rendition of the death certificate statements, the table still offers little more than a pallid portrayal of the aspirations, sweat, failures, successes and genius of this generation of Rhode Island Jews. Consider, for example, the category called "Other." Under this bland rubric were included such individuals as fourteen males listed as "cattle dealers," virtually all of whom were born in Russia; or a handful of blacksmiths and horse traders. Where

did they learn their trade? And were they successful in their business?

The category labeled "Food" hides the astonishing upward mobility, over the years, in the scope of occupational activities of those Jews working in this field. In those born prior to 1900, most were said to be employees or owners of modest stores selling groceries, meat, poultry, fish and produce. In those born after 1900 the numbers listed as grocery clerk or butcher or baker diminished while those identified as owners of markets [or supermarkets], or in the wholesale food business, increased dramatically.

The sale of liquor was necessarily included in the category of food. It is surprising, though, the extent to which Jews owned liquor or wine stores. About 2% of adult male Jews were so employed, usually as store owners. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, that seventeenth-century Jews were specifically recruited by the Polish hierarchy to manage village liquor stores since it was believed that they tended not to consume their own products. Was there any familial continuity between those seventeenth-century Polish Jews managing liquor stores and those currently managing similar establishments in Providence?

The clothing industry had been the source of livelihood for about one out of every six adult male Jews. In the older cohort, those born before 1880, the great majority were listed as tailors, salesmen of finished garments, or textile factory workers. Those in the clothing industry who were born later [and perhaps were the sons of these earlier tailors and salespeople] tended to own their own shops; and, in those born beyond 1900, about 17% owned textile plants, garment factories or held senior managerial positions in such facilities. About 11% of those in the apparel industry identified themselves as involved in the sale or repair of shoes. Here, too, an upward mobility is readily apparent. The earliest ones were called cobblers or shoe-repairmen; later came proprietors of shoe stores; and occasionally even owners of shoe factories.

There are a few unresolved questions regarding those Jews in the metals business [table 4]. First, why did large numbers of Jews [born before 1900, particularly those emigrating from the Baltic states of Lithuania and Latvia] become sheet metal workers, and in later years, owners of sheet metal concerns? Why from the Baltic region? And why so many Jews in sheet metal work but not in similar metal working crafts? And second, what was the background of those Jews initially self-employed as collectors of junk metal? In subsequent years, the identity of their occupation changes to scrap

metal dealers with a defined address rather than an itinerant pushcart. And then, still later, the name changes to metal reclamation and its owner is listed as president or treasurer. Some, arriving in Rhode Island without financial resources, must have appreciated the merit of recycling the metal refuse of others, and perhaps after a generation or so of expanding it into a major industry.

The category called "Government" embraces all forms of employment under municipal, state or federal jurisdiction and includes such positions as tax clerk, postal worker, policeman and member of the armed services. In this category were uniformed police, detectives [city and private] but no firemen or garbage collectors.

The principal professions identified in this Jewish population included medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, law, engineering, teaching, and the rabbinate. And it was the professions, requiring extended, disciplined education as well as fulfillment of stringent licensure requirements, that showed the greatest growth in numbers, accounting for 16.1% of all male Rhode Island Jews born after 1900.

The category called "Other" embraced many occupations containing too few adherents to justify a separate grouping. These included such activities as blacksmithing, auctioneering, music playing, acting, and labor union leadership. It also included over a dozen males whose occupation was listed as "janitor" or "sexton."

Does marital status in some manner determine a Jewish man's occupation? Or, conversely, does the occupation determine whether or not a Jewish male chooses to marry? There were indeed mild differences in occupational status between the "married" and "never married" males in this study. The rates of chronic unemployment, unskilled labor jobs and membership in the armed services were consistently higher among the "never married" group. And the rate of chronic institutionalization was significantly higher among the "never married," presumably because such people were involuntary inmates of state institutions and may have been there since childhood.

The category of "Other" included those who died while long-term residents of state institutions. Only one of these Jews died while an inmate of a prison. But there were many [about 1.6% of all male Jews and about 1.5% of all female Jews] who died in state-run institutions established for the care of the mentally retarded or the mentally ill.

The question arises: was chronic institutionalization more common among the foreign-born Jews because they were, on average, poorer, had undergone the stresses of migration, and needed to learn a new language and a new way of life? But contrary to this intuitive impression, the data indicate that the rate of long-term institutionalization is slightly *higher* among native-born Rhode Island Jews. This might be explained by the rigorous screening for mental disease adopted by immigration officers at such entrance sites as Ellis Island. The exclusion of immigrant offspring showing obvious mental retardation, cerebral palsy, or Down's syndrome might account for the differences.

#### **Occupations [female]**

In contrast to the males in this study, only about 14% of the adult women were listed as gainfully employed. Undoubtedly, large numbers of those women listed as "at home" in the occupation question box regarded the family store as their home and probably exerted a significant role in the daily management of the family grocery, haberdashery, or general store. Corroboration of this is seen in many of the death certificates of widowed women, which listed their occupation as "proprietor" or "owner."

Of those women listed as employed beyond the home, 17.9% were in sales [typically in women's garments], 13.5% were office clerks or stenographers, 8.5% factory workers [typically in the jewelry or textile industries], 12.7% in the professions [as school teachers, social workers, pharmacists, nurses and laboratory scientists], and about 10% of the employed women were listed as bookkeepers. A curious distinction arises here: men were identified as accountants or auditors while women were identified as bookkeepers. Only personal knowledge of their respective range of duties would determine whether this distinction was justified.

#### **Place of Death**

Table 5 provides information concerning sites of death [whether at home, in a hospital, in a nursing home]. Dying males generally had living spouses to render immediate care; and accordingly, more males died in their homes than did widowed women. The increased rate of deaths in the home, for both men and women, may reflect the expanding influence of the hospice care movement in the Rhode Island region.

### **Conclusion**

The data summarized here provide a small window into the lives and struggles of Rhode Island Jews born between 1870 and 1930. These data offer some dimension and texture in a population which had undergone a major transition as they evolved from an impoverished, immigrant Jewish enclave, often occupying the lower socioeconomic strata of Rhode Island, to a firmly established community rich in material and intellectual resources. Supplementing individual life stories and other more personal sources of information, demographic data illuminate that collective transition in a comprehensive and factual manner.



**Table 1**  
**Average Age at Death**

YEARS	Women		Men	
	No.	Average age at death	No.	Average age at death
1953-54	172	66.9 yrs	242	63.6 yrs
1955-56	183	68.7	236	64.2
1957-58	224	68.2	258	66.3
1959-60	197	70.3	245	7.7
1961-62	210	69.0	276	67.0
1963-64	266	69.6	258	66.7
1965-66	248	71.7	287	67.4
1967-68	250	71.2	282	68.2
1969-70	241	73.1	324	68.8
1971-72	225	70.6	306	70.2
1973-74	242	74.4	289	0.8
1975-76	226	74.8	292	2.4
1977-78	234	74.9	286	72.1
1979-80	251	76.1	276	71.3
1981-82	263	76.3	262	73.8
1983-84	298	79.8	281	75.1
1985-86	309	79.4	303	75.0
1987-88	288	79.6	289	76.9
Totals	4,327		4,992	

**Table 2**  
**Places of Birth [in percent]**

Place	Year of Birth				All
	before 1880	1881-1900	1901-1920	1921+	
Rhode Island	3.2%	13.6%	41.9%	63.2%	21.5%
Mass.	1.1	4.5	13.8	10.3	6.7
Conn.	1.1	1.3	1.3	0	1.2
New York	3.2	5.8	8.9	9.3	6.3
Other States	2.5	2.5	5.7	9.2	3.6
United States	11.1	27.7	71.6	92.0	39.3
Russia	60.4	48.9	15.9	2.3	40.2
Poland	4.6	5.9	3.4	1.1	4.9
Austr-Hung.	10.7	7.9	3.2	1.1	6.8
Rumania	5.4	3.0	1.3	0	2.8
Baltic states	5.4	3.8	1.3	0	3.2
Germany	2.5	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.5
Europe, other	0	0.9	1.5	0	0.9
Other	0	0.3	0.6	2.3	0.4
Foreign	88.9	82.3	28.4	8.0	60.7
Of U.S.-born, % R.I.-born	29.0	49.2	58.5	68.8	54.6

**Table 3**  
**Marital Status**

Year of birth	Married	Widowed	Single	Divorced
Prior to 1880				
Males	41.1%	51.4%	5.6%	1.9%
Females	10.48	8.8	0.8	0
1881-1900				
Males	71.2	15.1	10.8	2.9
Females	33.7	57.1	4.7	4.5
1901 +				
Males	79.8	2.2	13.3	4.7
Females	55.9	21.0	18.2	4.9

**Table 4**  
**Occupations of Males**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>born before 1900</b>	<b>born in 1900 or later</b>
Food	14.8%	9.7%
Clothing	21.9	15.1
Jewelry	8.0	5.1
Home furnishings	4.6	6.1
Sales, other	2.9	2.0
Merchandise, other	7.2	6.4
Metals	6.8	2.3
Manufacturing, other	5.4	8.4
Labor, skilled	7.4	6.9
Labor, unskilled	2.9	2.0
Insurance	2.2	1.5
Banking, credit, securities	0.4	2.3
Real estate	3.6	2.0
Accounting	0.4	2.3
Advertising	0	1.3
Government	1.6	2.0
Professions	5.1	16.1
Other	4.8	8.5

**Table 5**  
**Places of Death\***

<b>Dying In</b>	<b>Year of Birth</b>			
	<b>1881 - 1900</b>		<b>1901 - 1920</b>	
	<b>men</b>	<b>women</b>	<b>men</b>	<b>women</b>
Hospital	64.6%	55.1%	69.2%	66.1%
Nursing home	16.1	30.6	8.4	16.3
Home	19.3	14.3	22.4	17.6

\*A very small number died in places such as the city streets or in public buildings.

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## The Rebirth of the Jewish Community in Newport, 1850-1854

by Benjamin Brown

*The Notes has been home to a cottage industry producing articles, through the years, on the Jews of Newport. Ben Brown, who recently received his M.A. in Jewish-American history at Brandeis University, focuses here on a significant period of five years in that perpetually intriguing story. His essay won a RIJHA award this year.*

After being closed for over fifty years, the Touro Synagogue of Newport, Rhode Island inaugurated a new era when it reopened in the summer of 1850. Isaac Leiser noted in his nationally circulated Jewish periodical *The Occident* that "the synagogue, ... all the Israelites having moved from there, was reopened during the month of August, [and] about thirty Jews from various [parts of the country] met there during the bathing season."<sup>1</sup> To Leiser's readers, which consisted in part of second, third, or fourth generation Jews whose immediate ancestors had resided in Newport and belonged to the Touro Synagogue, the reopening rekindled nostalgic sentiments. Newport and the Touro Synagogue held a special place in American Jewish memory due to the notable events that occurred there which intertwined American and Jewish history. Among the most prestigious events was President George Washington's town meeting in the Touro Synagogue as well as his famous letter concerning religious liberty in America. In addition to commemorating the historical significance of the Touro Synagogue, the reopening of 1850 had a contemporary significance. Newport was beginning to experience an age of unprecedented wealth, prosperity and fame as one of America's premier summer resorts and bathing centers, and the reopening of the Touro Synagogue was part of that growth.<sup>2</sup>

Four years after the reopening, town officials honored the special relationship between Jews and Newport by planning and organizing with the leaders of the American Jewish community an elaborate funeral for one of Newport's exceptional sons and one of America's most philanthropic Jews, Judah Touro. Significantly, during this funeral, the City of Newport graciously housed all visiting Jews. Both the reopening of the Touro Synagogue

in 1850 and the funeral of Judah Touro in 1854 indicate that Jews were an accepted part of the society which vacationed in Newport during the summer months.

### **Newport—A Brief Overview**

The American Jewish community traces its roots to a few distinguished colonial port cities. Pre-Revolutionary Newport had been a strong, vibrant British colony heavily involved in shipping and trading, particularly with the British West Indies. However, with the onset of the American Revolution and the British blockade of Newport, shippers and traders were unable to trade with their traditional markets, and as a result Newport declined commercially. During the war, the residents of Newport were politically divided over the Revolution. Before the British invasion of Newport, many Patriots fled Newport. Most of the remaining Tories, including Judah Touro's father, Isaac Touro, departed Newport shortly after the invasion because trade plummeted as the former colonies were barred from trading with the British empire. With the departure of Newport's Jewish community, the Touro Synagogue ceased to hold religious services and eventually closed as the community "faded out of existence."<sup>3</sup>

Newport did not resume its pre-war prominence in American commerce until the 1830s, when its economy began to recover. Southern plantation owners such as George Noble Jones of Savannah, and Hugh Ball, Henry Middleton, and Ralph Izard of Charleston, escaping the malarial tidewaters, built "cottages" in Newport and vacationed there each summer.<sup>4</sup> This influx of Southern summer vacationers helped revitalize the Newport economy. Soon well-to-do families from Philadelphia, New York, Boston and Baltimore (as well as those individuals who worked during the summer months) followed the example of the Southerners and summered in Newport, enjoying the agreeable weather, fresh sea air, social activities and luxury that Newport offered.<sup>5</sup> This growing development transformed Newport from a seacoast town struggling to survive the economic devastation of the American Revolution into a summer resort where some of the wealthiest people in the world flocked, reaching its zenith during the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>6</sup>

The Jewish community of pre-Revolutionary Newport had been economically wealthy and enjoyed the highest degree of social acceptance. The Jews of Newport erected one of the first synagogues in North America, Yesuat Israel, now known as the Touro Synagogue, and the centrality of the

Touro Synagogue to the Jewish community living in Newport was apparent to the first President of the new republic, George Washington. Among the most notable events associated with the Touro Synagogue is the presidential address delivered by George Washington during a town meeting held in the Touro Synagogue during his visit to Newport in 1781. Additionally, in 1790, President Washington was the recipient of a congratulatory address by the warden of the Touro synagogue, Moses Seixas. In his reply, the President sent a famous letter "To the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, R. I." which contains what has since become the classical expression of religious liberty in America: "... For happily the Government of the United States \_ gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance ...."<sup>7</sup>

After the Revolution the Newport Jewish community declined, reflecting the general decline in Newport, and eventually the Jewish community came to an end. Historians have commonly accepted 1822 as the last year of permanent Jewish settlement in Newport, when as the journal of Stephen Gould states, "the last Jew left Newport for New York."<sup>8</sup> Fourteen years later, the Baptist preacher Reverend Arthur Ross lamented the status of the Touro Synagogue, "which was once thronged with [Jewish] worshippers, [but] is now never used, except occasionally for the solemnities of the funeral service of some of their descendants."<sup>9</sup> Ross observed both the absence of the Jewish community in Newport and the centrality of the Touro Synagogue for visiting Jews. In 1852, the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized this Jewish community's end when he visited the Jewish cemetery in Newport and wrote:

Closed are the portals of their Synagogue,  
No Psalms of David now the silence break,  
No Rabbi reads the ancient Decalogue  
In the grand dialect the Prophets spake.

. . . . .

Gone are the living, but the dead remain ....<sup>10</sup>

Although Longfellow's words were moving and expressive, they were not historically accurate.<sup>11</sup> While no permanent Jewish community existed in Newport at the time, Jews did vacation in Newport along with other summer vacationers, and by the summer of 1850, Jewish visitors to Newport were numerous enough and sufficiently organized to reopen the Touro Synagogue with a celebrated revival marked by religious services and lectures.

### The Revival of 1850

As the *Newport Mercury* reported on August 10, 1850, "Our public houses are all crowded with visitors from every part of the country, and Newport never presented a more lively appearance than at present."<sup>12</sup> During the height of the 1850 summer bathing season, from the middle of July to the first of September, approximately thirty Jews arrived in Newport, not only to enjoy the bathing season, but also for the purpose of reopening the Touro Synagogue. Since no permanent Jewish community existed in Newport, Jews who desired to attend the reopening were required to travel some distance from their permanent places of residence.

