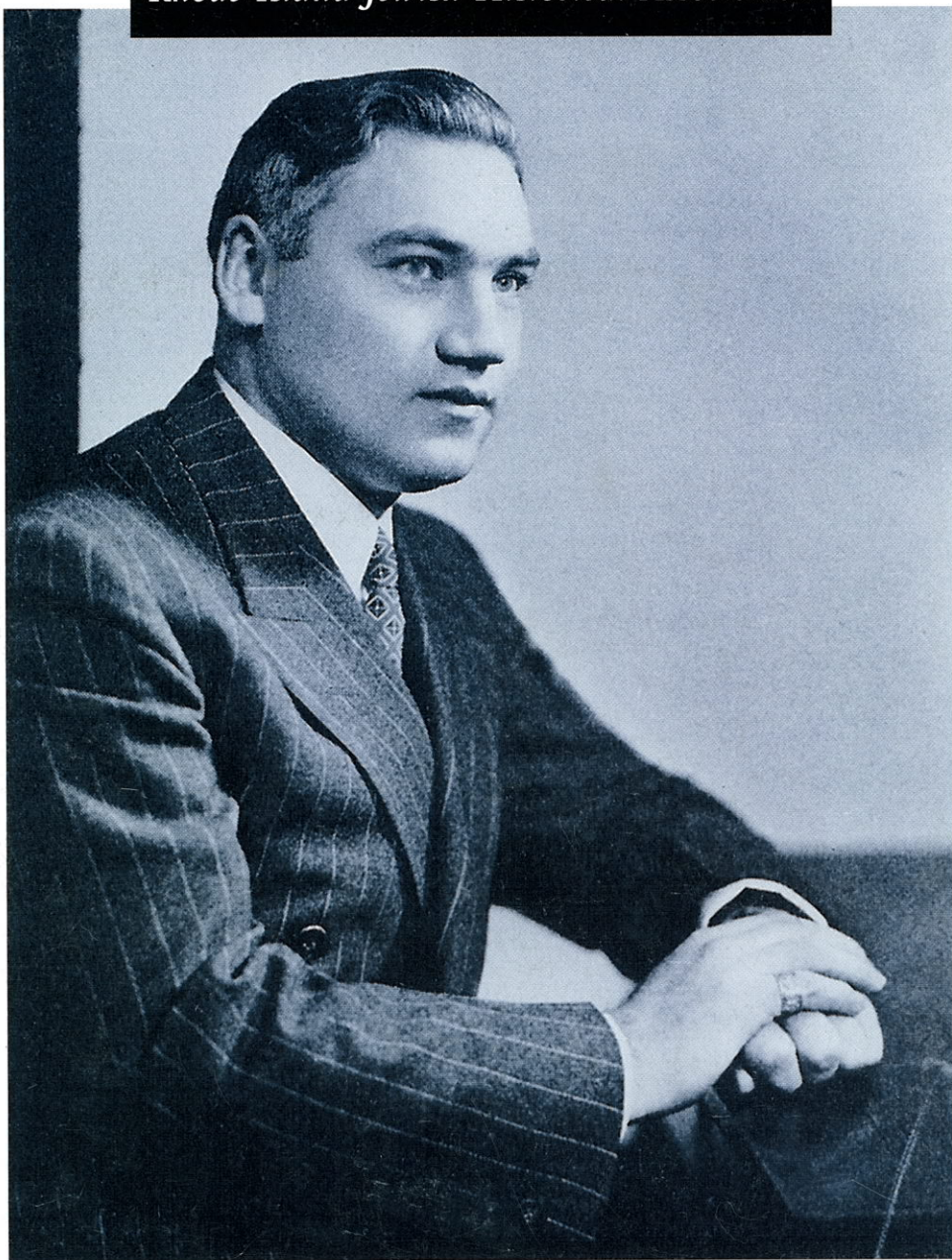


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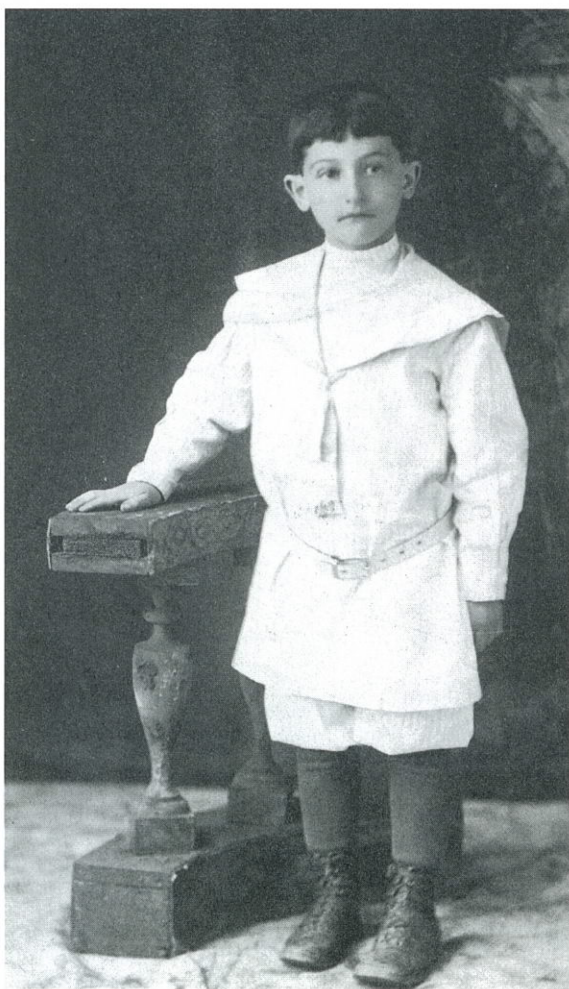


# NOTES

VOLUME 14 NOVEMBER 2004

NUMBER 2





ISRAEL J. KAPSTEIN, 1910



Rhode Island  
Jewish Historical

# Notes

VOLUME 14

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NUMBER 2

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION  
130 SESSIONS STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906-3444

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## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

I am honored and delighted to serve as the ninth editor of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*. This wonderful publication has few counterparts in all of North America. Our homemade journal thrives through the efforts of many — history buffs, students, teachers, and scholars — Jews and non-Jews alike. After fifty years of accomplishments, it remains surprisingly fresh, frank, and flexible.

This issue of *The Notes* presents new facets of many familiar topics: family, patriotism, persecution, immigration, education, labor, recreation, and faith. Language is another recurring theme because the Jews portrayed in these pages have spoken or read Afrikaans, Arabic, French, German, Old High German, Latin, Russian, Spanish, and Yiddish in addition to the language of prayer. They have expressed themselves through an amazing variety of genres, including stories, letters, scholarly discourse, teaching, and song.

Like most issues of *The Notes*, this one reveals the diverse sources of historical writing: personal reminiscences, interviews, manuscripts, vital statistics, naturalization records, census records, city directories, maps, photographs, artifacts, archaeological excavations as well as newspapers, periodicals, and books. In my opinion, *The Notes* seem most effective when bridging the recent past and the near future, binding one generation to another. Without our publication, national and world events would seem less vivid; local memories would probably fade away.

I am grateful to the many friends and colleagues who make *The Notes* one of our community's brightest lights. I would like to thank the Association's publications committee, especially its chair, Stanley Abrams; Anne Sherman, who keeps our office humming; our new graphic designer, Bobbie Friedman; and our new printers, Signature Printing. Most of all, I would like to thank our writers, who engage, challenge, and inspire our many loyal readers. Enjoy!

George M. Goodwin



## REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS AND PEOPLE IN MY LIFE:

### PART I

BY HAROLD TREGAR

Wondering whether it had any historical value, Harold Tregar, a retired advertising executive, submitted an essay about his involvement in a key Rhode Island election. Needless to say, it was wonderful. Had he written anything else? Two years earlier, Tregar had authored a short autobiography, an heirloom for his two grandsons. So much of it was intriguing that the second half of *Reflections* will be published in the next issue.

From the Civil War to the Vietnam War, *The Notes* has presented accounts of Jewish Rhode Islanders in the military. The largest number of articles, based on oral history interviews, focused on World War II. As a member of Tom Brokaw's "Greatest Generation," Tregar shows that soldiers experienced more than hardship and danger. Numerous aspects of military life were quite amusing, if not downright zany. Feelings of fateful or divine intervention occurred at the least predictable moments.

For months, I took my wife, Eunice, to Rhode Island Hospital's dermatology clinic, three times a week, for the hot tar treatments for psoriasis. Each time I'd drop her off and have to drive around looking for a place to park. The hospital parking lots covered I don't know how many acres; they had expanded over half of South Providence, extending into my old neighborhood. For some strange reason, they left standing all the old posts and street signs just where they had been. Old familiar names were: Dudley and Plain Streets, Gay and Dudley, Plain and Blackstone. And one day, as I drove around, I spotted a sign that stopped me short: Staniford and Blackstone Streets. Here was the corner where I had lived!

Had it been about 75 years earlier, my car would be standing in front of the old three-story house where I grew up! As I stared at that street sign, almost as in a dream, I was six years old again, following my sister Freda up the street to the Willard Avenue Primary School for the first time, she assuring me all the time that I'd be OK. But I knew better. I liked the idea of starting



AT 16 years

school. What frightened me was the thought of having to speak English all the time. Up to then, my closest friend and companion was Bubbe, my grandmother, and we always spoke Yiddish. And I was afraid the other kids would laugh at the way I spoke English. I was a scared little kid that day as I entered the strange new world of English Only! My sisters never told me until later that I actually spoke English with a Yiddish accent.

My thoughts wandered. In my memory's eye, I turned to look across the street, half expecting to see the yellow brick public bathhouse where we all went every week for a hot shower. Hot water at home came only from a pot on the kitchen stove. Then I could hear again the clang and clatter of my wagon as I pulled it up the street on Friday afternoon. How proud I was of that red wagon! My father had built it. He died when I was a year old, so I knew only what my sisters told me. He was a blacksmith, and he built that wagon as only a blacksmith would. It had metal corner irons for extra strength, a heavy curved iron handle to pull by, with metal rims on the wheels in place of tires. You could hear me coming a block away. It was a heavy, sturdy wagon, built to last.

I felt like a dray horse as I leaned forward, pulling with my usual cargo, a big iron pot filled with *cholent*. This was a thick mixture of meat and potatoes and other things that my Bubbe prepared for the Sabbath. It required a lot of cooking, and the baker on Willard Avenue allowed the women to put their pots into his oven on Friday, after he banked the ovens for the night. It cooked slowly all night and, since he didn't bake on the Sabbath, you could pick up the pot any time the next day, with a hot meal for the Sabbath. Handling the heavy pot was a challenge, but it was a weekly chore I looked forward to. It let me use my wonderful wagon.

I looked up, sure I would see Snowball on the roof. You see, we always had an all white cat, and they were all called Snowball. I don't know where my Bubbe found them. Snowball was always a house pet, and never was allowed outdoors, except onto the roof of the house. We lived on the third floor, and the front porch extended under the eaves of the roof. So Snowball could easily jump



from the porch to the eaves onto the roof, where she ran around doing what cats do all day. I don't know who taught them to do this, but it must have been a strange sight for people on the street. Here was a white cat running around on the roof. I thought nothing of it.

As I continued to daydream, other familiar images came to mind. I was sitting on the back steps on the day before Passover, grating the fresh horseradish to be ready for the gefilte fish, a special Passover delicacy. The fumes of the freshly ground horseradish would send tears running down my cheeks. As the youngest I was automatically assigned this job. But it made me feel important.

In another scene I was sitting down to lunch on a Sunday, with some of my cousins visiting. With seven or eight kids having lunch, my mother just didn't have enough dishes. But that didn't faze her. She had us turn the dish over and eat the pickled herring from the back of the plate, then wipe it clean and turn the plate over for whatever else she served. It didn't bother us at all. In fact, for years after, I assumed that pickled herring had to be eaten on the back of the plate.

I also remembered being fascinated as the men installed our first "electricity." How excited I was! When the day came, I could only imagine how bright the house would be with the magic "electricity." When they finally hung a cord from the ceiling in the kitchen and one in the front room, put in "bulbs" and pulled the chain, we all sat around and marveled at the wonderful new brightness in the house. No more kerosene lamps or gas jets in those two rooms. From then on, all the reading was done there. (The bedrooms and the bathroom were still dark.)

I could see myself emptying the burned ashes from the kitchen stove in the morning, carrying them down to the cellar to be sifted, so the unburned pieces could be brought back upstairs to be reused, along with a fresh pail of coal. This usually took several trips. Then Ma would have breakfast ready.

I don't know how long I sat there lost in nostalgic reverie. By then it was almost time to pick up Eunice.

## THE CLOTHESLINE

When I was very young, I was a skinny little kid, not very athletic. But I was very determined, and I had a strong will to do the things I wanted to do. Being

scared never stopped me.

One of my earliest recollections was my job to keep the clothesline working. Every house in our neighborhood was a three-story building, and in the backyard were clotheslines running from a window to a pole at the other end of the yard. It was a double line going around a pulley at each end. You attached the wet clothes with wooden clothespins to the bottom line, and pulled the top line around the pulley so you could hang more clothes. It was the only way to dry your wet laundry. So the clothesline was a critical necessity. But the key to this whole procedure was keeping your line working smoothly over the pulleys. Every once in a while the line would slip off the pulley. The one attached to the house was easy to fix. You simply leaned out the window and fixed it. The pulley at the other end was another story. Someone had to climb up the pole to reach the pulley. We lived on the third floor, so that's how high the pulley was. As a seven or eight-year old, that pulley looked like a mile up in the air.

The pole had wooden crossbars nailed on, and you kept reaching up, one step at a time, as you made your way up the pole. I was the only one who was small and light enough to chance the rickety cross bars. I did it each time with a combination of dread and bravado. Of course, I was scared stiff; but I was, for the moment, a family hero. They needed me. I can just imagine how my mother must have felt, standing down there watching her baby go up the swaying pole. But, like many things in her life and mine, we did it because we had to. I've never forgotten the feeling of coming down from the pole with a proud grin and hugging my mother.

#### MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH SHAKESPEARE

I graduated from Point Street Grammar School when I was twelve, so my first encounter with Shakespeare may have occurred a year or two earlier. My friend, Abe Goldstein, and I regularly went to the library, and somehow we came across *The Merchant of Venice*. We certainly knew nothing about Shakespeare, but the story struck a chord with us. It was about an old Jewish merchant who was being persecuted just because he was Jewish, and we knew plenty of those. "Hath not a Jew eyes, ears, nose...if you prick us, do we not bleed?" What a great story! It wasn't hard for a ten-year-old kid in South Providence, in 1927, to understand this. We certainly couldn't have understood everything

we were reading, but we did understand enough to pique our interest.

Over the summer we continued to read most of the Shakespeare plays in the library, including *Julius Caesar*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Hamlet*. I can't even remember all the titles now. I can't explain it, but we actually enjoyed them and we'd sit around talking about each as we read. We were just reading them and getting the flavor, not studying them, which is what ruins Shakespeare for kids in high school. If we didn't understand every word, so what? It was a flavor of the stories that fascinated us.

One day the thought hit us – why can't we write one of these plays? Of course! We would write a play “à la Shakespeare,” and present it to our teacher as a long lost Shakespearean play that was just discovered. In our ten-year-old mentality, it was perfectly possible. So what if it was written in a ten-year-old scrawl, in pencil, on notebook paper! We worked at it for several weeks, as though we were plotting some secret scheme. And then the summer ended, and we had to go back to school. So the world never found that long lost Shakespeare play. But it made for an exciting summer.

A year or two later, when I got to high school and we actually studied *Julius Caesar*, I told the teacher the number of Shakespeare plays I had read. I'm sure she thought I was fabricating. I really didn't care.

#### **HOW THE FATES CONSPIRED TO HAVE ME MEET EUNICE**

When I graduated from Classical High, I was 16. I had never eaten non-kosher food (maybe a hot dog, but certainly not lobster or clams). As it turned out, if I had been able to eat lobster, I might have never met Eunice.

My art teacher at Classical, Asa Randall, was an old Maine Yankee, a fine old-fashioned artist, a type rarely found teaching in the public schools. He looked like Ichabod Crane, but he loved young people, especially if he felt you had any talent he could encourage. He took a liking to me, and we actually became close friends. He took me on sketching trips and he introduced me to a whole world I never knew existed. He was the one who first encouraged me to think seriously about going to art school, something I never even dreamed was possible. There is no question that he changed my life. We were a real odd couple of friends, the old Maine Yankee and the Jewish kid from South Providence.

Each summer he went back to Maine to teach at an art school in



Boothbay Harbor. He also ran the art colony, rough cabins in the woods, where the summer students lived. This was long before motels. You can imagine how a sixteen-year-old from South Providence felt being part of this! He arranged for me to study at the art school for the summer and work around the colony for my keep. In my mind, this was as close to heaven as I could get. One of my "jobs" was to drive one of the women around in her Franklin, which was like a Cadillac!

At the art colony they lived on lobster and all kinds of shellfish; their lobster pots were right at the foot of the hill, and clams were plentiful. It was the cheapest food they could serve. Unfortunately, it was so strange to me that I couldn't make myself even try it! I found myself living on cheese or jelly sandwiches. Finally, out of pity, the cook asked for any of my mother's recipes. She tried to make potato latkes, but she drained all the liquid out and she ended up with potato cement. After a couple of weeks, I was really starving, and I was tall but very thin anyway. The cook decided I had to do something. If I could not eat their food, I'd have to go home. I was heartbroken, but I had to agree, so I went home. It was one of the sorriest days of my life.

That's how I happened to be at home that July, instead of in Maine, where I was supposed to be.

I got a call one day from my friend, Arthur Hoffman, that he'd been invited to a party on the East Side, and that he'd try, somehow, to get me in. He was a very smooth liar, so he had no trouble convincing the girl who invited him that a friend had come in unexpectedly from "out-of-town" (Maine was out of town!), and he couldn't come to the party without his friend. The girl who had invited him was Eunice Jacobs, whom I had never met.

That's how I happened to meet Arthur's cute little friend, Eunice. And



AT 20 years



we hit it off immediately, even after she found out how I got to the party.

I suppose we might have met sometime later, but maybe not. The fates do strange things. I've thought many times, if I had not been a good kosher boy and had been able to eat lobster, how my life (and Eunice's) might have changed.

It wasn't until many years later that I could get myself to eat lobster.

### MY FIRST CAR

By 1939, I'd been out of RISD for two years. I was 22 years old and working for Paramount Line, a greeting card manufacturer. Our art director was an older, more experienced artist than I. Unfortunately, he was gay, and in 1939 that was hardly acceptable. My friend Alfie and I got along OK with him. He was a decent enough guy, but the women on the staff just wouldn't accept him, and they made his life miserable. Eventually, it began to affect production, and they had to replace him. That's how I became art director, although I was only 22. Of course, I didn't object. I felt I could handle it, and it also meant going from \$16 a week to \$32.50 a week (not \$32!).

That was a very respectable wage in 1939, especially for a 22-year-old, and I felt I could finally begin to think about getting married. The first thing I did was buy a car, which I'd never owned before. It was a 1934 Chevy Cabriolet, and was I proud of it. Owning my own car was something I'd always dreamed about but never expected to achieve. It gave me a new sense of freedom to be able to go wherever I wanted and to take my girlfriend wherever she wanted to go without asking any favor of anyone. With Christmas coming, I thought it would be a great idea to go away for the holiday, someplace we'd never been, like New Hampshire. I'd only read about New Hampshire in the winter, with the snow.

There was an ad in the Sunday paper for Bartlett, New Hampshire, with all kinds of winter sports. With my new car, I thought, why not? I broached it to Eunice and our friends, Celia Gilstein and Lloyd Bazelon. They all loved the idea, but they questioned getting their parents' permission. Celia was at home and Eunice was a secretary for a liquor distributor. Lloyd was still a student at optometry school. So in addition to his parent's permission, he also had to get the money. I was the only one who felt I didn't have to get anyone's permission or the money. The three of them agreed to ask their parents, fully



EUNICE AND HAROLD, 1945

expecting to be turned down. But to their amazement, all of them thought it was a great idea! I learned later that Eunice's mother talked to Celia's mother, and they decided that Eunice and Celia would chaperone each other. Both mothers decided we were "good boys who could be trusted with their girls."

We were thrilled and we made reservations at a small inn in Bartlett – it was long before motels – and on Christmas Eve we started out for New Hampshire. It was snowing on an idyllic winter night, and we were four kids in love, going off for our first trip alone, in our own car! That was long before Route 95, so we drove up Route 1 through dozens of small towns in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and it snowed all the way.

About halfway the car started to chug and skip, but as long as it didn't actually stall I just kept going this way for about 150 miles. We didn't care; we were having a ball. When we finally got to Bartlett, about two in the morning, I first thought to lift up the hood and see what was wrong. It was something I could have fixed in a minute if I'd had sense enough to check. One of the

clips attaching a wire to the top of one of the spark plugs had come loose, and it was not resting on the plug. As we bounced along it made intermittent contact with the plug, just enough to keep us going. But who worried about things like that!

When we got to the inn we were frozen, tired and hungry, but deliriously happy. It was a winter scene like one of the hundreds of Christmas cards I had drawn. A soft blanket of thick snow was still quietly falling, with the warm glow of the house lights glistening on the snow. We were the only guests for Christmas Eve, so we went right into the kitchen with the innkeepers. We were so excited to be there, we didn't care what we ate. We were dead tired so, in a while, we went to our rooms. It turned out to be a thrilling, memorable night, when we discovered how deeply our love had grown, as we truly became one. It was a night we would never forget as we talked and laughed about it many times through the years. And yes, Eunice's mother was right, she could trust me never to hurt her Eunice.

For the first time in our lives, we found out what was meant by "winter wonderland." We played in the snow and went sledding. Eunice went skating (I had never skated), and we just had the time of our lives. I was so grateful to Eunice's mother.

With the trip to Bartlett behind us, now the four of us could think ahead to summer. Having the car opened unlimited vistas of places I'd only dreamed of. I read an ad for Newfound Lake in New Hampshire. With "permission" no longer a problem, we just had to find a good time and the money. We reserved a cabin on Newfound Lake, and it was a really old fashioned cabin, with an outside toilet, a wood stove in the kitchen, but it did have electric lights. We stocked up on food for a week. (Celia's father ran a market and he loaded us up.) When we got to the cabin, all we needed was some ice for the refrigerator, and we settled in.

We just swam in the lake, Lloyd caught some fish, the girls cooked, and we just relaxed and played house for a wonderful ecstatic week. Seeing Eunice's glowing face for the first time at breakfast in her bathrobe and learning what it was like to have Eunice around for relaxed, unhurried loving, I came to realize that she had become much more than just my girlfriend.

All of this was made possible by buying my first car. In fact, two years later, when we were married, the car took us on a leisurely drive up to Canada

and back down through Lake Champlain, ending up at the Long Island World's Fair. No problems with the car, and we spent about \$350.

When I think of the thousands of dollars we spent on subsequent vacations, without having half the fun, I wondered. If we could only relive the sheer magic of the discovery of true love.

### HOW I BECAME A "DOCTOR"

By 1942 we had been married for two years, and Eunice was very anxious to start a family. We had been through a short stay in Holyoke, Massachusetts. I was doing freelance greeting card design and general commercial work and doing very well financially, as were most guys who hadn't gone into the service. As a married man, I was classified 3A, which meant I was still safe from the draft.

By early 1943, we were starting to get reconciled to the fact that Eunice wasn't going to get pregnant. Suddenly, in the spring of 1943, married men were reclassified 1-A, "eligible to be drafted." Within a month, Eunice told me she was pregnant! I received this news with a mixture of joy and dread. I had no idea when I might have to go. Eunice was due in October. I went to my draft board to try to get a deferment until the baby was born. I will never forget the response of the draft board chairman, a Jewish jerk whom I knew. I tried to impress on him that the course of the war would hardly be affected if I went in three months later. With a smirk on his face, he said, "We men are necessary at the laying of the keel; but they can handle the launching without us." He said this to a 26-year-old, expecting his first child, who would be leaving his wife just three months before she gave birth. May he rot in hell. I was drafted in July; Betsy was born in October, and I wasn't there.

But we did have some luck, compared with what might have been. I went to Fort Devens for induction, from which I could have been sent anywhere in the country for basic training. Imagine my feeling when I found out I was going to Westover Field, outside of Holyoke, where we had lived for eight months. Only 75 miles from Providence!

At Westover, I was attached to the 101st Airborne Engineers, a new type of outfit that was expected to lay emergency landing strips on the islands in the Pacific. They would land in helicopters. Instead of basic training, I was assigned to the base's special services (because of my art background). The



special services officer was a third-rate Broadway actor who was drafted early, when they needed officers. I soon found out how vain he was; he loved to have me do sketches of him. So I accommodated him. I found that if I asked him to pose for a sketch about Thursday or Friday, he'd be in a friendly mood when I asked him for a weekend pass – and I could go home! I did an awful lot of sketches of that idiot. I don't think he ever caught on.

My dentist from home, Aaron Gershkoff, was a major in charge of the dental clinic. He was an orthodontist, and he found that the base commander, Col. Ulysses Grant Jones (honestly, that was his name), had a young daughter whose teeth needed straightening! Aaron offered to do it, and he became a good friend of Col. Jones. Aaron hinted to the colonel that he had a friend on the base who was a portrait painter, and what a great chance to have a portrait of his daughter.

The colonel and I met and just talked art. He found out I was a mural painter. Just what the officers' club could use – some murals depicting the mission of the Airborne Engineers! What a great idea, I agreed. I'd love such an assignment. So he set up a studio for me on the second floor of one of the hangars (the size of two football fields), and I requisitioned everything I needed, including an easel, paints, and brushes. I got to work on a set of three murals. I actually completed two of them and was working on the third before a word was ever said about a portrait! I completed the set and they were installed in the officers' club. Then I went to the colonel's home and met the little girl. I told him she was so cute that I wanted to do a full-length painting instead of only her head. He would send his car for me in the morning, and I would spend half a day painting.

One day the colonel told me he'd gotten orders that all base personnel were to be reassigned for training to go overseas. The one thing he could do for me was to recommend me for officers' candidate school, which would guarantee me at least another fourth months on the mainland. When I found out that as an officer my pay would go from \$80 a month to \$250 a month, I agreed to go. Usually, the officer you worked for was the one to sign your application for OCS, but my lieutenant in special services didn't even know I was applying. My application and letter of recommendation were signed by "U.G. Jones, Commanding."

The only OCS open at the time was for a new corps, the Medical

Administrative Corps (MAC). So that's where I went to Camp Barkley in Abilene, Texas, where I spent four delightful months training in the desert with the temperature about 110 every day. With 20-mile field marches, obstacle courses and all of the other fun things, I went from 245 pounds to 185. But I felt great. And I finally graduated and got my bars as a Medical Administrative Corps officer. Our insignia was a caduceus with an "A" in the center. That's how I became a "Doc."

### ED, MY "BUDDY" AT WESTOVER FIELD

Before I say more about my experiences in Texas, let me tell you about my "buddy," Ed. I met him at Westover when I was assigned to special services;

he was the chaplain's assistant. He had been a top-level concert pianist and was personal friends with prominent stars, some of whom were card-carrying Communists.

Westover was the jumping off point for air squadrons heading overseas. As each group left, they would leave young wives stranded around the base. Looking for help, they would go see the chaplain. That meant they had to go through Ed. And he would hand pick the ones he wanted for his personal "attention." He would tell me about each of them.

Westover was a small base at that time, and normally the top entertainers skipped us. But Ed was able to get Yehudi Menuhin because they shared the same agent. I went with him to pick up Menuhin,

and we sat on the stage behind him at the concert. It was a thrill. Then he asked the base adjutant if he'd like to have Paul Robeson. So Ed arranged for a Robeson concert. Then he realized that our base theatre still had segregated seating – this was 1944 – and Ed said he would not insult Robeson by having him appear with the black soldiers seated in the back. So Ed, a private, went to the adjutant, a major, and told him unless they changed the seating for that



LT. TREGAR, MAC

concert, he would call Robeson and cancel it. Believe me, this took guts. The adjutant told him it was army regulations and he couldn't do it. So Ed called Robeson and canceled the concert. Not many army privates could have done that.

Ed was in demand by all the churches in Springfield as a guest organist on Sundays. Since he had to go into town to practice each week, he was given a pass to get off the base at any time. He was the only private and enlisted man who had this privilege.

Russian relief was a popular activity at that time. They ran all kinds of fundraisers for this. Many of the prominent families in Springfield were involved, and Ed was a guest artist. That's when he met somebody's young daughter. Poor Phyllis didn't stand a chance. Ed became a steady guest at their home. Her parents thought it was great. He was a big deal around Springfield. What they didn't know was that when he stayed at their home, he was sleeping with Phyllis, right down the hall from her parents! One day her father came to ask Phyllis something, and he found them together in her bed.

As Ed described it to me, "I sat up in bed, and the whole situation struck me so funny, I couldn't stop laughing." "I thought the old man would have a fit." But it didn't bother Ed a bit. Except that Phyllis got pregnant shortly afterward. Since Ed knew that I was very friendly with a physician, he wanted me to ask him for a drug that would cause an abortion. Against my better judgment, I went to the physician and told him about a friend who had a problem. He thought it was me. I didn't want to give him Ed's name, but the physician agreed to get the stuff. He refused to personally deliver it, because it was a very serious offense. He did it as a favor to me, but he insisted I take the stuff and deliver it. I didn't want to be caught with it either.