Most of the thirty Jews who traveled to Newport to reopen the Touro Synagogue were members of well-known New York families that had deep roots in Newport. For example, Israel Kursheedt, from New York, attended the 1850 reopening. Along with Israel Kursheedt were other family members: Asher, Alexander, Manuel, Alexander E., and I. B. Kursheedt.<sup>13</sup> For Theodore I. Seixas of New York, the reopening was particularly sentimental, since many of his ancestors, including Moses Seixas and Isaac M. Seixas, had been members of the Touro Synagogue and were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Newport.<sup>14</sup> Other vacationing Jews included three from Charleston, South Carolina, and one each from New Orleans, Louisiana; Savannah, Georgia; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Germany.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in August of 1850, a few families from New York were joined by other Jewish vacationers for the first religious services held in the Touro Synagogue in over fifty years.<sup>16</sup>

The religious services began on Friday, August 2 and Saturday, August 3, 1850, which was duly noted in the Touro Synagogue Guest Log:

This Sacred Edifice was reopened for Divine Service and Sabbath the 20th day of Ab 5610, corresponding with the 2nd [and] 3rd days of August 1850 after a suspension of about Sixty years by a few of the children of Israel temporarily sojourning in this city, and this continues during the season while the requisite number remains to form a Congregation.<sup>17</sup>

The services on the first Sabbath were conducted by Reverend Doctor Morris Jacob Raphall, Theodore I. Seixas, Samuel Cohen, Ashur Kursheedt, and Gustavus I. Isaacs, all of New York. Rev. Dr. Raphall, Rabbi of the Elm Street Synagogue of New York City, preached at the Touro Synagogue "in

his usual impressive and accepted manner.”<sup>18</sup> As had always been the custom in the Touro Synagogue, the services were conducted in “accordance with the ritual of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews.”<sup>19</sup> Services on the succeeding Sabbaths were led by “Reverend Eleazar Lyons of Boston, Ashur Kursheedt, as Parnas (President), and Joshua Isaacs, as Secretary.”<sup>20</sup> Significantly Gustavus I. Isaacs, Eleazar Lyons, and Joshua Isaacs also had family histories associated with the pre-Revolutionary Newport Jewish community. That the leaders of the contemporary American Jewish community found themselves leading services in their ancestors’ synagogue added much to the occasion.<sup>21</sup> The services provided the vacationing Jews with a venue to meet, mingle, and strengthen communal ties. However, Saturday night involved an activity that included both Jews and non-Jews: the lectures by Dr. Raphall on the “Poetry of the Hebrews.”<sup>22</sup> Sundown, as reported in the *Newport Mercury*, was at 7:06 PM, allowing the Jews enough time to observe their service, end Shabbat, and open the doors of the Touro Synagogue to the public for the lectures delivered by Dr. Raphall.<sup>23</sup>

The lectures, delivered by Dr. Raphall in the Touro Synagogue, discussed the “Poetry of the Hebrews” and were intended for public enjoyment by both Christians and Jews. Dr. Raphall had delivered these lectures to many communities after his arrival in America, and according to Rebecca Gratz, these lectures were considered an intellectual event and had a “stimulating effect” for Jews and Christians alike.<sup>24</sup> The lectures lasted from the beginning through the end of August, and were held Wednesday and Saturday nights.<sup>25</sup> As the *Newport Mercury* reported on July 27, 1850, “the celebrated Dr. Raphall Rabbi Preacher of the Elm Street synagogue, New York intends shortly to deliver in this place, his much admired lectures on Sacred Poetry.”<sup>26</sup>

This newspaper report was directed towards the greater Christian community in Newport. The writer designated Dr. Raphall as “Rabbi Preacher,” indicating to the readers of the *Newport Mercury* that he was — in Christian terms — a religious leader of the Jewish faith. Moreover, this notice was written *before* the lectures and the paper made it very clear that the subject upon which Dr. Raphall was to lecture would be of interest to Christians. Another journal, the nationally circulated *Christian Spectator*, observed that such subjects as the history of the synagogue, which might be thought of as a religious or intellectual concern only to Jews, was actually

a subject that would “not fail to interest every enlightened Christian.”<sup>27</sup> Dr. Raphall’s lectures on the “Poetry of the Hebrews” shared that general interest. Copies of the lecture syllabus, available the night of each lecture at the Touro Synagogue door, detail the subject of each particular lecture as well as the date and time.<sup>28</sup> Each lecture was a complete presentation and therefore continuous attendance was not required.<sup>29</sup> The lecture topics, which included topics on the Book of Job, Moses at the Red Sea, the Psalms of David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the meaning of the word “Prophet,” were precisely those topics considered to be exciting biblical history by Protestants.<sup>30</sup> Certainly these lectures were designed to address the Protestant population in Newport at the time. As a result, it is very likely that many individuals in the audience were Christians.

Yet, even though the subject of the lectures was of interest to many Christians, Dr. Raphall was competing with many other entertaining activities for the summer visitor’s attention, and not just religious activities.<sup>31</sup> Further, while the lectures would interest many Christians and Jews alike, it is difficult to ascertain whether these lectures were attended by Jews, non-Jews, or in fact were widely attended at all! Although the Touro Synagogue encouraged visitors to register in the Guest Log, no record exists of those who attended the lectures.<sup>32</sup>

On August 3, 1850, after the first service and lecture, the *Newport Mercury* very favorably reviewed Dr. Raphall and sought to encourage attendance at these lectures by Jews and gentiles alike. According to the newspaper, “The distinguished Hebrew Divine, Dr. Raphall, commences his series of lectures on the poetry of the Hebrews .... These lectures have been listened to in the chief cities of the Union by ministers and professors of all sects and persuasions, with universal interest.”<sup>33</sup> The *Newport Mercury* continued, “As a lecturer, Dr. Raphall is admitted to have but few equals .... Dr. Raphall is a treat that should not be allowed to pass by without being freely partaken of by our citizens.”<sup>34</sup> Obviously the city paper was impressed with the events at the Touro Synagogue and was willing to showcase these events to the entire summer population in Newport. The expression “universal interest” and the laudatory remark that the lecture “is a treat that should not be allowed to pass by without being freely partaken of by our citizens” strongly suggests that Dr. Raphall’s audience was not limited to Jews.

In addition to the published account of the lectures in the *Newport Mercury*, another mention of the lectures appears in the very same paper, this time located in the advertisement section:

Biblical Poetry—A course of six lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, as contained in the Old Testament, will be delivered at the synagogue, Touro Street, in Newport by the Rev. Morris J. Raphall, M.A., Ph. Doctor, late of Birmingham, England, Rabbi Preacher at the Synagogue, Elm Street, New York, on the evenings of Wednesday, 7th, 14th, 21st, and Saturdays, 10th 17th, and 24th of August. Tickets for the Course, \$2 each, to be had at the bookstores and the principal hotels; tickets for a single lecture 50 cents each, which, together with syllabi to be had at the door of the synagogue, on the evenings of the Lectures; and also of Dr. Raphall, at 37 William Street.<sup>35</sup>

This advertisement has many interesting details. First, the use of “Hebrews” and the decidedly Christian terminology “Old Testament” distinctly denotes that the audience to whom the advertisement is directed was predominantly Christian. “Hebrews” was a term that Jews used to describe themselves to the world outside the Jewish community, because “Hebrews” did not have the negative connotation as often associated with the word “Jew.” The use of the Christian designation “Old Testament,” distinct from the decidedly Jewish word *Tanach*, also denotes that the intended audience for this advertisement possessed Bibles containing both an *Old* and *New* Testament. These lectures were not free to the public, and that the tickets were *sold* at local bookstores as well as at the principal hotels indicates that enough anticipated demand for the lectures allowed for the distribution of tickets from non-Jewish locations.<sup>36</sup> Finally, since this lecture notice was located in the advertisement section of the *Newport Mercury*, it is highly likely that either the Touro Synagogue or Dr. Raphall sponsored the advertisement. It is even possible that Dr. Raphall himself wrote this advertisement because it lists his residence in Newport during the summer months, presumably for the purpose of selling more tickets to cover his expenses.<sup>37</sup> The revival of 1850, then, was a celebrated occasion that brought together thirty Jews from New York and elsewhere for the purpose of reopening the Touro Synagogue during a time of increasing wealth and prosperity in Newport. The religious services at the Touro Synagogue were intended for the vacationing Jews while the program as a whole was intended to include both the local non-Jewish community and the vacation-

ing Jewish community. Four years later, many of these Jews gathered again in Newport, along with Jews from all over the country, this time for a less joyous occasion, the funeral of Judah Touro, who was laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery in June of 1854.

### The Funeral of Judah Touro

"The venerable Judah Touro departed this life on the evening of Wednesday, the 18th to 19th of January (18th to 19th of Tebeth), in the 80th year of his age," noted the *Occident* in March 1854.<sup>38</sup> Judah Touro was clearly one of the greatest philanthropists in Jewish-American history. Before his death, he gave large sums of money to many communities and philanthropic organizations across the United States, both Jewish and non-Jewish, including Newport, where he had been born, and New Orleans, where he had been a longtime resident. His philanthropy was especially apparent in his will, from which Newport greatly benefited.<sup>39</sup> In recognition of Judah Touro's philanthropy to Jewish organizations and synagogues in the United States, his friend Isaac Leiser printed a request in the *Occident* that urged congregations and organizations to show their recognition and respect by sending delegations to Newport for the funeral.<sup>40</sup> In subsequent issues of the *Occident*, congregations and organizations published resolution after resolution pledging to send delegations to Newport to attend the funeral.<sup>41</sup> As a result, in June of 1854, between one hundred and one hundred and fifty delegates went to Newport for the funeral of Judah Touro.<sup>42</sup>

Judah Touro's roots went back to the faded community of pre-Revolutionary Newport. His father had been the *Hazzan* of the Touro Synagogue and a leader of the old community, and Judah Touro grew up in Newport. His brother Abraham had also grown up in Newport and had donated funds for the maintenance and upkeep of the synagogue and Jewish cemetery.<sup>43</sup> Long before Judah died, he endowed the Redwood library. In his will, part of Newport's heritage, the "Old Stone Mill" was provided for by a large sum of money as a gift to the City of Newport, that it may be preserved and enjoyed as a park.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, family and friends were buried in the Jewish cemetery, including Judah Touro's sister, Rebecca Lopez, and his brother Abraham. Judah had been raised by his maternal uncle Moses Michael Hays and his family in Boston, and the Hays family was also buried in the Jewish cemetery in Newport. Judah Touro's first cousin Catherine Hays, whom he had intended to marry, was also buried in the Jewish cemetery. Ironically, Catherine died unmarried about two weeks before

Judah Touro's own death.<sup>45</sup> His will indicates his desire to be buried in the Jewish cemetery with his family; after his death in January, Touro's body remained in New Orleans until arrangements could be made to transport his remains to Newport.<sup>46</sup>

On May 26, 1854,

The body of Mr. Touro was conveyed from New Orleans, on board the steam-packet Empire City ... and arrived at New York on Sunday morning, the 4th of June .... The Shamash of the Portuguese Congregation of New York, Mr. David Phillips, was detailed to attend the remains, and to have them conveyed on board the steamboat Bay State, on which the various delegations then at New York assembled, in the afternoon of Monday the 5th, to proceed to Newport.<sup>47</sup>

In recognition of Judah Touro's important ties to Newport's days of greatness, and in recognition of the more recent donations to the Redwood Library and "Old Stone Mill" park, the City of Newport organized and planned a major civic occasion during his funeral. As the delegates arrived in Newport harbor, Mayor William C. Cozzens sent them an official invitation in the form of a City Council resolution, delivered by the City Marshal as the steamship docked on the wharf:

Resolved, That the executors of Judah Touro, and such of the members of the Jewish faith as may accompany his remains to the city, be and are hereby invited to become the guests of the city during their stay here .... In compliance with the request in the last resolution it affords me pleasure to invite you, and those of your brethren who may accompany you on this melancholy occasion, to become the guest of the city during your sojourn here .... The City Marshal ... will conduct you to the Touro House [Hotel], where accommodations have been provided for you.<sup>48</sup>

In accordance with the City Council resolution, the Jewish delegates were conducted to the Touro House hotel as official guests of the city.<sup>49</sup> After breakfast at the Touro House, the delegates were called to order and requested to report themselves and were found to be from New York, Charleston, Savannah, Buffalo, New Haven, New Orleans, and Philadelphia.<sup>50</sup> Jacob I. Moses was appointed Chairman, and Asher Kursheedt Secretary of an *ad hoc* committee representing the Jewish delegations.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the Executors, together with the *ad hoc* committee, called upon the Mayor, the Aldermen, and the Councilmen of

Newport.<sup>51</sup> The Rev. Dr. Raphall, on behalf of the Jews, addressed the gathering. “[S]ince it is our sad duty to attend to the grave the remains of Judah Touro, it is no small source of consolation to us that this duty has to be performed here, for the friendly feelings that subsist between the Jews and the city of Newport.” Rev. Dr. Raphall continued,

During the more than a century and a quarter that Jews resided in this city, the connection between them and your fathers was one of peace and good will .... The good feeling between you and us is thus to both a precious inheritance .... Mr. Mayor, we beg to acknowledge the receipt of your communication, to thank you for the excellent measures you and the council have adopted.<sup>52</sup>

The Mayor responded in kind. “Our city and State, the home and birthplace of religious toleration, have opened wide their doors to Jew or Gentile,” he said, adding that “the ceremonies of this deeply interesting occasion will long be remembered by our citizens.”<sup>53</sup>

At half-past three, the funeral ceremony began. The Jewish delegates gathered at the Touro Synagogue to find an “immense crowd outside the building, and the interior filled to its fullest capacity.”<sup>54</sup> “The lady’s gallery was densely crowded,” and “there were thousands in the street who could not gain admission.”<sup>55</sup> As soon as the synagogue was filled and the city government officials had arrived, the doors were closed. Thousands had to remain outside until the ceremonies were concluded.<sup>56</sup> The funeral service was attended by the most notable Jewish clergymen in America, including Rev. Dr. Raphall, Rev. S. M. Isaacs, Rev. Ansel Leo, Rev. J. J. Lyons of New York; Rev. J. K. Gutheim of New Orleans; Rev. Joseph Sachs of Boston; and Rev. Isaac Leeser of Philadelphia; nearly all of whom were in their robes to signify the sanctity of the occasion to both Jewish and non-Jewish participants.<sup>57</sup> Judah Touro’s rabbi in New Orleans, the Rev. J. K. Gutheim, administered the religious service, reading several Psalms in Hebrew and the 90th Psalm in English, and then delivered a glowing and eloquent eulogy to Touro’s memory: “[I]n all that is truly honorable, and generous, and noble, he was foremost among the foremost.”<sup>58</sup>

At the conclusion of the religious service in the Touro Synagogue, the funeral procession formed, beginning with the rabbis and other prominent Jews, followed by the City Marshal, Mayor and other city government officials, the Redwood Library president and directors, the Fire Protection Company Number Five, and ending with ordinary citizens and

strangers.<sup>59</sup> Significantly, rather than walking directly from the Synagogue to the Jewish cemetery, a block away, the procession took an extensive planned route through the city. The procession started on Touro Street and marched to Thames Street, down Thames to Pelham, up Pelham to East Touro, and from East Touro to the cemetery, intentionally passing through the main commercial center of Newport.<sup>60</sup> While passing through “the principal streets of the city, the procession found all the places of business closed and all the inhabitants congregated in the streets” for a Newport City Council resolution had been passed which requested that as a sign of respect, all the bells be tolled and the places of business be closed during the march of the procession.<sup>61</sup> After walking through the commercial center, the procession walked by the “Old Stone Mill.” After passing the Old Stone Mill park, Touro’s remains were taken to the Jewish cemetery where Rev. Lyons recited the 91st Psalm while the body was carried to the gravesite.<sup>62</sup>

At the gravesite, the Rev. Isaac Leeser delivered an eloquent address, noting that Touro’s father had been the *Hazzan* of the Touro Synagogue in Newport, and observing that “Eighty years have elapsed since the minister of the Jewish congregation which then flourished in this isle of the sea was greeted by the birth of a son; and, after four scores . . . the wanderings of this son are brought to a close, and he is to be interred here where his kindred sleep.”<sup>63</sup> The coffin was placed in the grave, and the Rev. Isaacs Leeser deposited upon it “a quantity of earth which had been brought from Jerusalem for that purpose.”<sup>64</sup> The grave was then filled up, “each Israelite present throwing in, as customary, three shovels of earth.”<sup>65</sup>

After the funeral, the delegates gathered again at the Touro House to formally thank the City of Newport for its respect and hospitality. Their resolution declared,

*Whereas* the inhabitants and authorities of the city of Newport, have, in so signal a manner, displayed the utmost degree of courtesy in welcoming the delegates of Jewish congregations and societies assembled this day, June 6, 1854, to attend the internment of the remains of their late fellow Israelite, Judah Touro, and to mark the appreciation of said delegates of the sympathy shone of the worth of their brother who has been put to rest in his native place, from which he had been separated for many years, therefore, *Resolved*, that we the delegates return our sincere thanks for the hospitality so characteristically extended to us by said inhabitants and authorities, and that we shall carry back with us to our homes a lively recollect-

tion of the courtesy shown to us.<sup>66</sup>

Dr. Raphall then addressed the meeting and thanked the Mayor on their behalf. Within a day, all the delegates departed Newport and Isaac Leiser reported in the *Occident* that "the experience was more like a dream or a fancy sketch than a sterling reality."<sup>67</sup> The entire population had come to the funeral procession and every possible mark of respect was paid to the honored memory of Judah Touro. "It was the most elaborate and impressive function at Newport since the funeral of Commodore Perry in 1826."<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