We devised a plan. Ed would be waiting on a corner in Springfield. The physician and I would drive by, toss the package to him, and then drive away. The plan worked smoothly – like it is done in the movies. Except that seven months later Phyllis delivered a healthy baby. I think that Ed and she eventually got married, but I shipped out shortly afterward and I lost track of him.

I know he never went overseas, because early in basic training he pulled a stunt. He absolutely refused to do anything that might injure his hands. He convinced the psychiatrist that he could never do anything that might affect his playing the piano, and he stuck to it. He refused to handle a



rifle or anything else dangerous. They had no choice but to classify him as unfit for overseas duty. And he spent the war as a chaplain's assistant, laughing at everyone. He thought that, as an artist, I was crazy not to do the same thing, so I wouldn't injure my hands. I couldn't do it. Very few people had the stomach to carry that off. Ed did.

Eunice visited Phyllis at her home. She was really a very nice kid. But she didn't stand a chance against Ed. I imagine that eventually they must have separated, and he probably went back to New York and the concert stage. For her sake, I hope Phyllis got rid of the bastard. But he was a fascinating bastard.

#### **HOW A BAPTIST MINISTER SAVED ME**

In July, 1944, I had just received my commission, and I was home on a week's leave. I was assigned to go back to Texas for three months of additional training as a battalion surgeon's assistant (BSA). This was a new position created to replace a doctor at the frontline battalion aid station. We were trained to give plasma to keep men alive for evacuation. Also, the casualty rate for battalion surgeons was so high, it was cheaper to lose a BSA than a doctor.

The one good thing was that as an officer I could now bring my family down for these three months. All we had to do was find a place to live. Abilene was a small town and Camp Barkley had thousands of men looking for apartments. I had arranged with Max Susswein, a fellow BSA whose wife and baby were also coming down, to share an apartment. He was a former meat inspector from Brooklyn and a pharmacist. His wife was from upstate New York. She and Eunice had never met, of course, and it was a real gamble how they'd be able to live together. Max was in his late thirties and a real nice Jewish guy, very New Yorkese.

Eunice's mother thought she was crazy, taking her baby to Texas under those conditions. But there was no question she was coming. Getting to Texas with a one-year-old was an adventure in itself. It was a two-day train ride, and Betsy was just starting to walk. So I walked from Rhode Island to Texas, up and down the length of the train, leaning over and holding her arms over her head.

As so many times in those years, the fates intervened for us. As an army officer walking a baby, a lot of passengers stopped us to talk. One of them was a Baptist minister returning to Texas. When he heard we were going



to Abilene, he said he had good friends there. He was sure they'd be happy to help us if we ever needed any help. He couldn't have known how prescient this would turn out.

There were only two hotels in Abilene, and we had reserved a room, with the Sussweins, in one of them. Rooms were very scarce. We got to Abilene after a long and tiring ride from Fort Worth, late in the day. We were both exhausted, and Betsy was tired, hungry and cranky. I still had to take a bus out to camp to sign in after I got Eunice and Betsy settled. We took a cab to the hotel, and I went to check in. But they had no reservations for us! I almost died. Eunice was in the lobby sitting on our luggage, holding Betsy, almost in tears. It didn't help to argue. If they had no reservation, that was it. There were no empty rooms. Eunice was on the verge of calling home to tell her parents she was coming back. They would just say, "I told you so."

Then I thought of my train friend, the Baptist minister. Fortunately, I had saved the card he gave me. I had no idea whom I was calling, but I was desperate, so I called. It turned out to be an old couple living in a small house outside of town. They were real storybook Texas Baptists. I'm sure they had never seen a Jew before in their lives. But they were very kind. When they heard our predicament, they offered to let us sleep overnight in their spare room. In the room were a bed, a bureau, and a Bible. To us it looked like a room at the Waldorf. All I could think of was a Latin expression I'd learned in school, "deus ex machina." A God-sent miracle. And I blessed that Baptist minister. I got Eunice and Betsy to bed, but I still had to go out to camp to check in – which I did. I got back pretty late, and I crawled into bed with them. And did we sleep!

The next morning the couple fed us breakfast, and I had to leave Eunice and try to find a place to stay. I was able to reach Max at camp, and I found out what a total idiot I had been! I had called the wrong hotel. The Sussweins had been looking for us with a comfortable room waiting. But somehow, the next morning with Betsy fed and happy, and in the daylight, it didn't seem like such a disaster. Somehow, we survived. Max and I found a farmhouse outside of town where we could rent two bedrooms on the second floor, sharing a kitchen with a third couple.

Thankfully, Eunice and Max's wife, Frances, hit it off immediately and became like two sisters. Eunice had been apprehensive about living with a

"New York" woman; Frances had been worried about living with "an artist and his wife." Being together with our families for the first time in many months, Max and I thought that room was heaven.

I've thought many times how fate has a way of intervening in strange ways. If I had not been walking Betsy on the train, I never would have met that Baptist minister, and how much worse that first night in Texas might have been for the three of us.

### **HOW I HITCHHIKED 6,000 MILES BY AIR**

My ship, the *S.S. Fayetteville Victory*, was a converted victory-class freighter, being used as a troop ship. It was a small, slow ship, the kind they built by the hundreds when the war started. It was no luxury ship. Run by a crew of merchant marines, there was a small complement of army guys in charge of the troops when they came aboard. I was in charge of the ship's hospital. No kidding!

We had just returned to our base in Seattle from a trip to Korea, where we brought back troops who had been training to invade Japan. We would be in Seattle for two or three weeks while our ship was overhauled. Two or three weeks hanging around, but with Eunice and Betsy 3,000 miles away. No way could I accept this. Officially, we were supposed to stay within a hundred miles of Seattle, but I decided I was going to get home, one way or another.

Even if I could afford it (which I couldn't), you needed a priority to get an airline ticket. I decided to use the army air force. Why not? I left word with a friend where I would be if any change in plans came up. I had been stationed at Westover, so I was familiar with base operations. I went to operations at Fort Lewis and found there was a plane leaving for San Francisco. I got hold of some blank orders, and I put myself on orders to San Francisco. Then I went to the dispatcher and asked if I could hitch a ride. It was a C-47, a cargo plane, but they had a few canvas seats. There was no heat in the cargo area, but I got aboard and flew to San Francisco, where there were flights going East.

I snooped around and found a plane going to Chicago. I found a plane going to Westover, so I put in orders! This sounds outrageous, but as an officer you could get away with it if you had the guts. MPs almost never stopped officers, unless you did something foolish. From Westover, I knew how to hitchhike to Providence; I had done it dozens of times. And I walked in on

Eunice! She thought I was in Seattle! Eunice got over the shock pretty well; I thought her father would have a fit. He was sure I would go to jail. Even if I were caught, as an officer I would only be fined. Which was worth risking. I got to spend a week with Eunice.

After a week, I called and found there was no change at the ship, so I hitchhiked back to Westover, and started the same process in reverse. The incredible thing is, I had no problem. I guess guys were doing this all the time. I had no trouble getting on flights. The worst thing was the cold. Sitting for hours on a canvas seat in the cold was no fun. Each trip I was able to do in a day. Altogether, I was gone nine days.

When I got back to Seattle, there was my ugly little ship just where I'd left it. And only a couple of guys knew I had been gone. I'm sure some of the others had gotten home, too. How many others had traveled 6,000 miles I didn't know.

## **ARMY EXPERIENCES**

Battalion surgeons' assistants expected to ship out as replacements at the Battle of the Bulge, which was then raging. Before shipping out, we got a few days of leave, so Mom came to New York to see me off. We stayed with Mom's cousins, Thelma and Henry Boltinoff, who had a small apartment in Fort Washington Heights. They had one bed and a living room couch. We were good friends and young so we had no compunctions about sleeping together. We thought nothing of it. One night Thelma, Henry, and Mom were together (with Thelma in the middle), while I was on the couch. The next night Thelma, Henry and I were together (with Henry in the middle) while Mom was on the couch.

You can imagine our good-bye when I had to leave and report to the ship. We HOPED we would see one another again. That night, instead of sailing, our ship anchored in the harbor. We didn't know why, but there I was, looking out at the city, picturing Mom in one of those buildings. Here was I, sitting in the harbor, aching to be with her one more night. What should I do?

Now, I'm not the daredevil type, but you have to remember the times and the circumstances. At the time, to spend one more night with Mom, I would have almost killed. I took advantage of the fact that I was an officer, and I gambled. I called the harbormaster's office, said I was Lt. Tregar, and that I

had important business ashore. I absolutely had to get off the ship. When they said OK, we'll send a boat out for you, it first dawned on me how I would get to the little boat.

From the deck of the ship down to the water was about the height of a five or six-story building. When I looked down at that boat, it looked like a postage stamp. They threw a rope ladder over the side, and said, "Sir, go ahead." I almost died. I had never been on a rope ladder in my life, and it looked awfully flimsy, swinging at the side of the ship. But it was too late to back out. I thought to myself, what a crazy way to get killed, right in New York harbor! But I started down, one scared step after another, and gradually the little tiny boat got closer. Then I jumped aboard. I didn't even stop to think that I would have to do the same thing in reverse to get back on the ship.

I went ashore and took a cab to Fort Washington Heights and walked in on Mom. How she survived the shock I don't know. She thought I was on my way to Europe, and here I was. I told them what I had done.

And you know what? That night was worth everything I went through. Early in the morning, I went back to the harbormaster's office, reported that my business ashore was completed, and they took me back out to the ship. But this time I knew what I was in for, and going up the ladder was less scary than coming down. I went to my cabin (as an officer I had one) and told the guys what I had done. I think any one of them would have done the same thing to see their wife.

But that whole business was just an anticlimax to what we found out that morning. I guess my guardian angel was watching. That weekend New York harbor was so clogged with hospital ships with casualties from the Battle of the Bulge that they had to make emergency arrangements to get the men off the ships and out to army hospitals. So they set up a temporary hospital train outfit on Staten Island, in the old B & O railroad yard, and all medical troops in the harbor that weekend were diverted to Staten Island to run the hospital trains. Talk about fate!

One day later and I'd have been on the way to Europe. Now try to imagine Mom's reaction when I called her from Staten Island. Now you want to know why I'm a fatalist?

I spent the next eight months running around the country in charge of hospital trains. That's right: in charge. We did have nurses and Red Cross



workers, but no doctors. I had some weird experiences as a train conductor. But I always had a hundred or more bad casualties to worry about. That's right: I was the Doc, and I was "in command."

### HOW I SERVED FOR AN EXTRA SIX MONTHS

Sometime in 1945, the flow of casualties from Europe had slowed to a point where the hospital train unit on Staten Island was no longer needed. By then, troops were being returned from Europe in large numbers and being redeployed to the Pacific, in preparation for the attack on Japan. There were not enough ships available to do this fast enough, so first they took over all the big ocean liners, which had pretty much stopped sailing during the war in Europe. Then they converted dozens of small freighters to carry troops. One of these was a victory-class ship, the *S. S. Fayetteville Victory*, which eventually became my "home." But here's how I got to it. In Yiddish it's called *bashert* (something destined to be).

A group of us from the hospital train unit were reassigned to the Boston port of embarkation, and put in a pool for temporary duty on ships sailing to Europe. Our job was to run the ship's hospital. Of course, we were "qualified." We were Medical Administrative Corps officers! As far as the Army was concerned, a ship going to Europe was "empty," so it didn't need a doctor. This meant that a MAC officer went as a transport surgeon. I made one trip to Marseilles, when I reset a kid's dislocated shoulder.

One morning a friend of mine, a young guy from Lynn, Massachusetts, came to me with a request for a special favor. Frank was assigned to a ship sailing that week, but it was his wife's birthday and they had a big party planned. Would I do him a favor and switch turns with him? He would take my next assignment.

Being the nice guy that I am, I said, "Sure, why not?" So I took his ship sailing that week. When I got the order, it was to report to the Brooklyn navy yard! Believe it or not, that ship was being recertified for duty in the Pacific, and I was now a member of its staff. That's how I ended up on the *Fayetteville Victory*.

I found out later that Frank never made another trip, that mine was the last assignment from the Boston POE. He was discharged shortly afterward, while I stayed in another six months, with all kinds of "fun" happenings.

We sailed down the East Coast, through the Panama Canal, on our way to Korea. Then we started our slow trip up and across the Pacific. On the way, we had a very upsetting experience. We were taking a complement of troops to replace some already in Korea. As was the rule, when we had troops aboard, we used the doctors among them. As it turned out, I was very thankful for this. One night they came to me and said, "Doc, one of our group, a merchant marine sailor, is pretty sick." "He hasn't left his bunk in two days; he's out cold." I grabbed a young doctor and went to see him, a kid about 18. He hadn't had any food or drink for two days and was completely dehydrated. The young doctor, just out of school, felt helpless to do anything. He said, "If he weren't so young and a merchant marine sailor, I would swear he was in a diabetic coma."

Since it looked like he was really going to die, we opened his locker to see if it would tell us anything. Sure enough, there was a diabetic's insulin kit. If he were a diabetic, he wouldn't have gotten into the merchant marine. He certainly wouldn't have been at sea. He had apparently not taken his insulin for two days and went into a coma. All the doctor could do was to give him massive doses of insulin. But it was too late. He died that night. It was my only experience with death. I shuddered to think what I would have done if I'd been alone.

We had no way to keep a body aboard since we were still days away from port. As transport surgeon, it was my duty to make the decision to divert the ship to Honolulu. My MAC training had hardly prepared me for this.

I was pretty shaken up by the time we left Honolulu and headed for Inchon, Korea. This had become a marshaling point for troops and equipment preparing for the attack on Japan. However, Japan had recently surrendered, and ships like mine were bringing troops back who had been assembling there. One of the strangest sights I'd ever seen was the mountains of equipment and supplies of all kinds piled up on the beaches. There was a pile of stretchers as tall as a three-story building. Another pile of literally millions of surgical scissors and stethoscopes, worth untold millions of dollars, was left abandoned on the beach, because it was cheaper to leave them there than to transport them back to the States. I always wondered what the Koreans did with all of it. I picked up a small, stainless steel surgical scissors as a souvenir, which I used for years.

We sailed back to our home port of Seattle, and laid over for a couple of weeks until our next assignment to take a shipload of replacement troops to Nagoya, Japan. Eunice's brother, Milton, was stationed in Tokyo. His was the first air force squadron into Tokyo. As a squadron supply officer, he set up the first supply base there. This became a major air force supply depot for Japan, and eventually for the entire North Pacific command. Milton had one hell of a job. As a major, he was in command of the whole outfit. Warehouses and fleets of trucks and Jeeps ran to the horizon. I don't think even he knew everything they had. How I met Milton in Japan, and the time I spent there, is another story.

On the trip back from Japan I had a pretty bad accident. We were going through a storm and the seas were really rough. The ship was rolling and pitching, and I was out getting some air. The hatches had a steel band that held them in place. As I went sliding across a wet hatch cover, my leg slipped on the edge and got caught behind one of the steel bands. I tried to stop the fall with one arm as my body went forward. Unfortunately, your knee only bends one way, not sideways, and it snapped. I ended up with torn cartilage in my knee and a fractured elbow. Of course, I didn't know what it was until we reached Seattle and I could get to the hospital. Until then, I was the only "doctor" aboard. Fortunately, I had a very good medical sergeant who knew how to immobilize my leg and my arm, and I had plenty of painkillers in our supplies. I sweated out a rough week until we reached port.

#### **HOW I FINALLY "ESCAPED" FROM THE ARMY**

By 1946, I had been in the service for three years. By then, most of the troops had been discharged. But my job, on a troop ship bringing men back from overseas, remained.

I was a patient in the hospital at Fort Lewis, Washington, waiting to have my knee operated on. There was a point system, based on length of service, which determined when you were eligible for discharge. This was printed every day in the newspaper, and Mom would watch for it, to see when I had enough points. One day she called me with the news we'd been waiting for. I HAD ENOUGH POINTS! Unfortunately, I was a hospital patient, and they would never let me go until I had completed my "treatment."

It's easier to get out of jail than to get out of an army hospital. I found

out what it would take to get out. You needed about half a dozen signatures, not only from the medical staff. As an officer, I also needed signatures to prove I didn't owe any money in the officers' club, the officers' mess, and a few other places. I figured, "What the hell!" It wouldn't hurt to try.

I was actually a "medical" officer, so I found the necessary forms and I signed them! After all, I was Lt. Tregar, Medical Administrative Corps, and I brazened it out. What could they do to me? Then I had to have my footlocker shipped home, and I carried one barracks bag of clothes. (I was walking with a cane.) When I went to the gate with all my forms filled out and "signed," with my cane and my barracks bag, I looked like hundreds of other officers heading for Fort Dix, the discharge center in New Jersey. And I got on a plane.

To this day, there may still be a record of Lt. Tregar missing from Fort Lewis Hospital. So help me, that's how it happened. I faked my way out of that hospital and got to Fort Dix, where I joined thousands of others waiting to be separated. Before they finally let you go, you had to go through an army reserves pitch, where they did everything possible to get you to sign up. The amazing thing to me was how many guys went for it. I told the guy, "Are you nuts?" "I don't ever want to see a uniform again." "Just let me out of here." I had alerted Mom that I was on my way. And I went home!

For months after that, I kept getting bills for shipping my footlocker. I couldn't believe they actually expected me to pay for this. I just ignored the bills, and they stopped.

I was eligible for a disability pension, which I applied for and got. But it was a small amount, and it meant going to the veterans' hospital periodically for checkups. It was a nuisance, so eventually I told them to shove the pension. I was too busy working to waste the time.



## **HARRY FISH LIVED HERE: ARCHAEOLOGISTS AT WORK IN SOUTH PROVIDENCE**

**BY E. PIERRE MORENON**

The author, a member of the Religious Society of Friends, was an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins University and earned his doctorate in anthropology and archaeology at Southern Methodist University. He has conducted field studies in Texas, New Mexico, North Carolina, and Egypt. Since joining the faculty of Rhode Island College in 1978, Morenon has completed more than 100 archaeological projects. His current research focuses on the State Home and School, which borders and lays beneath the RIC campus.

Morenon's scientific study of South Providence is a perfect complement to Harold Tregar's reminiscences. Both articles raise similar questions. When do ordinary lives become extraordinary? Indeed, what are their essential differences? Perhaps the process of writing history transforms the unremarkable to the remarkable. Perhaps a subject's significance is determined by a writer's skill. Fortunately, definitive answers to these tantalizing questions will never be known.

### **FAMILIAR MEMORIES AND ORDINARY DETAILS**

A visitor may sample Providence's byways by starting on Benefit Street and ending on Atwells Avenue. One street is famous for what it represents, the other for the people who live along it. With its remarkable eighteenth and nineteenth-century architecture, Benefit is a centerpiece of historic Providence. In contrast, Atwells is a monument to Providence's fine Italian restaurants, ethnic celebrations and markets.

Each place is memorable for its details. Today, on Benefit Street, tourists walk by granite steps that lead up to ornate porches fronting on bay widows. These historic houses were once the homes of seamstresses, shipwrights, clerks and politicians. Visitors to Atwells Avenue eat escarole and penne soup or purchase hard sausages hanging in market windows from people who worship at a nearby parish church. Ordinary people live in these memorable places.

Willard Avenue from Eddy to Broad Streets, particularly between Gay Street and Prairie Avenue, was also a well visited place from 1900 to 1950. It too was a memorable place, replete with ethnic foods, important monuments and ordinary people. Today, parking lots, hospitals and service agencies reveal little about this former cultural center and historic neighborhood in South Providence.

What memories are left after its residents leave and its buildings and landmarks have been torn down? Ten years ago young archaeologists worked to reconstruct family and community memories from the dust of a small empty lot on Gay Street, between Blackstone Street and Willard Avenue.

Two decades after urban renewal had cleared much of this part of Providence, a landscape of weeds and weathered houses remained. Few of the young archaeologists who began their work in 1987 expected to find remnants of a thriving Jewish community, which in 1947 Bernard Segal had described in this way:

When you think of Willard Avenue, you have in mind that segment of the street, between Gay and Prairie, which gives the Avenue its originality. That part of the street is studded with stores, shops, markets and establishments which make it the all-Jewish business center.

It is Delicatessen Lane, where fifteen groceries and food stores whet your appetite with the aroma of spiced corn beef, pickled tongue, juicy frankfurters, tight skinned wursht, coal black olives, and dilled pickles.

It is Synagogue Row, where three of the five orthodox *Shulen* of South Providence stand within a few hundred feet from one another, and a second story shop sells religious articles and books.

To this area are attracted shoppers from the far away East Side, and from Cranston and Edgewood. They come in all types of vehicles and in all kinds of weather. No matter what else these suburban residents have given up, they have not forgotten Willard Avenue. It is the bridge between many of them and their Jewishness. (SEGAL 1947)

When interviewed by Syd Cohen in 1947, some small business owners and customers foresaw a stable and viable future.

Willard Avenue will continue as the largest and most important Jewish shopping center in the metropolitan Providence area as long as its store owners and managers provide top quality produce at reasonable prices, and better parking than exists at present. (COHEN 1947)

The changes to this neighborhood forty years later were invisible to the students and teachers of Edmund W. Flynn Model Elementary School. Indeed, the section of Willard Avenue between Gay and Prairie described by Segal in 1947 lay beneath the school. Children who walked to Flynn from nearby Prairie Avenue or were bused from the East Side and other parts of Providence did not imagine in 1987 the smells, sounds and sights of their former neighborhood. Neither could most of the Flynn teachers, who walked up the Gay Street steps each morning. To teachers and parents alike, these empty lots were silent places, filled with waste and danger, and best left ignored.

## UNDERSTANDING NEIGHBORS

As an archaeologist, who teaches at Rhode Island College, I wondered how archaeology could help children explore their neighborhood and the changes to it. Beginning in 1987, I was surprised and pleased by the structure of the social studies curriculum in place at Flynn School. There, youngsters moved logically from surveying the immediate world of their families and friends to studying their nearby community. Students' perspectives in later grades became regional, national and global. In this micro-to-macroscopic examination of the world, third graders were expected to master words like "neighborhood" and "archaeology." And, as I soon discovered, the neighborhood on Gay Street between Willard Avenue and Blackstone Street was a place well worth social science and archaeological investigation.

Many landmarks that can be found today near Flynn School remain unchanged since the early twentieth-century (Figure 1). Streets like Prairie Avenue, Blackstone Street and Willard Avenue are still there, although Willard no longer runs between Gay Street and Prairie Avenue. Rhode Island Hospital has much expanded. Today parking lots and medical buildings cover what



FIG 1 MAP OF SOUTH PROVIDENCE IN 1908  
REPRODUCED FROM HORVITZ (1977:190)

was once a small pond, where children skated in the early decades of the last century. The once diverse and expanding residential and business community of the early 1900s has few homes today. This area is now known for nearby Women and Infants' Hospital, Ronald McDonald House, dental offices, and health-related businesses rather than for its Jewish roots.

"Students Understanding Neighborhoods" or Project S.U.N. was a parent and school initiative intended to immerse Flynn students and teachers in a study of their own neighborhood. They planned to use the perspectives of history, geogra-

phy, archaeology, and many other disciplines.

In January of 1987, when I first met the working committee of four third-grade teachers, administrators, and Project S.U.N. organizers, there was no agreement about how to proceed with archaeological work. Two constraints were evident. First, educators wanted students to work near the school, preferably within close walking distance, and project activities had to be appropriate to third-grade curricular demands. As one teacher asked bluntly, "My children need to spend time on reading and writing; will archaeology help them?"

Second, there were archaeological constraints: third graders could not dig up "significant," fragile or sacred sites. Having worked as an archaeologist in Rhode Island for many years on all kinds of projects, I could assure the teachers: "Important surprises are everywhere in Rhode Island." "Every place has its untold story," I explained. "This project had endless possibilities."

The working committee discussed possible focal points for an archaeological study of the neighborhood. One longtime teacher hoped to dig into colonial or early American history. Often seen as a foray into ancient or poorly documented realms, archaeology can be a means to establish material roots to



a documented history. Yet, excavating historically unique remains was beyond our scope; we could not secure a permit for work best left to seasoned professionals. Another teacher, new to Flynn, was open to any kind of archaeological exploration. A third teacher, highly experienced, thought that focusing on more contemporary communities made sense. She noted, "Fifty years is 'old' to young children." The fourth teacher, with many years of service to Flynn, had heard that Willard Avenue was a Jewish neighborhood early in the twentieth century. He had no curricular materials, however.

The working committee decided to focus on the twentieth-century. It also agreed that an empty lot, just across Gay Street from the school entrance, would be the place where third graders from four classrooms would excavate. The project was designed to end with an excavation in April of 1987.

We did not anticipate that these preliminary discussions would result in two series of excavations. The first, involving third graders from Flynn, occurred in 1987, 1992 and 1993. The second series, involving third and seventh graders from Alperin Schechter Day School on the East Side of Providence, occurred in 1993.

We did not expect that approximately 350 students from fifteen classes, on seven occasions over a period of six years, would participate in archaeological fieldwork. In 1987 there was also no thought that more than 100 undergraduate students from five courses at Rhode Island College would assist with this project. Ultimately, dozens of homeroom teachers, teacher assistants and subject specialists as well as historians, preservationists and archaeologists would contribute their services. In addition to Rhode Island College, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, the Providence Preservation Society, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, and the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities were involved in various ways.

## THE PROJECT DESIGN

Excavations usually are preceded and succeeded by a series of activities. Archaeological field work is the middle of a complex process, even when children are participants. In our design of an excavation along Gay Street, we began by creating reading lists, as well as curricular materials, stories, discussions, oral histories, and walking tours. Field investigations were followed by artifact

analyses, writing, storytelling, drawing, experiments, and a project review. All these steps represent a familiar research design in the language of scientific archaeology: background, problem formulation, procedure, data collection, synthesis and conclusion.

Throughout this project, however, the design followed the vernacular of a child-centered curriculum, as illustrated in Table 1. To the children, excavation procedures were viewed as “collecting the clues.” These were clues about an empty lot in 1987. However, by 1993 young archaeologists were collecting clues about Harry Fish. The steps in this design remained constant between 1987 and 1993, although some elements were added and others were modified.

This essay highlights the project’s evolution from 1987 to 1993 through the five steps used in the design of this study.

**TABLE 1**

Steps followed during the archaeological study of an empty lot at the corner of Gay and Blackstone Streets in South Providence from 1987 to 1993.

PROJECT DESIGN	DETAILS IN EACH STEP
1. Developing the Story	Review of published documents; compiling children’s literature; compiling documents, maps and photographs; consultation; oral histories; story writing; illustration
2. Preparing for Study	Reading stories; telling the story; studying objects, photographs and maps; group discussions; grandparent interviews; walking tours
3. Collecting the Clues	Excavation, recording, mapping
4. Inventing the Past	Personal writing; group writing; drawings; neighborhood scenes; science experiments; story telling; time capsule
5. Reviewing/Redesigning the Project	Evaluation; professional presentations; manuals; videotape; grant writing

## DEVELOPING THE STORY

In 1987, as teachers and archaeologists alike were just beginning to learn about the Willard Avenue neighborhood, a child-centered reading list of fiction and detective stories was created to help youngsters imagine archaeology and early twentieth-century urban life. For example, *The Egypt Game* by Zilpha Snyder, an imaginative tale of children discovering ancient history in an empty

lot, was a story that several children selected from our reading list. By 1992, however, the actual documentation compiled by our project had supplanted this kind of story. Detective stories and fiction were replaced by maps, photographs, and interviews. In 1987 a "magic box" filled with likely artifacts that children might find was brought into each classroom for children to use. By 1992, this box was filled with photographs, audiotapes, videotapes and actual objects from our excavations.

"The Empty Lot," a story written about "The Prairie Avenue Club" for this project in 1987, was hardly mentioned in 1993. In contrast, a neighborhood walking tour of South Providence, in which children identified architectural details using a scavenger-hunt format, was later embraced.

In 1992, I developed a curriculum manual, *What Was Here When Grandparents Were Children?* It recognized that the archaeological study along Gay Street was more than a study of an empty lot. The lot on Gay Street across the street from Flynn School was no longer an empty place. Children were encouraged to talk to their parents and grandparents, incorporating memories. Students from Alperin Schechter Day School, who in 1993 joined this study, expanded on this approach and invited community members to speak in advance of field work. For example, Syd Cohen, who had conducted the interviews published in 1947, was a keynote speaker. Lawrence Budner, a professor of communications at Rhode Island College, and I produced a videotape, "Who is Harry Fish?" This twenty-eight minute study included interviews of parents, teachers, neighbors, former community members, historians and Harry Fish's grandson.

## PREPARING FOR STUDY

Beginning in February and March of 1987, students and staff at Rhode Island College began to compile background information on Lot 154. The first brief archival search, a trip to the Providence Tax Assessor's Office, sought answers to two questions: who currently owned Lot 154 lot, and could it be studied through excavation?

This search also produced a thumbnail history of the lot (Table 2) and several possible stories about changes to the neighborhood. Essentially, John and Emily Heljerson built and occupied the first house on Lot 154 at 204 Blackstone Street in 1898. That house stood from 1987 to 1993 (or the duration

of this study). A second house was added to the lot at 56/58 Gay Street and was first occupied in 1903. Harry Fish, who had previously lived at 204 Blackstone, purchased Lot 154 in 1907. He lived there until 1933. Fish added a third building at 50 Gay and 210 and 208 Blackstone in 1913.

**TABLE 2**

Deed Record for Lot 154, Providence, Rhode Island in 1987

LOT 154		LOT 10 (subdivided)	
Year	Owner of Record	Year	Owner of Record
1895	Ann Whittles		
1896	Charles Reilly		
1899	John and Emily Heljerson		
1907	Harry Fish		
1933	Exchange Real Estate Company		
1934	Industrial Trust Company		
1941	John and Samuel Montaguila		
1945	Nicole and Albert Bergantini		
1947	John and Albert Bergantini		
1950	John Bergantini	1952	Matthew J. Serpa, Jr.
1967	Joseph G. Larocque	1955	Willie W. and Mary C. Perry
1983	South Providence Realty Corp.		
1984	J.E.J. Realty		

In 1933, during the Great Depression, the lot with its three houses was transferred from Fish to Exchange Real Estate Company. The lot returned to private ownership during the 1940s. Lot 154 was subdivided in 1952; 204 Blackstone Street was then designated as Lot 10 and purchased separately by Matthew Serpa, Jr. This house was purchased by Willie and Mary Perry in 1955. In 1992 members of the Rhode Island College research team visited Mrs. Perry in her home at 204 Blackstone Street and interviewed her son-in-law.

During an urban renewal campaign in the 1960s, the two buildings along Gay Street were removed. Harry Fish's longtime residence at 56/58 Gay Street, for example, was vacant in 1967 and not listed in 1970. J.E.J. Realty Corporation owned this empty lot when plans for archaeological investigations developed in 1987. Today, Lot 154 and Lot 10 are indeed vacant and empty. Even the original building at 204 Blackstone Street, standing throughout the period of this project, has been torn down. The block that includes Lot 154 has recently become a gated asphalt parking lot, entered off Willard Avenue, for nearby University Gastroenterology-Bayside Endoscopy Center.



Maps and engineering logs at the Providence Sewer Department (Figure 2) were next examined by the research team. These logs record the exact footprints of buildings constructed from the late 1800s as well as the dates of sewer connections. As buildings were erected, Sewer Department engineers added them to this century-old map, placing new buildings over the outlines of demolished structures. The Flynn School, for example, overlaps many buildings that once were homes, work and social places along Gay, Robinson, and Blackstone Streets and also Willard Avenue. A footprint of the South Providence Hebrew Congregation is also identifiable. A photograph from the 1950s (Figure 3), taken at the corner of Willard Avenue and Gay Street looking to the northeast (towards what is now the Flynn School), shows some of the buildings that were removed by urban redevelopment. Unfortunately, no photographs of the other side of this street, looking towards Lot 154, have been found.

Next, Providence directories were examined in the library of the Rhode Island

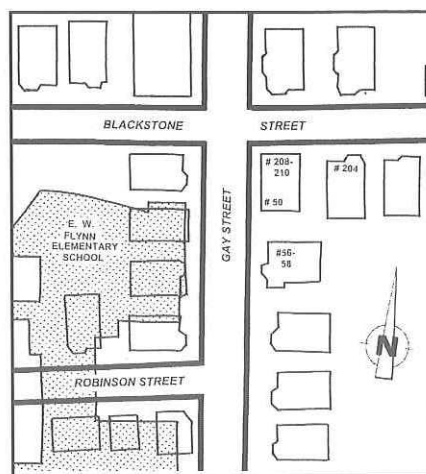


FIG 2 MAP OF BUILDINGS AT CORNER OF GRAY + BLACKSTONE STS. NUMBERED BUILDINGS ARE IN LOT 154.



FIG 3 PHOTOGRAPH OF BUILDINGS REMOVED AT CORNER OF GAY ST. + WILLARD AVE. TO CONSTRUCT THE FLYNN SCHOOL. REPRODUCED FROM HORVITZ (1977:191)

Historical Society. Some details about residents of the three buildings on Lot 154 were found (Table 3). For example, in the early twentieth century occupations changed from molder, carpenter and machinist to shoemaker, umbrella maker and grocer. Family names like Heljerson, Erickson and Josephson were replaced by Fish, Samowitch and Dworkis.

During the early 1930s, another shift in residency occurred. Bernard Johnson, a porter, and John Gromley, a helper, moved into these buildings. The Fish family moved away. Harry Fish became central to our investigation because he lived in, built or owned all of these buildings from 1907 to 1933.

But who was Harry Fish?

A 1926 plat map of Blackstone, Willard and Gay Streets provided a reference for Harry Fish's Lot 154. Neighbors listed on this map living just across the street or down the block, such as Biller, Millman or Weisman, are

**TABLE 3**  
Summary of Providence City Directory Information for Lot 154 in Five-Year Intervals from 1900-1935. Owners are in **bold**.

	56/58 GAY STREET		208/210 BLACKSTONE 50 GAY STREETS		204 BLACKSTONE STREET	
Yr .	Resident	Occ.	Resident	Occ.	Resident	Occ.
1900	Not built		Not built		Chas Anderson Wm. Erickson <b>John Heljerson</b> Theo Heljerson Albert Patterson Carl Lifgrn Nils P. Newberg Chas Josephson <b>John Heljerson</b> Ernest Johnson <b>Harry Fish</b> Max Schreiber	Carpenter Carpenter Carpenter Carpenter Laborer Carpenter Carpenter Machinist Carpenter Cornice Maker Shoemaker Jeweler
1905	Henry W. Peterson Chas S. Anderson	Molder Carpenter	Not built			
1910	Jacob W. Samowitch Samuel Reitman Harry Rubin Charles Phillips	Tailor Peddler Paperhanger Tailor	Not built			
1915	<b>Harry Fish</b> Aaron Feldman	Shoemaker	Boston Cash Grocery David Spawn	Clerk	Carl Dworkis Morris Brier Harry Ackerman Carl Dworkis Berry Gordon Harry Ackerman Karl Dworkis Henry Rotenberg Mrs. Gertrude Ginsberg Anthony R. Magellan Isaac Markovitz Mrs. Marion Paulis Rene G. Bessette Geo. P. Cory	Umbrellas Peddler Grocer Umbrellas Painter Grocer Umbrellas Grocer Widow Welder Grocer Utility Man Lab
1920	<b>Harry Fish</b> Hyman Barwick Sam Ludovitch	Grocer Painter Grocer	David Robinson Julius Schwartz D. Danjou	Grocer Driver Painter		
1925	<b>Harry Fish</b> Hyman Barasch William H. Bryer	Driver Painter Jeweler	Hyman Barasch Morris Gladstone Jacob D'Anjou	Painter Grocer		
1930	<b>Harry Fish</b> Marry Kaufman James Burns	Driver	Jacob Marcovitz Isaac Davidson Martin O'Malley	Grocer Peddler Clerk		
1935	Bernard T. Johnson Harry O. Hunt Jas. F. Burns	Porter Wood Worker Jewelry	Wm. R. Daport Louis Gorra John J. Gromley Mrs. Dora M. Bowen	Contractor Barber Helper		

probably related to current Providence residents with the same surnames. Though many individuals were queried about their family connections to Willard Avenue, no details about Harry Fish were added.

Eleanor Horvitz's study of the Jewish community of South Providence, published in the 1976 issue of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, did contain an abundance of evidence about the neighborhood in general. Once again Ms. Horvitz searched the archives of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, but no new information about Harry Fish was discovered.

During the second period of field investigation, in 1992 and 1993, staff and students at Rhode Island College resumed searching standard references. We learned more about Fish from Providence directories (Table 4). In 1901 he moved to Willard Avenue and worked as a shoemaker at 804 Eddy Street, at the intersection of Potters Avenue, only a few blocks from his residence. This building has been replaced. Fish remained in this section of Providence until 1939, however. His last residence at 189 Somerset Street, a few blocks north of Gay Street and Willard Avenue, is now under a parking lot for Women and Infants' Hospital. By now it was clear that Harry Fish personified the story of Willard Avenue.

The Rhode Island College team also consulted Providence birth and death records, as well as obituaries from the *Providence Journal*, to reconstruct important family details (Table 5). Additionally, George Goodwin shared information from

**TABLE 4**

Residential history of Harry Fish. Collected from Providence City Directories by Eleanor Morin.

YEAR	NAME	OCCUPATION	WORK PLACE	RESIDENCE
1901-1902	HARAN [SIC] FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	234 WILLARD AVE.
1093	HARAN [SIC] FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	79 GAY ST.
1904-1905	HARRY FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	79 GAY ST.
1906	HARRY FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	60 GAY ST.
1907-1909	HARRY FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	204 BALCKSTONE ST.
1910	HARRY FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	58 GAY ST.
1911-1914	HARRY FISH	SHOEMAKER	804 EDDY	56 GAY ST.
1915-1916	HARRY FISH	SHOE REPAIRER	804 EDDY	58 GAY ST.
1917	HARRY FISH	SHOE REPAIRER + GROCER	50 BERGEN	56 GAY ST.
1918	HARRY FISH	SHOE REPAIRER	50 GAY	56 GAY ST.
1919-1932	HARRY FISH	DRIVER	NONE LISTED	58 GAY ST.
1933	HARRY FISH	NONE LISTED	NONE LISTED	56 GAY ST.
1934	HARRY FISH	NONE LISTED	NONE LISTED	189 SOMERSET ST.
1935-1937	HARRY FISH	LABORER	NONE LISTED	189 SOMERSET ST.
1938	HARRY FISH	NONE LISTED	NONE LISTED	189 SOMERSET ST.
1939	HARRY FISH	LABORER	NONE LISTED	189 SOMERSET ST.

**TABLE 5**

Harry Fish's immediate family. Collected by Stefania Weldon and Eleanor Morin.

NAME	BIRTH	DEATH	NOTES	SOURCES
HARRY FISH	1874	6/4/1940	BORN IN RUSSIA	PROV. JOURNAL 6/6//40, 18; M. FISH
SARAH HELFEN- BEIN FISH	1878	3/5/1939	BORN IN RUSSIA; M. HARRY FISH C. 1898	VITAL STATISTICS: 36:171; M. FISH
MAX FISH	12/30/1900	3/5/1992	M. ROSE WEISBERG; 2 SONS; WARREN + MARTIN – CRANSTON	PROV. JOURNAL 3/6/92, B4; M. FISH
MEYER FISH	2/10/1903	3/21/1905		VITAL STATISTICS; 18:5,22:136
MINNIE FISH PASS	5/25/1905	12/26/1960	MARRIED MAX C. PASS; 1 SON; HARRY, 2 DAUGH- TERS; MRS. NORTON RAPPOPORT, MRS. ANTHONY DE LUCA – PROV.	PROV. JOURNAL 12/27/60,15; M. FISH
MORRIS FISH	5/25/1905	NOT LISTED	DIED IN LAS VEGAS, NA	VITAL STATISTICS: 19:66; M. FISH
RUTH FISH KRISS	6/25/1915	12/4/1983	MARRIED ABRAHAM KRISS; 2 DAUGHTERS: HARRIET SALTZMAN, SONYA RATHBUN OF PROV.	PROV. JOURNAL 12/6/83,C3; M. FISH

the 1920 federal census (Table 6), which depicts a young, working family.

Stefania Weldon called every Fish in the Providence phone directory. She and Eleanor Morin subsequently interviewed Martin Fish, Harry's grandson. Portions of this interview were included in the video documentary, "Who Is Harry Fish?"

The research team also visited Lincoln Park Cemetery in Warwick. Harry and Sarah Fish were members of the South Providence Hebrew Congregation, so they were buried near other congregants in Section 34A.

### COLLECTING THE CLUES

In the spring of 1987, excavations began, as planned, in the empty lot on Gay Street with groups of students from Flynn School. Markers were placed at 10 meter intervals down the length of the 32 meter (100 foot) by 13 meter (40 foot) lot, an area of approximately 400 square meters. Field investigations focused on the backyards of the houses where Harry Fish and his family had



**TABLE 6**

The Harry Fish family at 56/58 Gay Street in 1920. Provided by George Goodwin.

	NAME	AGE IN 1920	OCCUPATION
	HARRY FISH	46	DRIVER [CAR/TRUCK]
	SARAH FISH	41	
	MAX FISH	19	DRIVER [CAR/TRUCK]
	MINNIE FISH	14	CARDER [JEWELRY SHOP]
	MORRIS FISH	12	
	RUTH FISH	4	

lived and worked from 1907 to 1933. We knew from the sewer map (Figure 2) that each of the two cellars was approximately 25 by 40 feet (for a combined area of nearly 200 square meters). The houses took up half of Lot 154. From 1900 to 1970 this lot was hardly empty. We wanted students to excavate in the back and side yards of both houses, where they would find discarded evidence from the early twentieth century. These young archaeologists were well prepared and excited about what they could discover about their urban neighborhood

In April of 1987 four classes at Flynn School excavated in fifty-minute intervals. Each class of third graders was divided into four research teams of five to seven children. When one class finished, the next group of four teams took its turn. Each team worked with one or two college students and a teacher. Each team excavated one 50 x 50 centimeter (20 x 20 inch) hole in five centimeter (2 inch) levels. By the end of the day and after nearly four hours of field work, four small holes had been excavated to only 20 to 30 centimeters (8 to 12 inches), studied, and refilled for safety reasons. The combined area of the four holes was one square meter, a tiny portion of the 400 square meter lot. The combined area examined was less than one percent of Lot 154 even when adding the subsequent field investigations from 1992 and 1993.

The children excavated, screened artifacts, and recorded their observations in writing and on audiotape. The project was also videotaped. Artifacts were brought to Rhode Island College, where they were washed and described. Written and taped observations were duplicated. All of the materials were then returned to Flynn classrooms one week later for use by students and teachers. This is what we found (Table 7) in 1987, again from a tiny volume of carefully studied soil.

The hundreds of recovered artifacts are typical for the late nineteenth

and twentieth centuries. The construction materials included square and wire nails, window glass, bricks, and asphalt shingles from residences built by Heljerson and Fish. There were also many pounds of clinkers, whiteware and porcelain plates, cups and bowls, all sorts of glassware and bottle fragments as well as chicken bones and oyster shells. There were many personal items such as buttons, a comb, a clay pipe, 78 rpm phonograph records, and plastic checkers. Students were particularly excited by fragments of shoes because they knew that Harry Fish was a shoe repairman.

Virtually all the components of a household — kitchens, bedrooms, closets, living rooms, and play areas — were found by carefully sifting though soil removed from just a few square feet and just a few inches beneath the surface of this lot. One adult expectation was unfounded: no dangerous objects, such as hypodermic needles, were found. The throwaway, fast-food world of the late twentieth century within which these children lived was barely represented in the archaeological record. Surely many of the excavated objects belonged to Harry Fish, his contemporaries, and mid-twentieth century residents of this South Providence neighborhood. However, a few objects, particularly the oyster shells and the clay pipe, did not fit into this time period. They were apparent clues to an even older period of occupation. In 1987 we were puzzled by this

**TABLE 7**

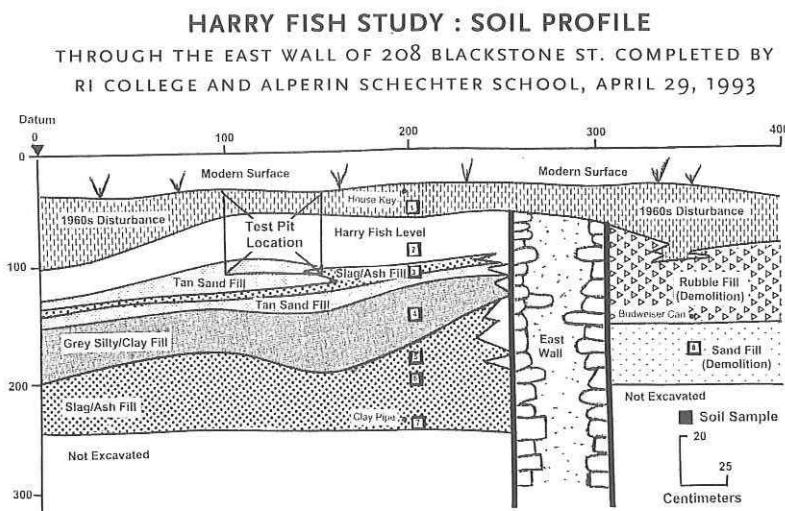
Excavation results for Harry Fish Lot 154 in 1987. Compiled from Morenson 1992: A21-A27.

OBJECT CATEGORIES	CENTIMETERS BELOW SURFACE		
	0-10	10-20	TOTAL
COAL AND CLINKERS [GRAMS]	1665.7	4589.9	6255.6
BRICK [GRAMS]	646.2	1453.1	2099.3
MORTAR [GRAMS]	272.5	525.1	797.6
ASPHALT [GRAMS]	0.0	109.6	109.6
SHINGLES, TARPAPER	20	16	36
NAILS	2	38	40
WINDOW GLASS, CAULKING, PAINT	17	39	56
FLOWER POT	3	2	5
BOTTLE GLASS	66	75	141
WHITWARE/PORCELAIN CERAMIC [CUPS, BOWLS, PLATES]	7	11	18
SHELL AND BONE	13	12	25
HOUSEHOLD [LIGHTBULB, MIRROR, METALHANGER, BRASS CURTAIN ROD, LOCK]	4	3	7
ENTERTAINMENT [RECORDS, HARD PLASTIC CHECKERS]	2	3	5
PERSONAL ITEMS [BUTTONS, SHOE, COMB, GLASSES CASE, CLAYPIPE BOWL, DOUBLE SIDED RAZORBLADE]	4	4	8
OTHER [IRON FRAGMENTS, CANDYWRAPPERS, PLASTIC, STYROFOAM, CARFUSE, HOSE, CAN]	33	80	113
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF ITEMS RECOVERED, EXCLUDING COAL, BRICK MORTOR AND ASPHALT</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>454</b>

curious anomaly.

In May of 1992 and 1993 we completed a second and third period of field study at Harry Fish's lot using procedures identical to those used in 1987. Our results were indistinguishable from the 1987 study. Once again, we found typical nineteenth and twentieth-century objects within twenty inches of the modern surface. In June of 1992, a class of college students spent a day in Lot 154, defining the actual foundations. We found the east wall of 208/210 Blackstone and 50 Gay Streets, the building that Harry Fish constructed in 1913. Part of our interest here was to better understand the results of the third graders' test excavations (Table 7). From the profiles of the soil strata, it was certain that the third graders had studied the back and side yards of Harry Fish's buildings (Figure 4).

In fact, the demolition of these structures in the 1960s had left the side and back yards nearly intact. After tearing down these buildings, the cellar holes had been filled with sand brought from elsewhere. Though the surfaces around these buildings had been disturbed to a depth of 10 to 20 centimeters, the excavations completed by third graders reached undisturbed strata. We were pleased that the evidence was a reasonable material record of the twentieth-century Harry Fish household.



**FIG 4** CROSS SECTION OF BACKYARD, WEST WALL AND  
INTERIOR OF BUILDING AT 50 GAY/208 + 206 BLACKSTONE STREETS,  
BUILT BY HARRY FISH IN 1913

The stratigraphic work (Figure 4) in 1992 and 1993 also demonstrated that the building foundation at the corner of Blackstone and Gay Street had been carefully constructed in 1913. Even with construction, earlier sediments remained intact, adjacent to the foundation walls. Unlike today's contractors, builders in this earlier era used less heavy equipment, removed less soil, and built stone/mortar foundations that fit snugly against excavation sidewalls. The 1913 excavation, which created the foundation to this building, was not much larger than the foundation itself. In the profiles of the sidewalls to our excavation trench we could see levels or strata that predated and postdated this building and Harry Fish's lot.

In 1993 we were attentive to twentieth-century and earlier remains. While third graders from both schools continued to focus on the story of Harry Fish, seventh graders at Schechter were also curious about the pre-Harry Fish evidence. In April of 1993, working only with the older Schechter students, the research team reopened the test trench from the previous summer and reanalyzed the stratigraphy (Figure 4).

These students helped dig the last few centimeters of the test trench, which was 4 meters long, .4 meters wide, and 1.2 meters deep. The north wall of this trench was cleaned, and two-liter soil samples were removed from different strata. At the top of our profile, in the Harry Fish levels, we discovered a key. One could only wonder whether one of the Fish children might have lost it, perhaps in his or her seventh-grade year. Some objects evoke speculation.

Although the exposed stratigraphy was our primary interest, within mixtures of ash and clinkers we also recovered more oysters and quahogs, and a few artifacts, such as a clay pipe, creamware ceramics, and a nineteenth-century glass bottle. This shellfish and waste were not the byproducts of a household or two, however. Rather, our meter-deep, debris-laden deposits were older and had been cut into the foundation of the house built by Harry Fish. The new housing constructed at the end of the nineteenth century for recently arrived Swedish and Jewish immigrants had been built on a refuse dump. This part of Providence had been a landfill before it was an urban neighborhood to arriving immigrants.



## REINVENTING THE PAST

In 1993 Martin Fish was curious why we were interested in studying his grandfather, Harry. After all, Harry Fish had led an ordinary life. He was one of millions who had emigrated to the United States and one of thousands who had settled in urban Providence. Indeed, a century ago, hundreds of people just like Harry Fish constructed new lives near Willard Avenue.

The answer to Martin Fish's question is that archaeologists should study the lives of ordinary people. Yes, Lot 154 is an ordinary place. The things that we found there were commonplace. Nevertheless, typical people, places and objects give us a point of view to understand complex relationships and events. Harry Fish's experiences, while common, did happen on Willard Avenue. History, like archaeology and anthropology, depends on ordinary people. We notice small details, as in the 1906 series edited by Hamilton Holt, *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans as Told by Themselves*. Bernard Segal and Syd Cohen took a similar approach in 1947, when they used ordinary people to illustrate their article, "Life on the Avenue." Societies are built not only from the top down, but from the bottom up. While famous people are best remembered, history belongs to all of us.

I told Martin Fish that Harry was an ideal guide to third graders in their interpretations of Willard Avenue. Yet, a scholar who saw the videotape, "Who is Harry Fish?" wondered how the name Harry Fish had been selected. He conjectured, "It's such a perfect name to use as a title." I explained that Harry Fish really existed.

In our postmodern world it has become stylish for anthropologists and scholars in many fields to argue that culture is invented; that we make sense of our world, its history, and even knowledge itself through humanly-designed lenses. This is not to say that history or knowledge is false. Though objectivity is sought, it is rarely achieved. We revise and modify our understanding of the world through our own beliefs, social institutions, and technologies.

As an archaeologist, I believe that the Gay Street excavation helped youngsters understand their neighborhood in new ways. Yet, when the project was designed (Table 1), I was curious about what children and teachers might do with their experiences after the excavation was completed. Would



FIG 5 WILLARD AVENUE SCENE FROM THIRD GRADE ART PROJECT, 1993

archaeology become merely a pleasant distraction, a recess before students and teachers returned to classroom business?

Simply put, this project did change thinking. It changed not only the children's thinking, but also the thinking of participating teachers. An observation made in 1987 and every year thereafter was, "I cannot believe how well 'Ronnie' behaved." Though his name changed each year, "Ronnie" was of course that archetypal, problem student who became engaged. He remained engaged and focused throughout this project, on the walking tour, during the excavation and during the activities that followed field work. It did not appear to make a difference whether "Ronnie" was gifted or had special needs, or whether he came from the nearby neighborhood or from the East Side of Providence. Thinking and invention require attention and hard work, and that is what happened.

Consider the case of the teacher who in January of 1987 questioned whether this project would interfere with the academic needs of her children.

When I entered her classroom in mid-May, two weeks after the excavation, art work covered the students' desks. Each child had depicted a room in Harry Fish's home. Small pieces of coal and clinkers were glued to images of fireplace grates. Perhaps some archaeologists would cringe at children using artifacts within their art, but these children had collected several thousand grams of coal (Table 7) two weeks earlier. The teacher also showed me a story that her entire class created in answer to its question: what happened to Harry Fish? In this class he had become Detective Harry who searched for clues.

This class also created a time capsule. Each child brought in an object that he or she thought would best represent 1987 in another fifty years. A 1987 penny, an eight-track tape, and an action figure were among the items buried in the Flynn School courtyard. If discovered in 2037, these items will indeed represent a treasure to eight and nine-year olds. These children had selected ordinary, everyday objects for future children.

In 1992 and 1993 students continued to write stories and make art. They also conducted science experiments with materials and soil samples brought into their classrooms. What most interested me as an anthropologist and an archaeologist was the way in which classroom work had become collaborative. For example, children from four classrooms worked together to portray the whole neighborhood, creating a child's-eye view of the early twentieth century (Figure 5). That view incorporated Harry Fish's shoe repair shop, the South Providence Hebrew Congregation, laundry hanging out to dry, corn growing in yards, and an ambulance racing to the scene of an accident. Layer upon layer of paint, magic marker and pop-up figures were added over street names and buildings.

Students at Schechter discussed changes in the Jewish community. Some of their grandparents had arrived in Providence around the same time as Harry Fish, yet none could recall the Fish family. These seniors did recall others from the Willard Avenue neighborhood. At the end of 1993, seventh graders created an "archaeology museum" from objects they had recovered.

So, did the stories, art works, discussions and museum created by children from Flynn and Schechter Schools represent an invented past? Were the names, maps, photographs, interviews, and artifacts they gathered in some sense constructs?



In 1993 a significant number of third graders at Schechter were recent immigrants from Russia. It was remarkable watching children born near Moscow or Kiev excavating and studying materials from Harry Fish's lot. Nearly a hundred years earlier, this Russian immigrant had adjusted to American life by helping to build a new community just off Willard Avenue.

It was also remarkable watching children from Flynn working with children from Schechter in 1993. Now the project was a collaboration between two schools. To a young girl who had been in the United States for only a few months, Harry Fish's family experiences were ordinary. To a student from Flynn who lived just around the corner, Harry Fish was a familiar neighbor. As one child who had grown up in the neighborhood proudly announced as she dug behind Harry Fish's home, "I live near here."

## **REDESIGNING THE PROJECT**

Ten years ago, elementary and middle-school students and teachers from Edward W. Flynn Model Elementary School and Alperin Schechter Day Schools worked with Rhode Island College faculty and students to reinterpret their neighborhood. In 1993, Gay Street, off Willard Avenue, was not the same historic or ethnic community it had been in 1947 or 1907. In 1992, when asked about these changes, Martin Fish commented: "You cannot go back." Neighborhoods do change; monuments are removed.

Today Lot 154 is a small corner of an asphalt parking lot. Visitors to nearby medical buildings park on and walk over Harry Fish's home. It is just a few inches under this surface. These details are part of the history of South Providence and the dynamic Jewish community that developed and flourished there during the twentieth century. The evidence is still there.

New memories were created from 1987 to 1993 through a project that connected objects recovered through excavation with neighborhood walking tours, documents and community knowledge. The critical part of this project was the active involvement of children with their teachers in the study of their neighborhood.

Many young archaeologists who ten years ago rediscovered parts of their neighborhood through archaeology now attend college, hold jobs and build new homes. These are exceptional and ordinary people with memories of Willard Avenue and those who lived there.



Support provided by the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities was invaluable. Additionally, I would like to thank Project S.U.N. and the many organizations that participated in aspects of this program. I am particularly grateful to Edward Flynn School, Alperin Schechter Day School, and the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. The author takes responsibility for any errors or shortcomings.

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**"IT ALL BEGAN WITH KOPPELMAN":  
THE JEWISH FLORISTS  
OF RHODE ISLAND  
BY GERALDINE S. FOSTER**

Geraldine Foster needs no introduction to our readers. A former president of our Association (and the only woman to date), she has been a contributor to *The Notes* since 1988. Following careers as an educator and communal leader, she found a new occupation as a writer. Indeed, she has written frequently about the occupations of Jewish Rhode Islanders.

As a historian, Foster might be called a "first responder." Drawing upon her own rich memories and interviews from a vast personal network, she has not merely set the record straight but has often set down the record. For generations to come, historians will build upon her myriad observations and keen insights.

"...SOME OF THE NEIGHBORS HAD POTTED PLANTS, BUT MY PARENTS CONSIDERED THEM A PAGAN CUSTOM."<sup>1</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer

"...YOUR SON, THE WOULD-BE RABBI, WORKS ON THAT GARDEN LIKE A REGULAR PEASANT."<sup>2</sup> Chaim Grade

An integral part of planning a party or family *simcha* is the floral decoration. We consult with a florist about the variety of flowers, their colors, and the shape of a centerpiece or a bouquet. On Shabbat and holidays, flowers grace our homes and festive tables, and in synagogues they add fragrance and beauty to our observance. We plant flowers and flowering bushes in our yards and decks to embrace our surroundings and delight our eyes.

It was not always so. Flowers and plants were not generally used in Jewish homes or in synagogues.<sup>3</sup> The one exception was Shavuot, when flowers and greenery celebrated Israel's betrothal to Torah. In Europe, where Jews could not own land but lived in tightly-knit communities, growing flowers was not considered part of Jewish tradition. It was an occupation fit only for peasants; Jews grew scholars. Such scholars could point out that only once does the

Bible mention gathering flowers (Song of Songs 6:2). The Talmud emphasized the fragrance and medicinal properties of certain species, not their beauty.<sup>4</sup> Unlike Christians, who decorated their homes and churches with flowers, Jews could replicate the knops and petals of the Tabernacle menorah in their synagogues. They could also embroider stylized flowers on textiles and napery.

Over the centuries, Jews in Rhode Island have worked in numerous capacities: as shopkeepers, manufacturers, artisans, peddlers, laborers and, eventually, as professionals.<sup>5</sup> In 1910, the first Jewish florist was listed in the Providence directory. His name was Joseph Koppelman.<sup>6</sup> Most Jewish florists in Rhode Island learned their trade in his shops and greenhouses. As a friend of his remarked, "It all began with Koppelman."<sup>7</sup>

#### THE KOPPELMANS

In 1907, Joseph Koppelman and Samuel Schmidt opened a flower shop at 21 Washington Street in Providence. According to the city directory, Schmidt resided here, but Koppelman lived in Boston. The partnership lasted one year. Then Schmidt moved to Boston, and Koppelman moved to Providence. Koppelman lived and worked in Rhode Island until his death in 1943.