While the summer reopening of the Touro Synagogue in 1850 was in celebration of an unforgettable era, "calculated to revive in the mind the great and important events which had taken place," the funeral of Judah Touro in 1854 laid to rest the last remaining member of the Touro family, which once had lived in Newport and had played a leading role in that community.<sup>69</sup> The funeral was a day of mourning, not just for the American Jewish community and its representatives visiting Newport, but for the entire City of Newport, Jews and gentiles alike. The legacy of the Newport Jewish community and the acceptance and respect afforded to all citizens was evident during the reopening of 1850 and the funeral of 1854. Additionally, the reopening and the funeral sparked a renewed interest in the Touro Synagogue and in the years after the reopening of 1850 and the funeral of 1854, the Touro Synagogue Guest Log is filled with approximately 250 pages of visitors' signatures and notes, indicating that Jewish visitors were increasingly interested in visiting and learning the historical significance of the Newport Jewish community and the Touro Synagogue. Years later, the money from Judah Touro's will was used to facilitate the rebirth of the Newport Jewish community, and by 1883, a large enough Jewish population had returned to Newport to make it possible to reopen the Touro Synagogue on a full-time basis.<sup>70</sup> As one Jewish visitor later wrote after visiting the Touro Synagogue, "The occasion of our visit to Newport recalls to our memory the glorious history of our race and prompts us to say that we are proud to be numbered among God's chosen people."<sup>71</sup>



**Appendix 1**

**Touro Synagogue Visitor's Log for Religious Service Attendance,  
August 2-3, 1850**

Revd. Morris J. Raphall	New York
Israel B. Kursheedt	New York
Asher Kursheedt	New York
Alexander Kursheedt	New York
Harris Avameon*	New York
Samuel Choen	New York
George Levi	New York
Theodore I. Seixas	New York
James Raphall	New York
Charles Raphall	New York
Joshua Isaacs	New York
Gustavus I. Isaacs	New York
Manuel Kursheedt	New York
Alexander E. Kursheedt	New York
Abraham Emanuel	New Orleans, Louisiana
Octavius Cohen	Savannah, Georgia
Samuel Hand	Charleston, South Carolina
Swab*	Germany
Jacob I. Moses	Charleston, South Carolina
Besy Hand	New York
Charles Lazarus	New York
B.W. Hand	New York
Jane Warner*	New York
Mif* Cohen	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Caroline Hart	Charleston, South Carolina
Esther Raphall	New York
Bella Raphall	New York
Virginia G.* Isaacs	New York

Source: the Touro Visitor's Log on deposit at the Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island. \* denotes illegible in the Guest Log

## Appendix 2

Syllabus Cover for Dr. Raphall's Public Lectures, August, 1850  
Courtesy AJHS

# SYNAGOGUE, NEWPORT.

## SYLLABUS OF A COURSE OF SIX POPULAR LECTURES ON THE

# Poetry of the Hebrews,

AS CONTAINED IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES.  
BY THE REV. MORRIS J. RAPHALL, M. A. PH. D.,

Rabbi Preacher at the Elm-street Synagogue, New York, late of Birmingham, England.

### LECTURE I.—Wednesday, August 7, 1850.

**INTRODUCTION.** Definition of Poetry; difference between Sacred and Profane Poetry. Origin and poetic individuality of the Hebrew Language. Personification. Sacred Poetry identified with the History and Institutions of the Israelites; its progress to be traced through the Old Testament. *First Period.* Fragments of Antiquarian Poetry.—The Patriarchs. Joseph. The history of Israel. The Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. The Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. The Israelites' journey to the Promised Land.

### LECTURE II.—Saturday, August 10.

*First Period Continued.* The Book of JOB. Under what species of poetic composition ought this book to be placed? Proved to be a Dramatic Poem. Its general design—its plot or action—its dramatic persons. Job; his wife; his three friends. Character of the discourse—its connection and progress.

### LECTURE III.—Wednesday, August 14.

**RETROSPECT OF FIRST LECTURE.** *Second Period.* The national poetry of the Hebrews originated in Moses; his writings the standard models of all subsequent Hebrew poets. Means by which he exercised a great and lasting influence on the minds of the Israelites. Moses' ode on the Red Sea; his last song; his blessing; the 90th Psalm. The Book of Esther. Deborah's ode.

### LECTURE IV.—Saturday, August 17.

*Third Period.* Condition of the Israelites prior to the reign of David. His poetic talents early developed; his virtues of his life; their influence on the character of his poems. The collection of Psalms or Psalms; authors of that collection. Didactic poetry of the Hebrews. State of the nation at Solomon's death.

### LECTURE V.—Wednesday, August 21.

*Fourth Period.* Prophetic poetry, only found in the Sacred Scriptures. Haggai, the non-Israelite prophet; his school. Schools of the Prophets. The meaning of the word Navi, prophet—oracle. The authority of the prophets whence derived; its influence. Prophecy; its general design; characteristics of prophetic poetry.

### LECTURE VI.—Saturday, August 24.

*Fourth Period Continued.* Isaiah; his times; character of his compositions; sublimity. Jeremiah; his times; character of his compositions; pathos. Ezekiel; character of his compositions; force. The minor prophets.—Isaiah in Babylon; its influence on the language and habits of thought of the Israelites. The three last prophets. Close of the Canon of the Old Testament. Concluding remarks.

N. B. The various translations introduced are original.

Days open at 8 o'clock. Lectures commence at half past 8 o'clock, P. M.

(Atkinson, Printer—163, The Corner)

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- Touro Synagogue Visitor's Log (on deposit at the Newport Historical Society).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Occident*, Oct. 1850, Vol. 8, No. 7, p. 365-366.
- <sup>2</sup> "Business of Leisure: the Gilded Age in Newport." *Newport Historical Society*, 1964, Vol. 62, No. 3, p. 97.
- <sup>3</sup> Arthur A. Chiel, "Newport Synagogue, A Rewarding Legacy." *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, (hereafter *RIJHN*), Vol. 9, No. 1, p. 74-75.
- <sup>4</sup> "Business of Leisure: the Gilded Age in Newport." p. 98. Individuals from the South often vacationed in the North to "escape the heat and the diseases associated with [the summer] \_ and Charlestonians who could afford to do so left for summer resorts\_ particularly to Newport, Rhode Island."
- <sup>5</sup> Myra Beth Young Armestad, *Lord, please don't take me in August: African Americans in Newport and Saratoga Springs, 1870-1930* (Urbana, 1999), p. 14.
- <sup>6</sup> "Business of Leisure: the Gilded Age in Newport." p. 97.
- <sup>7</sup> Morris Aaron Gutstein, *The Story of the Jews of Newport* (New York, 1936), p. 212-213.
- <sup>8</sup> *American Jewish Historical Society Publications* (hereafter *AJHSP*), Vol. 27, p. 424. See also Gutstein, p. 191-267.
- <sup>9</sup> David C. Adelman, "Life and Times of Judah Touro." *RIJHN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 287.
- <sup>10</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Complete Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston, 1911), p. 191.
- <sup>11</sup> Geraldine S. Foster, *The Jews in Rhode Island, A Brief History* (Providence, 1985), p. 23-24.
- <sup>12</sup> *Newport Mercury*, August 10, 1850, p. 3, col. 1.
- <sup>13</sup> Touro Synagogue Guest Log, insert 2a. The Touro Synagogue Guest Log is housed in the Newport Historical Society building in Newport, Rhode Island, on loan from the Touro Synagogue. The Touro Synagogue Guest Log begins with two inserts, apparently written after the lectures and inserted into the front of the Guest Log at a later date. See Appendix 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Gutstein p. 299-320.
- <sup>15</sup> Touro Synagogue Guest Log, insert 2a.
- <sup>16</sup> The individual from Germany was likely vacationing in Newport during the time and happened upon the reopening. For a list of all the visitors for the reopening of 1850, see attached notes.
- <sup>17</sup> Guest Log, insert 2a. Of note is that the 20<sup>th</sup> of Av 5610 corresponds to the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1850. The discrepancy in dates is likely due to a mistake by Leeser since the Touro Synagogue reopened on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> of August 1850, which was a Friday and Saturday, and corresponds to the 24<sup>th</sup> of Av 5610.
- <sup>18</sup> *Occident*, Oct. 1850, p. 365-366. It was common for Leeser to receive information of events and then to report that information in his *Occident*.
- <sup>19</sup> Guest Log, insert 2a.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>21</sup> Gutstein p. 77
- <sup>22</sup> See Appendix 2.
- <sup>23</sup> *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 3, 1850, p. 1.
- <sup>24</sup> See Harry Simonhoff, *Jewish Notables in America, 1776-1865* (New York, 1956), p. 328. Simonhoff states that, "In a letter to her brother, the gracious Rebecca Gratz testifies to [the lecture's] stimulating effect upon her relatives and upon Christian

clergymen. [Dr. Raphall's] coming would be greeted as an intellectual event in many communities."

<sup>25</sup> *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 3, 1850, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, July 27, 1850, p. 3, col. 1.

<sup>27</sup> "Jewish synagogue," *The Christian Spectator*, p. 461.

<sup>28</sup> *Newport Mercury*, Aug 3, 1850, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>29</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Vacationers were offered a wide choice of activities. As a result, Dr. Raphall's lectures had to compete with some very fancy events. There was, for example, the P. T. Barnum Circus which boasted six Chinese people, one particular girl "with feet only 2 \_ inches long" (see *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 17, 1850, p. 3, col. 4). Or one could attend the "ten-pin alleys, bathing, ... or participate in the public and very promiscuous promenade up and down the halls of the hotel, to the unheeded music of the best bands in America." (see "Gossip from Newport," *Littell's Living Age*. Vol. 50, 1856, p. 345). Lessons at the Dancing Academy promised an entertaining way for people to socialize (see *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 10, 1850, p. 4, col. 1). Events occurring for the benefit of religious institutions were not uncommon either — "The Ladies of the Zion Church (Episcopal) intend holding a sale of articles, both useful and fancy, at the Ocean House Hall, on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of August" (see *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 3, 1850, p. 3, col. 4).

<sup>32</sup> Guest Log begins with two inserts, apparently written *after* the lectures and inserted into the front of the Guest Log at a later date. As a result, the Guest Log only chronicles the Jews who were visiting for the summer and does not include any non-Jews. However, the Guest Log clearly indicates that the Touro Synagogue did in fact have non-Jewish visitors.

<sup>33</sup> *Newport Mercury*, Aug. 3, 1850, p. 3, col. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Newport Mercury*, Aug 3, 1850, p. 3, col. 4.

<sup>36</sup> The impact of the price of the tickets on attendance is unknown. However, it was not uncommon for religious or charitable organizations to charge an entrance fee for their events to help raise money. See the *Newport Mercury*, August 1850.

<sup>37</sup> Dr. Raphall's temporary residence at 37 William Street was a boarding house for visitors to Newport.

<sup>38</sup> *Occident*, March 1854, Vol. 11, No. 12, p. 40 (590).

<sup>39</sup> Adelman, *RIJHN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 275-283.

<sup>40</sup> *Occident*, March 1854, Vol. 11, No. 12, p. 594.

<sup>41</sup> *Occident*, April 1854, Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 46-50, *Occident* June 1854, Vol. 12, No 3, p. 158-160, including K.K. Congregation of Bnai Jeshurun of New York, Hebrew Education Society of Philadelphia, Gemelath Chesed Society, Congregation Shaaray Tefilla of New York, Shearit Israel of Charleston, S.C., Ohabai Shalom of Boston, MA.

<sup>42</sup> *Newport City Documents*, Addresses of George H Calvert, Mayor of the City of Newport; and Reports of Committees; comprising The Finance, Overseers of the Poor, Firewards and School Reports, for the Year 1853-1854. p. 22. Touro's body was placed in a vault in the Jewish cemetery in New Orleans after his death and was later removed to Newport. Why this delay can only be conjectured. One possible explanation is that the weather did not permit the safe transport of the body to Newport or that the weather did not allow a proper cememorial funeral in Newport.

- <sup>43</sup> Gutstein p. 292.
- <sup>44</sup> In his will, Judah Touro had "bequeathed to the City of Newport, in the State of Rhode Island, the sum of ten thousand dollars, on condition that the sum be expended in the purchase and improvement of the property in said city known as the 'Old Stone Mill,' to be kept as a public park or promenade ground." See Adelman, *RIJHN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 275-283.
- <sup>45</sup> Gutstein p. 299-320.
- <sup>46</sup> Adelman, *RIJHN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 276. Note also that this is uncommon and of questionable halachic permissibility.
- <sup>47</sup> *Occident*, July 1854 Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 209.
- <sup>48</sup> *Newport City Documents*, p. 19. *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 211.
- <sup>49</sup> *Occident*, July 1854 Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 209.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* 211-212.
- <sup>51</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 210. See also *Newport City Documents*. p. 22.
- <sup>52</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 212-213. See also *Newport City Documents*, p. 22-24.
- <sup>53</sup> *Newport City Documents*. p. 19-22.
- <sup>54</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 213.
- <sup>55</sup> *Newport City Documents*. p. 22.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* Also, *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 222.
- <sup>58</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 213. See also *RIJHN*, Vol. 6, p. 245-248. James L. Gutteim, *The Temple Pulpit* (1872), p. 156.
- <sup>59</sup> *Newport Mercury*, June 3, 1854, p. 2, c. 3.
- <sup>60</sup> *Newport Mercury*, "City Council News", June 3, 1854. p 2, c. 3. See *RIJHN*, Vol. 6, p. 232, for a map detailing many of the significant Jewish historical sites of Newport.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* Also, *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 216.
- <sup>62</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 216.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 217. Also, *Occident*, March 1854, Vol. 11, No. 12, p. 589-592.
- <sup>64</sup> *Newport City Documents*, p. 22. Also, *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 222.
- <sup>65</sup> *Occident*, July 1854, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 222.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 223.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>68</sup> *Providence Journal*, June 6, 1854, issue of June 8, 1854.
- <sup>69</sup> Adelman, *RIJHN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, p. 291.
- <sup>70</sup> Touro's will provided for the "Touro Ministerial Fund," was administered directly by the City of Newport, and was intended to pay the salary of a minister, should the congregation ever be re-established. Gutstein p. 262.
- <sup>71</sup> Touro Synagogue Guest Log. Edna Cohen, quote dated Feb. 26, 1906.

## Lawrence Spitz, Champion of the Common Man

by Alene F. Silver

*Dr. Silver, a frequent contributor to this journal, is Professor Emerita of Biology at Rhode Island College and a former Research Associate at Brown University, with over twenty papers to her credit.*

The Depression of the 1930s was a time that is hard to imagine today. The stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing industrial collapse hit blue-collar workers hard in Rhode Island as well as the rest of the country. The great majority had no resources to fall back on. Their faith in the system and confidence in business leaders sank to an all-time low.<sup>1</sup> The mill city of Woonsocket, R.I., was devastated by the Depression. The value of manufactures fell by about 50%. The number of jobs fell by 30%. As late as 1935, less than 50% of wage earners had full time work.<sup>2</sup>

If you wanted a job [in the textile mills] you brought the foreman a bottle of whiskey, or painted his kitchen on Sunday. Or, if you encountered a fair foreman, such as I did, he had a different method. On a Monday morning he would stand on the loading dock and he would have a handful of spindles, the bobbins on which the yarn is wound, and they're hollow, made out of cardboard, hard cardboard. He needed ten people in his department, ten out of fifty or sixty spindles he had in his hand, a piece of paper marked with an X on it, tucked inside. He threw them up in the air, and then you scrambled on the street — on the sidewalk, in the gutter for these spindles. A young, strong, agile, wiry kid like myself would scoop up five or six. In the process I had to knock a few of the old timers out of the way. But everybody was down on their knees scrambling for them. And that's how you got your job; if you found a spindle with an X in it you worked that week. This foreman felt that he was much fairer than the others because he didn't demand tribute. Of course if you were a good-looking girl it was an entirely different type of tribute that was demanded in those damned sweat shops. When I went to work in this mill in Pawtucket, the foreman was a pretty decent guy, and we had long talks — "Don't mention unions here, by God, you'll never get a job again. I won't say anything to the employers, but don't you mention unions. You're a nice bright guy and you need the job," and so on and so forth. Well, I needed

the job, but I didn't need the job as badly as the guys who were married and had kids, and I had more sense of independence.<sup>3</sup>

These are the words of Lawrence Spitz, who became a well-known union organizer in Rhode Island and elsewhere, and a man responsible for much important legislation favorable to ordinary citizens in this state.