Koppelman had no formal training in floricultural or floral design, but he was an astute businessman. His daughter, Florence Koppelman Miller, stated that he began as a street vendor of flowers in Boston. A brother-in-law already in the business helped him get started. Koppelman became successful, but he decided to relocate elsewhere so as not to compete with his relative. Providence offered possibilities, so he began commuting daily from Boston. Even after moving to Providence, Koppelman took the train to Boston each day to purchase flowers for himself and others to sell to florists.

On September 27, 1911, Koppelman received a charter for his own company, which became known as Providence Wholesale Florist. Its purpose was "raising, growing, purchasing, and selling trees, shrubs, vines, plants, flowers, and seeds."<sup>8</sup> Koppelman's name was misspelled (as Kopelman), but this error was corrected.

In 1913, having recognized the value of growing his own flowers, Koppelman purchased an existing greenhouse complex on Pawtucket Avenue in East Providence. His daughter, Mrs. Miller, recalled that there were three houses on the property. In addition to the family home, there were two



ELIJAH KOPPELMAN

shacks, which were refurbished for relatives immigrating to the United States.

There was a lovely orchard on the property, Mrs. Miller recalled, and the family enjoyed the fruit and picnics there. When it was found that the trees interfered with his greenhouse flowers, the orchard was cut down. While growing his own flowers, Koppelman continued his purchases in Boston, which he also wholesaled.

Two of Koppelman's sons, Roland and Elijah, joined the business, which soon encompassed growing, wholesaling and selling at retail outlets.

Roland, who had attended Rhode Island State College (later known as the University of Rhode Island), took charge of the East Providence greenhouses. His specialty was roses. Elijah, who had a degree in botany from Brown University, was involved in all phases of the business. Mrs. Miller remembered that Roland loved growing flowers, and Elijah preferred wholesaling. A third Koppelman son, David, did not actively participate in the family business. After moving to Florida, however, he arranged for consignments of flowers.

In the 1950s the Koppelman brothers purchased the greenhouses and flower shop on East Avenue in Pawtucket that had belonged to the Hoffman family. Elijah took charge of the new acquisition, while Roland remained in charge of the East Providence facility.

Betty Koppelman Steele recalled that carnations and roses were grown in the East Avenue greenhouses. She described the retail shop, built of stone, where her father would place a striking floral arrangement in the bay window. He also made dish gardens. Rennie Brown remembered that his father, Louis, brought green plants from the Koppelmans.

There were night watchmen at the greenhouses in East Providence and in Pawtucket. The watchman in Pawtucket did not understand English well, so on cold nights Joseph Koppelman stayed in the greenhouses to make certain the furnace did not go out. In the 1960s, however, the greenhouses were razed to make way for redevelopment.



### CHARLES SMITH

In 1907, Joseph Koppelman and his brother-in-law, Charles Smith, had been partners in a floral business. Also employed as an ironmonger, Smith had fashioned a set of gates for Brown University. In 1912, according to the Providence directory, Smith opened his own shop, Smith the Florist, at 25 Washington Street. This space was previously occupied by the Koppelman Company. The following year Smith moved to 67 Washington Street, then later to 69 Washington Street, where he remained until 1922. At that time he established a wire wreath business.<sup>9</sup>

Smith was one of the first florists in Providence to have a telephone in his shop. This is known by the asterisk placed beside the name of his establishment in the 1917 Providence directory.

### LOWELL AVENUE GREENHOUSES

In 1905, when 17 years of age, Aaron Cohen came to America. His brother, William, who was 13 years old, arrived at the same time. After working in a



LOWELL AVENUE GREENHOUSES

jewelry factory, Aaron found employment with Frederick Hoffman at his greenhouses on East Avenue in Pawtucket and then with Joseph Koppelman in East Providence. From both he learned how to grow flowers and successfully manage a greenhouse. William Cohen worked with O'Connor Florist, where he learned floral design and retailing. Aaron's son, Maurice, did not know whether it was by chance or plan that prompted the Cohen brothers to seek experience in different phases of the same business. Whichever the case, William and Aaron pooled their knowledge and in 1920 purchased an existing greenhouse and retail shop. They renamed the business Lowell Avenue Greenhouses.

Maurice and Gerald Cohen agree that their father loved growing things. There were fields in the back of the property where Aaron raised vegetables for his family and William's. In the greenhouses, he grew everything but roses. When asked which flowers Aaron grew, his sons laughed and said, "Too many carnations, too many gladiolas, and too many snapdragons." Aaron also grew stock, asters, and chrysanthemums. Maurice commented that his father "cut a thousand carnations every day." Lowell Avenue Greenhouses also produced geraniums, which were well known for their size and color and were in demand for Memorial Day.

With one exception, all of the Cohens' flowers were sold in their own shop. One florist, McCarron, bought snapdragons for his shop.

When Aaron and William added two greenhouses, they employed two helpers and a greenhouse manager. Summers were the slowest period, so old-plants were cleaned out and were replaced by new seed.

While primarily responsible for growing flowers, Aaron also assisted William with design. William, however, took charge of the store. Both Cohen brothers were considered good teachers. However busy they might be, the Cohens had a cardinal rule. Each brother took one day off each week.

## **BOWERS & RESNICK**

In 1905, Samuel Resnick emigrated to the United States from Russia at 12 years of age. Three years later, he found employment with Joseph Koppelman and began to learn the floral trade. Whether or not he attended school, Resnick was known for his arithmetic calculations and for his excellent business sense.

In 1921, Resnick entered into a partnership with William Bowers, a

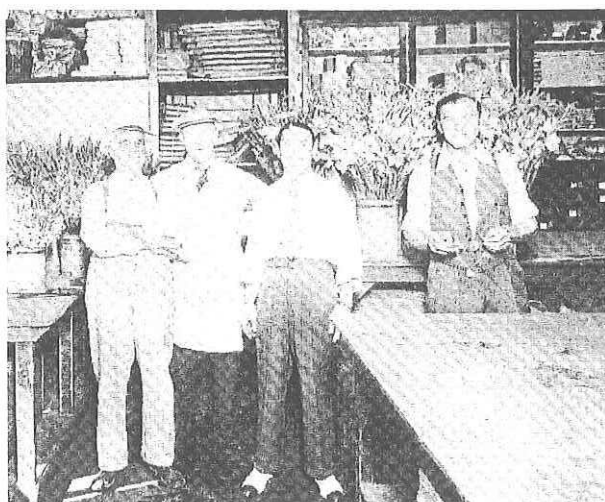
retail florist whose shop was located at 136 Washington Street in Providence. Neither of Samuel Resnick's children, Albert nor Helen Resnick Lehrer, knew how the partners met. "People said that Father was crazy to do it," Mrs. Lehrer stated. "He had to borrow \$9,000, a very large sum for those days."

The retail portion of Bowers & Resnick fronted on Mathewson Street, across from Shepard's Tea Room. It was a small place, Mrs. Lehrer recalled, but very pretty with flowers and plants. A stairway led to a small mezzanine where a secretary had her desk. Bowers, she remembered, was the "front man who did all the selling." Resnick was the buyer who also had charge of the wholesale portion of the business, which was located around the corner, on Maiden Lane, but in the same building. Unlike the retail shop, Mrs. Lehrer said, "It was a huge place with two tremendous refrigerators and three very large work tables." Albert Resnick often accompanied his father to buy flowers at local greenhouses, where both were warmly received. Samuel also went regularly to Boston to buy stock.

Mrs. Lehrer said that her father had a special rapport with his employees. They regarded him as a friend as well as an employer. They always addressed Bowers as "Mr. Bowers," but Resnick was "Hey, Sam." When Bowers fired someone, Resnick would quietly hire him back if he felt that the dismissal was arbitrary or unjustified.

"My father had a very strong work ethic," Albert Resnick stated. "He worked very hard and became very successful, even during the Depression years." Resnick was very generous to members of his extended family and others in need.

Albert and Helen recalled going with their father late on Friday afternoons to Temple Emanu-El. He was an early member of its board of trustees and regularly provided floral arrangements for the *bimah*. Albert recalled how Samuel



BOWERS + RESNICK: L TO R : GEORGE FRASER, MR. KELLY, ELI ABRAMS, SAMUEL RESNICK



would go to the kitchen, cut flowers, and then go up to the sanctuary. "I was very young," he said, "and would literally hang onto his coattails." Albert added that his father always felt at home in the Temple.

Though Samuel Resnick died unexpectedly in 1940, the floral business continued to be known as Bowers & Resnick. Three employees – Jacob ("Jack") Cohen, Eli Abrams, and a man known only as Kelly – asked Mrs. Resnick to join them in starting another wholesale flower company. They said that her husband's reputation was so good that a business bearing his name would be successful. Mrs. Resnick declined, however, because she had five children to support.

Jacob Cohen, who had also worked for Joseph Koppelman, remained with Bowers & Resnick for 38 years. In 1960, he formed his own wholesale flower company, Jack Cohen & Son, and retired fourteen years later. Jack's daughter-in-law, Paula Cohen, remembered the long hours. He would be up at 3:00 A.M. to go to Boston.

#### **ELI ABRAMS**

After army service during World War II, Eli Abrams, who had worked in the retail section of Bowers & Resnick, established his own flower shops. The first was in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of Providence, the second in Pawtucket.<sup>10</sup>

#### **ROBERT BERKOWITZ**

Robert Berkowitz was born in Palestine. For many years after his arrival in Providence, he worked for his relative, Joseph Koppelman. According to Berkowitz's son, Dr. Norman Berkowitz, this is where he learned to design floral arrangements. As late as 1925, Berkowitz worked in Koppelman's wholesale and retail store on Custom House Street.

Berkowitz established Rhode Island Florist Supply, which sold ribbons, picks, and other necessities for florists. He went to Boston for supplies. For a short time, Berkowitz was a partner with Amnon Horvitz in the B & H Flower Shop. During the Depression, Berkowitz worked from home, mainly on a wholesale basis, but also designed arrangements for weddings. One of Dr. Berkowitz's patients commented on how beautiful her wedding was as a result of his father's handiwork.



Later, Berkowitz also had a shop, Rhode Island Floral Supply, which he moved to Hope Street. The difficulty of obtaining gas coupons for his delivery truck during World War II persuaded him to give up his involvement in the floral business.

### **SIMON COLITZ**

Simon Colitz owned a flower shop in Woonsocket for fifty years.<sup>11</sup> He began his business in 1919, after serving in the navy. It is not known where or how he learned his trade.

Bernard Goldstein recalled that the Colitz shop was located on Main Street, "downtown where the action was." The shop was long and narrow, as if sandwiched between two buildings. From this small space Colitz prepared floral arrangements for Shabbat services at B'nai Israel synagogue, where he had been a founding member. Needless to say, Colitz provided flowers for countless weddings within the Jewish community and beyond. Writing in her diary during the late 1920s, Ida Katherine Colitz praised the table decorations and corsages prepared by her husband for a luncheon in Providence held by the National Council of Jewish Women.<sup>12</sup>

Simon and Ida Katherine performed countless *mitzvot*, such as settling Holocaust survivors in Woonsocket and providing transportation for the blind. The couple was honored with a community-sponsored tribute on their fiftieth wedding anniversary. It was noted that Simon "has learned that simplicity is beauty, and many can look back to their wedding day and also those of their children and acknowledge his artistic design."<sup>13</sup>

### **PAUL BROOKNER**

Paul Brookner came to this country from Romania in 1910, when he was about 10 years old. As a young teen, he enjoyed spending time at a flower shop in downtown Providence. Sometimes he ran errands or made a delivery near the store. When Brookner left school at age 16, he became the shop's delivery person. Having watched florists arrange centerpieces and decorations, he began during his spare time to make floral pieces using discarded flowers. He became so proficient that he was hired to take the place of a designer who became ill.

In 1921, when Brookner was 21 years old, he went into business for

himself. "It was a risky thing to do," explained his son, Edward, "but he had his calling and he knew it." Brookner's flower shop was located at 103 Broad Street in Providence. Until his retirement around 1982, he remained in the same general area, the lower numbers of Broad Street.

Paul's nephew, Stephen Brown, remembered that the stores were located on the fringes of downtown. As a result, Paul did very little walk-in business. Even on holidays, almost all of his work came through telephone orders. Ordinarily, the front of his shop was bare.

As in all flower shops, work was done in a back room. Yet, Brookner's store was also a place where people would come to sit and talk while the proprietor was working. "It was an unusual group," Stephen Brown said, "and Paul was very good to them." "He took care of them."

"I remember going to the greenhouses with my father and meeting other Jewish florists," Edward Brookner commented. "There was a sense of camaraderie among them, not competition." Brookner thought that the floral trade was a difficult life. On Christmas and Easter, even Mother's Day, his father slept in the store. Nevertheless, he loved the business.

#### **MAX BROOKNER**

Paul's brother, Max, was also a florist. Stephen Brown said, "He worked hard and did excellent work." Max frequently worked for Paul, but also went out on his own several times. One of his shops, located on Broad Street, was Vogue Florists. During the 1950s, Max Brookner moved to Florida and opened a shop in Coral Gables.

#### **ISRAEL ROSENBERG**

Israel Rosenberg began working at age 14 for a family named Carpenter, which owned a flower stand in Union Station in Providence. He was later employed by Frederick Hoffman who, in addition to his greenhouses, had a retail store in downtown Pawtucket. Rosenberg worked in the retail store for two decades, with the exception of a stint in the navy during World War I. With the Depression, Hoffman had to scale back his staff. Because his son-in-law was also employed there, Rosenberg had to leave.

Lacking any other trade or experience, Rosenberg decided to open his own business. The Flower Shoppe was also located in downtown Pawtucket.

During the late 1940s, he built his own building on lower Broadway and remained there until his death in 1956.

Howard Rosenberg characterized his father as a very gentle, soft-spoken man. "He did business with a handshake," he said, "and his word was his bond."

Howard remembered that the floral trade was "a seven-days-a-week business." A general florist did everything: weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, anniversaries, and hospital bouquets. When there was a wedding, even one in his family, everyone helped. "On holidays," Rosenberg recalled, "you worked through the night."



ISRAEL ROSENBERG

#### LOUIS BROWN

Louis Brown was well aware of the demands imposed by the floral business. His brother was a florist in Worcester. After his discharge from the service following World War II, Louis found employment in a local business, but his salary was insufficient to meet his young family's needs.

In 1948, Brown opened Campus Florists on Mathewson Street in Providence. "We had happy memories of the place, except for the hours," Miriam Brown recalls. "The weekends were especially hectic with weddings on Saturdays and Sundays." The prom season was also a very busy time, because Brown was known for his corsages, especially orchids. When Maurice and Gerald Cohen needed orchids for their shop, they came to Lou Brown. He bought them in tremendous quantities and in a variety of colors, but did not wholesale them.

Though Brown became successful within a decade of establishing his business, an incident dissuaded him from continuing. One afternoon his son, George, perhaps eight or nine, appeared at the shop unannounced. He had walked from the family home on Humboldt Avenue to Mathewson Street to see his father. This was the only way he could. Because of his long hours, Brown realized, he rarely saw his family. He found employment as a con-

troller in a local business.

### **TWIN FLORISTS**

Maurice ("Moe") and Gerald ("Jerry") Cohen knew all about the long hours and hectic weekends of the floral business. They had served their apprenticeships at Lowell Avenue Greenhouses under their father, Aaron, and uncle, William.

After army service during World War II, Moe and Jerry resumed working in the family business. But Moe always wanted to work with his brother. That way, Jerry said, if someone wanted flowers, it would be easy to remember "The Twins."

Twin Florists opened on Park Avenue in Cranston in 1951. Customers did find it easy to remember the shop's name. "We were busy right from the start," Moe stated. Park Avenue, however, was torn up to be repaved. Eli Abrams, a cousin of Jerry's wife, allowed the Cohen brothers temporary use of his floral shop on Academy Avenue in Providence. Of course Moe and Jerry needed their own telephone number.

The Twin Florists' original store proved too small, especially during holidays when there were large displays. More storage space was also needed. After six years, the Cohen brothers moved to larger quarters on Gansett Avenue, where they remained until Moe's official retirement. Though the twins sold their business in 1987, Moe and Jerry continued working separately.

### **THE WEDDING DESIGNER**

Jacob Ponce was primarily a window dresser. How he became a designer and coordinator of weddings his daughter, Beatrice Ponce Sydney, did not know. He did a great deal of work with several florists, however. According to Moe Cohen, Ponce worked mainly with Paul Brookner and then with Abraham Kroll (of Kroll-Murphy) when Kroll had become too elderly to do weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. Often, however, a bride's family would directly approach Ponce to serve as a coordinator. Mrs. Sydney said that he did everything: selecting a color scheme, ordering and arranging flowers, preparing a *chuppah*, and planning a procession. Arranging table seatings was particularly difficult because of who had to be seated together and who had to be seated apart. Mrs. Sydney said that her father was very fussy about everything, particularly the white carpet on which a bride walked.



Ponce worked in downtown Providence – at Zinn’s restaurant and the Narragansett and Crown hotels – but also at Weinstein’s Lake Pearl resort in Wrentham, Massachusetts. After putting the finishing touches on everything, he would come home, shower, dress in his tuxedo, and then return to the venue to make certain that arrangements went as planned. The flower girls and bride had to enter on cue!

### **“EVERYONE HELPED”**

Wives played key roles in their husbands’ businesses. For example, early in Joseph’s career, Bessie Koppelman worked as a bookkeeper. Her beautiful handwriting is preserved in a ledger from 1909 belonging to her granddaughter, Jane Koppelman. Hilda Brookner was a stalwart in Paul’s floral shop. Nettie Cohen kept the books and Rose Cohen helped as a clerk and as a cashier at Lowell Avenue Greenhouses. Frances Cohen, Moe’s wife, was the bookkeeper for Twin Florist for 39 years. She also made boxwood plants and corsages. Julia Cohen, Jerry’s wife, was a schoolteacher but found time to make corsages.

Children were also indispensable. Israel Rosenberg’s son, Howard, recalled, “If you saw something that needed to be done, you did it.” It was ingrained. He remembered an incident, before a holiday, when a delivery of flowers to the shop was expected. Israel brought out the huge vases for the flowers, filled them with water, and then put them in the front of the store. Minutes later the florist ordered, “Everyone stay right where you are.” “Where,” he asked, “are the vases?” Howard’s sister, who was about 10 years old, had seen the big vases full of water, carried them to the back room, and emptied them. She had been taught to empty a bucket of water because it was unsightly and, without flowers, might become malodorous. She thought she was doing what was expected.

Stephen Brown “stemmed” flowers for his uncle, Paul Brookner. This meant putting a wire around a stem and then attaching it to a pick for insertion into an arrangement. While working summers at Lowell Avenue Greenhouses, Barbara Cohen Miller did preparatory work for arrangements. Her sister, Claire Cath, also helped make floral pieces.

“All our children participated,” Maurice and Gerald Cohen said. Jerry’s daughters made corsages. Moe’s sons helped, as did their friends. Perhaps

the technical term was *schlepped*. When the boys were old enough, they went out on deliveries. Only reluctantly did they deliver floral displays and casket blankets to funeral homes.

## HOLIDAYS

Boxes, a continuing need, had to be made up well in advance of holidays. This task was usually reserved for younger members of a family. Albert Resnick folded boxes for his father, as did Stephen Brown for his uncle. Remmie Brown recalled that the small balcony of Campus Florists was completely filled with boxes for corsages at prom time. Maurice, Gerald, and Barbara Cohen prepared their share of boxes at Lowell Avenue Greenhouses.

Everyone – young and old – worked on holidays. Display stands were brought from cellars and filled with plants. Other items were polished, dusted, and moved. Flowers had to be turned into memorable creations.

Christmas required poinsettias, roping, and greens. Betty Koppelman Steele recalled the flocking machine in the East Avenue store that was used to cover Christmas trees with pink or white candy. Well before Christmas, Aaron Cohen bought immature poinsettias in various sizes from a grower in Taunton. Having been nursed in his greenhouse, they were sold at the proper time. Edward Brookner remembered that for three nights before Christmas, his father and two employees worked frenetically to fill orders and make deliveries.

One Christmas Eve, as Paul Brookner was closing his store, a good customer requested a centerpiece. Though no flowers were left, Brookner salvaged enough discarded blooms to make an acceptable arrangement. The customer had no quarrel with the selection of flowers, but complained that she had expected something more elaborate.

Easter required lilies and other potted plants. "People really got dressed up in the 1930s and 1940s," Howard Rosenberg recalled, "and every lady had to have a corsage." "I remember going in to work with my father at 5:00 A.M. on Good Friday," he continued, "and not coming home until Sunday." "We grabbed an hour of sleep when possible."

Edward Brookner recalled that Mother's Day also brought a steady stream of customers for corsages." Howard Rosenberg thought that the popularity of Valentine's Day was a comparatively recent development. He recalled

that one year, during a blizzard, it was impossible for his father, Israel, to move his truck. Fortunately, he had a teenaged helper whose grandfather owned a livery stable. The floral valentines were delivered by horse and sleigh.

Moe and Jerry Cohen remembered a delivery problem on a very hot summer day. Their truck broke down on its way to a wedding and reception in Fall River. The flowers would have wilted in the heat. After a frantic call or two, a second truck was dispatched and disaster was averted.

### **MULTIPLE OCCASIONS**

Often, Twin Florists had several events the same night. "With great difficulty we juggled them all," Jerry Cohen proclaimed. The brothers would set up one event, leave someone in charge, then go on to the next, and so on. If necessary, florist friends would help.

On one weekend Twin Florists had three weddings and a party. The first wedding was at Beth David synagogue on Oakland Avenue. Having completed their work, the Cohen brothers left one wife in charge, then rushed to the Biltmore Hotel for the second wedding. But they had to run back to Beth David because a floral canopy pulled screws out of a wall. With that problem fixed, it was back to the Biltmore, where they left another wife in charge. The third wedding was at Temple Beth-El, where still another staff person was left in charge. Then it was on to the Wayland Manor to decorate for a party.

### **CHILDREN'S MEMORIES**

"I was very proud of my father," Barbara Cohen Miller said. "I never knew anyone else whose father was a florist. He loved flowers and working with flowers." When the family went on vacation, Aaron always stopped at other florists to visit and find new ideas. He was also very proud of the fact that Lowell Avenue Greenhouses never advertised. The work spoke for itself.

Albert Resnick was very young when his father died, but he recalled very vividly visiting Samuel at his place of business. There were three large tables in the workroom. He recalled the fun of jumping from one to another.

"The East Avenue greenhouses were rather old," Betty Koppelman Steele said, "and vulnerable to the children in the neighborhood who would throw stones at the glass panels." When the greenhouses were empty and about to be razed for redevelopment in the 1960s, my father and I went to the

site and threw rocks at the glass." Mrs. Steele said that Roland always wanted to do that.

The Brookner brothers used to play at Paul's store. "It was a wonder world," Edward said. "We used to lock ourselves in the big refrigerators. Or we played bat ball outside the back door. We would take a tube for a bat and crushed foil for the ball. One time we broke a window in the church nearby. When we saw the priest come out, we hid in a garbage can. After the gentleman left, my father told us to come out. He knew where we were hiding. He laughed and told us to play down the street."

Edward Brookner also explained that Paul was the florist whom gypsies trusted. "Whenever there was a gypsy funeral," he remembered, "they would come." "I remember the black limousines pulling up in front of the store – ten, eleven, twelve of them. My father would have worked for three days to create arrangements for them, and they came to pick them up and bring them to New Hampshire or Connecticut or elsewhere in New England. I remember once I was there when payment was made. The fellow reached into his pocket and pulled out a thick, thick roll of thousand dollar bills. My mouth was wide open at the sight."

Fran Cohen said, "Whenever our son, Stuart, saw Moe, he would cry." Moe worked such long hours that the child seldom saw him. "As soon as I could drive," she said, "I began to take him to the shop so he could get to know his father."

## CODA

The Jewish florists learned their profession by serving apprenticeships in the shops of others, most notably the greenhouse, wholesale and retail operations of Joseph Koppelman. They chose the profession because they truly loved flowers, appreciated their loveliness, and enjoyed creating beauty. It was also their means to realizing the American Dream – a business of their own and security for their families even though it also meant working long hours and coopting family and friends to assist during busy seasons. The resultant stresses discouraged a second generation from carrying on the family business. Other opportunities, less demanding of time and energy, beckoned.

There were exceptions: Roland and Elijah Koppelman, Maurice and Gerald Cohen, and Maurice's son, Stuart. The Koppelman brothers sold their



business almost sixty years after their father established his first shop. Stuart Cohen worked as a florist with his father and uncle at Twin Florists and at several wholesalers in Rhode Island. He is currently employed at Fall River Florist Supply, but not as a florist.

Changes have also come with the times. The proliferation of super-market flower shops has played a role. New materials have replaced the more labor-intensive ways of the past. Valentine's Day has risen in importance as a floral holiday, while Easter corsages are becoming rarer. Bouquets have replaced the corsage as the flowers of choice for proms and Mother's Day.

With the sale of Twin Florists, the era of the Jewish florists/shop owners came to an end.

#### Endnotes

##### JEWISH FLORISTS OF RHODE ISLAND

David Abrams  
*Biltmore Florists*

Eli Abrams  
*Academy Avenue Florists*

Robert Berkowitz  
*Rhode Island Floral Supply*

Max Brookner  
*Vogue Florists*

Paul Brookner  
*Brookner Florists*

Louis Brown  
*Campus Florists*

Jacob Cohen  
*Jack Cohen & Son*

Aaron and William Cohen  
*Lowell Avenue Greenhouses*

Maurice and Gerald Cohen  
*Twin Florists*

Stuart Cohen  
*Twin Florists*

Simon Colitz  
*Colitz Florists*

Joseph, Elijah, and Roland Koppelman  
*Joseph Koppelman & Company*

Joseph, Elijah, and Roland Koppelman  
*Providence Wholesale Florist Market*

Abraham Kroll  
*Kroll-Murphy Company*

Abraham Littman  
*Flower Depot*

Jacob Ponce  
*from home*

Sidney, Rubin, and Esther Popkin  
*Biltmore Florist*

Samuel Resnick  
*Bowers & Resnick*

Harry Rosenberg  
*from home*

Israel Rosenberg  
*The Flower Shoppe*

Charles Smith  
*Smith the Florist*

#### INTERVIEWS

Jane Koppelman – June 15, 2004  
Howard Rosenberg – June 14, 2004  
Edward Brookner – June 28, 2004  
Albert Resnick and Helen Lehrer – June 30, 2004  
Stephen Brown – July 1, 2004  
Beatrice Ponce Sydney – August 4, 2004  
Florence Koppelman Miller – August 11, 2004  
Maurice and Gerald Cohen – August 17, 2004

#### TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Bernard Goldstein – June 20, 2004  
Mary Kirsh – June 22, 2004  
Barbara Cohen Miller – June 23, 2004  
Dr. Norman Berkowitz – June 23, 2004  
Dr. Murray Miller – June 25, 2003  
Betty Koppelman Steele – June 27, 2004  
Ruth Baker-Battist – July 4, 2004  
Florence Koppelman Miller – July 21, 2004  
Paula Cohen – August 8, 2004  
Remmie Brown – August 25, 2004  
Louis Brown – August 26, 2004

A special thank you must go to Maurice ("Moe") Cohen, who inspired this article and who paved the way by sharing with me his knowledge of flowers and florists, his love of his chosen field of endeavor, and his insight. Thank you to Anne Sherman who took care of details when it was difficult for me to come to the office of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

<sup>1</sup> Isaac Bashevis Singer, *In My Father's Court* (New York: Farrar, Straus + Geroux, 1966), p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Chaim Grade, *My Mother's Sabbath Days* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1986), p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Flowers," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972, VI, p. 1,367.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1,366.

<sup>5</sup> Occupations are identifiable in various lists of Jews found in the first three volumes of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*.

<sup>6</sup> Florence Koppelman Miller said of her father Joseph Koppelman, "What we know about my father we got from here and there. He was very secretive about himself." It was from conversations with members of his family that we were able to piece together an outline of Joseph Koppelman's storied life prior to his coming to Rhode Island.

He was born in 1876 in Russia. When he was very young, his family left to settle in Palestine. According to one source, they walked overland to reach their destination. However, their life in Palestine did not suit him, and age 15 or 26, he ran away to Morocco, where he joined the French Foreign Legion.

If he was looking for a life of travel and adventure, Koppelman found it in the Legion. During the Boxer Rebellion in China, he was one of the Legionnaires protecting the French Legation in Peking. He also fought in French Indochina, where he suffered severe wounds. His life was saved by a German, Koch, and a Frenchman, Rousseau, who brought him by boat to safety.

While he was off fighting for France, his three sister, at different times, came to the United States. Two of them Layla (Leah) and Esther, married and lived in San Francisco. Somehow, Koppelman contacted them and he, too, went there to live with his family. Layla found him a job as a wine taster, but decided that she did not like his coming home smelling of wine, according to Mrs. Miller, so she sent him to Boston where the third sister lived. Her husband sold flowers. Esther and Charles Smith came east with him.

Unfortunately, all of Koppelman's mementos, including his medals, were stolen from a truck he kept in his store.

<sup>7</sup> Comment by Dr. Murray Miller.

<sup>8</sup> "Chartered Organizations," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, II (June, 1956), p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> As an inventor, Smith held a patent for a machine that made wire frames for wreaths. This machine prevented serious injuries to workers. Smith's son, Dr. Joseph Smith, became an expert on communicable diseases. For many years he served as Providence's superintendent of health and registrar.

<sup>10</sup> For many years Eli Abrams was also active in Republican politics in Pawtucket. According to the March 28, 1965 issue of the *Providence Journal*, he was narrowly defeated in 1954 in his race for representative of District 10. Abrams was appointed a deputy sheriff by Governors Christopher DelSesto and John Chafee, and in 1959 he served as president of the Providence County Sheriff's Association.

<sup>11</sup> Colitz obituary, *Providence Journal*, June 7, 1983. He died at age 98.

<sup>12</sup> "Ida Katherine Colitz: A Jewish Clubwoman's Diary," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, VII (November, 1990), p. 438.

<sup>13</sup> Document in Colitz file, Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

## THE CENTENARY OF HEBREW FREE LOAN BY GEORGE M. GOODWIN

This article is based on an essay written for the souvenir program of Hebrew Free Loan's centennial banquet held on March 30, 2003. The author was completing his second year as the organization's president. This was indeed a busy year, for he was also serving his first year as president of our Association and coediting its anthology.

As a member of Temple Beth-El, a parent of former students at Alperin Schechter Day School, and an alternate member of Chabad House's *minyan*, Goodwin considers himself an ecumenical Jew. He also enjoys the distinction of having lived in three holy cities: Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Providence.

When established a century ago, Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence was the product of an extraordinary time and place as well as farsighted people. Because many of these circumstances and leaders have long been forgotten, it now seems appropriate to rediscover them.<sup>1</sup>

### MIGHTY PROVIDENCE

No longer a quaint or bucolic backwater, Rhode Island, toward the close of the nineteenth century, was an industrial powerhouse. By 1900, its population had reached 429,000. Two decades later the Ocean State claimed 600,000 residents.<sup>2</sup>

Providence, the second largest city in New England, was the crucible of this expansion. Between 1890 and 1900, its population increased from 132,000 to 176,000, almost twice the combined populations of Pawtucket, Woonsocket, and Newport, the state's next largest cities. Though difficult to believe today, Providence, at the turn of the twentieth century, was America's twentieth largest city.<sup>3</sup> The capital city's population would continue to soar, reaching its zenith in 1925 with 268,000 residents.<sup>4</sup>

More than one historian has referred to the period from 1828 to 1928 as Providence's "century of growth."<sup>5</sup> Its amazing transformation was exemplified



by the construction of two landmarks: the three-story Arcade and the Industrial Trust Company (later Fleet Bank), the tallest building in New England.<sup>6</sup>

Providence's phenomenal development in the early twentieth century hinged on several industries. For example, the city led the nation in the manufacture of woolens and jewelry. Providence was America's third largest center for the manufacture of machinery and machine tools. Factories producing files, screws, steam engines, and silverware were the largest in the world.<sup>7</sup> Imagine the relentless noise, belching smokestacks, acrid odors, and mountains of refuse.

Impressive as it was, Rhode Island's industrial might was also transitory. Between 1919 and 1939, the state's supply of manufacturing jobs decreased by 20%, compared to the national average of only 3%. Between 1920 and 1935, the number of jobs for Providence's industrial workers decreased by more than one-fourth, from 60% to 44%.<sup>8</sup> The state's myriad textile mills, which had sparked America's industrial revolution, began closing during the 1920s. Most of those jobs, for men and for women, would never return.

### IMMIGRANTS' TOIL

Rhode Island's industrial expansion, magnificently illustrating capitalism's freedom and fury, benefited largely from immigrants' toil. By 1910, for example, 70% of Rhode Islanders were either foreign-born or children of immigrants. This was the highest percentage of foreign-born in the entire country. Massachusetts was second with 67% foreign-born. In 1915, one-third of Providence residents were foreign-born; another third were children of immigrants.<sup>9</sup>

Though Jews had begun settling in Newport in 1658, their presence in Providence was miniscule before the Civil War. In 1877, a year before City Hall was erected, approximately 105 Jewish names were listed in the city directory. (Except for three widows, all names belonged to men.) The names of 19 Jewish men were also identifiable that year in the Pawtucket directory. Perhaps 500 Jews lived in both cities.<sup>10</sup>

Irish, French Canadians, and Italians were the largest ethnic groups who settled around Narragansett Bay and besides Massasoit's fast-flowing streams and rivers. Needless to say, the vast majority of immigrants were Catholics. By 1905, Rhode Island had become the first state in the nation with a Catholic majority.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 102,000 Catholics resided in Providence,

compared to approximately 88,000 Protestants and 8,000 Jews.<sup>12</sup>

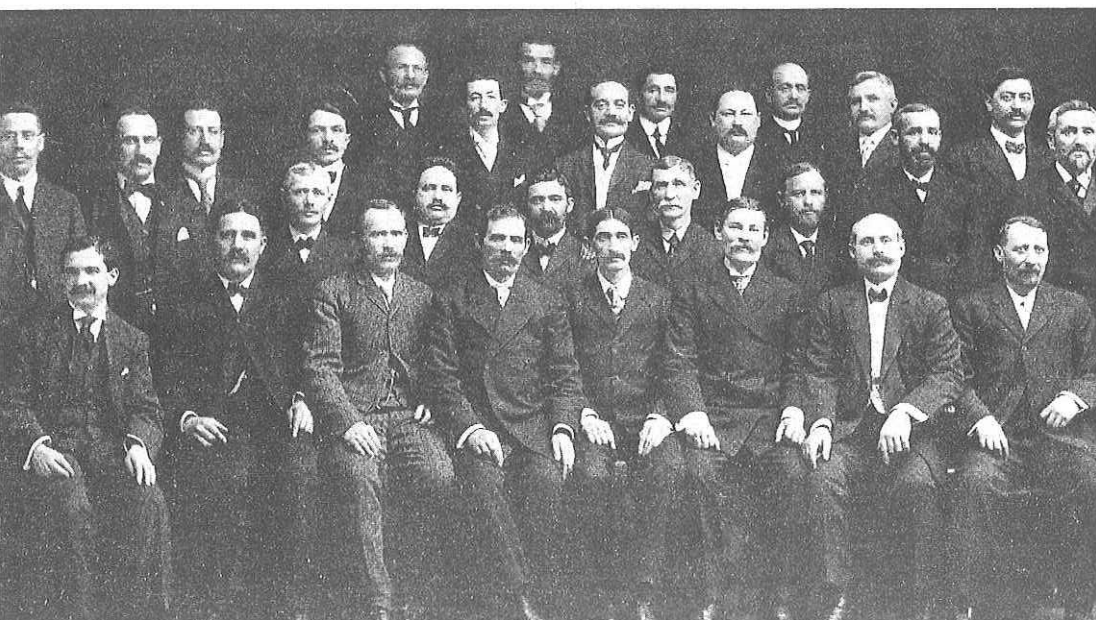
Providence's predominantly poor and struggling Jewish community, a microcosm of Boston's North End or Manhattan's Lower East Side, was divided between two neighborhoods. Those living near Willard Avenue, in South Providence, tended to be immigrants from Galicia, Romania, and the Ukraine. Those Jews living in the area of Smith Hill or the North End, in the shadow of the State House (completed in 1904), tended to be immigrants from Lithuania, Poland, and Belorussia.<sup>13</sup> Jews, like Italians, moved into dilapidated neighborhoods formerly occupied by Irish. They crowded into drafty and moldering tenements predating the Civil War. Could these East European immigrants have even imagined the splendor of Newport's Cliff Walk?

For better and for worse, these bedraggled Jewish neighborhoods disappeared. Fords, highways, diplomas, and mortgages symbolized the forces that led to their demise. Indeed, by the 1950s, Providence lost more of its population to suburbanization than any other major American city.<sup>14</sup>

In 1905, just after the founding of Hebrew Free Loan, Rhode Island's Jewish community exhibited numerous demographic patterns. Those regarding employment are particularly pertinent. Approximately 36% of peddlers were Jews, three times the percentage of Italians. About 14% of garment workers were Jews, half the percentage of Italians. Comparable percentages of jewelry workers were Jews and Italians, 3% and 4%.<sup>15</sup>

A decade later, however, Italians far outnumbered Jews as jewelry workers, tailors, and laborers. Yet, when facing the same economic conditions, both groups became active in labor unions. Italians helped lead the 1913 garment workers' strike; Jews were instrumental in the 1917 jewelry workers' strike.<sup>16</sup> By 1915, however, perhaps 70% of Jews were self-employed. Their entrepreneurial spirit was remarkable even in a city as bustling as Providence.<sup>17</sup>

Though denied suffrage, Jewish wives and mothers, like their counterparts among all ethnic groups, helped support families. Approximately 31% of Jewish women bolstered their husbands' incomes, though often performing household chores rather than working in factories. Among Jewish children 15 years or older, 67% of boys and 58% of girls were required to bring in dollars.<sup>18</sup> Large numbers of these kids shined shoes or hawked newspapers until late at night.



FOUNDERS AND ORIGINAL BOARD MEMBERS, 1903

### FOUNDERS AND ORIGINAL BOARD MEMBERS

So what can be said more specifically about Hebrew Free Loan's 30 founders and original board members? The men who posed for the board of directors' first commercially executed portrait in 1903 look quite distinguished.<sup>19</sup> They were: Kalman Abes, Abraham Abrich, William Adelman, William Baxt, Louis Bolotow, Myer Brown, Herman Epstein, Barnet Fain, Aaron Feiner, Jacob Feinstein, Benjamin Flink, Abraham Golden, Benjamin Goldstein, Charles Goldstein (secretary), Joseph Joslin (treasurer), Sidney Kapland, Hyman Katz, Philip Kelman, Joseph Kroll, Joseph Levy, Saul Lewando, Adolph Linder, Harry Lyon, Samuel Lubet, Harry Lyon, Samuel Priest (president), William Rabinowitz, Zalman Rosen, Harry Rosenhirsch, and Isaac Wolf. (Lena Lewando, also a founder, is missing from the photograph.)

Dressed in their nattiest attire, including starched collars, waistcoats, and high-laced shoes, these gentlemen look proud, confident, and rather intimidating. Rather than lowly immigrants, they resemble burgomasters or selectmen. Some wore beards, but yarmulkes were probably disdained or forbidden.

There can be little doubt, however, that the founders and original



board members were New Americans. The Association's name until 1917 was *Gemilath Chesed* (Deeds of Loving Kindness), and all of its early records were in Yiddish. Nineteen men are identifiable from naturalization records filed in Rhode Island's state and federal courts.<sup>20</sup> (Presumably, many board members were naturalized elsewhere.) Without exception, their port of arrival was New York City – primarily Castle Clinton rather than Ellis Island. The earliest to arrive on American shores was Benjamin Flink in 1879; the last was Benjamin Goldstein in 1899. The vast majority arrived in the 1880s and were naturalized the following decade.

As for countries of origin, 13 out of 18 founders and original board members came from Russia. Benjamin Flink, Joseph Kroll, and Adolph Linder came from Austria. Hyman Katz arrived from Poland, Kalman Avis from Romania. When accepting citizenship, New Americans forswore their allegiance to various emperors, czars, kings, and potentates. As promised in Washington's letter to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, written in 1790, America's Jews were emancipated from centuries of official hatred and oppression.

By today's standards, Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members were relatively young men, probably in their 30s, 40s, and early 50s.<sup>21</sup> Eight of these men (Abraham Abrich, Barnet Fain, Abraham Golden, Philip Kelman, Harry Lyon, Samuel Priest, William Rabinowitz, and Isaac Wolf) were married in Providence between 1891 and 1900. While they had a fair number of biblical names, their spouses included two Idas as well as Annie, Betty, Fannie, Lena, Minnie, and Pearl.<sup>22</sup>

Providence birth records further demonstrate the founders and board members' relative youthfulness. Surely some of these men came to Providence with young wives and children, but between 1891 and 1920, 21 fathers sired at least 84 offspring. The average of four children per family is somewhat misleading, considering that there were only three families (William Baxt, Benjamin Flink, and Joseph Joslin) who actually produced four children while living here. Indeed, at one extreme, there were two families (Kalman Abes and Sidney Kapland) with only one child. At the other extreme, there was one family (Barnet Fain) with eight children, and one (Abraham Abrich) with nine. That the founders and original board members were relatively young (or prolific) is reinforced by the fact that 31 of their children were born after



Hebrew Free Loan's establishment.

As for names of those children born in Providence, clear favorites emerged. Four boys were named Hyman and three Isaac. Two boys were named Harry, Israel, Jacob, Leonard, Morris, Peter, and Sam. As for girls, the favorite names were Ruth and Sarah, with three for each. Two girls were also named Fannie, Ida, Jennie, Mildred, and Rose.

By 1903 Providence had produced several wealthy Jews. Dare we call them "tycoons?" The most prominent were the Samuels brothers, Joseph and Leon, whose Outlet Company, founded in 1890 on Weybosset Street, became not only a highly successful department store but a beloved social institution.<sup>23</sup> Another leading retailer and property owner was Caesar Misch, who in 1903 built a six-story office tower on Westminster Street.<sup>24</sup> Several Jews, such as the Lederer brothers – Adolph, Edward, and Henry – prospered as jewelry manufacturers. In 1897 the seven-story Lederer Building arose on Mathewson Street.<sup>25</sup>

None of Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members belonged to this patrician group, however. Indeed, none probably belonged to such Jewish groups as the Oxford Club, organized in 1901, or the 20th Century Elite Club, organized in 1909.<sup>26</sup> None would build a residence on Blackstone Boulevard, play golf at Ledgemont Country Club (founded in West Warwick in 1932), or erect a mausoleum.

Lacking civic triumphs or exploits, most of Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members can be considered, like us, somewhat ordinary. On February 4, 1903, when the 18 founders gathered at Charles Goldstein's shop at 317 North Main, it was surely a Herculean effort to pool \$700. Had they ever heard the word "endowment?" Eleven of their gifts were for \$25 or less. Indeed, had our founders and original board members lacked vision, compassion, and fortitude, they would have quickly disappeared and been entirely forgotten. End of story.

Fortunately, we now have good reason to be inquisitive. Information about the occupations of all but four of Hebrew Free Loan's leaders (Myer Brown, Herman Epstein, Zalmon Rosen, and Isaac Wolf) can be gleaned from the Providence directory of 1900. Predictably, one (Benjamin Goldstein) was a peddler and two (Louis Bolotow and Joseph Levy) were tailors. Two other men mastered manual skills: Kalman Abes as a carpenter and Philip Kelman as a blacksmith.

The vast majority of founders and original board members were self-employed as shopkeepers or small manufacturers. They dealt with a startling array of goods: paper (Abraham Abrich), cloaks (William Adelman), caps (Aaron Feiner), leather (Jacob Feinstein), groceries (Benjamin Flink), junk (Abraham Golden and Samuel Priest), store fixtures (Charles Goldstein), yeast (Sidney Kapland), tobacco (Hyman Katz), pictures (Joseph Kroll), clothing (Adolph Lindner and William Rabinowitz), umbrellas (Harry Lyon), and bristles (Harry Rosenhirsch).

Only Saul Lewando enjoyed professional status. Yet, he was listed both as a physician and as a milliner. His sister (not his wife), Lena, was the only woman among the Association's founders and original board members. She was employed as a clerk in Saul's shop. In Association records Samuel Luber was also occasionally listed as "Doctor," but in 1900 he worked as a hairdresser.

A great many founders and original board members worked a few blocks from one another along North Main Street, beneath the spires of the First Baptist Church in America and St. John's Cathedral (Episcopal). Proprietors along this commercial artery included: Aaron Feiner at 93 North Main, William Rabinowitz at 224, the Lewandos at 256, Jacob Feinstein at 281, Hyman Katz at 303, Charles Goldstein at 317, and Samuel Luber at 335. Additionally, several men resided on North Main: Joseph Levey at 10, Joseph Kroll at 36, Hyman Katz at 305, Samuel Luber at 337, Kalman Abes at 353, Sidney Kapland at 508, and William Baxt at 553. Other founders and original board members worked or resided nearby on such streets as Canal, Chalkstone, Charles, Lippitt, Orms, Pratt, and Smith.

At least four leaders of Hebrew Free Loan shared living quarters. Hyman Katz, for instance, shared rooms with a widow and two clerks. Samuel Luber shared rooms with a tinsmith, a watchmaker, a peddler, and two clerks.

Founders and original board members frequently changed residences. No doubt, more than a few left Rhode Island to seek greener pastures. For instance, in 1917 Dr. Lewando relocated to Pittsburgh.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, in 1923, two decades after its founding, almost half of Hebrew Free Loan leaders were still living and working in Providence. According to the city directory, many were involved in the same trades or businesses. At least a few reached a higher rung on the economic ladder. Benjamin Goldstein, no

longer a peddler, sold clothing. Louis Bolotow, formerly a tailor, sold dry goods. Perhaps only a better advertiser, Abraham Golden progressed from selling junk to "old metals."

## SYNAGOGUES

Providence's oldest Jewish congregation, eventually known as Sons of Israel and David, was founded in 1854.<sup>28</sup> In 1877 it became the state's first Reform body. Having erected its own building downtown in 1890, Sons of Israel and David was also known as "The Friendship Street Synagogue." Not until 1911, with its move to a new structure on Broad Street in South Providence, did the congregation become known as "Temple Beth-El."

The state's oldest Conservative congregation, founded in 1921, was Temple Beth Israel.<sup>29</sup> The second, Temple Emanu-El, was founded three years later. In 1927 it became the first synagogue to build on the East Side (on property purchased from Brown University).<sup>30</sup>

By 1914 the North End would claim the staggering number of 24 synagogues – all Orthodox or "traditional."<sup>31</sup> Surely, the strangest was the Hebrew Mission for Converted Jews, located at 450 North Main. The North End's oldest synagogue was Sons of Zion, founded in 1875, which erected its own edifice on Orms Street in 1892. Founded primarily by Lithuanians, it spun off several other congregations, attracting Poles, Romanians, or Russians. Alas, Congregation Beth Jacob, which was founded in 1895 and built its own structure on Douglas Avenue, is the only surviving synagogue. Indeed, it has outlasted the entire North End.

Most likely, many of Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members were affiliated with a variety of *shuls* and *stiebels* (but not Sons of Israel and David). Given a dearth of membership records, details will never be known. In 1904 several leaders of Hebrew Free Loan helped establish Congregation Ahavath Sholom, known as the "Howell Street Synagogue." These included Louis Bolotow, Sidney Kapland, Dr. Saul Lewando, Samuel Priest, and Harry Rosenhirsch.

## JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

It is quite possible, however, that many of Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members were neither observant Jews nor active in syna-



gogues. Indeed, many Jews were irreligious or anti-religious. Yet, the North End comprised a crazy quilt of Jewish organizations, the vast majority of them non-religious. Jewish ideals and values were transmitted through countless mutual-aid societies, many transported from European *shtetls*. Through weekly or monthly membership payments, *landsmanshaften* provided sick benefits, burial expenses, and support to widows and orphans.

Consider only a few examples: the First Odessa Independent Association, the Lubliner Sick Beneficial Association, and the Yelisebethgrad Progressive Benevolent Association. Jewish tradesmen also established their own organizations, such as the Cooperative Union of Cigar Makers, the Peddlers' Protective Union, the Providence Hebrew Butchers' Association, and the Providence Protective Ladies' Tailors Association.

Jews of the North End established or belonged to chapters of such national organizations as: B'nai B'rith, the Independent Order of American Hebrews, the Independent Order of the Western Star, the Jewish Mothers of America, and Workman's Circle (*Arbeiter Ring*). If somehow these were not enough, Providence had dozens of local associations, such as the Hebrew Adelphean Society, the Hebrew Criterion Association, the Hebrew Dramatic Club, and the New Idea Social Club. Reclusive Jews joined perhaps three or four organizations.

Early in the twentieth century, Providence produced at least two national leaders of Jewish organizations. Colonel Harry Cutler, a successful jewelry manufacturer, was, following the Kishinev pogroms of 1903 and 1905, an early member of New York's American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress.<sup>32</sup> Between 1908 and 1913, Marion Misch served as president of the National Council of Jewish Women.<sup>33</sup>

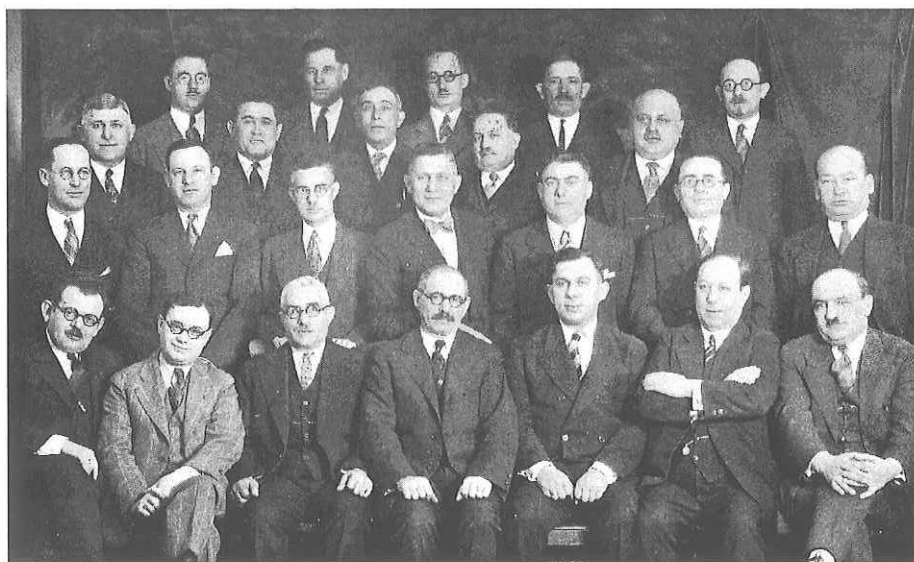
Around 1915, when Hebrew Free Loan was located at 299 North Main, numerous Jewish organizations operated nearby.<sup>34</sup> The Hebrew Educational Alliance, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, and Star lodge 330 of Order B'rith Abraham were found at 128 North Main. Poaly Zion was at 344, the Workman's Circle Bakery at 319, and the Zionist Association at 470. A second Workman's Circle Bakery stood at 593 North Main. The North End Dispensary, founded by the Providence "section" of the National Council of Jewish Women, was located at 49 Orms Street. The Jewish Home for the Aged stood at 191 Orms.



America's oldest Jewish federation, the Combined Jewish Philanthropies, had been established in Boston in 1895. Beginning in 1900, Providence attempted to consolidate its fundraising efforts. These attempts did not succeed until 1945, however, when the General Jewish Committee was organized, itself a precursor to the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island.<sup>35</sup> Yet, communal caring and sharing have forever been Jewish imperatives.

Derived from Exodus (22:24), the mandate for establishing Hebrew Free Loans is biblical. Perhaps based to some degree on success in Providence, Hebrew Free Loans were chartered in South Providence in 1906, in Pawtucket in 1909, and in Woonsocket in 1914. (Both Pawtucket and South Providence are still active.) But in 1907 the Providence Association also splintered. Louis Bolotow established the United Hebrew Assisting Association, and Harry Rosenhirsch established the Workingmen's Gemilath Chesed Association.

So, given the number, variety, and vitality of Jewish communal agencies, the establishment of our Hebrew Free Loan was far from remarkable. Yet, in 2003, how many Jewish organizations are celebrating centenaries? Even within the International Association of Hebrew Free Loans, how many chapters have reached our magnificent milestone?



BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 1928

## HEBREW FREE LOAN'S VIABILITY

What is so remarkable about our Hebrew Free Loan is its viability – its fundamental and ongoing usefulness. In every era and whatever the need, the Association has been not only a beacon of hope but has offered practical steps toward self-improvement and security. Despite precise by-laws, only seldom amended, the Association has attracted not only new borrowers but also new donors and new directors, who continually recycle funds. As the world has rapidly evolved, Hebrew Free Loan has remained relatively simple, stable, and inviting.

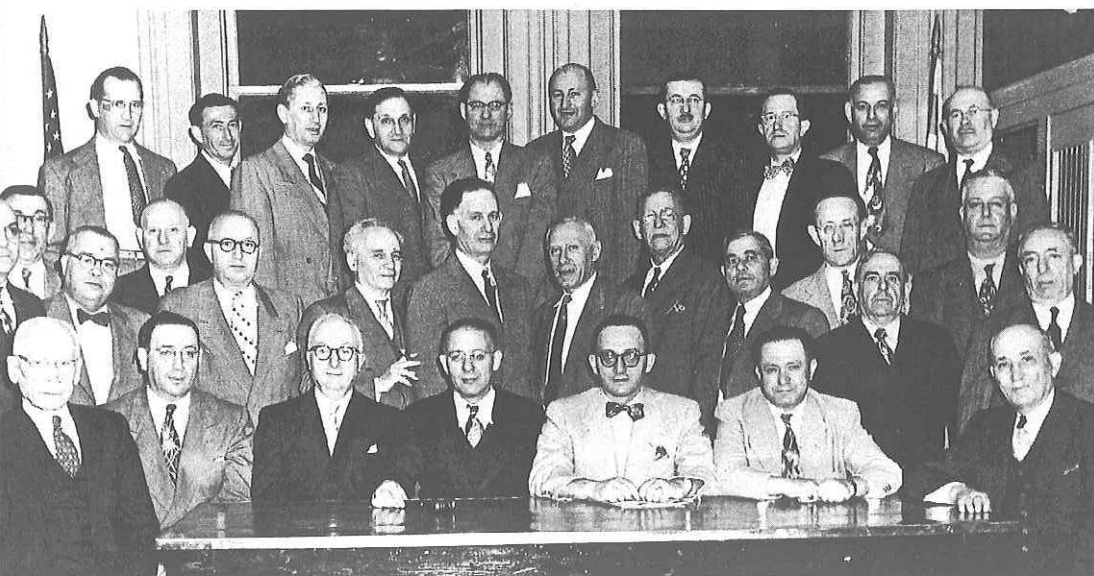
Nevertheless, a question arises as to whether the greater *mitzvah* rendered by the Association is helping those in financial need or helping others increase their sense of communal responsibility and service. Clearly, each group has been encouraged and rewarded by the other. Their fates have been entwined.

Hebrew Free Loan has prospered, both as an idea and as an actuality, for another important reason. True to Jewish teaching, the Association has never been considered a charity. Despite occasional references, the Association has never been a “Jewish bank.” Hebrew Free Loan has been an instrument of *tzedakah* – social justice – providing opportunities to Jews and others to help themselves.

Individuals not only repay loans but also replenish a sense of self-respect and dignity. Indeed, the lending of trust may be far more costly than the lending of mere dollars. Dollars can eventually be repaid; a damaged reputation may be irreparable.

Having met every second Wednesday evening since its inception, imagine the number of meetings attended by Hebrew Free Loan's board members. At the very least, 2,500. Add to these all kinds of committee meetings: to oversee investments and collections and to plan such fundraising events as dances and picnics. Then factor in the board's interviews with each applicant and his co-signers. Over a century the Association has made well over 20,000 loans, an amount exceeding \$5 million.

The Association was most active during its early decades, when immigration was unfettered and credit was unobtainable from other sources. When loans were \$5 to \$25, they went a long way toward buying groceries, paying rent, or stocking pushcarts. During the Association's first five years,



BOARD OF DIRECTORS, 1951

more than 1,500 loans were approved. The year producing the greatest number of loans was 1912, when nearly 600 were processed. Another extraordinary year was 1940, when 420 loans were approved.

Eventually, the New Deal, the G. I. Bill, the Great Society, and Pell Grants brought some relief to enduring financial hardships and pressures. Even while favoring loans for education, the Association has found it necessary to steadily increase the amounts available. Unfortunately, today's maximum loan of \$2,500 would cover less than one course at some universities.

Hebrew Free Loan has remained eager to assist with unforeseen and recurring difficulties, help young people start out on their own, and settle new waves of immigrants. In the latter capacity, the Association has worked fruitfully with Jewish Family Service and Jewish Federation for three decades.

### TODAY'S BOARD

Today's board of directors differs in several respects from the Association's original. Nearly one-third of current members are women. Most board members are college graduates, and many hold professional degrees. The board includes, for example, teachers, lawyers, psychologists, a librarian, an accountant, a nurse, and an optometrist. Today, however, relatively few board members own or operate their own businesses. None has an establishment on Hope



Street, which suffices, if any can, as the city's Jewish thoroughfare. Indeed, none of us harbors the expectation that Rhode Island will rise again as an industrial colossus or as a magnet of Jewish immigration.

Compared to the original board, we are probably "old geezers." Hardly any member is under 50, and several are retired. Thank heavens, we are expecting only grandchildren.

Hebrew Free Loan's current board represents an entire spectrum of Jewish beliefs, practices, and affiliations. In order to be inclusive, we serve kosher food. Except for our traditional Hanukkah party, however, we do not recite prayers. But we retain some elements of ritual. For example, we customarily stand for a moment of silence to honor the Association's departed members. Numerous plaques display the names of benefactors and past presidents. One of our officers is still called "custodian," though we no longer safeguard collateral.

Our board members live and work throughout metropolitan Providence and far beyond. While a few individuals have followed in relatives' footsteps to leadership in the Association, many others have come to Rhode Island and our board only later in their lives. We happily include natives of the former Soviet Union, Poland, and South Africa. More board members speak Afrikaans than Yiddish.

While some board members have experienced economic hardship, most are middle-class wage earners, who own homes and automobiles, attend athletic events and concerts, and take winter or summer vacations. Whatever our condition or station, we love to *kvetch*.

Like our predecessors, the board poses every few years for a portrait. Are we somewhat vain or afraid of being forgotten? Some men wear suits and ties; a smattering wear beards and yarmulkes. Men and women alike are adorned with bright colors and bold patterns. We smile, look relaxed, and feel at ease. While enjoying humor and friendship, we also respect each other's spirit of service and devotion.