In 1932, thousands needed relief across the country. The New Deal government of F.D.R. created the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1933, and by 1935 about one quarter of the unemployed were paid for relief work. But most unemployed workers had no help. In Woonsocket the woolen-worsted industry was better off than cotton and rubber, but owners were understandably cautious. There were wide fluctuations in seasonal jobs and fewer full-time jobs. Part-time work was about 66% higher than in the 1920s. The situation of *underemployment* as contrasted with *unemployment* may have been instrumental in fostering union activity, according to labor historian Gary Gerstle. The part-time worker could see all the connections between the employers' decisions and the job situation. The unemployed, on the other hand, were excluded from all information. The situation was thus ripe for increased union action.<sup>4</sup>

In 1931 the United Textile Workers (U.T.W.) in Lawrence, Massachusetts, had struck against a 10.5% decrease in wages. Although the union did not win, some of the strikers, a group of Woonsocket militants, decided to launch their own union. These workers were from the Jules Desurmont mill. The new union was called the Independent Textile Union (I.T.U.). It included the future guiding spirit of the I.T.U., Joseph Schmetz, who was also responsible for bringing young Lawrence Spitz to the I.T.U. in 1936.

In 1932 the new union, I.T.U., had a great success. Early in the year management cut wages by 17.5% and union workers walked off the job *en masse*. "A stunned management not only rescinded the wage cut but granted workers a 7.5% wage increase."<sup>5</sup> Early in 1933, however, the managers of Jules Desurmont reimposed the 17.5% wage cut. Although workers struck for two months, their union money ran out and the workers returned under conditions set by the management. One of the conditions was to sign a contract not to join or support labor unions for the duration of their employment.

Government action saved the workers and the I.T.U. Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act (N.I.R.A.) guaranteed the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. It also called for the resolution of labor

disputes by the decision of joint labor-management boards. Some of the Woonsocket mill owners subscribed to the N.I.R.A. provisions, but some did not. In general, French textile magnates, who controlled many of the spinning mills, maintained rigid class distinctions between the mainly French-Canadian workers and the management. In addition, the French owners felt no responsibility for obeying U.S. guidelines since they were French citizens.<sup>6</sup> Other mill owners and financial leaders were more conciliatory. They apparently felt that the general economy of the country would benefit from industrial peace and a possible influx of consumer money. These conciliators included some Providence bankers and the Filene brothers of Boston, as well as some of the mill owners. The lack of unity among the mill owners with regard to labor gave the unions a strategic advantage at that time.

In the summer of 1934 the United Textile Workers of America (U.T.W.) called a nationwide strike for September 1st to protest against infractions of the N.R.A. codes by employers. This general strike of 1934 included 400,000 textile workers from Maine to Alabama, *and was the single largest industrial action in the history of American labor.*<sup>7</sup>

The main infraction of the N.R.A. codes concerned the right of workers to organize into unions of their choice, and to bargain collectively. Many employers were firing union members, decreasing wages, increasing hours, and permitting deplorable working conditions. The Woonsocket I.T.U. did not share all the grievances of textile workers elsewhere, since they had already worked out various problems with most local owners who were mainly compliant with the N.R.A. codes. However, the I.T.U. wished to stage a sympathy strike with the U.T.W. This local action might have been peaceful had it not been for the defiant actions of one manufacturer, Woonsocket Rayon. The owners refused to shut down the mill and became the focus of a violent struggle between workers and the police, who were aided by the National Guard. The conflict made national headlines on September 12th and 13th, as thousands of workers attacked the Woonsocket Rayon plant. Eventually the mill was damaged, forcing it to close. The I.T.U. kept all the Woonsocket mills closed for two months, until the national strike ended.

The violence of the Woonsocket strike was blamed on Communists. The Providence police arrested ten alleged Communists on September 12th and 13th. None of them, however, had been in Woonsocket during the riot.

Most of the rioters were probably French Canadian workers who lived in Woonsocket or nearby towns and who had been devastated by the Depression.<sup>8</sup>

Alone among the textile workers in the country, the I.T.U. emerged from the strike of 1934 with a solid organization, enhanced visibility, and an immensely increased membership. As a result of the union's actions the workers gained the eight-hour day and the right to have consultations between management and union about personnel and working conditions. Wages were the highest in New England. The manufacturers complained that the new conditions put them at a competitive disadvantage. Later on, when machinery was invented to do the highly skilled work of the "mule-spinners," the owners were able to move their factories out of New England into the Southern states where workers were less skilled and accepted lower wages. But for the time being the situation for the textile workers in Woonsocket looked considerably brighter.

The guiding spirit of the I.T.U. was Joseph Schmetz, born and raised in Belgium, who hoped to guide Woonsocket workers according to his image of Belgian social democracy. This necessitated the "Americanization" of the largely French Canadian labor force, as well as the radicalization of their views. He started a monthly magazine promoting the idea of merging union actions with politics. Thus the I.T.U. enthusiastically endorsed Roosevelt's bid for a second term. In addition, he filled the magazine with information on American history and culture. He encouraged workers to acquire American citizenship. Topics of French Canadian interest were excluded because he wanted to make the I.T.U. a place for *all* Woonsocket workers, not just the largest group.

He also wanted the union to provide tangible benefits such as employment bureaus, workers loan agencies, and a social service system to alleviate the suffering of the unemployed and the sick. The French Canadian culture was oriented toward Quebec and was very conservative. Schmetz felt that the interests of labor and of the union could best be served by discouraging this orientation.<sup>9</sup>

In order to implement his broad strategy he needed help. He needed someone who was not an immigrant, who had a sophisticated knowledge of American political culture in order to "Americanize" his socialist ideals — someone fluent in English to promote contacts in the world of organized labor, someone who had a thorough knowledge of labor legislation. Schmetz

himself could have done any of these things, but he needed help to accomplish them all.

After considerable consultation and deliberation, Schmetz in 1936 nominated an outsider for the position of General Secretary of the I.T.U. This was Lawrence Spitz, who did not belong to the I.T.U. and had not worked in a Woonsocket mill. Spitz, only twenty-five years old, had been a U.T.W. organizer in Providence. He was not a novice in the labor movement, but had working relations with many I.T.U. leaders during his organizing work for the U.T.W.

Spitz was born in New York in 1912, the grandson of Jewish immigrants from the German-speaking region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He was not religious and had only a vague sense of ethnic identity. The family moved to Providence in 1917, where he attended public school and Commercial High School. "He spoke English without an accent and without pause." He excelled at managing complex union finances, lobbying state legislators, broadcasting Labor Day radio addresses, organizing political campaigns, and interpreting the obscure language of federal and state statutes. He was talented, bright and attractive. Had it not been for the Depression he would certainly have succeeded in some entirely different vocation. But the Depression plunged his family into poverty and propelled Spitz into a life of opposition to the dominant corporate structures that he held responsible for causing so much human misery and personal distress.<sup>10</sup>

The I.T.U. workers were impressed with Spitz's intelligence, dedication and elan. He gave very popular lectures on American history, explanations of the intricate Wagner Act, and a good deal of class-conscious oratory. The workers were mainly Catholic, and there might have been some ambivalent or anti-Semitic feelings against him. If there had been any obvious connection to Communism, he would have been out immediately. The goals of both Schmetz and Spitz were to increase Americanized progressivism, to support the C.I.O. and the New Deal. They hoped the massive labor support of F.D.R. and the Democratic Party would push the New Deal in the direction of social democracy. In their opinion, American society gave verbal support to democratic principles, but at the same time had permitted the existence of industrial autocracy.

Within the local community of Woonsocket there were inherent contradictions that militated against the goals of Schmetz and Spitz. The largely French-Canadian workers were patriotic but also parochial. They were anti-

capitalist but also anti-communist. They were militant but also devout. These contradictions were not prominent at first, but in the next decade they became more evident. Eventually they were decisive in causing Spitz to leave.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1936 and 1941, the I.T.U. achieved many goals. It doubled the size of the union, established new locals, improved shop conditions, and created many entities that increased the well-being of the workers. These included housing projects, medical clinics, life insurance, and credit unions. Every year the union offered a greater variety of educational programs. Spitz taught a course in American labor history, and arranged a lecture series that brought prominent government figures, labor leaders, clergymen, and professors to Woonsocket. The I.T.U. opened its own library in 1938. The next year the union arranged with the W.P.A. (Works Project Administration) for classes in English, citizenship, trade unionism, journalism, drama, and chorus. The last two were extremely popular. Dances and outings were well attended, drawing 5,000 to 6,000 people.<sup>12</sup>

The I.T.U. record showed it to be ahead of other American unions in its gains for labor. For instance, the auto workers were still trying to obtain recognition for their union from General Motors and Ford at this time. Within the I.T.U., however, there was one lasting bone of contention between two factions. This concerned the limits of industrial democracy. Socialist radicals felt that there should be few limits on the power of the unions over the owners. The ethnic workers, mainly French-Canadian, were influenced by their clergy who connected socialism with atheism, and were less anti-capitalistic.

The radicals were intent on examining the excuse given by owners for lowering wages "due to need." In 1938 there was a strike concerned with owners' refusals to open their books after they lowered wages. The U.S. Department of Labor studied the case and reached a compromise on the wage level. But it did not force the books to be opened. The I.T.U. continued to demand open books in 1939, offering to withdraw its demands if costs were too great. The focus of the union attack was the Woonsocket Rayon Mill. The parent company, Manville Jenckes, released information purporting to show losses during the previous five years. The union argued that the mill undervalued its product by selling yarn to Manville Jenckes at an artificially low rate. The union proposed to submit the dispute to impartial auditors. But this was rejected by the company, which had no intention of

fostering governmental supervision; in fact, it intensified its efforts to discredit the I.T.U. and sow discord in the union. Through the Woonsocket Chamber of Commerce, company officials portrayed the I.T.U. as a radical organization bent on destroying Woonsocket industry. Foremen were sent to strikers' homes, urging them to return to work. Then the Board of Directors of the Manville Jenckes Corporation announced the permanent closure of the mill due to "excessive demands of the union," blaming "Communists."

For a year (1939-1940), the conflict grew, complicated by the action of a union official who tried to arrange an unauthorized agreement with the managers. Schmetz and Spitz rebuked him in public and Schmetz was then accused of behaving like "Hitler" by a group of workers. At a stormy meeting, Lawrence Spitz made an impassioned plea for unity, and warned that dissension would weaken and destroy the union. He defended Schmetz and "broke down and wept." His emotional defense of Schmetz moved the delegates to vote to return Schmetz to the Presidency.

Finally in 1941 the National Labor Relations Board, in response to official complaints by the I.T.U., charged Manville Jenckes with numerous violations of the N.L.R. Act. Shortly thereafter the I.T.U. negotiated a contract with Woonsocket Rayon which included a closed shop, vacation with pay, dues check-off, and improvements in wages and working conditions. It was a tremendous victory for the I.T.U. Three thousand more workers joined the union, and Spitz was overjoyed, stating in an editorial that the I.T.U. had successfully defended democracy. However, the union did not win the fight to open the corporate books to the public.

Schmetz had hoped that union members would eventually embrace social transformation, but instead many workers were not averse to class distinctions now that their greater security and higher pay gave hope of ascending the social ladder. The largely ethnic workers saw their traditional culture fusing with an American identity. As their numerical strength grew, they looked forward to increasing power. This was indeed manifested after World War II.

During the war, production increased enormously. The awarding of lucrative contracts by the government compensated the industrialists for governmental regulation. After the war, the New Deal continued, despite threats from Senators Joseph McCarthy and Robert Taft. Union membership had doubled during the war, although in the late 1940s many members

were lost due to the expulsion of Communist-led unions from the labor movement. Nevertheless, by the 1950s labor had "enormous economic and political muscle."<sup>13</sup>

In Woonsocket, the I.T.U. followed this path, increasing its membership during the war, negotiating large increases in wages and benefits that moved workers out of poverty. Lawrence Spitz wrote an impressive essay at this time, "Labor Review, 1931-1942," giving the history of the I.T.U. during the decade. According to Gerstle, it is an unbiased account of past internal conflicts including those he was involved in. He tried to mollify the ethnic workers who threatened the power of the radicals. Spitz wanted to realize a social democratic vision and thought that the war years might provide the opportunity. He also believed that the union should affiliate with the C.I.O.

Opposition grew from the ethnic union, egged on by the clergy. Schmetz was declining in power and died in 1944. Spitz was drafted into the army in 1943, and did not return until his honorable discharge in 1946. During these war years the ethnic group took control of the I.T.U. and refused to put Spitz back in a leadership position in 1946.

Lawrence Spitz then accepted a standing offer of a staff job in the Providence sub-regional headquarters of the United Steel Workers of America (U.S.W.A.). This was a solidly anti-communist union in the C.I.O. During the next twenty years (1946-1966), he became one of Rhode Island's most important C.I.O. leaders. In 1964, the President of the C.I.O. selected Spitz to join him at the Pittsburgh headquarters as director of the union's Wage Division. In both Providence and Pittsburgh Spitz had a more rewarding and successful career than in Woonsocket. In Providence, Lawrence Spitz drafted the first Labor Relations Act in Rhode Island, which guaranteed Rhode Island workers the right to belong to unions of their choice. He helped to pass the Rhode Island Anti-Injunction Act, the Fair Housing Act, and the Cash-Sickness Act.

But Spitz did not limit himself to union action. He was a prime mover in many social and civic organizations — vice president of Impact Rhode Island, chairman of the governor's advisory committee on Area Redevelopment, vice president of the Rhode Island Council of Community Services, member of the board of directors of the Rhode Island Heart Association, and member of the Rhode Island Manpower Development Committee. He was a member of the Governor's Committee on Mental Health and the Rhode Island Youth Employment Committee. He served on various committees of

the Rhode Island AFL/CIO, chairing the committees on Medical Economics, Workers' Compensation, and Taxation. He was also one of the founders of the Repertory Theatre of Rhode Island, and served on its Board of Directors .

As chairman of the Medical Economics Committee of the R.I. AFL/CIO, Spitz played a major role in developing improved health programs in the state. He endeavored to prevent increases in the cost of membership for Blue Cross and of hospital fees. He urged that the public, rather than the hospitals, should have a majority of the trustees on the Board of Blue Cross. His activity in the health field led to his participation in the development of Group Health Plans in Providence, New Haven, and Pittsburgh.<sup>14</sup>

He became so well known as a fighter for the common citizen that when he left Rhode Island in 1965 to take up his post in Pittsburgh, the *Providence Journal Bulletin* published an editorial about him, headed "A Gadfly Who Will Be Missed":

Lawrence Spitz, until recently subdistrict director of the United Steel Workers of America, is not afraid to rock the boat. He is a non-conformist blessed with articulate speech, and the combination made him Rhode Island's most effective iconoclast.

His considerable energies were spent in fighting for the working man in the conference room, the union hall, and at the State House, where he appeared frequently on behalf of legislation favorable to labor. His sharp mind and sharper tongue cost him friends among politicians, not all of whom he held in high esteem; but they respected him as much as they feared and, sometimes, disliked him.

His major achievement while in Rhode Island was to shake some concepts held by the Rhode Island Hospital Service Corporation and Physicians' Service. He hammered away at the idea that Blue Cross especially should assume more responsibility for keeping down hospital costs for subscribers, and that a majority of its trustees should represent the public instead of the hospitals. He has had some success.

Mr. Spitz has been chosen to fill a high post in the steel workers union in Pittsburgh. Rhode Island will miss him. It needs a non-conformist to jolt it out of complacency, occasionally.

In 1948, Lawrence Spitz had entered Brown University, graduating in 1951, magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa. In 1976, he received the

honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from Brown University. The citation stated, "You have devoted time, energy and imagination to community development, youth activities, physical and mental health organizations and the arts, as well as to the labor movement. We honor you for your achievements, your wit, your wisdom, and, above all, for your compassion." The following year, the sixty-five year old Spitz with his wife Lillian moved to Sun City, Arizona, a retiree among retirees. There he organized the "Union Club," becoming its first president.

In 1988, Spitz was one of six honorees selected by the Rhode Island Labor History Society. On this occasion he donated his massive collection of papers to the Society. These dealt with labor relations in Rhode Island from 1933 to 1987, together with personal papers concerned with his work from 1930 to 1965. (These papers are now held in the archives of the Rhode Island Historical Society.) During this 1988 meeting, Spitz spoke at length, reeling off the names of people he had worked with fifty years previously. "He recalled a strike he led at a mill in nearby Wrentham, Mass.," John Phillips reported, "because company officials refused to build a bathroom for the company's only female employee. After four months the mill owners relented. 'I think that was the first port-a-john that was ever used,' Spitz said."<sup>16</sup>

In 1991, when Spitz was seventy-nine, he was interviewed by reporters from the *Providence Journal*.<sup>17</sup> It was on Labor Day, and Spitz was visiting his summer home on Martha's Vineyard in the aftermath of Hurricane Bob. He recalled working conditions in some of the Woonsocket mills in 1939. Mill workers had come to his home complaining:

Their conditions were horrible. They had repeated conjunctivitis. They would be working on these spinning frames and they would get a splash of the acid. The acetate would go into their eyes. They would have to go into a darkened room at home for forty-eight hours before they could go back to work. They were not compensated. [One worker said,] "You know when I go home and take the change out of my pocket, the half dollars are black."