Indeed, like Hebrew Free Loan's founders and original board members a century ago, we are grateful for America's freedoms and opportunities to perform Deeds of Loving Kindness. May our successors feel a similar sense of responsibility and gratitude over the coming century, as they endeavor to strengthen Rhode Island's precious Jewish community by extending a helping hand.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> My research builds on three articles published in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* (hereafter referred to as *The Notes*): "Gemilath Chesed Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence," Vol. I (December 1924): p. 129-146; Benton H. Rosen, "The Hebrew Free Loan Associations," Vol. V (November 1969): p. 275-288; Marvin Pitterman, "The Hebrew Free Loan Association, 1938-1950," Vol. VIII (November 1980): p. 227-244. See also: Eleanor F. Horvitz, "The Jewish Woman Liberated: A History of the Ladies' Hebrew Free Loan Association," Vol. VII (November 1978): p. 501-512. Numerous handwritten and published records produced by Hebrew Free Loan of Providence have been deposited in the Association's archives.
- <sup>2</sup> Demographic figures are found in: *Providence Industrial Sites* (Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1981), p. 31. For illustrated histories, see: Patrick T. Conley and Paul R. Campbell, *Providence: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Company, 1982) and Patrick T. Conley, *An Album of Rhode Island History, 1636-1986* (Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Company, 1986).
- <sup>3</sup> These statistics are found in *The Providence Directory 1900* (Providence: Sampson, Murdock + Co., 1903), vii-viii. Boston was America's fifth largest city. Other large cities in New England were Worcester, 29th; New Haven, 31st; Fall River, 33rd; Lowell, 39th; Cambridge, 41st; and Hartford, 49th.
- <sup>4</sup> John S. Gilkerson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence: 1820-1940* (Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, *Providence Industrial Sites*, p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup> William McK. Woodward, ed., *Downtown Providence: Commerce in Architecture* (Providence Preservation Society, 1982), p. 11-12. For a more recent and authoritative reference, see Wm. McKenzie Woodward, ed., *Guide to Providence Architecture* (Providence Preservation Society, 1903).
- <sup>7</sup> Judith E. Smith, *Family Connections: A History of Italian and Jewish Immigrant Lives in Providence, Rhode Island, 1900-1940* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 10. This key reference is based on the author's 1980 dissertation at Brown.
- <sup>8</sup> Smith, p. 21.
- <sup>9</sup> Smith, p. 11.
- <sup>10</sup> David C. Adelman, "Population of the Jewish Community of Providence," *The Notes*, Vol. I, (June 1954): p. 72-74.
- <sup>11</sup> Gilkerson, p. 7.
- <sup>12</sup> Gilkerson, p. 280.
- <sup>13</sup> Smith, p. 136. For detailed studies of these neighborhoods, see two extensive articles by Eleanor F. Horvitz in *The Notes*: "Old Bottles, Rags, Junk! The Story of the Jews of South Providence," Vol. VII (November 1976): p. 189-257 and "Pushcarts, Surreys with Fringe on Top: The Story of the North End," Vol. VIII (November 1979): p. 10-50.
- <sup>14</sup> Smith, p. 20.
- <sup>15</sup> Smith, p. 153.
- <sup>16</sup> Smith, p. 155. See also: Paul M. Buble, "Jews in Rhode Island Labor: An Introductory Investigation," *The Notes*, Vol. X (November 1988): p. 146-156.
- <sup>17</sup> See: Joel Perlmann, "Beyond New York, A Second Look: The Occupations of Russian Jewish Immigrants in Providence, RI and in Other Small Jewish Communities, 1900-1913," *The Notes*, Vol. X (November 1989): p. 376-388. Also: Perlmann, *Ethnic Differences: School and Social Structure Among the Irish, Italian, Jews, and Blacks in an American City, 1880-1935* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- <sup>18</sup> Smith, p. 58.
- <sup>19</sup> More than 20 framed portraits of boards of directors are currently displayed in the Association's office at 58 Burlington Street.

- <sup>20</sup> These men were: Abes, Abrich, Adelman, Baxt, Bolotow, Brown, Fain, Flink, Golden, Goldstein, Katz, Kelman, Kroll, Lewando, Linder, Luber, Lyon, Priest, and Wolf. See: David C. Adelman, "Naturalization of Jews to 1906," *The Notes* Vol. I (June 1954): p. 11-71.
- <sup>21</sup> For vital records in Providence, see the published indexes belonging to the Rhode Island Historical Society. The Society's library also has an excellent collection of city directories from throughout the state.
- <sup>22</sup> For Jewish names, see: Stanley M. Aronson and Betty E. Aronson, "'Thy Name Shall Be Abraham:' A Survey of First Names in the Jewish Population of Rhode Island," *The Notes* Vol. XII (November 1996): p. 190-204.
- <sup>23</sup> See: Eleanor F. Horvitz, "The Outlet Company Story and the Samuels Brothers," *The Notes* Vol. VI (November 1974): p. 488-531 and Samuel C. Smart, *The Outlet Story*, (Providence: Outlet Communication, 1984).
- <sup>24</sup> For Caesar Misch, see: Eleanor F. Horvitz, "Marion L. Misch: An Extraordinary Woman," *The Notes* Vol. VIII (November 1980), p. 9-12.
- <sup>25</sup> *Providence Industrial Sites*, p. 56.
- <sup>26</sup> For lengthy lists of Jewish organizations, see: David C. Adelman, "Chartered Organizations," *The Notes* Vol. II (June 1956): p. 21-85 and Vol. II (April 1957): p. 114-118.
- <sup>27</sup> Seebert J. Goldowsky, "Jews in Medicine in Rhode Island," *The Notes* Vol. II (April 1957), p. 158 and footnote 9, p. 190.
- <sup>28</sup> See: Seebert J. Goldowsky, *A Century and a Quarter of Spiritual Leadership* (Providence: Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David, 1989).
- <sup>29</sup> Eleanor F. Horvitz, "Temple Beth-Israel, 1921-81," *The Notes* Vol. 9 (November 1980): p. 30-67.
- <sup>30</sup> David E. Horvitz, *Temple Emanu-El: The First Fifty Years* (Providence: Temple Emanu-El, 1974).
- <sup>31</sup> Smith, p. 136.
- <sup>32</sup> See: "Reminiscences of Harry Cutler," *The Notes* Vol. II (April 1957): p. 104-107 and Stanley B. Abrams, "Harry Cutler: An Outline of a Neglected Patriot," *The Notes* Vol. IX (November 1984): p. 127-140.
- <sup>33</sup> Horvitz, "Marion L. Misch," p. 7-64.
- <sup>34</sup> A map showing the relative proximity of Jewish organizations in the North End and Smith Hill neighborhood is found in Smith, p. 138-139.
- <sup>35</sup> See: Hadassah Davis, "Jewish Federation of Rhode Island: Fifty Years of Giving," *The Notes* Vol. 12 (November 1995): entire issue.

## CANTOR JACOB HOHENSEMSER BY PHILLIP MILLER

Educated at Temples Emanu-El and Beth-El, Philip Miller graduated from Hope High School in 1963. He earned degrees at Georgetown University and the University of Michigan before receiving his doctorate in Middle Eastern studies from New York University. Among other subjects, he is an expert on the Karaites of Russia, the Arabic language, and the Qur'an.

Having served since 1978 as the librarian of the Klau Library of Hebrew Union College in New York City, Miller is one of the most distinguished members of Rhode Island's diaspora. Many readers will recall his wonderful visit here in November, 2001, when he spoke to our Association.

As this essay indicates, Phil's upbringing in Rhode Island remains deep in his heart. He lucidly demonstrates that excellent historical writing only begins with a factual presentation.

I left Rhode Island when barely out of my teens and, except for brief visits, I have not lived there for several decades. If anything, my memories are vestigial, if not flawed. What could I say about my childhood or adolescence? It was suggested that I write about the Jewish teachers I encountered in the Providence public school system because both my parents were teachers. In many cases, however, these persons were my parents' colleagues, even close friends!

My family was unusual in that we had deep connections with both Temple Beth-El and Temple Emanu-El, with their clergy and teachers. What more could I say about Rabbi Braude or Rabbi Bohnen? Then it struck me. I could write about Cantor Hohenemser. Why would I want to write about him? Perhaps because my memories of him are so many and abiding, but also because I learned a tremendous lesson from him many years after he died.

The facts about his life are rather simple. He was born August 12, 1911 in Tübingen, Germany. But I already feel I must digress. The family name Hohenemser may sound unusual to American ears, but it simply means a person who originally came from Hohenems, just as *Berliner* means "from Berlin" or

*Posner* means "from Posen." Hohenems is a town on the Austrian-German border. Its Jewish population went into serious decline after the mid-nineteenth century, and it would be difficult to ascertain who of Cantor Hohenemser's ancestors came from Hohenems and when he left. Hohenems would be just another small town where Jews lived in Central Europe, except there was one native son whose name lives on in Jewish history. Salomon Sulzer (1804-1890), the cantor of Vienna, was one of the greatest cantors of all time.

Cantor Hohenemser was graduated from Die Israelitische Lehrerbildungsanstalt Würzburg (the noted Jewish teachers institute in Würzburg) in 1931, and pursued further musical study at the Trapp Conservatory of Music in Munich (1936-1938). He served as cantor at the Great Synagogue in Munich, after the death of Cantor Emanuel Kirschner (1857-1938), one of the great names in Jewish music. And Cantor Hohenemser was interred at Dachau before Kristall-Nacht. (Munich's Jews were cruelly singled out by the Nazis before November 1938, with the main synagogue being demolished the previous July.)

He emigrated from Germany to the United States in September 1939 and arrived in Providence in 1941. On the voyage to America, he paid for his passage as an entertainer, singing nightly in the ship's cabaret. One of the passengers on board was Ted Mack, the talent scout and director of an immensely popular radio program, "Major Bowles' Original Amateur Hour." He put Hohenemser on the radio, not as a contestant, but as a way of giving free publicity to a young, unemployed German cantor seeking a pulpit.

One story my mother told me when I was growing up was that the Jewish community in Providence wanted to get its new cantor married off. Samuel Rosen, my maternal grandmother's brother, on the rise in Temple Emanu-El's governance, looked to his nieces as a potential match. But my mother's older sister was already seriously involved with a young man in military service, and my mother's younger sister was simply too young. So Uncle Sam approached his sister, my grandmother, about a possible match with my mother, who was only recently graduated from Pembroke College. My mother, for her part, had no desire to be a *khazan'te*, a cantor's wife, and the matter ended there.

Cantor Hohenemser attended the Cantors Institute at the Jewish Theological Seminary from 1952 and received his doctorate in sacred music in



1960. He died near San Francisco on August 6, 1964. I was in Israel at the time, living on a kibbutz, and I remember the shock I felt when I opened the letter from my father informing me of Cantor Hohenemser's death.

Perhaps my very first memory of him was at Simchat Torah when I was about six or seven years old. I remember being with Charles Rouslin, my maternal grandfather, who was holding my kid sister Andrea in his arms. Cantor Hohenemser began to sing in his rich baritone, and I was utterly amazed that a human being could create such a sound! My sister was not so impressed, however. She was so frightened that she began to bawl and wail, such that our grandfather was forced to take us out of the sanctuary and take us home.

My next memory was the summer of 1953, when I, with my cousin Stephen Yoken, attended Camp Tel Noar (in Hampstead, New Hampshire), where the cantor and his wife Frieda served as counselors/administrators. I remembered that everyone called Mrs. Hohenemser by her first name, but the cantor was only ever called "Uncle Honi." What I remember most about "Uncle Honi" was the mutual warmth and affection between the campers and him. Always smiling or laughing, his presence help dispel the terrible homesickness I often felt. And when I returned home after the summer and began Hebrew school at Temple Emanu-El, it took a great effort not to continue calling him "Uncle Honi."

While I wish I could say that I enjoyed Hebrew school, the truth is that I did not. But I did enjoy attending services when I could hear Cantor Hohenemser hold forth. Being German in what was essentially a congregation of Eastern European Jews or their descendants presented a number of musical obstacles. The cantor had the beloved melodies of his childhood, but the congregation expected theirs. To his credit, he managed to strike a balance.

I recall he sang "El Adon," from the Sabbath Shaharit service in a lilting melody in a major key in 3/4 time, which is in contrast to the Eastern European, which tends to be strident and in a minor key. When I came to work at Hebrew Union College, I met Eric Werner (1901-1988), one of the great Jewish musicologists, and he asked me about my training and background. When I said that Cantor Hohenemser prepared me for my Bar Mitzvah, he shook his head knowingly and said that I indeed would have been trained well.

I remembered that lilting melody used for "El Adon" and asked Dr.



CANTOR HOHENEMSER, MURIEL PORT, ARTHUR EINSTEIN

Werner about it. He sat himself down at a piano and played the first eight measures. "Is this it?" he asked. "Now listen closely." And he proceeded to replay those eight measures several times, each time in a different tempo or phrasing. Suddenly I realized he was playing "Si Vuol Ballare" from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*! Dr. Werner then explained how this was a perfect example of how popular melodies and operatic arias were adapted by Jews in Western and Central Europe to synagogue use, and this "El Adon" had already long been considered *echt deutsch* (authentically German).

I also remember Cantor Hohenemser using his "Bar Mitzvah boys" as a choir for Sabbath morning services, especially for Musaf. And I recall his teaching us a specific melody for "Mi-Memoko Hu Yifen," from the Musaf Kedushah, a melody that was distinctly Eastern European sounding. An adult present objected to a "folk song" being used in the synagogue, but Cantor Hohenemser smiled and said to watch the congregation's reaction when he sang it and indicated for the congregation to join in.

The following Sabbath, without any prior announcement, he began to

sing this section of the liturgy with the Eastern European melody, and before he could indicate to the congregation to join in, their voices swelled and filled the domed sanctuary. The melody had indeed achieved “folk” status, being the immortal “Af’n Pripetshik,” by Mark Warshawsky.

Let us fast-forward to the late 1960s. I was a graduate student at the University of Michigan, and I frequented an Orthodox *minyán* Saturday morning. Not that I was Orthodox, for I was not, but this was an exceptionally warm and congenial group of young men and women whose company I enjoyed. One Saturday the group’s informal leader asked for a volunteer to prepare the Maftir for the following week. As it happened to be Parashat Shekalim, my own Bar Mitzvah portion, I volunteered. Reviewing the Haf-tarah was hardly a problem, for I could still hear Cantor Hohenemser’s rich voice in my head as I reviewed the text.

The following week, as I began intoning the Haftarah, I suddenly heard a chortle, and looked up. There was a professor who attended this *minyán*, a very learned gentleman who, I must admit, did not seem to care for me. That is, he was never friendly, and, indeed, was even at times hostile. It was he who chortled, got up from his seat, and going over to the bookcase, took down a volume and began to “learn” sotto voce. Moreover, the remainder of the congregation regarded me with strange looks upon their faces, and when I finished, the handshakes proffered and *yashar koach* uttered seemed feeble.

What was wrong? I knew the melody I used was rather different from the one customarily heard. But had I so badly misremembered what I had learned at my Bar Mitzvah? I must admit, I felt bad, and was thereafter disinclined to frequent that *minyán*.

It would be two or three years later that my negative feelings were resolved. In 1971 or so my wife and I moved from the Ann Arbor area to a northern suburb of Detroit, where we joined a “traditional” congregation, Beth Abraham-Hillel.

A word or two about this congregation is necessary. Beth Abraham was an old established congregation on Seven Mile Road in Detroit’s Jewish “Northwest” quadrant. After the 1967 riots, when the Jewish community fled Detroit for the suburbs, Beth Abraham (also known affectionately as *The Galitzianer Shul*) moved to a new building on what was then remote Fifteen Mile Road.



At the same time, there was a moribund congregation named Beth Hillel. It was made up of German Jews, but had no building. Indeed, they met only for the High Holy Days, when they would rent a hall and bring in a German cantor to pray to the melodies they revered from their youth. But the cantor died, and there was no replacement. In order to give the aging membership of Beth Hillel a stable place to gather and to worship, they merged with Beth Abraham, hence, the hyphenated name.

Worshipping there in the early 1970s was a rare treat. There were two excellent cantors: a lyric tenor from Romania, who could “shray and cry” and evoke Eastern Europe; and a bass baritone from Slovakia, who prayed the preliminary service, read Torah, and led an all-male choir in an archaic *meshorer* style. And there were still old-timers who would *daven far’n umed* in Galitzianer Hebrew (something now long gone, except among some Hasidim). Consequently, there was a free mixture of German and Eastern European customs. (For example, in the German tradition, when a man received an Aliyah to the Torah, his wife would stand in her place and remain standing until her husband returned from the Bimah.) Consequently, one could hear *Burikh Ato* from one person and *Nawsen ha-Tawroh* from his neighbor.

Why this digression? One Sabbath, I believe to have been near Hanukkah, a gentleman named Erlebacher mounted the Bimah to chant the Haftarah. It was something Mr. Erlebacher did every year at that time as a “Personal Purim.” While on patrol in the South Pacific during World War II, his unit was ambushed by the Japanese. Afterwards, the Japanese shot each wounded American soldier to be certain he was dead. Mr. Erlebacher was only lightly wounded because the coup de grace fired at him missed its mark. He lay there for hours until he was certain the Japanese were gone. He was the only survivor of his unit. And this was the anniversary of his survival.

As he began to intone the Haftarah, a chill ran down my spine. It was exactly the “Trope” Cantor Hohenemser had taught me! Indeed, I had not misremembered it.

At the Kiddish afterwards (sponsored by Mr. Erlebacher), I sought out Mr. Erlebacher, and I excitedly recited my entire story, including the incident in Ann Arbor. He looked at me warmly and said softly, “Honi and I were in Blau-Weiss together.” (Blau-Weiss was a Zionist youth organization in Germany until 1929.) Consequently, Mr. Erlebacher and Cantor Hohenemser





CANTOR HOHENEMSER POSSIBLY IN MUNICH

had known each other as teenagers! I do not know what stunned me more: that he had known Cantor Hohenemser or that the childhood nickname he used was close to the one I knew.

He told me that Honi was one of the most popular boys in their circle of friends and a natural leader. Afflicted with a weak heart from childhood, this did not stop him from hiking, mountain climbing, and other strenuous activity. Indeed, Mr. Erlebacher expressed surprise he had not died sooner.

Then he told me a story that made me catch my breath. It was after 1934, when the Nazis were already in power. Mr. Erlebacher and Cantor Hohenemser had traveled to Berlin together to attend a meeting and were returning on a night train. The next morning, with the coach filled with German citizens and a few Brown Shirts, Cantor Hohenemser donned tefillin and began to pray Shaharit. Mr. Erlebacher confessed he was genuinely frightened. Cantor Hohenemser looked his way and asked if he had stopped

believing in God. Shamed by this comment, Mr. Erlebacher put on his tefillin and began to pray too.

The Brown Shirts gathered around and began to mock the two young Jews and incited the other passengers to join them. According to Mr. Erlebacher, if there was a time when Honi's heart might have given out, it was then. But instead, he stopped praying, and looking the Brown Shirts in the eye said in a calm and cool voice that it was a sad day for Germany when a person could not speak to God in public or in private.

To Mr. Erlebacher's surprise, the crowd grew silent and broke up. The Brown Shirts exhorted them to return to the mockery, but it was to no avail, and eventually they left the car, leaving the two men to pray in peace.

While we were talking, a small group of "Beth Hillel people" had gathered to give Mr. Erlebacher their best wishes. Seeing them, he stood up and exclaimed loudly, "This young man knew Honi!" I was immediately swamped by them, each asking me how I knew Honi and from where did I know Honi. We then sat in a circle, and each person in turn told yet another anecdote about this man who grew and grew before my eyes, becoming larger than life. Amidst their joy and laughter, I came away from this unexpected encounter with a sense that regardless of the years that had passed since his death, or the hundreds of miles separating them physically, the gifts of love and friendship that Jacob Hohenemser inspired in his contemporaries were immortal.

I would like to thank Dr. Yaffa Weisman and Rabbi Dr. Geoffrey Goldberg for their invaluable suggestions.

## ESCAPE FROM GERMANY TO COLOMBIA AND RHODE ISLAND BY SUSAN HAHN BROWN

Reserved by nature, Susan Hahn Brown was not eager to tell her family's story. Fortunately, your editor prevailed. Some assistance was provided by Elisabeth Hahn, the author's 97-year-old mother. Within the panorama of Jewish history, Brown's narrative seems both unusual and familiar, heart-wrenching and heart-warming.

This is the story of a typical, proud German family, which, after living in Germany for over two hundred years, found itself scattered over many countries to escape Nazi persecution.

Before 1933, Jews in Germany considered themselves Jewish by religion, but definitely German by nationality. Although their lives were limited in some ways by institutionalized anti-Semitism, they were able to make a comfortable living, practice their religion and socialize comfortably not only with other Jews, but also with non-Jews. Before the nineteenth century, Jews were restricted to living in small villages. By the early years of the twentieth century, many had moved to cities and participated actively in the professional and cultural life of their country.

### SEVEN GENERATIONS

The family tree (on the following page) shows seven generations of Elisabeth Hahn's family in the land currently known as Germany. Family records have been traced back to the birth of Abraham Levi in 1710, in the village of Lenkersheim, a town near Nuremberg.

Lenkersheim and Nuremberg were in the state of Bavaria, which existed as a separate kingdom under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire. Modern Germany had yet to be formed. Little is known about the family in the 1700s; however, by 1815, some branches had spread to the nearby village of Ickelheim. When it became necessary for Jews in the Holy Roman Empire to take German names, the whole family took the surname of Ickelheimer.

## FAMILY TREE OF ELISABETH FRANK HAHN

### ABRAHAM LEVI

born in Lenkersheim, Bavaria (1710)

### son MOSES LEVI

born in Lenkersheim (1736)

six children, later known as Ickelheimer,  
born in Lenkersheim:

**JUECKEL, SCHEINELE,**

**SALOMON,**

**LAEMMLEIN** (1776-1858),

and two others

three Ickelheimer sons

born in Lenkersheim:

**ABRAHAM, HERMANN** (1815-

1882), **JOSEPH**

nine Ickelheimer children

born in Lenkersheim:

**KLARA, LOUIS, RIKE,**

**MORITZ, LEOPOLD** (1853-1922),

**BABETTE, SIGMUND, EMIL, MAYA**

six Ickelheimer children

born in Windsheim:

**HERMANN, SIEGFRIED, BABETTE** (1886-1961),

**STEFAN, ROSA, MARTA**

Babette married Arthur Frank,

born Forchheim (1876-1929),

in Nuremberg, March 1907

one daughter, **ELISABETH FRANK,**

born in Forchheim (December 1907)

Elisabeth married Simon Hahn, born Zirndorf (1897);

died Bogotá, Colombia (1976)

Married in Manchester, England, 1933

two daughters born in Bogotá:

**EVA HAHN TÉLLEZ** (1934)

**SUSAN HAHN BROWN** (1940)



SUSAN'S MATERNAL

GRANDPARENTS,

BABETTE + ARTHUR FRANK

During the nineteenth century, the laws of Bavaria were changed, providing citizenship and equality between Christians and Jews, and providing homeland, legitimacy, and residency for Jews. In fact, in 1919 the German Reich passed laws instituting full freedom of religion and full freedom of conscience for everyone.



In the 1880s, with the freedom to now live in larger towns, the Ickelheimer family moved from Lenkersheim to the nearby town of Windsheim, where it remained well into the twentieth century.

After over two centuries of residence in what became Germany, the Ickelheimers considered themselves satisfied and proud Germans, in spite of periodic persecution or officially established discrimination. They couldn't believe that the day would come when they would have to flee their homeland to protect their lives. To put their time frame into world perspective, the Ickelheimers lived in Bavaria long before there was a unified German nation and long before there was a United States of America.

Elisabeth's mother, Babette Ickelheimer, was born in Windsheim, the second of six children, in 1886. All the children were educated, including the girls. Babette, her brothers and sisters attended school in Windsheim. The girls finished what we would call junior high school, and the boys finished *Gymnasium* (the academically-oriented high school). In March 1907, Babette married Arthur Frank, and the young couple moved to Forchheim, in Bavaria, where Elisabeth was born on December 1907. In 1908, Babette's parents moved to Munich, where two of her younger brothers were able to study medicine. The family prospered as Babette's older brother went into the hops business, which supplied Munich's many breweries.

Elisabeth's father's family, the Franks, lived in Forchheim, where they were established as dry-goods dealers. Some members of the family also operated a shoe store in Forchheim. In 1921, when Elisabeth finished grade school, she and her parents moved to Munich, where her father, Arthur, went into the hops business with his brother-in-law. In Munich, Elisabeth finished high school and continued to business school.

Simon Hahn, who many years later married Elisabeth, was born in 1897 in Zirndorf. This town near Nuremberg was founded by Jews who had intended to move to Palestine. Its original name was "Zionsdorf." Hahn's family had settled there since at least the early 1800s. They were well established as cattle dealers and lived a comfortable and satisfied life.

When World War I broke out, Jews, as patriotic Germans, enlisted in the armed forces. Most men in the Ickelheimer family did so. Two of Babette's brothers were doctors, and they served in the medical corps. A third brother served in the infantry. Elisabeth's father served in the War Ministry; and her

future husband, Simon Hahn, served in the signal corps. Other cousins and uncles also served. Some, including Simon, were wounded, and a few died. All considered it only right that they should defend their country in this terrible war – as did Jews in America. It is ironic that 40 years later, in Rhode Island, Simon would compare his military service with Robert Brown, the father of his son-in-law to be. Mr. Brown had also proudly served in the First World War, but in the United States army.

In 1927, after studying Spanish and training with a large export company, Simon Hahn started traveling in Latin America: first in Argentina and then in Colombia. His territory became the whole nation of Colombia, which is larger than Texas. At the time Simon first went there, long-distance



SUSAN, ELISABETH + EVA HAHN

travel within the country was mainly by riverboat or by mule. The more heavily populated areas were in the mountainous western part of the country; the eastern part was mostly jungle or semi-flooded grasslands. Simon found little or no anti-Semitism in Colombia, mostly because in this predominantly Catholic country nobody knew any Jews. He developed a business relationship there with another German Jew who had been in Bogotá for several years. Simon would periodically return to Germany for business and to see

his parents and his sister, who had since married and set up housekeeping in Munich. The newlyweds had an apartment directly above that where Elisabeth and her parents lived. This apartment was actually sublet from Elisabeth's Ickelheimer grandmother.

#### **DETERIORATING CONDITIONS**

By January 1933, Hitler came to power in Germany, and conditions began to deteriorate. Thanks to the extensive amount of time he had spent out of Germany, Simon Hahn very quickly realized that life there was no longer safe for Jews. In the early spring of 1933, Elisabeth and her mother (her father had died in 1929) went to Garmisch, a resort area in southern Germany, for a vaca-

tion. She tried to convince Simon to join them there, but by this time he did not want to enter Germany again. He persuaded Elisabeth to join him and his friend in Switzerland for a motoring vacation. They had a very pleasant trip, and by the time Elisabeth returned to Germany, she was hoping her future would be with Simon.

Simon had continued to try to convince Elisabeth and her mother to leave Germany while it was still possible. Elisabeth therefore decided to try bringing a lot of luggage with her on the auto tour to test the border inspection system. She had expected to claim that they had rented a summer home in Switzerland. To her surprise, nobody checked, and nobody cared.

Elisabeth suddenly became convinced to leave when one of her close friends, a lawyer named Alfred Strauss, was sent to Dachau concentration camp for opposing a Nazi in a court case. He returned home in a closed coffin with instructions NOT to open it. The cause of death was given as "sudden heart failure." (He was a young man, about 35 years old).

## PREPARING TO ESCAPE

As the months passed, more and more Jews became at first concerned about their economic situation and then their own safety. Even in the mid-1930s, Jews were required to have "permission" to leave the country with their personal possessions. In some cases, a summer rental in Switzerland was still a workable pretext for getting linens and other household goods out of Germany. Others shipped goods with the help of foreigners. Fortunately, Hitler's anti-Semitic bureaucracy had not yet achieved full efficiency.

Elisabeth and Babette continued to plan carefully. Taking money and financial papers out of Germany was much more difficult, however. Babette, a very resourceful woman, went to her safe-deposit box in the bank, declaring that she had to "put in" something. She then removed all the securities – replacing them with cut-up newspapers. Later she went to a Jewish banking house to sell the securities for cash, with instructions NOT to sell them to the bank from which they had been removed (to avoid any notice from the bank or the government).

To transport the cash and other valuable papers, a friend of Elisabeth's lent her a suitcase with a false bottom. The suitcase was then filled with clothing. An outsider was hired by her friend to take this luggage to Italy, to retain



some of the money as a fee, and forward the rest to Elisabeth in Switzerland. Simon was not able to persuade the rest of his family to leave at that time. Business was supposedly good, and they didn't believe that there was any danger. The danger was more visible to someone traveling outside the country than to those remaining in their homes. (Simon's sister and her family waited until after Kristallnacht, at which time they were very lucky to get out and, with Simon's help, were able to reach Colombia as well.)

Elisabeth and Babette arrived in Sankt Gallen, Switzerland, and found lodging in a boarding house. They had enough of their belongings with them for their needs, and Elisabeth planned to find employment while they looked for a place to settle. It was then that Simon proposed marriage to Elisabeth and requested that she not remain in Europe but come with him to Colombia where they would have a comfortable home and where he had business opportunities.