Gary Gerstle, labor historian and author, on whom we have relied for the account of the Woonsocket mill history, was quoted in the September 1, 1991, issue of the *Providence Sunday Journal*:

[Spitz was] a multiskilled, talented leader — an extraordinary character, compelling and charismatic. Imagine this man coming

into a small mill town in the 1930s. There was a sense that he was one of them and yet he wasn't. He spoke English beautifully without a trace of accent (in contrast to the mill workers). Here was someone saying "You're all Americans; stand up for your rights." The kind of electrifying effect this had in working class communities is hard for us to remember.

Gerstle also noted "Spitz was attracted to the idea of unions as transforming people's lives and uplifting their spirits," but that now this "has drained out of the labor movement."

In March, 2000, Lawrence Spitz was inducted into the Rhode Island State Heritage Hall of Fame, along with eight others. He was described as a "pioneer labor leader who was a strong advocate for the working man, who drafted its first labor relations act and helped to gain major legislation for fair housing and citizen representation at Blue Cross."<sup>18</sup> But Larry Spitz never forgot the dramatic labor conflicts of his youth. Fifty years after the great Woonsocket riot he spoke at a labor forum celebrating the textile general strike of 1934. He said (in 1984),

The most vibrant, strongest instrument of democracy was an industrial union. It gave hope and encouraged thousands that were in despair. Remember that [the 1930s] were grim times. People were being paid in scrip in many areas. They were required to live in company-owned homes, and buy in company stores. It wasn't only in the coal and mining communities that this prevailed, it was in textiles, in Albion, in Manville. In Woonsocket, the only place that there was some organization — and it was faint in those days — people had the feeling that they had some dignity. Who were these people? They were your grandfathers, your grandmothers, your fathers, your mothers. I know, I talked to them in the privacy of their homes. They wanted to make a better life for the generations to come. And they did.<sup>19</sup>



**Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> Paul Buhle, *Working Lives: An Oral History of Rhode Island Labor*. Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1987, p. 27.
- <sup>2</sup> Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914 - 1960*. Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 96-98.
- <sup>3</sup> Buhle, p. 29.
- <sup>4</sup> Gerstle, p. 102.
- <sup>5</sup> Gerstle, p. 104.
- <sup>6</sup> Gerstle, p. 109.
- <sup>7</sup> Gerstle, p. 129.
- <sup>8</sup> Gerstle, p. 133.
- <sup>9</sup> Gerstle, pp. 153-158.
- <sup>10</sup> Gerstle, pp. 159-160.
- <sup>11</sup> Gerstle, pp. 195-196.
- <sup>12</sup> Gerstle, p. 198.
- <sup>13</sup> Gerstle, p. 263.
- <sup>14</sup> Spitz's activities in Providence are here summarized from the detailed archives of the Rhode Island Historical Society.
- <sup>15</sup> *Providence Evening Bulletin*, Sept. 7, 1965.
- <sup>16</sup> John Phillips, *Providence Journal Bulletin*, August 31, 1988.
- <sup>17</sup> *Providence Sunday Journal*, Sept. 1, 1991.
- <sup>18</sup> Gary Gerstle, *Providence Sunday Journal*, Sept. 1, 1991.
- <sup>19</sup> *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*, March 16, 2000, p. 9.
- <sup>20</sup> Buhle, p. 72.

## My Life at the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island

by Saul Barber

*Not all the tales about Russian immigrants were success stories, with happy endings. As the Aronson article points out, a certain number of newcomers had bad luck, either medically or economically, encountered ill health or poverty, and ended up being cared for by welfare agencies, orphanages, or other institutions. One such institution was the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island (JORI), founded in 1909, moved in 1924 to a new building on Summit Avenue in Providence, and closed in 1942. It accepted thirty-five to forty-six children each year, ages five to sixteen. Camp Jori opened in 1937 for summer activities (see the back cover photo in the last issue of the Notes, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2000).*

*The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island has been discussed many times in the Notes and in other publications; for example, see the article by Sonya Michel, "Children, Institutions, and Community: The Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island, 1909-1942," in the Notes, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1975), pp. 385-400. More recently, Alene Silver described the humane care offered to boys and girls at the Orphanage by Elizabeth Guny, who served on the Board of Directors from 1927 to 1942; see "Elizabeth Guny and Other People's Children," Vol. 12, No. 4 (1998), pp. 498-503.*

*Rarely, however, do we get the chance to read an account of daily life at the Orphanage told by a former resident because very often those who grow up in such an institution may be reluctant to talk about it. But the late Professor Saul Barber, with an accurate memory for details and a wish to document all the facts of his upbringing, wrote an autobiography that we are privileged to excerpt here, faithfully reporting his nine years at JORI.*

*Barber's account is for the most part positive. After the terrible shock of his father's death, he adjusted quite well to the Orphanage, describing his life there with an appreciation for the close-knit community and the relatively wholesome environment it provided. After leaving, and finishing high school, he went on to the University of Rhode Island, then to Yale University, where he earned a doctorate in biology, and finally to Oxford University, to study with a grant from the National Institutes of Health. He then taught biology at Lehigh University, eventually becoming chairman of the Biology Department and Acting Dean of the College of Arts and*



*The Barber Family, 1926. From left: Betty, age 13; Nathan, age 8; Ida (mother); Frances, age 11; Saul, age 6. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Saul Barber.*

*Sciences. He was active in the ACLU and many other organizations, and became a lifelong friend of Elizabeth Guny and Maurice Stollerman, among others who had helped him during his years at JORI. So his story had a happy outcome after all!*

*Dr. Barber retired to Cape Cod with his wife; he died in 1998 at age seventy-eight. He left his wife, who still lives at the Cape, two sons, and a daughter. We are grateful to his family for offering his manuscript and the photos accompanying it.*

### **A Death in the Family**

I was six when my father died, and it changed my whole life. He was thirty-six, my mother thirty-four, and they were raising a family of four children, with me as the youngest. My parents were Jewish immigrants from the Russian Ukraine. My father came to the United States in 1910, at the age of eighteen, and sent my mother her ticket a year later. They had been married only shortly before he left for America, partly at least to avoid service in the Czar's army, which was an extreme hardship for Russian Jews.

He settled in the Boston area because he had relatives there, and went to work in one of the many immigrant sweat shops, common in the big cities at that time, owned no doubt by co-religionists who had preceded him to America. Five children were born but the eldest, a son, died in infancy. The two oldest were girls; they were thirteen and eleven years old, my brother and I being eight and six at the time of my father's death.

He had moved from sweatshop employment to independent work peddling fruit and vegetables from a horse and wagon. From peddling he saved enough to open, with a partner, a neighborhood fruit and vegetable store, which appeared to be successful. But his partner eventually absconded with the funds, apparently after having skimmed weekly receipts for several months before disappearing. This left my father without the resources to continue the business, but he was able to connect with a cousin in Providence, and start a business with him buying live chickens from the central markets and selling them store-to-store to the kosher butcher stores in the area.

The whole family moved to Providence when he had the business going well a few months after starting it. The business he was in was a marginal sort of thing. Each day's receipts were needed to buy the next day's stock,

with only enough profit for him and his cousin to support their families. They had done well enough to have purchased an old truck to carry their crates of live chickens from store to store. There was a lot of physical labor involved in loading and unloading the stock but each of them was young and strong and thought nothing of it. This is, until my father became ill.

He had complained for some weeks of greater than usual fatigue as well as a slight numbness in his extremities. The doctor had recommended soaking alternately in hot and cold water, but that did not relieve the symptoms. One afternoon my father came home early very short of breath, almost gasping for air, and unable to continue working. The doctor diagnosed him as having pneumonia and advised bed rest for at least several days. But the next day my father was breathing normally and felt much better. So, feeling the pressure of the need to earn his day's receipts, he went back to work, although my mother, fearing the worst, pleaded with him to remain home. Her fears were well-founded because he came home early again, this time truly gasping for air, and was quickly hospitalized with the diagnosis of double pneumonia. He died within twenty-four hours.

My most vivid, and last, recollections of my father were seeing and hearing him gasping for breath on each of the days when he came home early from work and was immediately put to bed. I never saw him again, although I do recall the stretcher being wheeled to the waiting ambulance. In school on the day of his death, I remember being called out of class to the principal's office with my brother, who had also been called out; we were told to go home immediately without being told why, although the pitying looks on people's faces filled us both with a sense of foreboding. When we got home we didn't have to be told the news. We saw my mother seated in the kitchen along with a number of neighbor women. My mother was crying, as were some of the neighbors. I ran to her and buried my face in her lap. The whole family of course, was devastated by my father's death. In later years I have felt that my brother and I, more so than our sisters or even our mother, suffered the most.

Since coming to this country my mother had always lived in Jewish neighborhoods and therefore spoke Yiddish more often than English. When speaking English she never lost the thick Yiddish accent common to most Eastern European immigrants even after living here over sixty-five years. She also never learned to read or write English with any degree of fluency. She learned only enough to get by — street and street car signs, food box

labels, etc. For reading recreation she turned to the Yiddish daily newspapers that were readily available in those times.

As a young girl in Russia, my mother helped her mother in a Jewish bakery shop. With this background, my mother was able to obtain employment in a local Jewish bakery. The hours were long and the pay very little but it was just enough to support us while we children continued our schooling.

When we first moved to Providence our parents had enrolled us boys in a *Cheder* (Hebrew school), which we attended for an hour or so every day after public school, but after my father's death we could not afford the small tuition and we were withdrawn. However, it was decided that as the males in the family, my brother and I were to say the *Kaddish* (mourner's prayer) which custom required be said by adult male survivors, morning and evening, daily for a year following any death in the immediate family.

The *Kaddish* is a relatively short passage, reminiscent of an eight to ten-line poem, so that we had both memorized it completely within a short time. My recollection of this period is dim but I do remember the two of us running to the synagogue early each morning before school in order to be present at the morning minyan to say *Kaddish*. I remember the rabbi as a small, slender man who seemed genuinely fond of the two of us. I recall him referring to us as "Shaynah, Kleegah boychiks" (pretty, bright young boys). Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to discipline us whenever we misbehaved, which we occasionally did, with a swift and sure hand swat across the head. It was not a truly hard hit and was always justified.

My father died in October of 1926 and for the rest of the school year we continued to live as a nuclear family. As the year progressed, however, it became clear to my mother that my brother Nathan and I were not being properly supervised. We lived in a run-down and unsavory neighborhood and without more supervision by our sisters we were beginning to run a bit wild. Neither sister, at ages eleven and thirteen, was quite mature enough to manage two normal, high-spirited young boys. We wouldn't go to bed when told and after supper insisted on going out to hang around the neighborhood until our mother came home. Since, during the winter months, she often came home from work after dark she worried about what might happen to us.

One of my father's older brothers, Uncle Shlayme, also lived in Providence, so my mother consulted him. He recommended that she apply to the local Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island (JORI), which had been started a number of years earlier under the auspices of Jewish philanthropic organizations. It had moved to a brand new building just a few years earlier and my uncle had been impressed by it. They looked into it further and decided to approach the superintendent regarding us. A decision was finally made that we were to be admitted to the orphanage until circumstances changed or until we were old enough to care for ourselves responsibly. It was my admission to the orphanage, and the years I spent there, that changed my life so drastically.

I spent nine years there, from the age of six to fifteen. Nathan was two years older, thus not traumatized quite as much as I was, and he was at JORI two years fewer than I. Our sisters remained at home with our mother and did not suffer displacement trauma. Their lives did change for the worse. Neither was graduated from high school, despite the fact that both were excellent students. They chose instead to leave school at age sixteen in order to help out with home finances. My older sister Betty, in particular, was devastated by our father's death. Nevertheless, my sisters did not suffer the effects of a complete change in their lives, whereas my brother and I did.

I must say at the outset that the orphanage was a benign place and did for us what my mother wanted. My years there were happy ones and since leaving I have enjoyed a happy and productive life, including what I may regard as a successful professional career. Undoubtedly, however, the abrupt change in my life and the subsequent years in the orphanage affected my psyche in ways which had strong effects on my personal relations and career decisions. I cannot say what kind of person I might have been or what kind of career I might have pursued otherwise. I can envision that my father, had he lived, could easily have become a successful, affluent merchant as so many immigrant Jews who started like him did. Would I have joined him in his business and been like so many others of like background, a conventional businessman with rather limited intellectual horizons? I'm sure I'll never know the answer, but posing the question leads me to explore my life in the orphanage to recall some of the things that shaped my life.

### **The "Home"**

My mother never told Nathan and me that she was putting us in an orphanage. My vision of such an institution would have been like something out of a Dickens novel, grained entirely, I am sure, from a children's grapevine rather than any familiarity with the author. She realized that we would have objected strenuously to any notion of leaving home permanently for another residence; consequently, she broached the subject of our going away to camp for the summer, and that was what we thought was to happen.

One beautiful day in June of 1927, after school was over for the academic year, my mother and Uncle Shlaymie walked with us to the orphanage, carrying with us only a few belongings. I was almost seven years old. It was about a two mile walk, from the north side to the east side of the city, but it was a lovely day and an enjoyable trek, especially since we thought we were going to camp and were looking forward to the playground facilities which had been promised to us.

We did not become aware of the true situation for many days after our arrival. What we saw on arrival was a two-story red-brick building with a central portion, two wings and an ell off each wing. It was only a few years old, still impressive looking, and located in what I suppose must have been a lower middle-class neighborhood, directly across the street from a public grammar school. The latter had an extensive playground with swings, hammocks, a large slide and a roundabout. My mother pointed this out to us as fulfilling her promise of a playground and we were mollified despite the strange appearance of the "camp."

I don't recall the process of being admitted to the orphanage, or of meeting the superintendent or the boy's supervisor. I do recall being fed supper separately because the children had already been fed. The supper included my first experience with chocolate pudding. It looked delicious, but when I tasted it, it was bittersweet and I didn't like it. To this day, I don't like bittersweet chocolate.

The building fronted on Summit Avenue; Fifth Street on the left, as one faced the structure, separated that side from the Summit Avenue Grammar School and its playground. Otherwise, it was surrounded by single family residences or two-story houses housing a family on each story. The orphanage building had three stories.

The living room was where we usually gathered after supper, if it was dark out, until it was time to go to bed. Bedtime was in three shifts according to age groups. During summer, of course, we played outside as long as it was light. We younger children went to bed then when it was still light, a hardship we resented as children everywhere do. In the living room we also listened to certain programs of the radio, especially on Sunday nights when Eddie Cantor, Jack Benny, and Edgar Bergen (with his puppet, Charlie McCarthy) were on. Otherwise, the room was used for reading, although quiet conversation was allowed. During summer months we were all required to spend one hour there directly after dinner (noon) as an enforced rest period.

The library contained perhaps several hundred books, mostly for juveniles. It was there that I found an almost complete series of the Rover Boys, Tom Swift, Ralph of the Railroads, the Boy Allies, and others. I was an avid reader and over the years I read them all. When I was older, in the high school years, ten or so desks were added to the room and assigned to each of us who regularly had homework from school.

On the second floor each wing contained the dormitories, three rooms on each side of the superintendent's apartment, the girls on the left and the boys on the right. A door at each end of the apartment connected with each dormitory.

In my early years there, we didn't use the living room as a social hall. Rather, the playroom was designated for that purpose as well as for play. The girls had a similar room in the other wing, thus keeping the sexes largely separated during indoor leisure hours. I don't remember what was in the girl's playroom, but I think there was a sewing machine where some of the girls learned the rudiments of sewing. Later, when the ping-pong and pool tables were added to the boys' playroom, that's all it was used for. By that time, with a couple of changes in superintendents, the rules were more relaxed. The living room was used more as a social hall and the girls used the ping-pong and pool tables freely. Basketball was the favored sport for the boys during the winter months. Beyond the basketball court, at the end of the gym, was a semicircular stage. The backstage area was used to store remnants of sets from productions put on only infrequently for relatives, friends, and members of the Jewish community of Rhode Island. No doubt these were part of fund-raising efforts.

The backyard was large and spacious. The section closest to the back doors was almost completely sandy with perhaps an occasional patch of tall

grass and weeds. There was, in this area, a large sandbox that could easily accommodate a dozen children at a time. For several years there was also a horseshoe pitching area and we used to spend long hours at that game during the summer. I don't know if it was regulation size but we did have metal stakes and real horseshoes. In later years the superintendent was able to get a WPA crew to fix up that whole area. They put in a series of cement sidewalks and built a cement tennis court enclosed by a chain link fence. The horseshoe pitching area had long since gone and the sandbox was removed. The tennis court was much used, not only for the game itself but also for roller skating.