Getting married, however, needed some planning. Switzerland required extensive documentation and a long residence. England wanted only passports and had a short residency requirement. They then went to Manchester, where

Simon knew some people, and were married by a group of rabbis (who had to share the responsibility because it was during the weeks after Passover when there aren't supposed to be any Jewish marriages). This exception was made because Simon had already booked passage for them on a ship to Colombia; there certainly was no way for them to have a Jewish wedding on board the ship or in Colombia. After the wedding, they returned to Switzerland, and went on a week's honeymoon in the company of a Swiss friend, Simon's sister, and Elisabeth's mother, Babette.

While they were honeymooning, Babette's sister in Germany shipped a large amount of household goods, china, silver, linens, and other valuables to them in Boulogne, France. After the honeymoon, Babette went to Strasbourg to stay with relatives. Simon and Elisabeth proceeded to Boulogne,



ICKELHEIMER HOME, WINDSHEIM, 1910



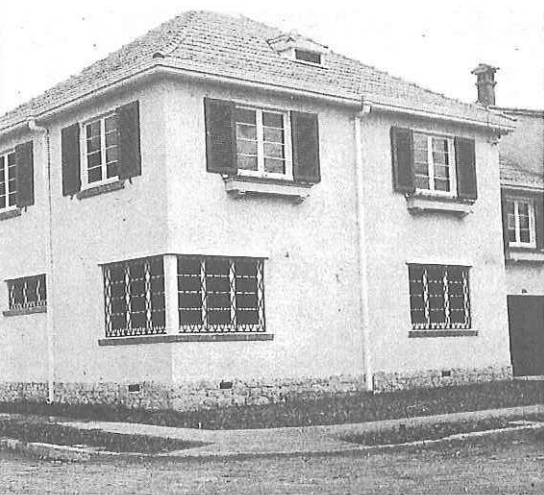
where their ship to Colombia departed on August 12, 1933.

### REACHING BOGOTÁ

The crossing took three weeks, and they arrived in Colombia at the Atlantic port of Puerto Colombia, near Barranquilla. This city is built on the delta of the Magdalena River, which flows north almost the whole length of the country. From there they had to transfer all their belongings (by now several large shipping crates and trunks) to a riverboat to sail to Puerto Salgar. It is almost impossible to imagine what went on in the mind of a young woman who had

grown up in Germany and then found herself chugging up a river for a whole week in very hot tropical weather. She was surrounded by jungle that came right down to the river's edge, and (except for her new husband) was accompanied only by strangers who didn't speak her language.

After reaching Puerto Salgar, the couple had to traverse the mountains to Bogotá, (where Simon was already a partner in an import business with Louis Gold-



HAHN HOME, BOGOTÁ, 1936

stein). Nowadays, this route up the mountains is covered on a paved highway (albeit steep and full of tight curves) in a matter of about five to six hours. In 1933, there was first a six-hour train ride to Villeta (a small mountain village, where lunch was already waiting for them on a table in the yard, complete with flies). After lunch they continued their trip by cab, accompanied by a truck with their luggage, on a narrow, winding mud road. Due to rain, landslides, and difficulty in finding a good vehicle with a reputable driver, it took another seven to eight hours – not counting connecting time, waiting time, loading and unloading time – to finally get Elisabeth to her new hometown.

It is important to realize, however, that in 1933, a “cab” and a “truck” in Colombia were not at all what the words represent in America. Although the cab was essentially an automobile that was available for hire, it was a vehicle

that would never have been in use in our world, anymore than the truck would have been. In that day and place, it was merely sufficient that the vehicle be capable of movement. Safety, smooth operation, cleanliness, adequate fuel supply, and mechanical efficiency were all concepts that had no place in reality. Furthermore, "road" was only a relative term. A road was simply a rocky and/or muddy track that had been somewhat smoothed by previous vehicles and that presumably ended up at one's destination. The number of detours, landslides, washouts, ravines, or river fords was entirely a matter of luck and weather.

Finally, after all the hazards of the road, with impromptu repairs, unexpected rainstorms, and much mental anguish, they arrived in Bogotá late in the evening. There, Mr. Goldstein, Simon's business partner, had offered to rent the Hahns a room in his house until they could find suitable quarters. Arriving at the Goldsteins' late at night, exhausted, dusty and bewildered, they were greeted with, "You're very late – dinner is spoiled!" This comment has been the source of much family mirth ever since.

### **BUILDING NEW LIVES**

After a mercifully brief stay with the Goldsteins, they rented an apartment, and Elisabeth began the strange process of housekeeping in a foreign environment. Nothing she encountered was familiar: not the food, the facilities, the town, the shopping, the people, the transportation or the weather. Many of the differences she had to learn about were actually health issues. Hot showers, drinking water, fresh meat, and pasteurized milk were either rare or unavailable. Most people in comfortable circumstances kept live-in servants to do housework, especially because there were no appliances. The absence of much hot water, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, kitchen machines, and central heating meant that housekeeping represented continuous hard work. In the kitchen everything was made from scratch, chopped by hand, mixed by hand, baked in unreliable ovens (at an altitude of 8700 feet above sea level, which changed cooking temperatures!) and cleaned by hand, with either soap, sand or both. In the beginning, Elisabeth's still weak Spanish was not up to the challenge of training a Colombian maid to meet German standards

Soon after living in their own apartment, Elisabeth and Simon started building a new home. While Simon spent his time working and dealing with

architects, builders and plumbers, Elisabeth struggled with all the strange new elements in her daily life. Shopping meant going with a large basket to an outdoor market, where the fruits and vegetables were displayed on the ground. The farmers often measured items by so many cents a handful. If they liked you, they would throw in an extra handful at the end. Eggs were sold individually, with no refrigeration, as were butter and milk. Chickens had to be examined carefully for any signs of illness or old age. They were bought live and killed at home by the maid. Dry food items were bought in a separate shop, where sugar, flour and salt were measured for purchase and sold by weight. Canned goods, usually imported, were not always available. Meat was displayed in individual cuts hung from a hook in the open air, without refrigeration or wrapping. Prices for most of these foods were incredibly low by European standards, however.

To provide themselves with drinking water, careful people boiled city water and then cooled it for drinking. Simon had brought a special porcelain filter from Germany to treat the boiled water so that it would taste better and have nothing floating in it. Most of the cooking was done on a coal stove, with a water heater working off the same stove for bathing and washing up.

Soon Elisabeth was pregnant but couldn't communicate well with her first Colombian doctor or with the hospital staff where her first daughter, Eva, was born in August, 1934. Likewise, the hospital didn't have the equipment or personnel that Germans took for granted.

By the end of 1934, the new house was finished, and Simon and Elisabeth moved in with their new baby. One of the great advantages of living in Colombia was the inexpensiveness of hiring help or having things made by hand. All the furniture, curtains, linens, clothes and shoes were custom-made with excellent workmanship and personally selected material.

Another advantage of the Hahns' new environment was that, at the time, it was a peaceful, democratic country with very little crime, violence, or anti-Semitism. Colombians were mostly friendly and eager to modernize their country with the help of European immigrants. There was certainly a strong economic stratification, however. The so-called rich were educated, lived in houses, owned property and had a role in the politics of the country. The poor lived from share-cropping or manual jobs. There wasn't a middle class in the years before World War II.

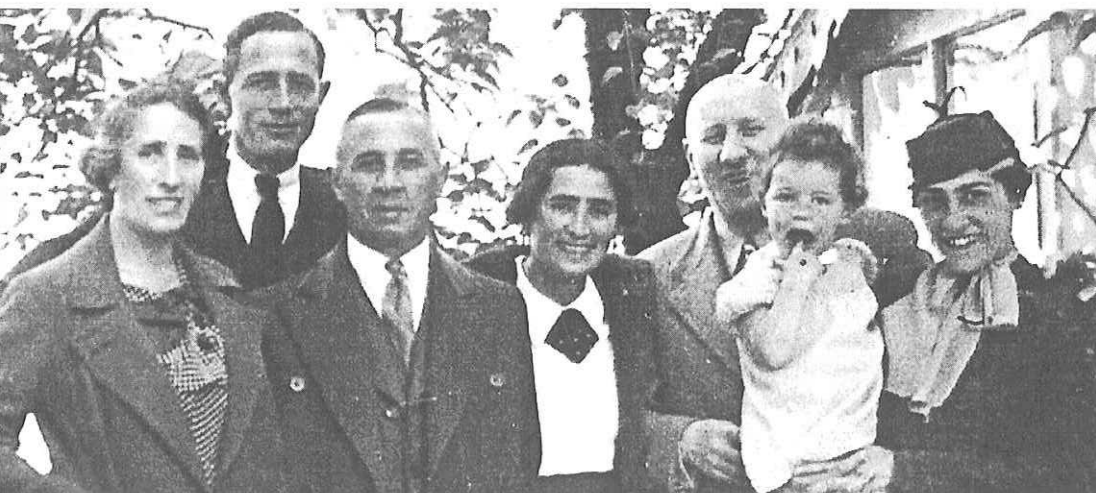


## A GROWING JEWISH COMMUNITY

In 1935 Elisabeth's mother arrived from Strasbourg. Coming from a large family that had kept servants in Germany, she considered herself quite equal to helping Elisabeth run the household with two servants. Although she never really became proficient in Spanish, she brought her great cooking ability and housekeeping experience to the project. She became a wonderful help to Elisabeth and her family.

Simon, in the meantime, had become quite successful in business; his partner was an older man who welcomed the opportunity to work less and reap greater benefits. As the situation in Germany deteriorated further, Simon became more and more involved in trying to help German Jews find a haven in Colombia. In 1937, Simon, Elisabeth, Babette, and their little girl, Eva, went back to Europe (but not Germany) to try to convince the rest of the family to leave. They met with several relatives in Czechoslovakia and traveled to Switzerland, Italy, France and England. One of Elisabeth's uncles had already moved to Palestine, and two others would shortly leave for New York, with the help of other relatives already there.

Back in Colombia, there was now a German Jewish community, which met for services in a rented house. As newcomers arrived, Simon and his friends found jobs and homes for them; and, when necessary, provided them with funds for their immediate needs. A large influx of people arrived



L TO R : ICKELHEIMER FAMILY WITH SIMON HAHN (TALL MAN), ELISABETH HAHN (MIDDLE), AND BABY EVA, KARLSBAD, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1937



right after Kristallnacht, including Simon's sister and her family, and Babette's sister with family. Simon was active in procuring visas for many of these people; sometimes it was hard because of changes in the Colombian government and new ministries that were not as open to the idea of granting shelter to refugees.

Besides the German community, there was also an increasing Polish and Hungarian Jewish community as well as the earlier Sephardic Jews. In the 1930s and '40s, however, these groups remained separate, as had been the case in Europe. The German Jews also stood apart because of their disdain for Yiddish.

As the Jewish community grew in Bogotá, they established synagogues, a kosher butcher, a Jewish cemetery and Jewish shops. Most of the time, the German community was a self-contained group, which even included some other German or Austrian immigrants who were not Jews but left their country because of the Nazi regime. During the war years, Colombia had arrested and confined some German Nazi sympathizers. Although it was mostly a token confinement (at a self-contained resort away from the cities), it was meant to show that the country was aligned with the Allies.

## ACCULTURATION

In 1940 I was born as Simon and Elisabeth's second daughter. Between 1933 and 1945 there were approximately 100 Jewish children born to these immigrant families in Bogotá. Most of us first learned our parents' language, but were soon equally proficient in Spanish. We not only spoke both languages fluently and without a foreign accent, but operated comfortably both in our parents' world and in our present environment.

After the war, there was another group of refugees – the people who had been rescued from concentration camps. Colombia was usually receptive to accepting them, and it is important to know that Colombia was one of the few countries offering visas to European survivors. It was said at the time that the refugees who left Europe for Palestine on the ship *Exodus* had Colombian visas in order to be allowed to board.

Those who came to Colombia after 1945 did so mostly because they knew people there who were willing to take them in and help them start a new life. Most of the immigrants were financially successful, and some became

quite wealthy. All their children went to private schools, because public schools in Colombia were used mostly for the indigent. The public schools taught reading and writing, but offered little else. Many Jewish children were sent to boarding schools, colleges and universities in the United States.

Although there was very little anti-Semitism in Colombia, all foreigners in the 1930s and '40s were looked upon as "outsiders" and were not integrated into Colombian society. Starting in the 1950s, however, as their numbers increased, Jewish children felt less isolated from the Colombian mainstream. A number of these children married non-Jewish Colombians, and soon became more like their spouses and less like their European parents. In general, the second-generation children, who often did not speak German anymore, became more "Colombian." Then in the 1960s, in an effort to retain the interest of these Jewish children and their Colombian spouses, the synagogues stopped using European languages and switched to Spanish. It might be asked whether the exodus, caused by Hitler, didn't continue his program to eliminate Jews long after he was gone from this earth.

In 1948 there was a revolution in Colombia. After a period of chaos and nearly a civil war, a dictatorship was established. This was followed by a slow return to democratic government. The damage, however, could not be easily reversed, and the general atmosphere of the country seems to have changed forever.

## **RICH AND POOR**

In 1953 a severe restriction on most imports greatly harmed Simon Hahn's import business. He changed his strategy and bought a factory that produced knitted socks and tights. His factory, with three shifts working seven days a week, became the largest manufacturer of children's socks in the country.

The Germans who settled in Colombia had to adapt to a society that had a totally different structure from the European environment they had left behind. There was a very large percentage of poor people with little opportunity to improve themselves. Colombia also lacked a welfare system as we know it. The wealthy were not taxed to help support or educate the poor, and the government could not and would not provide a living for those unable to make it on their own. Poor people were to some extent dependent upon charity. Many businesses, like Simon's, contributed to this charitable effort either by donat-

ing some of their products directly to the poor or by giving some form of employment to people who would otherwise be destitute. Although charitable contributions were expected and considered the right thing to do for those who were better off, there was a definite social wall between the poor and the "rich." Because we lived in a comfortable home, were educated, and could afford medical care, we were considered "rich."

As such we would travel by private car or by cab, very seldom by public bus. Public buses were usually dirty, overcrowded and uncomfortable. We shopped in certain areas and frequented only certain movie theatres or neighborhoods. One didn't engage in lengthy conversations with taxi drivers, store salespeople, mailmen, garbage collectors or servants. Because there were so many poor people, it was common to see beggars in the streets, to find people digging through garbage pails for things to sell, and to have a tremendous pool of poor workers for just about any menial job. Such manual workers as house servants, gardeners, laborers, factory workers or mechanics were paid very little.

#### **EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES**

In 1950, Elisabeth and Simon's older daughter, Eva, was sent to a boarding school in upstate New York. Drew Academy had been recommended by a German Jewish family in Colombia. This was Eva's first opportunity to visit and live in North America. She did well at school but preferred the much slower and more formal culture of Bogotá. She returned after graduation and in 1953 married a Colombian gentleman. They had three children: Miguel, born in 1954; Patricia, born in 1956; and Claudia, born in 1960 and recently deceased. Miguel and Claudia are now married and have two children each.

In 1958, Elisabeth and Simon felt that a good business background would be best for me, their younger daughter. An Austrian Jewish family they knew in Bogotá, the Jaeckels, had sent their daughter to Bryant College in Providence. Daisy returned to Colombia with an excellent education. Consequently, my parents decided this would be a good place for me to study, and it would provide me with great opportunities when I came back.

Up to this point (age 18), I had spent all my life in Colombia, surrounded by a Latin American culture and environment. I had attended the American School in Bogotá for three years, and this is where I learned

English. The American School used a total immersion system, whereby speaking English was mandatory. English was required not only in classrooms, but in the corridors and in the schoolyard during recess. Needless to say, as a young child and with these restraints, I learned quickly.

I then went to a new Swiss school, Colegio Helvetia, with an excellent reputation, where classes were small, and French, English and Latin were required of all students. I went there by school bus six days a week at 7 o'clock in the morning and returned at 5:45 in the afternoon. The school day there had seven hours of classes, one hour of lunch, and one hour for sports. Homework was required in the evening. The education was excellent and covered many courses that are more commonly taught at the college level in America. Though Colegio Helvetia was a coed school, my graduating class consisted of ten girls. Most of us are scattered throughout the world, but we still stay in contact with each other.

Going to the United States to be on my own – at a strange college, in a city called Providence (someplace north of New York), and speaking a somewhat foreign language – represented a tremendous change and required many adjustments. It was, nevertheless, an exciting challenge.

## **ARRIVAL IN PROVIDENCE**

In August, 1958, my mother and I left Bogotá and flew to New York. We spent a week there, shopping for things that I might need at college, and then took a bus to Providence. When we arrived, we took a taxi to the Minden Hotel, on Waterman Street, which the college had recommended. We then went out for our first taste of Rhode Island food – walking to Toy Sun's Chinese restaurant on Thayer Street. Little did I realize that I had now moved into the state that was to be my home for the rest of my life.

The next day my mother helped me move into the dormitory, and by the second night I felt part of the college campus. Two days later my mother returned to New York and then back to Bogotá. I was alone in the new world, knowing only some people in New York whom I might call if necessary.

My first culture shock was how friendly everyone was: the waiters in the restaurant, the taxi driver who brought us to the hotel, the clerk at the desk, the maintenance men who helped me move in, and the mailman who talked to everyone. He commented to various girls about bringing or not bringing



letters from their boyfriends. It was also unbelievable to me that the elevator operator at the Minden was going to be one of my classmates. The class structure in Bogotá was so rigid; here there seemed to be no obvious class separation. Everyone was friendly and more than eager to help.

Dating was another interesting experience for me to learn. In Bogotá, contact with boys was tightly controlled by one's family. Normally a boy would first spend an evening visiting with a girl's family and then, with her parents' permission, would be allowed to go out to house parties, school functions or synagogue celebrations. Girls very seldom went anywhere alone with a boy; another family member, a friend or another couple would go along. I often had to go out with my sister when she had a date. Often, when parents threw parties for young people, they would of course stay home to chaperone. It took me some time to adjust to the dating system at Bryant and beyond the campus.

I was very fortunate to have a wonderful and understanding house mother as well as classmates, who, along with their families, were very helpful to me. They took me in when the college closed for holidays, and I could rely on them for advice.

I successfully completed my first year of a two-year program and adjusted to American ways very easily. After spending the summer back home in Bogotá, I returned for my second year.

## **MARRIAGE IN COLOMBIA**

The following January I met, through one of my friends, a Providence gentleman who was a University of Rhode Island graduate, had served fourteen months as a lieutenant in Korea, and was an officer at Rhode Island Hospital Trust Bank. Our relationship continued to develop, and in May he wrote a beautiful letter to my parents asking for their permission to marry. Thanks to some advance information I had given them, he received their approval. In July they came to Providence to meet my fiancé, Stephen Brown, and his family. After many engagement parties given by his family and friends, and my graduation from Bryant, my family and I returned to Bogotá.

My parents had to plan for a wedding in October, and I needed to file all the necessary papers for immigration to the United States. I was going to move to the United States for the rest of my life, leaving behind my family, relatives, friends, maids, servants, a life of leisure, and everything I had grown

up with. How could I decide to do this?

My experience in Providence had so far been a happy one. My future family were wonderful people. My future husband was older, more responsible, and more established than the somewhat immature college boys I had been dating. Moreover, I was greatly impressed by the American social system – what a society! One can speak to anyone here without breaking any rules.

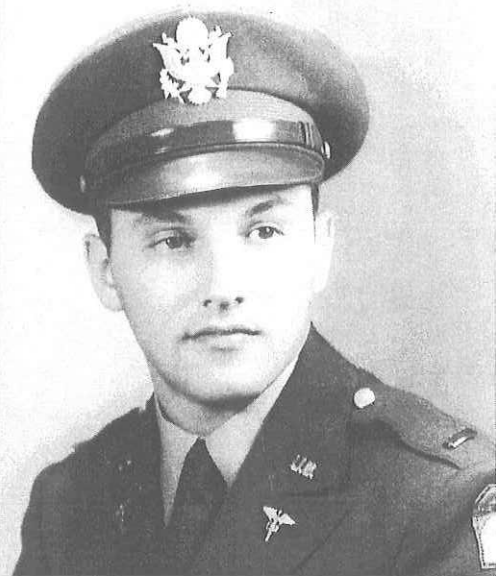
My six-month courtship took me out of the college atmosphere and opened the doors and homes of the Jewish community in Providence. The answer was easy, and I received my parents' encouragement. I wanted to become an American and live in a more stable country and community rather than remain in the Colombian-German-Jewish community, which was more restricting and limited in the possibilities it could offer. It seemed to me that this was the final step of my family's flight from Hitler's Germany.

In October, 1960, a contingent of six Browns went to Bogotá for two weeks of

parties and social events. Think of the language barriers. Most of my friends and relatives, including my grandmother, Babette, spoke German; maids and service personnel spoke only Spanish; and the American visitors spoke only English. Conversations in three languages were constant and somewhat bewildering to the Browns.

The events culminated on October 22, 1960, with a beautiful wedding and dinner at the German synagogue (whose official name was Asociacion Israelita Montefiore). Despite the horrors of the war, my parents' identity as Jews was never shaken. A special rabbi was brought in who could speak English as well as German. The service, presented in both languages, was understood by all.

The following day my husband and I flew to Miami for our honeymoon. This time I wasn't entering the country as a tourist with my Colombian



LT. STEPHEN BROWN, 1953

passport, but with all the immigration papers that I had received from the American embassy. As a new immigrant, all of my wedding gifts and personal belongings were allowed entry as "household effects." These included a set of silverware, a gift from my grandmother, which had been given to her when she married. The silverware was much more elaborate than was customary in America, with 8-piece place settings plus many serving pieces. In years to come, this unusual silver set would serve as a tangible link to my family's German background and a reminder of how far we had traveled.

### MARRIAGE IN RHODE ISLAND

After our honeymoon, we returned to Rhode Island, living first with Stephen's parents until our new home in East Providence was finished. There was one problem, however, that needed to be corrected. Stephen and I weren't legally married!

Colombia, basically a Catholic country, has laws heavily influenced by the church. Accordingly, both a civil and a religious marriage are necessary, but only a priest can perform both types of marriages. A rabbi does not have that authority. After their religious weddings, most Jewish couples go to a qualified public official for their civil ceremony.

There was a second problem. My immigration papers had to be issued in my maiden name. The American embassy would not process my papers in my married name without a complete marriage certificate, a process that would have taken at least another month. Because there was no legal record of our marriage after the wedding, I decided to enter the country under my maiden name, even though our Jewish wedding was perfectly acceptable by Jewish tradition. We would then have to be married again in this country – after our honeymoon – a custom that became popular long after we tried it.

The Brown family belonged to Temple Beth-El, so on November 9, 1960, we called upon Rabbi William Braude, at his home, and explained our situation. We had been to Providence City Hall and had taken out a marriage license. We would have been glad to have any type of marriage service he suggested, but preferred to keep it small. Most people thought we were married in Colombia (before our honeymoon).

After much discussion about the Jewish situation in Colombia and the exodus of Jews from Germany to Bogotá, Rabbi Braude read our *ketubbah*.

Looking up, he told us that he considered us legally married. He then took out his pen, signed the marriage license, and gave it back to us to return to City Hall. November 9th became our legal marriage date, but October 22nd, the date of our wedding, is the one the family celebrates.

### **MOTHERHOOD AND TEACHING**

We have two children: Allan, who is 42 and living near Philadelphia; and Roberta, who is 39 and living in Santa Monica, California. Allan has a daughter, Laurel; Roberta has a son, Ian Simon.

After my children were spending full days in school, I continued my education at the University of Rhode Island, where I received a B.A. in French. I went on to work on an M.A. in French literature, while teaching French to undergraduates. I taught languages at Lincoln School and then for fifteen years at Moses Brown before retiring four years ago.

I now work part-time as an interpreter at the Miriam Hospital, helping doctors and staff interact with patients and families whose dominant language is German, Spanish or French.

### **REPRISE: GERMANY AND COLOMBIA**

My father, Simon Hahn, died in 1976, but my mother, Elisabeth, is 97. She is in good health and continues to live in Bogotá. She speaks Spanish fluently and lives comfortably in Colombian culture. Though she visits us in Rhode Island nearly every summer, she has refused opportunities to move here. She prefers living in the house that she and Simon built in 1934 and is assisted by her maid and service personnel. She is closely attended to by her other daughter, Eva, and her grandchildren. Stephen and I have also been able to visit her in Bogotá many times.

Unfortunately, the original German Jewish community in Bogotá is passing on. The few elders who remain continue to be very close, however. Among the next generation, those aged 40 to 70, some have remained close to their German Jewish roots and several have intermarried with Colombians. In addition to the United States, members of my generation have emigrated to Israel, Switzerland and Ecuador. The grandchildren, those aged 20 to 50, have continued to intermarry and emigrate.

Elisabeth and Simon (and Elisabeth after her husband's death)





STEPHEN + SUSAN, USAQUÉN, COLOMBIA, OCTOBER, 1960

returned to Germany many times. Some of their trips were for months, but the country was no longer the one they had known. There are too many reminders of friends, neighbors and family lost to the Holocaust. Those who escaped ended up in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, England, Israel and the United States. A few loved ones were seldom, if ever, seen again.

Elisabeth and Simon felt comfortable returning to Bogotá, where they had built a new life and a new German Jewish community. Indeed, many were there because of Simon's efforts and support.

My husband and I have been twice to Germany and once with my mother. We have returned to the places where my parents were born and brought up, even to meet the family who bought the house and store that belonged to my mother's family. The same people who bought it were still living there. We also met the people who bought my father's house, but they were not overly friendly. We also visited the cemeteries where relatives are buried (and not buried). There is, for example, a grave for a relative whose body was never returned from a concentration camp. His family put up a stone in his memory.

My parents and my grandmother never talked much about their bad experiences in Germany. They wanted to talk only about good things and the

future. As children we didn't need to know. Only in later years did we begin to ask questions. They gave a limited amount of information. The general impression we received was that they had left early enough so that they never experienced the worst of it.

For that, of course, we are all grateful; but more than that, I feel greatly privileged to find myself in Rhode Island and as a United States citizen since 1964 – with all the rights and freedoms that my ancestors tried so hard to attain.

## ISRAEL J. KAPSTEIN OF BROWN

### BY JAY BARRY

A slightly longer version of this article appeared in the author's *Gentlemen Under the Elms*, which was published by *Brown Alumni Monthly* in 1982. (Barry was on the magazine's staff for three decades.) The article reprinted here with *BAM*'s permission marks the centenary of Israel J. Kapstein's birth. He died in 1983.

The gentlemen referred to in Barry's book were not students, but eleven of Brown's legendary professors. Five were alumni and two were foreign-born, but only one was a Jew. In 1946, Kapstein, the recipient of three Brown degrees, became the University's first Jewish professor to gain tenure. He was among the first in the entire Ivy League.

This biographical sketch, originally entitled "He Was Something of a Hero to Students on Two Campuses," is also invaluable for its profiles of two of Kapstein's close friends and classmates, S. J. Perelman and Nathanael West. These chums have entered the pantheon of American Jewish writers.

The late S.J. Perelman once recalled the hopes and dreams he shared with his friend Israel Kapstein when they were boys attending Candace Street Grammar School in Providence. "Kappy, who had been reading deeply in the works of Rider Haggard, wanted to be a white hunter in Africa, and I dreamed of one day becoming a world famous shoe salesman. Alas, neither of these goals was to be realized. Our parents were too provincial, too narrow in their outlook, and soon enough our noses were resting against the academic grindstone."

In the years that followed, Perelman was forced to settle for becoming one of the greatest humorists of his era, an era that included Robert Benchley, Ring Lardner, James Thurber, and George Kaufman. Perelman's lifelong friend, Israel James Kapstein, donned the robes of academe and spent a lifetime teaching Brown and Pembroke students about modern novels and romantic poets, with energy left over for some sensitive writing that caught



CLASSICAL HIGH SCHOOL

the heartbeat of American in 1941 and propelled him to a place on the best-seller list. His colleagues in the English department called themselves "Kappy's Boys," in deference to the impact he had on them. To his students on two campuses he was something of a hero.

This particular hero was born in Fall River on January 16, 1904. He grew up in Boston, in the atmosphere of Boston Harbor, and vaguely felt that some day he would automatically enroll at Harvard. Several things

happened to change those plans. First, the Kapstein family moved to Providence in 1916. Then, during his high school years, Kappy came under the influence of William T. Peck, an avid Brown alumnus in the class of 1870 who was principal of Classical High. Each spring, Peck took great pleasure in pushing his best students in the direction of his Alma Mater.

According to Kappy, his boyhood was uneventful, even dull. He was an errand boy, soda jerk, newsboy, and mill hand. He also made "honest but uneventful efforts" to make the Classical High football team. This, however, was not the picture Perelman painted on a warm June night in 1969 when some 400 colleagues and friends gathered at Andrews Hall to help ease Professor Kapstein into retirement.

"Man and boy, Kap and I have known each other a matter of fifty-three years, or, in other words, the life span of the Indian elephant – whom, curiously enough, he resembles in repose. We first became acquainted at an institution of learning in the north end of this city, the Candace Street Grammar School. It was there we acquired the fundamentals – the dexterity to clap erasers, a smattering of algebra, and the easy familiarity with the geography of Belgium and Sweden so necessary to humiliate our parents. With that kind of brilliance, it was unthinkable that we go elsewhere but to Classical High, where we accomplished a feat unheard of at that time. You have all seen those gymnasts at the circus who hang by their teeth from a high trapeze. Well, Kap and I hung there for four years, threatening to drop out of the educational spotlight at any moment.