The portion of Fifth Street separating our yard from that of the adjacent grammar school was still a dirt road and we had free access to the equipment in the school yard during the summer months. One of the chief attractions there, once we tired of the swings, slides, etc., was a tall wooden fence separating the boys' side of the yard from the girls'. During the summer, access to either side was not prohibited. We boys enjoyed the fence because climbing it was something of a challenge, as was walking along the top, which required some of the skill of a tightrope walker.

The neighborhood boys and girls used the playground facilities as much as we did and we interacted with them easily, in part because we went to school with them as well. The local boys also used the vacant lot for baseball and football and sometimes we played with them there and sometimes on our field. The rivalries, when they existed, were entirely friendly, often overseen by our boys' supervisor, who might also be the only available umpire for the game.

### **I Become an Athlete!**

I don't remember precisely when I was disabused of my notion that Nathan and I were in camp, but it must have been within a few days and it was surely told to us scornfully by one or more of the older boys. I do distinctly recollect one of the older boys telling Nathan and me that our mother had signed papers committing us until we reached the age of sixteen. This was undoubtedly untrue because over the years many children left the home in their very early teens or even before as their parental situations improved. Most of the kids (we were always called, and we always referred to each other as, kids) were, in fact, not orphans, but like Nathan and me, had lost one parent by death, or, in some instances, had lost the care of one parent for an extended period of time due to illness or marital separation.

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The truth of our registration in the orphanage rather than camp, and for a period extending far beyond that summer, became evident within the first few weeks and was a cruel blow. Our mother used to visit us once a week in the early years on Saturdays or Sundays depending on which day she had off. I used to beg her to take us home but she always responded with excuses that she couldn't afford to. I remember particularly promising her that I would work to help bring in money by selling newspapers on the street corner. I even demonstrated how I would do so by mimicking the calls of the boys who, in those days, were common sights in business districts selling their papers with loud cries of "Hey, get your morning papers!" My mother thought I was real cute doing this and called my behavior to the attention of one of the other mothers. I, of course, immediately desisted and never tried that tactic again. Eventually, when school started, I and Nathan as well stopped begging to be brought home, accepted our fate, and became thoroughly integrated into the life of the orphanage.

As I mentioned earlier, life at the "Home," as we soon called it, was generally benign and enjoyable, but there were instances of cruelty toward us younger boys by the older boys. These took place primarily when the boys' supervisor, Mr. Wiseman, had his day off and left the supervision of the routine to the oldest boy, whom I shall call Frank. He seemed to be particularly sadistic and I was always afraid of him. One of the things that he, and some of the older boys following his lead, used to do was to hold us younger kids under the cold shower much longer than necessary, after lifting us up so that our faces were very close to the shower nozzle. This latter gambit, in particular, was frightening to me because the full force of the nozzle on my face took my breath away and I used to struggle to free myself. I recall crying because of this mistreatment, but because I was the only one of the smaller boys doing so, I was then ridiculed for being a softie.

Those daily showers were frightening to me in another way. We were, it is true, very dirty by the end of a summer's day, and were required to scrub, with fairly stiff brushes, to get the dirt out of all our crevices. I had particular trouble getting the insteps of my feet thoroughly clean and was often sent back to re-scrub them when I was inspected. Once I remember that Frank sent me back so often, and I scrubbed so hard, that I abraded the skin and drew blood. I think that the practice stopped when I had to be bandaged for the injury and the reason for it came out. I'm sure, however, that I named no

one as responsible because revenge on me would have been swift and terrible.

Another sadistic thing that the older boys did to some of the younger kids was to upend one of us and hold his head under water in a filled wash basin for as long as they dared. This was terrifying to me and I used to struggle as fiercely as I could and choke and cry once released. The older boys would ridicule me for being such a sissy and compare me unfavorably to those who could withstand such treatment more stoically than I could. Once when they were doing this I struggled so hard that in my kicking I managed to kick one of them in the face hard enough to hurt him. That successful kick put an end to the session and may very well have triggered the end of the ducking torture entirely, since I remember no further attempts. The final end could also have been due to the fact that Frank left the Home for good sometime during my first year there, an event that I secretly celebrated. The last I heard of him he was in the U.S. Navy.

Those early summers when I was a "little kid" were spent mostly at free play, in the sandbox in our yard, or on the play equipment in the school yard. Sometimes we had roller skates available to us, the kind that clamped onto the soles of shoes, and we would skate on the sidewalks and driveways of the school. For some of my early and middle years we also used to go swimming three times a week, weather permitting, at Woodville, a freshwater pond in the woods somewhere north of the city. We generally arrived in mid-morning in time for a swim before lunch. The beach was a typical stony one and not conducive to sunbathing, but in back of the beach was a small meadow in which we had lunch and occasionally played some games. Mostly, however, we just swam, or rather the older kids swam and we little ones pretended in the shallow water. There was no "buddy" system to keep track of everybody and neither was there any attempt to teach us even the rudiments of swimming. Nevertheless, there were no drownings or near-drownings. And I did learn to swim there on my own.

Besides the Woodville trips, there were sometimes special outings. One of these was a visit to the forty-acre farm of one of the members of the Board of Directors (we kids called each one of them a "board of director"). The estate was in Barrington, and included a beach on Narragansett Bay or one of the bodies of water opening onto the bay. I remember all the kids got special outfits for the outings and I, along with the other little kids, received a special sailor outfit with bell bottom trousers which I thought was

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particularly beautiful. All I remember from that trip, and I believe we went there only once or twice, was running from field to field and swimming on the beach. The waters there were abundant with crabs, probably blue crabs, because several of the kids got nipped, and I was afraid to go in.

The other outing that I remember well, and which got to be an annual event, was the trip near the end of the summer to Narragansett Pier. This is a large public beach in the town of Narragansett heavily used in those days by the Jewish people of Rhode Island. It also was on Narragansett Bay but much further south than and across the bay from Barrington, thus much closer to the open ocean and less prone to pollution. It had a heavy surf and fine beach sand—as fine as anywhere I have encountered. This trip we took in a genuine bus; it was thirty or forty miles from the Home and thus too far to go in those makeshift trucks we used for the Woodville trips.

The trips to Narragansett Pier had to be planned well in advance and our greatest fear, as the date approached, was that it might be rained out. It never was. Playing in the heavy surf, making castles in that wonderful sand, and running along that hard-packed beach at the water's edge were like heaven to us. On one of these trips everything went just right and I remember thinking, as we rode the bus back to Providence, that I had experienced a perfect day, just as it said in the song that we sang in school: "When you come to the end of a perfect day." It remains in my memory as perhaps the happiest day of my childhood.

Sports played a large part in our leisure activities. During the summer, baseball was the favorite game. As I grew older I, and most of the other boys in my age group, gradually gave up the sand box and other "babyish" activities and emulated the older boys by playing baseball among ourselves as often as we could. Equipment for baseball was generally sparse and not in good condition. Usually only one baseball at a time was available for our use. That was used long enough so that the original cover was knocked off, but its continued use for weeks longer was accomplished by wrapping it in black electrician's tape.

The diamond area was a heap of hard-packed sand liberally endowed with stones. The stones and the general roughness of the surface made fielding ground balls a challenging and often painful experience. We had no regular bases and made do with heavy stones. The bases were also the only markers we had for foul lines; consequently, close decisions over whether a hit ball was fair or foul were often decided only after prolonged argument,

the decision largely dependent on which side had more convincing, or domineering, arguers. The outfield sloped a bit downhill and the grass was never cut. In early years "cow flaps" from a neighbor's wandering cow were a minor hazard in the outfield, but that stopped within a few years when cows were no longer kept in what was fast becoming an expanding urban area.

Sometimes a particularly brave, or foolhardy, kid chose to play catcher in the conventional way close behind the batter. One of our kids, Jackie Weiss, when he was big enough to play with the rest of us, did this, even though there was no pressure on him to do so. He escaped unscathed for several games, but eventually the inevitable happened. A ball that the batter just barely foul-tipped caught him squarely in the face. That event, I believe, was the one that finally convinced Mr. Katz, our new supervisor, that he had to arrange to get the money for a genuine face mask.

We also played tennis a lot once the court was constructed and tournaments were occasionally arranged. We also did a certain amount of organized track and field competing: the 100-yard dash, running broad jump (now called the long jump), high jump, relay racing and others. Also, one year Mr. Katz organized an intramural track meet.

During the winter months we played a lot of basketball. George Katz was a good player and had played with a local adult YMCA team before becoming our supervisor. He taught us the fundamentals of set-shooting, lay-up shooting and other maneuvers. Even when I was a little kid we always had an orphanage team which played local Jewish Community Center and YMCA teams. The whole Home would turn out to watch these games, although chairs had to be strung along the side lines since the depth of the offside area could accommodate only one row of chairs without jeopardizing the safety of the spectators. Initially we little kids were only spectators at these events. But as we matured we were organized into a team and occasionally played neighborhood teams. Later, as big kids, we played a fairly busy schedule of games over the winter months, perhaps one a week.

One year, perhaps when I was eleven, I won a secret ballot for most valuable player; for that outstanding accomplishment, which I was very proud of, I was given a very good baseball glove. It was the first glove I had ever owned and I kept it for many years, through college and graduate school. It was also the best glove I had ever used, since the gloves we usually had were pretty beat up and rarely was there one to fit into the right hand for a left-handed thrower.

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All the athletic competitions I played in at the Home were not only enjoyable but they also helped me compete later on. During my senior year in high school, when I had finally left the Home and was living with my mother and stepfather, I not only made my school's basketball team, but I was a regular starter. To be sure, my brother Nathan had paved the way for me. He had been a member of the junior varsity team at Hope High School in Providence during his sophomore year and then, when he left the Home to live with my mother and stepfather two years before I did, he made the starting team at Aldrich High School, to which I came in my senior year. We were not a very good team. We finished last in our league with only two victories, including a loss at season's end to our traditional rivals, but I loved every minute of it. After all, here I was, no longer an "orphanage kid," but instead on equal footing with all the other kids in the school and, indeed, even a bit of a star because of my basketball playing.

Back at the orphanage we also played a lot a touch football during the fall months. These were always just pickup games among ourselves. We had no goal posts so kicking played no significant role in the games. Usually each team would try to make a touchdown with its allotted four downs, because the field was short enough to make that a reasonable possibility. Occasionally a team might be backed up far enough to elect to kick on a fourth down but that was rare. Passing plays were the main weapon in those games. When I was younger we also played tackle football occasionally. I excelled at this game because of my agility and because I was the play caller of our age group. As the one who called the plays I was also the quarterback and passer even though my hands were too small to hold the ball in one hand.

#### **This Was Our Life**

Those first few years in the Home are often hazy in my memory. One incident stands out in my mind during those early years. I still longed to return to my home on Black Street with my mother and sisters and had romanticized the place in my mind. Those summer trips to Woodville Pond used to pass close to my old Black Street neighborhood and I was on the lookout for my house there each time. Once we passed by the corner of Chalkstone Avenue and Black Street and I actually saw my house quite clearly. I jumped up and cried, very excitedly, "There it is, there it is." Older boys asked what I was making such a fuss about and when I explained, ridiculed me for getting excited over nothing. I looked at my brother Nathan, and saw that he had not reacted as I had. I sat down feeling very chastened

and foolish. I think that incident may have finally broken my yearnings to return home and I accepted my lot with greater equanimity.

There were close to fifty kids in the home with, perhaps, twice as many boys as girls. Besides the superintendent and the boys' and girls' supervisors, there was a full-time cook, a full-time kitchen assistant and a full-time janitor who was also a jack-of-all-trades. All of these people lived in the home in single bed-sitting rooms except, of course, the superintendent and his family, who had a suite.

Once, a number of years later when I was about thirteen, four of us in the thirteen to fifteen age group broke the rules rather flagrantly and we thought the cook, Mrs. Brown, had caught us at it. It had been arranged for the four of us to join a club at the Jewish Community Center about a mile and one-half away. The club met once a week at night and we went regularly and found it very enjoyable. One week, however, when Jack Dempsey was opening in person in the Fay Theater in downtown Providence we decided to go see him instead of going to the club. I believe we had asked permission to go see him on another night but were refused on the grounds that it wasn't proper entertainment for us and anyway we'd get back too late from the show. The Fay Theater was a movie theater but also had an abbreviated vaudeville show accompanying their film. This was in the waning days of vaudeville throughout the country, but when Jack Dempsey made his tour he was a big attraction.

We decided that week to see Dempsey instead of going to the club. I think we felt we could easily be caught but not until after we came back, and seeing Dempsey would be worth any punishment we might get. When we came back, much later than usual, everyone seemed to be asleep and we walked very quietly along the back of the building on our way to the back door on the boys' side. It was dark there initially, but suddenly the yard became much lighter and when I looked back I saw Mrs. Brown in her window overlooking the back yard. She had apparently just entered her room and had put the light on and was looking out of the window. I thought she surely had seen us, and so did the others, yet we got in the building and upstairs to bed without any other encounters. As we waited for the ax to fall we thought for sure she had seen us and would report us. She never did. I don't know to this day whether she had not seen us because she was looking from a lighted room into a dark yard, or having seen us did not think anything of our coming in so late.

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The daily routine at the home still has some highlights of remembrance for me. We were awakened by the boys' supervisor, then we washed, dressed, and went down to breakfast. In early years we used to line up to go into meals but that was abolished at least by the time Stollie (Mr. Stollerman) became superintendent. The dining room had six or seven tables seating eight kids each, three on each side and one on each end. We each had an assigned place at a given table. The seating was not segregated by sex or age. At one end, an older kid, male or female, sat and was more or less in charge of that table. The two supervisors would carry the food out from the kitchen and distribute it to the different tables and the head kid at each table would do any further distributing. I don't remember if it was served family style at each table or if the dishes were carried out already served with food. Bread and butter were certainly family style since one of my clearer memories of those meals was hearing individual kids call out "Please pass the bread" loudly enough to be heard several tables away. The supervisors worked pretty hard during these meals responding to requests for more bread or milk, or even seconds when those were available. They ate either before or after us, I don't recall which, at a smaller table at the front of the room. The superintendent and his family ate in an adjoining room and the other workers undoubtedly ate in the kitchen.

Our meals were strictly kosher and we started each one with a prayer. Initially the prayer for each meal was recited in unison in Hebrew and was the traditional "Hamotzie" which translated into thanks to God for giving us "bread from the earth." Later, the prayer at supper was different. It was recited in English and started out "Our God and God of our fathers, another day has passed away and night is soon approaching. Before we, however...." For the life of me I can't remember another word of that prayer, even though I recited it every day of my life for at least four or five years.

The food was generally good and adequate for our needs, probably standard fare for lower-middle-class American Jews of the time. Mrs. Brown was, of course, Jewish and probably cooked in a manner typical of the times. I don't remember, for example, that my mother's meals were much different from those I got in the Home. To be sure, Stollie was always praising Mrs. Brown's cooking and often on certain holiday meals he would call her out of the kitchen to receive accolades from us for her special efforts for that feast.

During my first few years there were, however, certain meals which I dreaded. Those were the meals that included certain cooked vegetables which I could not, for the life of me, stomach. We were required to clean our plates before being allowed to eat dessert. If we lingered too long over unpalatable things we even forfeited dessert and, in fact, were not allowed to leave the table until our plates were cleared. For me, the three hardest vegetables to swallow were cooked spinach, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts. The spinach in particular was just boiled in water and came out as a green glop, but none of them was easy for me. I can remember sitting there interminably, dessert taken away from me, with all the other kids gone from the dining room, still not able to get the hated stuff down. Finally, what I did was to put the stuff in my pocket (imagine boiled, wet spinach!), bring my dish into the kitchen and scurry away to empty my pocket outdoors as quickly as possible. I got to be pretty good at pocketing the stuff (Brussels sprouts and cauliflower were easier to do than spinach) without being noticed and even in time to have dessert and leave with everybody else.

A number of us little kids had our tonsils out at Miriam Hospital during one of those early summers. They took six of us the time I went and we were all together in one children's ward, including the one girl of the group. The tonsil operation was a traumatic experience for me. They used ether as the anesthetic and the smell was not only overwhelmingly obnoxious but I had the terrifying feeling of being smothered. People were kind to us, however. I recall a number of them coming in to see and comfort us. I suppose six tonsillectomies in a row, on a bunch of little orphanage kids, was something of a phenomenon and people were curious about it. Some of them gave us a few coins apiece, but the room was darkened and I couldn't see what they were. Even in the darkness and in my misery I tried to figure out what denomination the coins were. The smaller ones I hoped were dimes and the larger, nickels (larger denominations were unthinkable), so I was disappointed the next morning to discover only five pennies and one nickel. Nevertheless it was a mini-bonanza for me since I almost never had any money of my own to spend.

We kids at the Home had our daily and weekly chores which generally took the form of cooperatively sweeping our dormitory and play rooms periodically, but I don't recall that these chores intruded significantly on our free time. During my first year the little kids used to take turns helping the kitchen man out after supper. This usually consisted of wiping the cutlery

after he had washed them and putting them away in an orderly fashion. I had two work experiences during my last two years in the Home. One was running errands for a Jewish tailor, Mr. Gilstein, whose shop was only a few blocks from the Home. The next year the superintendent got me a job at the Outlet Company, Providence's largest department store. This was a step up for me because I worked only one day a week, Saturday, albeit for eight hours, and was paid the magnificent sum of two dollars. This was during my junior year in high school and my last year in the home.

#### **Supervisors and Superintendents**

My first superintendent was a short but athletic looking man who, though stern in punishment, was friendly and kindly most of the time. His ideas for running the home were perhaps a bit old-fashioned because I seem to remember that there was a lot of regimentation, such as lining up for this or that. He left for a New York job within a year or two of my arrival and was succeeded by a man who was married to a gentile woman. He was not as kindly and kept himself, as well as his wife and small daughter, aloof from us residents. He was apparently something of a scholar with a Ph.D. degree in classics. I remember, for example, that he occasionally read Latin literature for his own amusement.

He was succeeded as superintendent by Mr. Stollerman, who remained in that post until the home was disbanded during World War II. "Stollie" (as we kids always called him, but not to his face) was a New Yorker, with Bachelor and Law degrees from New York University. He never practiced law, since lawyers were starving in New York during the depression, but came to us from a similar position in a smaller institution in New York. He was a short man with a pot-belly, a round face, a gift of gab, a pretty wife and a pre-school daughter. He quickly showed that he genuinely liked the kids and the home and that he had progressive ideas about how the institution should be managed. The kinds of regimentation we were used to were gradually done away with. There was, for example, no more lining up to go into meals, to get ready for bed, or to receive clean clothes. The atmosphere, although it had never been repressive, became much more like that of a family than an institution. Indeed, Stollie eventually had the official name changed in 1939 from "Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island" (JORI) to "The Rhode Island Jewish Children's Home." This was a small thing, to be sure, but it illustrates Stollie's more progressive way of thinking.

Stollie was an interesting case. He had progressive ideas about how to run an orphanage. As near as I can remember his ideas were to make life for us as home-like as possible. He was genuinely fond of the kids and they returned his affection. His wife and children mingled with us kids readily, although they still ate in their private dining room. His children often played with the Home kids as they grew to an age that was compatible with the youngest of us. I didn't know them well because they were all girls and the oldest of the three was five or so years younger than I. The youngest was born while I was still a resident and I remember Stollie answering the phone after the birth with the greeting "Eddie Cantor speaking." He had a good sense of humor and was, of course, referring to the fact that the famous comedian also had a family of all girls (five, I believe, in Cantor's case).

Stollie was a great talker and he loved it when a number of us older kids would corner him in the living room or on the stairs going up to his apartment and get him started telling stories. We would sit around him on the floor or stairs and he would tell us stories about his growing up in New York. His gift of gab served him in good stead because he used it effectively to raise money for the home or to get projects funded from public funds. He was always raising funds to improve the furniture in the living room, or to improve the interior decor of the rooms, etc. It was during his regime that the WPA was prevailed upon to build a series of sidewalks in part of the back yard. They also planted grass there and built our tennis court. He expounded ideas about care for kids like us (whom we would now call "underprivileged") in occasional talks around the state and eventually, I am told, wrote a small book on the subject. I am also told that he received enough recognition so that he was awarded an honorary degree by Rhode Island State College.

He was also, however, a very high-strung, worrying kind of person. One incident stands out in my mind that exemplified this. He was a pretty good athlete and played, in particular, pretty good games of basketball, ping pong, and pool. Despite the fact that he was reasonably well coordinated physically, however, he was a terrible automobile driver. He bought a car in my last year in the home and I remember once going into downtown Providence with him. The ride into town was not too harrowing but it was obvious even to me, who had very limited experience riding in cars, that he went much too slowly and that he was unduly worried about what the other cars would do. Worse than that happened when he entered a parking garage and the attendant pointed the way to a wide open spot for parking. It wasn't even that

he was afraid he couldn't fit the car into the slot. It was that he was afraid to advance the car beyond the garage entrance. Apparently he was not confident he could control the car for the short distance needed to approach the parking slot because a couple of times he started to accelerate to get the car moving but then braked almost immediately. The garage attendant saw what was happening and, much to Stollie's relief, offered to park the car for him.

Stollie was particularly fond of me and I liked him in return. He encouraged me to apply to college, even after I had left the Home, and raised funds privately to help me a little financially. For the first two years of college he raised the money for my fees and even contributed something to my room and board. Later, even though beginning in my sophomore year I earned enough during the summers and school year to cover all of my room and board, Stollie continued to help me with college fees and books. He also had his eye out for me as a possible son-in-law and said as much to my mother, but I never got to know any of his daughters very well because the war and graduate school took me out of state for many years. When I was in town I often paid him a courtesy visit but he died at a fairly young age (62). His family moved back to New York and I lost track of them.

During World War II the Home was disbanded (1942). The number of kids had shrunk markedly and those that remained could, with the new prosperity, be taken in by some member or members of their family. Stollie was made head administrator of the only Jewish Hospital in the State, the Miriam Hospital. The building and grounds of the Orphanage were transferred by title to the Hospital and over the years a new Miriam Hospital was built on the old orphanage site. The old hospital had outgrown its building on the other side of town and our much bigger building was converted to the hospital. Wings were added and the hospital is now much bigger, by several times, than our original building. I do remember once visiting my sister in that hospital where she had undergone cardiac surgery. The room she was in was in the oldest section of the hospital and therefore was in the part that had been the Children's Home. I believe I recognized her room as one of the boys' dormitory rooms. Something about the appearance and even the smell, over and above the hospital smells, brought me back to my childhood days there.

### **We Were Educated Too!**

During my first autumn in the Home I entered the third grade in the school across the street. I think it was in third grade that I read my first novel. It was probably no more than a long short story but I loved it so much that I then started to explore the books in the library at the Home. That first novel was available as one of many books that we could read while waiting for others in the class to finish assignments which some of us finished earlier than the rest. It was about a little girl named Clematis, after the flower, and involved a crisis in her life which was apparently resolved when she became deathly ill and then recovered. My reading after that was eclectic, ranging from the Rover boys and Tom Swift series to books of Bible stories (Old Testament only, to be sure) to Norse mythology. I recall that the book on Norse mythology was called "In the Days of the Gods" and that Thor, the god of thunder, was my favorite, with his hammer that he used to defend himself and do good deeds with, and which always returned to his hand no matter how far he threw it.

Most of the kids my age or younger didn't read for enjoyment as early as I did and I loved the stories so much that I wanted to share them. I was able to do this when we went to bed. As the youngest boys in the home at that time, our bedtime was perhaps an hour before the next group. We were, of course, not supposed to get out of bed or talk after lights were out, but once we felt that we were unobserved we took our chances in disobeying those rules. Talking was almost impossible to curb and this we did almost freely and it was during those times that I started telling the others about the stories that I had read. I never remembered them very accurately but I followed them as best I could and improvised the rest. I don't believe I was very good at improvising but the other kids seemed to enjoy my story telling almost as much as I enjoyed telling them. One of the series of adventure novels I told them about was the Boy Allies, several teenaged boys caught in Europe in the first World War. I remember having difficulty ending the stories properly. Their adventures always ended when they beat the Germans at something or other, but I always felt that some sort of ending needed to be tacked on to that in order to end the story properly. I finally used the device of each of them getting a medal from a high official as a reward for their daring deeds. But after a couple of times that was too repetitious so I used the device, first of making the medal bigger and bigger and, finally, of increasing the number of medals, each receiving "a whole roomful of

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medals.”

I recall two other things we used to do after the lights went out. We used to try to outdo each other in the tricks we could do on our beds. Our favorite was to see who could jump the highest, using the bed springs for an assist. These were iron bedsteads with flat, metallic straps criss-crossing the underside and the straps hooked to very strong springs attached to the frame of the bed. The mattresses were like thick quilted pads, since inner-spring mattresses (not to mention box springs) were unknown to us. So those beds took a terrific beating from our shenanigans but as far as I know they withstood them admirably.

After elementary school, we went to a new junior high school which had been open only about two years before I reached seventh grade. The junior high concept had only just been developed and adopted in Providence. Prior to that time grammar school went through grade eight and pupils went from there into senior high school for four years. Graduation from grammar school was a formal occasion with graduates dressed in Sunday best clothes and diplomas awarded. Nathan (who was just one grade ahead of me, albeit two years older) and I went to seventh, eighth and ninth grades at Nathan Bishop Junior High and tenth through twelfth in senior high school.

The junior high had a wonderful new gym equipped with parallel bars, horizontal bar, horse bars, rings, climbing ropes and a special device for teaching kids to do flips, etc., without danger to them, and I looked forward eagerly to using these devices. I was to be bitterly disappointed because I only got to use them for fleeting moments.

We did get into the beginnings of literature, however, and that was very interesting. I also took beginning Latin in the second half of the eighth grade and all of the ninth. I took to Latin immediately and the teacher was a good one. It was in Latin class that I finally began to understand English grammar more fully; over the years as I read and wrote more, the transference from Latin to English enabled me to become reasonably proficient in grammar and, I hope, clarity of expression. I do know that during my thirty plus years as a professor I had no trouble with manuscripts submitted for publication in scientific journals and that my colleagues in the biology department generally regarded me as the one to turn to for critical reading of their graduate students' theses and papers.

My religious education was continued in the home in two ways. First we went to a Jewish Sunday school at a nearby Conservative temple, Temple Emanu-El. Thus with my entry into the Home I changed over from an orthodox environment to a conservative one. I enjoyed Sunday school because it was another classroom situation of the sort in which I excelled, yet the pace and requirements of learning were slow and undemanding. They taught us Bible tales and, later, about Zionism and anti-Semitism and other issues of Judaic history and contemporary events. The Temple itself was an imposing, granite building situated close to both middle and upper-middle class neighborhoods with a significantly high percent of Jewish occupancy. My Sunday school classmates were, I could see, from families that were far better off than mine and they were, consequently, living the kind of life I would have liked to live. I was never completely comfortable with them for that reason, although none of them ever alluded to our differences in status.

We kids in the Home also received Hebrew lessons at the Home by a Hebrew teacher, Mr. Shoham, who came there once or twice a week for that purpose. I remember the teacher very well because he could have been a good father figure for me if I had gotten to know him better. He was of average height, neither heavy nor slender, with a small full black moustache, and he was a kind and friendly man. He had lived in what was then called Palestine for a few years so he brought with him the aura of an unusual experience, because we had been studying about Jewish settlements there in Sunday school and they seemed, to me at least, to be a dangerous and adventurous way of life. Because of my natural bent towards foreign languages I did extremely well in his classes and he appeared to be very fond of me and I retain, to this day, a pleasant memory of my association with him.

The teaching of Hebrew within Conservative Judaism at that time was restricted to learning the alphabet and their sounds, and then learning to pronounce the words as they appeared in the standard prayer book. In this manner we became proficient in reading printed Hebrew without understanding the meaning of a single word. We were told that the word which we pronounced "Ah doe Noy" meant God, but that was all. The combination of Hebrew letters which formed the word was not pronounced that way but we were told not to be concerned about that but to recognize it as a whole and pronounce it as dictated to us. Years later I made out that it actually spelled "Yeh-ho-vah," or Jehovah as it is Anglicized. Apparently the reason it was pronounced as "Ah-doe-noy" is that the true word is so holy that it should

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*Bar Mitzvah Group, JORI, 1933. Front left: Maurice Stollerman, Director; front right: Saul Barber. Back left: Rabbi Goldman; back right: Mr. Katz, Mr. Sandler. Photo courtesy of Mrs. Saul Barber.*

never be pronounced by mere humans but that the euphemism should be used instead. That euphemism itself became so holy that it was never to be pronounced outside of the recitation of prayers and a second generation euphemism, that is "Ah-doe-shem," meaning "God's name," was to be used whenever reference to God was made outside of prayer recitation. Learning Hebrew without being able to translate it was, to me, a great waste of time, and boring. Perhaps nowadays they are beginning to change that system, since with the founding of the State of Israel the Hebrew language has re-emerged as the official language of the country and is used in daily life as the major means of oral and written or printed communication.

The main purpose of teaching Hebrew the way I learned it was to prepare boys for their Bar Mitzvah ceremony (there was no corresponding Bat Mitzvah for girls when I was growing up) at the age of thirteen, at which they are required not only to recite a few prayers but also to read a passage from the Torah. I was Bar Mitzvahed in the Home, but instead of a single ceremony for me, which would normally occur, a group of six of us Home residents shared the same ceremony, each of us performing part of the ritual

in turn. It is interesting that in my Bar Mitzvah class of six kids two of us earned Ph.D. degrees and one became moderately wealthy as a stockbroker.

Although we went to Sunday school at the local Conservative temple we did not go to Sabbath services there. Instead we held our own Friday night services at the Home, usually presided over by the superintendent or the boys' supervisor. There was a special room available for this purpose, a long narrow one with a dais and pulpit to simulate a mini-synagogue. It was separated from one end of the main living room by a set of folding walls which, to my recollection, were never opened. It was also the room in which Mr. Shoham gave us our Hebrew lessons. Occasionally Friday night services were led by one of the older boys; I seem to remember my brother Nathan having done so for a while.

During my first year at the Home I was introduced to the Conservative version of the Passover Seder. It consisted of a short religious service recounting the events and significance of the Exodus of the Bible, followed by a holiday feast at which matzos instead of bread were eaten, and this was followed by another short service also relating to the story of Exodus. It was a jolly occasion with much singing of traditional, joyful songs reserved for just this event. One of the major events of the seder is the asking of the "four questions" by the youngest child sufficiently proficient in Hebrew to do so. I was chosen to do them, but because I had never participated in a group seder before, I missed my cue and one of the slightly older boys who had been through it before filled in the gap before I realized my error. It was, at the time, a significant disappointment to me.

I remember that during my very early years there the boys at the Home put on an old-fashioned "minstrel show" that was attended by family, friends, and donors. This was done in blackface and consisted of a chorus and a series of skits, songs, dances, etc. done by those who had any talent for it. It was put on in the gym, which had a stage for just such a purpose. I don't remember whether or not we little kids were part of the chorus, but I do remember it was an exciting night with all the outside people arriving and all of us staying up much later than usual. Minstrel shows were at that time a common form of variety show but, of course, tended to perpetuate the myth of blacks as good natured but shiftless ne'er-do-wells whose only accomplishments lay in song and dance. I hope those shows are no longer done.

Years later we kids put on a Purim play in which I had one of the leading roles. It was not a traditional Purim play that re-acted the events in Jewish

history leading to this holiday. Rather it was a play within a play, in which a group of orphanage kids who were quarantined in the hospital section of the Home because of an infectious but not debilitating condition and were consequently kept out of the normal celebration of the holiday, decided to put on their own Purim play just for themselves. I believe Stollie put it together by combining a play written about orphanage kids with the more traditional holiday play. I played one of the quarantined kids and the role of King Ahasuerus in the play within the play.

The gym was packed for the performance (folding chairs were used for all performances there) and it seemed to go off very well. I was surprised, in particular, by how well my performance was received. I recall being praised by Mr. Shoham for my part in it. It was a gratifying moment in my life and I never lost my interest in theater.

### **The Last Word**

Walking to junior high, about a mile away, was my first extended experience with a larger world outside of the Home and its near neighborhoods. The grammar school, after all, was just across the street. That part of the street was, in fact, unpaved for most of my tenure at the Home so that the school playground was like an extension of our own back yard and playing field. In fact, the kids who lived in the neighborhood located on the other side of our playing field generally used it as a shortcut to their homes. We Home kids thus had a goodly amount of interaction with kids outside of the Home, in school, classes, in the school playgrounds and in our own playing field.

But these contacts were limited to the vicinity of the Home, and our segregation from the rest of society was obvious to us. This sense of being different from all of the other kids bothered me a lot and I always yearned to be like everybody else. Walking those streets to school through middle-class neighborhoods awakened in me my sense of being different, identified by the rest of the world as an "orphan" living in an orphanage. I saw those houses and looked in their back yards and living rooms and yearned for the day when I could live like that. I suppressed these feelings and admitted them to no one — perhaps not even consciously to myself — but they were very strong and persisted in me for many years after I had left the Home.

I believe many, if not most, of the other kids in the Home harbored similar feelings of social inferiority and longing to be like everyone else. One of my friends once remarked to me long after we had both become

adults that it had taken him many years to get over what he called his orphanage complex. I knew instantly and without further explanation what he meant by that. I don't think I ever got over it fully. Once I left the Home, during my senior year in high school (in the city of Warwick, rather than Providence), and then during college, I never mentioned to any of my friends my years as a resident in an orphanage. To this day I mention it only very rarely to friends and acquaintances, so I suppose I will carry some of that "complex" with me to the end of my days.

Perhaps I felt this difference most keenly during the Sunday school classes. Most of the kids in these classes lived in upper-middle-class areas because the Temple was situated in such a neighborhood and because it was the relatively more affluent Jews who gravitated to Conservative (rather than Orthodox) congregations. Thus the kids of my Sunday school class had similar backgrounds to mine, parents or grandparents who were immigrants from eastern Europe, but whose lifestyle was so much more desirable than my own only because I had the misfortune to have my father die before I had reached a more mature age. I should emphasize that none of the other kids ever mentioned my lower social status, or even behaved in any way that could have been interpreted as "lording it over" me because of my status, neither those in secular or religious school. I don't think this was true just for me because I was a good student and respectable athlete, because I had no sense that any of the other kids in the Home, including some who were backward in school or athletic play, felt as if they were looked down upon because of their social status. Nevertheless, I repeat, many of us felt this difference keenly, and, in my case certainly, never got over it completely.

Perhaps it should be emphasized again that none of these feelings carried over into our behavior in the Home. There, within our own confines and with our own peer group, we felt secure and content. Our lives were actually not that much different from those whose lifestyles we envied so much. We had no lack of playmates and activities and "enjoyed" an extended family of over forty other kids. The food we ate and the clothes we wore were not that much different from those of our neighbors. We were loyal to our institution and carried with us, when we left the Home permanently, as much nostalgia for our childhood days as anyone else did. I left the Home in 1936, at the age of fifteen.



## Bibliographical Notes

By Lois Atwood

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"Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses of Jewish Clients," by George Goodwin, pages 67-92.

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First Jews in Rhode Island, Touro Synagogue, page 8.

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Meeting for Palestine Foundation Fund, pages 44-45.

World War II dance, Jewish Community Center, page 62.

Adler's Army and Navy Store in 1924, page 92.

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American Jewish Historical Society, page 159.

Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, page 160.

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**Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association**  
**47<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**  
**April 29, 2001**

The 47<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association was held on April 29, 2001, at Temple Beth-El. Kenneth Abrams, Chairman of the Day, called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

In the absence of Geraldine Foster, who had composed the talk, Toby Rossner presented the tribute to Eleanor Horvitz. On behalf of the general membership Anne Sherman also paid tribute to Eleanor, presenting her with flowers and a Tsedakah box. Eleanor gave a very gracious response.

President Robert Berkelhammer asked that the reading of the secretary's minutes of last year's meeting be waived. It was so voted. He then thanked Eleanor Horvitz, Aaron Cohen, Eugene Weinberg, George Goodwin, and Maurice Cohen for all their efforts on behalf of the Association. Bob said that the move to Heritage Harbor will enable the Association to show Jewish history to non-Jews as well as Jews, and there will be many other opportunities and challenges. To help meet new needs, Toby Rossner has been hired as Executive Director. More volunteers as well as more computers will be required. Fund raising must be initiated to provide money for the move and for operating expenses.

Jack Fradin's treasurer's report for the year 2000 was accepted as read.

Toby Rossner delivered her first report as Executive Director.

In the absence of Harold Gadon, chairman, Gene Weinberg presented the slate of new officers and members of the executive committee. The slate was approved and Melvin Zurier was the installing officer.

Bob Berkelhammer announced his presidential appointments to the board.

George Goodwin reported on the annual student competition. There were not enough applications to declare a winner but recognition for an excellent essay was given to Benjamin Brown, a doctoral student at Brandeis University.

Ken Abrams then introduced the speaker, Bernard Wax, former director of the American Jewish Historical Association. After a brief question period, Bob Berkelhammer closed the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Zita Brier, Secretary

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## Necrology — RIJHA Members November 1, 2000 – October 15, 2001

**Abrams, Lillian** (Grodsky), born in Boston, Massachusetts, a daughter of the late Samuel and Annie (Mazofsky) Grodsky. She was the wife of the late Saul Abrams.

Mrs. Abrams graduated from Boston Business School. During her professional career, she was affiliated with the Massachusetts Division of Industrial Safety. She received the governor's award for increasing government efficiency.

Mrs. Abrams was a member of Temple Emanu-El, the Brandeis Women's Committee, and Hadassah. She was a Life Member of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

She leaves a brother, David Grodsky. Died in Providence on February 15, 2001.

**Ackerman, Irving A.**, born in Providence, son of the late Isaac and Eva (Nachbar) Ackerman. He was the husband of the late Doris (Rubin) Ackerman. Mr. Ackerman was the founder and owner for 50 years of Paramount Office Supply, and a member of the National Office Products Association.

He was a founder and member of Crestwood Country Club, and a member of Touro Fraternal Association, a 32<sup>nd</sup> degree Mason, and a Shriner. Mr. Ackerman was a member of the former Temple Beth Israel, and a former member of Temple Torat Yisrael. He was also a member of Temple Sinai.

He leaves two daughters, Elayne A. Moe and Rayne Pass, and a son Arthur A. Ackerman. Died in Warwick on December 10, 2000 at the age of 87.

**Fain, Toby Ruth** (Lemelman), born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a daughter of the late Max and Hazel (Pinsker) Lemelman. Mrs. Fain was a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh, D.T. Watson School of Physical Therapy, and received her master's degree in public health from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Mrs. Fain established and ran the Birth Defect Center for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. She was a physical therapist for the State of Rhode

Island and for the Pawtucket school department.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El, Hadassah, and the Women's Division of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island.

She leaves a husband Robert Fain, a son, David Fain, and a daughter Dorie Fain. Died in Providence on December 4, 2000.

**Finkelstein, Sylvia** (Cardon), born in Montreal, Canada, a daughter of the late Max and Marsha (Mirkin) Cardon. Mrs. Finkelstein was a past president of Hadassah, a member of the Miriam Hospital Women's Association, and had been active in the Girl Scout organization. She was a Life Member of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

She was a member of Temple Beth-El and had served as president of its Sisterhood.

She leaves a husband, A. Archie Finkelstein, and three daughters, Dr. Judith Finkelstein, Mitzi Berkelhammer, and Marcia Goodman. Died in Providence on June 22, 2001.

**Goldsmith, James**, born in Providence, a son of the late Philip and Adele (Schlossberg) Goldsmith. Mr. Goldsmith was an Army veteran of World War II. He was awarded the Bronze Star and other decorations for combat service in Europe.

He had been in the insurance business since 1946. He served as president of the Independent Insurance Agents of Rhode Island and was a board member of that group's national organization. He was an insurance instructor at Bryant College and at Johnson and Wales University.

He was active in many community organizations that included the Urban League, Trinity Repetory Theatre, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Mr. Goldsmith was a member of Temple Beth-El and served on its board of Trustees.

He leaves a wife Marion (Jagolinzer) Goldsmith, a daughter, Barbara J. Goldsmith, and a son, David Goldsmith. Died in Sarasota, Florida on December 27, 2000 at age 86.

**Hanzel, Dr. Harold** "Archie", born in Providence, son of the late William and Katherine (Kushner) Hanzel. He was the husband of the late Beatrice (Goldstein) Hanzel and the late Florence (Coken) Hanzel.

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He was a graduate of Providence College and Temple University School of Dentistry where he was a member of the SED Dental Fraternity. Dr. Hanzel was an Army Veteran of World War II, serving as a major in the Dental Corps. He was a member of the Rhode Island and National Dental Associations, and the staff of the Miriam Hospital. He was active in musical endeavors, as member of the Warwick and Barrington Symphony Orchestras, the RSVP Band, and the Rhode Island Federation of Musicians. He was a professional dance band leader from 1930 to 1960. He also taught music at Woonsocket High School. He was given a special award in the Shriner Band, awarded to non-Shriners for exceptional service and dedication to the Shriners. The city of Cranston proclaimed March 13 as Dr. Harold Hanzel Day for his dedication and service to the Palestine Shriner Band.

He was a past president of Crestwood Country Club, Touro Fraternal Association, Royal Ridge Condo Association, and the Palestine Temple Shriner Band.

He was a member of the former Temple Beth Israel and Temple Torat Yisrael and its Men's Club.

He leaves two sons, Dr. Melvin Hanzel and Dr. Jeffrey Hanzel, a stepson, Gary Coken and a stepdaughter, Loraine Schulman. Died in Providence on July 18, 2001 at the age of 85.

**Kolodoff, David**, born in Providence, son of the late Jacob and Sarah (Uditsky) Kolodoff. He owned a liquor store in Providence for 40 years, retiring in 1978.

Mr. Kolodoff was a graduate of Roger Williams University. He was an Army Veteran on World War II, serving in Europe as a medic, and was awarded the Bronze Star.

He was a past treasurer of the Rhode Island Liquor Stores Association, and was a member of the Providence and South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Associations. An avid historian, he was also a member of the Rhode Island Historical Society.

He leaves a wife Libby (Soorkis) Kolodoff, and a son, Joel M. Kolodoff.

Died in Providence on May 29, 2001 at age 85.

**Krause, Edwin**, born in Cleveland Ohio, son of the late David and Clara Krause. His previous wife was the late Eunice (Fuldauer) Krause. Mr.

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Krause graduated in 1940 from Case-Western University where he earned the highest academic honors and won national acclaim in several sports. In 1964 his achievements were recognized by *Sports Illustrated* magazine. He worked his way up to become president of Madison Industries and a director of other companies. Mr. Krause was frequently sought as an adviser by commercial, financial, and civic organizations. He had said that "a man can't retire his experience. He must use it."

He had served on the national boards of the American Association of Industrial Management, the Council on Economic Education and Planned Parenthood. He served on the local boards of the Rhode Island Foreign Relations Committee, Miriam Hospital, Rhode Island Hospital, the United Way, the Research and Development Center of Rhode Island and the Rhode Island Philharmonic. He was a past chairman of the Moses Brown School's Board of Overseers and had served on the board of Rhode Island's Junior Achievement Organization, and also on the board of directors of Case-Western Reserve University. He served on many corporate boards including those guiding Hasbro. He was a Life Member of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. Mr. Krause was a member of Temple Beth-El.

He leaves a wife, Anne Berkelhammer Krause, a son, Rhode Island Superior Court Judge Robert D. Krause, and a daughter Nancy Krause Hymes. Died in Providence on October 7, 2001 at age 85.

**Leach, Muriel**, Born in Providence, daughter of the late Ernest and Sophie (Losch) Dauer. She was the wife of the late Max Leach.

A past president and treasurer of the former Jewish Home for the Aged, she was the first woman to hold those positions. She was a 35-year member of the agency's admissions committee and past president of the Women's Association. In 1992 she was the recipient of the agency's first Alexander Rumpler Award. She was president of the Providence Chapter of Haddassah, treasurer of the Western New England Region Board, and chairperson of the Wills and Beequests committee. In 1995 she was named Woman of the Year by Providence Haddassah.

She also served as President of Rhode Island chapter of National Council of Jewish Women, and had been co-chairman of its Russian Resettlement Committee. She was past chairperson of the Israel Bonds Women's Division of RI and member of the Cabinet of Israel Bonds of RI. In 1999 she received the organization's Deborah Award.

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In 1980 she was appointed by then Governor Joseph Garrahy to serve as a delegate to the White House Conference on Families. In 1982 she received a Community Service Award from the Rhode Island Section of the National Council of Jewish Women and in 1986 she received a medal for Community Service for her volunteerism in Providence.

Mrs. Leach was a member of Temple Emanu-El and a graduate of its Ben/Bat Torah Program.

She leaves two sons, David H. Leach and Bruce Leach and a daughter Susan Leach DeBlasio. She died in Providence on January 1, 2001 at the age of 87.

**Pitterman, Pearl**, a daughter of the late Charles and Julia (Miller) of Greenwich, CT. She was an award-winning flower arranger and a sculptress, and had presented a one-artist show of her work at the Palm Beach Community College in 1996. She was active in the Rhode Island Garden Club, and a former president of the Eden Garden Club in Providence.

Mrs. Pitterman graduated from New York University and Columbia University. She was a member of the League of Women Voters, and was active in ORT, Hadassah, and the National Council of Jewish Women both in Rhode Island and Florida. She was a Life Member of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

She was affiliated with Temple Beth Torah in Wellington, Florida, Temple Beth-El in Providence, and Touro Synagogue in Newport.

She leaves her husband of 58 years, Marvin, a son, Dr. Arthur B. Pitterman, and a daughter Dr. Joy Pitterman. Died in Wellington, FL on June 22, 2001.

**Sach, Phyllis**, born in New York City, a daughter of the late Samuel and Tillie (Luftman) Savlick. She was the wife of the late Gilbert Sachs. Mrs. Sachs was a legal secretary in the Rhode Island attorney general's office serving in four administrations. She was a talented pianist and artist, and was a docent at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El and served as a volunteer in the Temple library.

She leaves a daughter Betsy Block and a son Coleman Ray Sachs. Died in Providence on September 14, 2001 at age 85.

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**Silverstein, Myron**, born in Providence, a son of the late Barney and Pearl (Israel) Silverstein. Mr. Silverstein attended the University of Rhode Island. He was president and owner of Woonsocket News Company, retiring in 1990.

He was a member of the Rhode Island Seniors Golf Association. He was a lifelong member of Temple Emanu-El and served on the board of ACIDA.

He leaves a wife, Honey Silverstein, and two daughters, Lori Dorsey and Lynn Marks. Died in Providence on January 17, 2001, at age 72.

**Smira, Brenda**, born in Woonsocket, a daughter of the late Abraham and Rose (Guzner) Medoff. She was the wife of the late M. William Smira.

She was a member of Hadassah, the Brandeis Women's Association, and a life member of the Miriam Hospital Women's Association. She was also a member of Temple Emanu-El and its sisterhood.

She leaves two daughters, Deborah Smira Levovsky and Carol Smira Trow.

Died in Providence on April 28, 2001 at the age of 89.

**Tanner, Lewis**, born in Pawtucket, a son of the late Max and Freda (Halpert) Tarnapol. He was a graduate of the University of Illinois.

He had served as president of the Medical-Dental-Hospital Bureaus of America for three years. He was an Army veteran of World War II. Mr. Tanner was a member and past treasurer of Temple Beth-El.

He leaves a wife Eleanor (Geffner) Tanner and a son Ronald H. Tanner. He was the father of the late Marjorie Harrington. Died in Providence on October 1, 2001 at age 82.

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## **Erratum**

Volume 13, Number 2

“An Interview with Frederick Lee (‘Skip’) Weingeroff”

page 259, line 5: “program” should read “theater project.”

1917  
The following table shows the results of the  
investigation conducted during the year 1917.

TABLE I

Year	Number of cases	Percentage of total
1916	100	100.0
1917	120	120.0
Total	220	220.0

TABLE II

Year	Number of cases	Percentage of total
1916	100	100.0
1917	120	120.0
Total	220	220.0

TABLE III

Year	Number of cases	Percentage of total
1916	100	100.0
1917	120	120.0
Total	220	220.0

## **Funds and Bequests of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association**

### **Funds**

Arnold T. and Alice Axelrod Galkin	<i>General Fund</i>
Ira S. and Anna Galkin	<i>General Fund</i>
Seebert J. and Gertrude N. Goldowsky	<i>Research Scholarship Fund</i>
Benton H. and Beverly Rosen	<i>Book Fund</i>
Erwin E. and Pauline E. Strasmich	<i>General Fund</i>
Sylvia and Frederick Kenner	<i>General Fund</i>
Judith Weiss Cohen	<i>Memorial Fund</i>

### **Bequests**

Jeannette S. Nathans  
B. Ruby Winnerman

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## Life Members of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association

Stanley and Sandra Abrams	Dr. Alfred and Betty Jaffe
Mr. and Mrs. Carl Adler	Marilyn Kagan
Irving H. and Eleanor Adler	Patti Kaplan
Mrs. Max Alperin	Mr. Sherwin Kapstein
Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Alperin	Howard and Rachel Kaufman
Banice C. and Beverly Bazar	Arnold and Sheila Kaufman
Dr. Leonard and Shirley Bellin	Mr. and Mrs. Fredrick Kenner
Rosalie Adelman Beloff	Estelle R. Klemer
Robert and Miriam Berkelhammer	Robert A. and Betty Kotlen
Mr. Bertram Bernhardt	Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Krause
Mrs. Alice Bernstein	Mrs. Sanford Kroll
Mr. and Mrs. Stanley P. Blacher	Dorothy Frank Fox Levenson
Mr. William Bojar	George and Barbara Levine
Lynn and Elliot Brodsky	Mrs. Frank Licht
Mrs. Jesse Bromley	Judith Holzman Litt
Mr. Aaron Cohen	Dr. and Mrs. Stephen J. Losben
Mrs. Earle F. Cohen	Mr. Ronald Markoff
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*The Touro Guards, Jewish Volunteers during the Spanish-American War, 1898.*  
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