"There were moments, true, when the temptation to study was over-



powering, when we could have sullied our ignorance with homework, but we resisted it manfully. After all, there were too many cultural distractions to occupy us – the vaudeville at B. F. Keith Theater, the movies at the Victory and Fays, and, above all, the Empire Burlesque on Westminster Street. I know people whose first recognition of beauty came from Shelley and Wordsworth. Poor, benighted creatures. They never saw such visions of loveliness as Rose Sydell and her Bounteous Belles. Yes, these were the formative years. But one day childhood toys were put aside. We had reached man's estate. The mighty Van Sickle [sic] Gates at Brown University yawned to receive us – and we yawned right back.”

The college campus, usually a mirror of society, reflected the free-wheeling mood of the decade. Here, too, old values had gone sour. With their ukuleles and hip flasks, the self-styled sophisticates of the campus turned out in droves for football rallies and games. Some turned out in cars. The captain of the team was the BMOC, and the “Gentleman's C” became the accepted grade.

When Kappy and 413 other freshmen entered in the fall of 1922, the social calendar had replaced the academic calendar in the hearts of many Brunonians. And the dates marked in red on the calendar were for the big football weekends with Harvard and Yale, the Saint Patrick's Day Minstrel, and the Junior Prom. College songs and cheers were actually taught to freshmen during Chapel, one of the last bastions of Baptist discipline at Brown. While Sock and Buskin's first efforts at serious drama played to as few as fifteen students in the Art Gallery, Brown undergraduates were shimmying on the dance floors and steaming downtown to watch Clara Bow, Gloria Swanson, Douglas Fairbanks, and Rudolph Valentino live a life of fantasy and flamboyance in the silent flicks. And everyone was singing, “In the meantime, in between time, ain't we got fun?”

Well, almost everyone. There were still some students who went to college for an education, in addition to a bit of fun now and then. And Kappy was one of them. “Brown was a great, liberating experience for Sid and me as well as for a number of fellow students who were on the same literary bent as we,” Kappy told me recently. “Our teachers in the English department were



THE YOUNG PROFESSOR

open-minded, knowledgeable, and inspiring men. It was a wonderful teaching faculty. In addition to the department's advanced writing course, campus channels of self-expression were open to us: the *Brown Jug* for the humorists among us; *Casements* [a monthly magazine born in January 1923 and written entirely by undergraduates] and the weekly literary supplement of the *Brown Daily Herald* for the more serious."

One of the "inspiring" professors Kapstein talked about was Lindsay Todd Damon, who taught a very popular course in Victorian poetry on the second floor in Manning Hall. Everyone came together in this class – the grinds, football players, and English majors – such was Damon's popularity.

"Damon loved to read from Swinburne," Kapstein said, "and it wouldn't take him long to warm up to his task. His face would get red, his white hair would fly, and he would roll out those lines like an actor on a stage. Sometimes right in the middle of a reading the students would catch the fever of the moment and show their appreciation by stamping their feet in unison until one would think the old floor was going to go crashing down.

"It was something of an experience later to serve under him when he was chairman of the English department. At staff meetings with the young teachers he'd say, 'I want you to rip the guts out of that poem.' This would be said in a Teddy Roosevelt macho style and we'd look at each other and wonder whether or not we could really do what this man expected of us."

Some older alumni will tell you that one of the finest professors who walked the College Green at that time was Ben Clough, a mild man who had no children of his own but who has been accused of being the father of the legendary Josiah S. Carberry. During the mid-1920's, Clough pulled an unusual switch by leaving the English department and joining classics.

Everyone who took a course with Ben Clough loved him. "Ben was widely read, and he gave all of his love of literature to his students," Kapstein said. "Because of the enthusiasm with which he taught the course I'd find myself taking notes on authors I'd never heard of and then literally rushing to the library to get the books by these men."

Another brilliant professor was George W. Benedict, a man who had a great feeling for style, for words, and for the structure of the language. During one of his courses with Professor Benedict, Kappy wrote a novel. This brought the men together for long sessions in Benedict's office on the second

floor of University Hall, the professor sitting in his Morris chair with his back to the window and Kappy perched on the window sill looking over Benedict's shoulder as he went over the manuscript.

"I can see him now," Kappy said. "He'd stop, put his pencil on a word, and say, 'I understand what you're trying to say in this sentence, but this word doesn't quite carry the full meaning. Perhaps you might have tried another word.' He would suggest one or two, and then I would say, 'Mr. Benedict, I thought this word conveyed my meaning rather well.' Benedict would walk over to his bookcase. 'Let's look it up in the *OED*,' he'd say, meaning the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

"So we'd start by reading the first entry of the word, maybe going back to the twelfth century, and then we'd slowly come up to the present, noting the various changes in the meaning of the word. Frankly, I didn't learn a damn thing about writing a novel from Mr. Benedict, but I became so sensitive about the meanings of words, the overtones, that this has stayed with me all my life. He sensitized me. Like rubbing sandpaper over your skin for a long time."

There was a great deal of original writing being done on the Brown campus in the '20s, with many of the writers working professionally in that field after graduation. In Kapstein's class, alone, there was Duncan Norton-Taylor, who went on to become editor of *Fortune* magazine, and Garrett D. Byrnes, who had a long and happy marriage with the *Providence Journal*, ending his career as editor of its much-heralded Sunday supplement, *The Rhode Islander*, where he wrote with nostalgia but without syrup.

And then there was Kappy and his friends – Sid Perelman '25, Nathanael West '25, Quent Reynolds '24, and Jeremiah P. Mahoney '25. It was quite a group, three men of the Jewish faith and a pair of fun-loving Irishmen. Each was an individual, but there was a charisma that brought them together as undergraduates and kept their paths warm through their alumni years. Some of Kappy's fondest memories today revolve around these four men.

Mahoney, the only non-writer of the group, had other virtues. He excelled at Red Dog, a form of poker, and he was a connoisseur of jazz. "I remember one of Jerry's Red Dog games went until 5:30 in the morning and I had won \$92," Kap says. "My only problem was that all but \$1.50 was in IOUs. So I did the gentlemanly thing and tore them up. Jerry had a great jazz collection, including some early Louis Armstrong, and every so often we'd



head down town to Meiklejohn's on Weybosset Street, take a handful of records into a booth, and hole up for the afternoon."

S. J. Perelman wrote movie scripts for the Marx Brothers, won an Oscar for *Around the World in 80 Days*, and was a regular contributor to the *New Yorker* and other publications. Someone once wrote that his surrealistic, cranky, meticulously polished essays demolished the "warf and woop" of society. He continued his high school interest in drawing by joining the *Brown Jug* as a cartoonist in his freshman year, but switched to writing when his captions for the college humor magazine drew more attention than his cartoons.

According to Kappy, Perelman had a flair for humor from the time he was a boy. "I heard it as we walked to and from school, and I saw it in his early writing efforts at Classical. I think Ben Clough had quite an influence on Sid's writing while he was at Brown, as did Percy Marks. Sid once told me that of the professionals he was most influenced by Robert Benchley, Ring Lardner, and H. L. Mencken. Of course, Mencken made all the young intellectuals of the period feel good. Sid acquired the knack of using exaggeration to create humor from Benchley, his whacky approach from Lardner, and his cynicism from Mencken."

Nathanael West came into Kappy's gang late and left early. He was sociable, amiable, and very much interested in being seen on campus in the latest Brooks Brothers suit. He also could be a pampered egotist in the Miss Haversham or Reggie Jackson mold.



S.J. PERELMAN SPEAKING TO ALUMNI



Pep West was an excellent writer and was his own biggest fan. His nickname of "Pep" was a misnomer at its grossest. He was slow talking, slow moving, and profoundly lazy. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, took part in almost no campus activity, and studied just enough to get by. West limited his writing efforts to *Casements* and made his debut there with a long, critical, cynical article on Euripides. Indications are that the piece pleased relatives and some friends. Ironically, the four short novels West wrote between 1932 and 1939 – *The Dream Life of Balso Snell*, *The Day of the Locust*, *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and *A Cool Million* – were flops when first published, only later to gain critical acclaim.

"West had a sense of humor, but it wasn't as sharp as Perelman's," Kapstein said. "It was bitter. There was acid in it. But Pep was very much a literary man. His room on campus was lined with books, most of which he had read and committed to memory. He talked about books with enthusiasm and good sense. But as far as his private interests were concerned, Pep was absolutely unscrupulous. If he borrowed a book from you, you could kiss it goodbye. Or a pair of gloves, or anything else. He never had a sense of guilt or shame for what he did. And yet, I liked him. We became very good friends. Sid later married Pep's sister.

"In his professional writing, Pep really crucified the American middle class. His family had money, but I think Pep looked upon himself as an outsider, like many sons of immigrant parents. The fact that he changed his name from Nathan Weinstein to Nathanael West, the fact that his novels have this negative, bitter, ironical note, indicates to me, at least, that the things he was repudiating were the things that were typical of American life – democracy and the middle class.

"My last memory of Pep dates to the mid-1930s, before his Hollywood years. He and Sid had bought this nice old Dutch-style farmhouse in Bucks County, and Pep was really enjoying the life of a country squire – walking across the wide fields with his gun and his hunting dogs, that sort of thing. We visited him there and thought at the time that maybe Pep had finally found serenity."

Things were never better for Pep West than in 1940. He was married to a charming girl, Eileen McKenney, who achieved vicarious fame as the heroine of Ruth McKenny's best-seller, *My Sister Eileen*, and he was praised by

*Time*, which termed him the “most proficient United States surrealist since Poe” and praised his book, *The Day of the Locust*, as “by far the ugliest and best book to date about Hollywood.” But on December 12, 1940, the good life ended with dramatic suddenness for Nathan Weinstein when he and his wife were killed in an auto crash near El Centro, California.

Although Kappy wrote for the literary supplement of the *Brown Daily Herald* and contributed to the book review page of the *Brown Jug*, most of his writing efforts were devoted to *Casements* (he was editor as a senior). The publication was inclined to be on the arty side, but it was an ideal vehicle for the students whose interest went beyond Composition 1-2. The magazine achieved a modicum of distinction once when the Providence police banned a particular issue because of a couple of risqué pieces. Sales on campus doubled overnight after the ban.

During his last two years in college, when Kap was toying with the idea of becoming a Latin scholar, he was a member of the Latin Club and became avidly interested in Latin poetry. One day Professor Clough suggested that perhaps someone in his class might try rendering some of Martial's poetry into English verse. “Well, of course it was Kap who did,” Clough said some years back. “Next day he brought in a poem of Martial's and four different translations, all of them first rate. This was typical. He did four times beyond what was asked of him. This was his style as a student and what he was destined to do as a teacher and a friend.”

None of this is to suggest that Israel Kapstein was a grind, living out the dream of his college years in the classrooms and the library. Far from it. He and Pep West were leaders in the formation of a club, the Rabelaisians, a title suggesting – in Kappy's words – “a wine, women, and song approach” to life. It was a shapeless sort of club – no officers, no dues, no admission requirements, and no set meetings. Whenever the men got together they discussed books and writers, had a few drinks, and showed off their wit and occasionally some wisdom. Today Kappy admits that the members were about as Rabelaisian as a convention of choir boys.

“We enjoyed the sound of our own voices being cynical,” Kap said. “It was a cheap cynicism. You could buy it for a nickel. Frequently we didn't know what the hell we were talking about. We didn't even do much carousing, except for putting away some bootleg stuff now and then. A bootlegger visited the

dorms regularly and the boys would stash the stuff away, sometimes under the floor boards in the closets."

By the time Kappy graduated he was convinced that he wanted to be close to writing in some fashion. Publishing seemed the easiest route to that objective, and so he accepted an opportunity to work for Alfred Knopf at 730 Fifth Avenue in New York City, where he was a "utility infielder" for the firm for more than a year.

It didn't take Kappy long to make an impression on the boss. Being assigned to the textbook department, he did a quick survey of the mailing list and discovered that more than half the direct-mail material was coming back at a terrific expense. He sat down and wrote to every college and university in the country, asking each to send its latest catalogue, from which he then compiled an updated mailing list.

One afternoon, Mr. Knopf walked into the office waving a document in his hand and asking if anyone could read German. The deadly silence that followed was broken by Kap's voice answering in the affirmative. Knopf wanted a translation of a German publishing contract and wanted it bright and early the next morning. Actually, Kap didn't know very much German, but being an Ivy League graduate he did know how to find a German dictionary. He and the dictionary spent the night together, and a flawless translation was on Knopf's desk the next day.

After that, Kappy was the unofficial translator in the office. As time went by he also prepared indexes, wrote dust jackets, did proofreading, and was asked to read and criticize newly submitted manuscripts. It was excellent training for a man who wanted a career in writing.

For all his efforts, Kap was making the lordly sum of \$20 a week. Things in the Big City did get better after six months. He was jumped to \$30.

Meanwhile, Kapstein and Perelman were reunited on the top floor of a Greenwich Village flat on West 11th Street. There were two rooms, a bath, and a small kitchen. Supplied with the flat, at no extra charge, was the 6th Avenue El, on which trains would thunder by at regular intervals, breaking up conversations, not to mention an occasional cup and saucer.

In his talk at Kappy's retirement banquet, Perelman sketched a verbal cartoon of their life together in Greenwich Village:

"Put on your seven-league boots and knife through the clouds



obscuring New York's rooftops. As you look through the skylight on this dingy apartment below you on West 11th Street, you see us reunited. By some alchemy that can never be explained, both of us had learned to read and write – not well, mind you, but enough to scratch out a meager living. Kapstein, using his new-found literacy, worked for the publishing firm of Alfred A. Knopf, and I, a freelance comic artist, for magazines that inevitably went bankrupt the moment they bought my drawings. Ah, those were halcyon days in the Greenwich Village of 1927. What if we often went to bed hungry, if there was no money to ransom our laundry or pay the rent? Were we downhearted? Yes we were. We were miserable.”

Kap admits that he and Sid lived close to the vest. But miserable? Never. They were young and healthy, and if they didn't eat as often as they would have liked, well, at least they fed well on hope. Though its former Bohemian glories were much diminished, Greenwich Village still had the atmosphere of an artists' colony. Poets in cloaks and capes and painters in paint-spotted pants were still around. Siegel's Restaurant served a filling bread pudding, sparsely dotted with raisins, for only 15 cents. So the two aspiring writers struggled, but survived.

Kappy had his impetuous moments, like charging a Brooks Brothers suit he couldn't afford and then limiting his lunch to soup and a roll for a month or more to help pay for it. When the weather was good, Kap walked from 730 Fifth Avenue at the junction of 57th Street all the way back to his flat on 11th Street, window shopping as he went and browsing in the book stores that dotted his path.

For entertainment there were movies for 35 cents, jazz in Harlem, or the speakeasies. Quent Reynolds had an in at a couple of “speaks” and took Sid and Kap on the town at least once a week. There were also some inexpensive nights at the Kenmore Hotel playing penny-ante with the night clerk – whose name happened to be Pep West. Pep didn't care whether or not he got caught. It was his hotel.

There are two versions of how Kappy came back to Brown. If you believe Kap, he received either a letter or a telephone call from Professor Benedict inviting him to join the faculty in the fall of 1928. If you believe S.J. Perelman, it happened this way:

“Kap and I used to sit up until four in the morning figuring out ways



to improve our lot. Neither of us had the audacity to rob a bank or swindle an immigrant. For a while, we thought of becoming gigolos, but we didn't know any rich, elderly women to adopt us.

"It was a desperate situation that could only be solved by a miracle. And one day it befell us. There was a ring at the doorbell and a uniformed messenger handed me a telegram from Dublin. I had just drawn the winning number in the Irish Hospital Sweepstake. At practically the same instant another uniformed messenger appeared and handed Kap a telegram offering him a post on the English faculty of Brown University.

"Now comes the truly moving part. It was not until many years later that the truth emerged. I was the person sought for the teaching post and it was Kapstein who won the \$36. So you see how a trifling clerical error can affect the entire course of one's life."

Regardless of which version you prefer to accept, the point is that Israel J. Kapstein never thought seriously of joining an academic community until Professor Benedict's offer came along. Like Perelman, Kappy had spent time in the West 11th Street flat hunched over the typewriter trying to write short stories. Several came off the assembly line, but none sold. Freelance writing has always been a risky business. That's one reason so many aspiring writers flocked to the colleges and universities in the 1930s. A job on the faculty gave them their bread and butter – and three months in the year to write.

Events moved swiftly for Kappy after his return to College Hill. There was the marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Stella Cohen (they met at Candace Street Grammar School), in June 1928, his master's a year later, the Ph.D. in June 1933, and the birth of his first child, Judith, a month after that. Jonathan was born in May 1939.

Kappy once said that he had begun his intellectual life by reading on his own. As a book worm "masquerading as a fat little boy" he gnawed his way with insatiable appetite through whatever reading matter came to hand. His companion in this bibliomaniacal orgy was Sid Perelman. The only difference between them, according to Kap, was that in the excitement of today's book he forgot the one he had read yesterday, while Perelman carried them all in his head and at a moment's notice could tell you what shenanigans went on in chapter three of *Eleanor Glenn*, which was written in 1907.

"Once one gets to be a reader, one also gets the notion of becoming a

writer," Kappy says. "My first writing ambition was to become a poet. I made a little start in poetry while an undergraduate, but when I began graduate study the dream of poetry writing went glimmering. I found myself struggling with a new discipline, the discipline of scholarship, and the scholar in me finally shunted the poet aside."

The young instructor was working for his graduate degrees at a time when the German influence on graduate study and literature was still strong, though beginning to wane. The great German philologists of the nineteenth century had made literary study largely the study of language-- its historical development, its structures, and its meanings. As a result, Kap found himself engaged in the close study of Old English, Old French, Old Norse, and Old High German, presumably, he says, "to prepare me for teaching the Old Englishmen, Old Frenchmen, Old Norsemen, and an Old High German."

Eventually, the scholar gave way to the teacher, and by 1933 Kappy was carrying a full academic load. At that point Kappy was convinced that he had come to his life's work -- but he came to it at not much more money than he had been making working for Knopf Publishers in New York City. The average faculty salary in 1933 was only \$3,111, and salaries at most colleges, including Brown, were frozen. Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers danced "The Carioca" in *Flying Down to Rio* that year, Babe Ruth won the first annual All-Star game with a home run, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt was using the "fireside chat" to assure people that things were all right. But things were not all right. The world was sinking ever deeper into depression, the banking system had collapsed, men and women were selling apples on street corners for a nickel, and Hitler came to power in Germany.

"It was a world too massive, too fearsome to be ignored," Kappy says. "One could not pretend it was not there and go on with one's private life. The result of the world's pressure upon me forced me to respond to it in the way that a lifetime of absorption in literature led me to respond. Every moment that I could spare from my teaching and steal from my family, I gave to the writing of fiction. This was my response to the world I never made but nevertheless the world in which I was living."

Kappy ducked back to 1910 for his first literary success, a novelette called *The Song a Summer Evening Sings*. It was a nostalgic recreation of experiences common to that generation of Americans who grew up in those very

pleasant days just prior to World War I. Spending long hours in the library stacks reading newspapers for the 1906-to-1908 period, Kap filled notebooks with hundreds of notes, of which he used only three. He admits to becoming "a wreck" in the actual writing process, which took more than a year.

Spurred to finish the story by the bait of a \$2,000 short-story prize offered by a Boston publisher, Kappy drove the manuscript to Boston and personally handed it to the receptionist. "The rejection slip was back in Providence almost before I got home," he says.

A few weeks later the novelette was neatly packed and sent to a New York publisher, who promptly accepted it for *Story* magazine and sent Kappy a check that paid him about three cents an hour for his research and writing time. The piece was later published by Harper in an anthology under the collective title, *The Flying Yorkshiremen*, which became a 1937 Book of the Month Club selection. Kappy didn't get rich, but his story did bring him considerable critical acclaim.

"If I learned anything in the writing of that novelette," Kappy says, "it was that there is no harder job in the world than working with words. Back in my New York City days when Sid would be bent over his typewriter from morning to night, I'd hear a little chuckle out of him now and then. It wasn't that he was smiling at his own wit, but that he was happy at finding just the word he was looking for."

Kap's major opus, *Something Of A Hero*, took its title from perhaps the noblest but most aloof of philosophers, Santayana, who wrote, "The common citizen must be something of a saint, something of a hero."

Four years in the writing, this novel answered many of the questions crying out for answers in 1941: What is the meaning of democracy? How much does the individual owe society? What individual and group values can we live by? What is America and what ought America to be?

Kappy launched his novel of a small Midwestern city and its typical American citizens on the high tide of Fourth of July emotions in 1907. It was the era of Theodore Roosevelt, the Strenuous Life, the Square Deal, and resurgent patriotism under the Big Stick. Then the author skips ahead to July 4, 1917, with its war songs and war speeches. The youngsters we got to know in 1907 are now either in the Army or getting ready to go in. The third look is July 4, 1929, an era of high hopes and great expectations. The kids of 1907,



the soldiers of 1917, are crowding their elders for a place in the sun.

*Something Of A Hero* is a microcosm of an American town as the early twentieth century rolls slowly away into history, but Kappy stays away from preaching. And he waves no flags. Fred T. Marsh, writing in the *New York Herald-Tribune*, said that Kapstein was “a story teller of considerable virtuosity” and added: “There are remarkable portraits from the life of this small city gallery – that strawberry blonde, the tin-horn crook, and the Armenian confectioner make a triangle that you are not likely to forget.”

When *Something Of A Hero* shot high on the bestseller list in 1941, Kappy found his work in company with Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and John P. Marquand's *H. M. Pulham, Esquire*. The Literary Guild made it an alternate selection, England gave it rave reviews, and the novel was translated into Norwegian and Swedish.

“The book did well,” Kappy says, “so well that it bought me a house. The theme – the odds of democracy maintaining itself, being a living force in the lives of individuals – was popular in the early 1940s when the world was engaged in a bloody war that put democracy on the line.

“Writing, any sort of writing, requires discipline,” Kap continues.



BROWN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT (WITH GRADUATE STUDENTS)  
IJK IN FIRST ROW, SECOND FROM LEFT



"You have to develop a writing habit, sitting down at your freest time of day and not getting up until you've written something. Some days you'll be bone dry. But there will be other times when your fingers touch that typewriter and words are going to flow. Words meet words and ideas meet ideas. It's a wonderful feeling. It's also tiring. I'd work from 9 to 1 each day, but sometimes I'd be so carried away that I'd go back at it and work 'til 5. But the next day I'd be completely exhausted."

After *Something Of A Hero*, Kappy turned to short story writing and found a ready market for his wares in *Good Housekeeping*, *Collier's*, and other leading magazines. The short story is not necessarily easier to write than a novel; it's just different. To be effective, the short story has to be bound up tight, like the mechanism of a wrist watch. This usually means constant rewriting. Kap worked on one job over fifteen or sixteen times, polishing it with each go-round and not minding the time and effort because he sensed that this one was going to be something special. Just as he finished, after months of hard work, he got the idea for another short story, this one with a trick ending.

"I knocked that second story off in one sitting," Kap says. "No problems whatsoever. Then I sent them both off to my agent. 'I'm sending you a story that I've worked very hard on and which I'm sure will sell,' I told him, 'but I'm also enclosing something I banged out within a few hours. If you don't like that one, throw it in the basket.' In a few weeks I received a letter saying, 'The trick-ending story sold to *Collier's* for \$1,200. I had your other piece out twenty-one times and nobody wants it.' You know, writing is such a crazy business."

But all this time Kappy was a teacher. He'd never cheat on that. By the 1940s he was teaching writing courses in the short story and the novel, a section on the Romantic Period of English literature, and his much-admired course on the modern American and British novel, for juniors, seniors, and graduate students. The undergraduates referred to it simply as "Kappy 172."

Professor Mark Spilka '49, chairman of the English department two decades later, took the 172 course and lives to tell about it. "The course was always crowded, about 200 students," Spilka said some years back. "One remembers the inevitable charts he drew upon the board and the passages he read from the novels. Kappy's lectures had wit and charm and were delivered

with sardonic style. Most important to me was the sense they gave of a liberal conscience at work in the world of fiction. Also unforgettable is that long, long reading list he threw at us!"

There was a Kapstein style in the classroom. He was never inclined to baby his students. In fact, he liked to bait them, sometimes to the point of provoking anger. "When the emotions are stirred, education begins," he would say.

Kappy was particularly fond of his course on the Romantic Period. He didn't subscribe to the theory, popular at colleges in the early 1960s, of spending an entire semester trying to decide what some ancient author really meant in the middle three words on the fourth line of the second stanza of some obscure poem. He wanted his students to learn history and philosophy with their literature. And this was the accepted way of teaching the subject until this other foolish fad came along, ran its course, and died.

"One reason I enjoyed teaching literature is that if you want to do a good job you have to know so much besides literature," Kap told me. "You certainly have to have some notion of political movements when you consider that people like Byron, Shelley, and Keats were all political revolutionaries in their youth. In other words, to understand what the poets were saying, and why they are saying it, you first have to understand the age in which they lived. So you mix the pot, adding a touch of history and a touch of philosophy and maybe a dish of politics to your main dish and, you hope, when the semester ends your students have learned some literature but have also become better-educated individuals."

In the fall of 1936 a highly promising student scored well in the freshman placement exam, was assigned to an honors section, and found himself with nine or ten other classmates at a conference table presided over by Professor Kapstein. The student's name was E. Howard Hunt '40. He recently talked freely about Kappy to me.

"I saw him first seated at the end of our seminar table in University Hall. Jaw jutting. Powerful fingers drumming. Eager to begin. Effortlessly he dominated the room, involved my classmates and myself, and quickly brought us into harmony with his intent and purpose. I. J. Kapstein was obviously a man to soar with among the spheres of intellect. A man to play mumbly peg with on the green grass.

"Coming from a western New York public school, I was accustomed

to grandmotherly teachers and was totally unprepared for a male instructor who was informal, Jewish, a hairy chested baseball enthusiast and camp counselor, and seemingly knowledgeable of all things. Kappy's questioning had a gentle, depreciatory quality that diminished me to ant-size, but his own self-depreciation was a restorative leaven. Occasionally he'd insert the Garment District phrase, 'Such a gorgeous guy like me,' that startled me until I came to understand that my professor used slang and humor to puncture pretentiousness among students. That device showed us explicitly that Kappy was not just an austere Ivory Tower scholar but a man who had traveled the streets with a receptive ear and could grapple with life on whatever terms it chose.

"Once in discussing novel themes, Kappy remarked that he had always been interested in the common man's struggle for the necessities of life. I quickly said I had always been interested in the uncommon man's struggle for the luxuries of life – and that brought me a withering glare. Thereafter I refrained from elitist remarks, however jocular.

"Recognizing a superior being, I began to copy Kappy's manner of dress: brogues, wool socks, flannels, tweed jacket, button-down shirt, rep and challis ties. And while I was undergoing that external change I found that the mental and cultural stimulation I was receiving from Kappy was working needed changes in me. I was hypnotized by his persona, and for the first time in my life began to study in earnest and prepare for our seminar encounters. I wanted to please him, receive his approbation, and that desire marked a watershed in my life."

In time Howie Hunt became a baby sitter for Kappy and Stella, learning how to burp a baby while the Kapsteins enjoyed an occasional night away from home. There was always a sandwich in the refrigerator, a glass of milk, and sometimes a finger or two of Scotch. More important from Hunt's point of view was his unimpeded access to Kappy's library, which he tried to devour on the theory that if those books had made Kappy what he was, then he had to acquire their knowledge.

"In class and out, Kappy called me 'young Hunt,'" Howard continues. "It was a distinction I reveled in, for it showed he was aware of me. I was a swing trumpeter playing at most college and fraternity functions, and often saw Kappy and Stella, handsomely attired, among the dancers. His fondness for jazz formed another bond between us.





1957

"That my professor, and by then, my friend, was a successful creative writer sharpened my own creative instincts and inspired me to write a novel for his course in my senior year. It was not a very good novel, but two years later, while in the Navy, I produced *East of Farewell* and at Kappy's suggestion sent it to an editor with whom he had worked at Knopf. Thus began my career as a novelist.

"After his son, Jonathan, was born, I realized Kappy was spending hardly any time working on his novel, *Something Of A Hero*. When I remonstrated, he said, 'Look, young Hunt, I brought my children into the world. The least I can do is give them my time.' Responsibility. Not at all congruent with the stereotype of creative writers.

"I was then, and am now, overwhelmed by the vitality, the affirmative masculinity, the intellectual fervor of this man who was quite literally my first teacher. But he was much more than that. He was my guide to unexplored realms of literature, my companion in a great adventure of the mind, a friend and confidant without a gap of generations.

"In that era I could have easily drifted through four years of Brown in a haze of beer and Wellesley weekends. But in me Kappy saw more than I knew was there. He sparked the tinder, nursed the glow, and gained my everlasting gratitude."

Howard Hunt went on to become perhaps Brown's most prolific writer, with many of his spy thrillers written under a pseudonym. The list of men who studied writing under Kappy and then went into the field professionally is lengthy. It includes Burt Shevelove '37, who is perhaps best known



for the musical comedy *A Funny Thing Happened On the Way to the Forum*; Charlie Mercer '39, who wrote a dozen novels, including the best seller, *Rachel Cade*; Jack Newcombe '48, associate editor of *Sport* magazine in its formative years and later London bureau chief for *Life*; and George Kennedy '41, executive head of Kiplinger Publications.

Kappy's popularity extended to the Pembroke campus, where he won "Favorite Professor of the Year" honors with monotonous regularity. In 1939 he was "married" to the entire Pembroke senior class in a ceremony with five bridesmaids attending. At his retirement banquet, the late Anne Byam O'Neil '41 said that the essence of Kap's charm was that he had something different for each student – encouragement for the shy, a curb for the excessive, a pin prick for the pompous, and a listening ear for the lonely. "He saw through all the college crises of heart and head," Anne added. "It was mostly soothing. Sometimes scolding. But above all – listening. Why do we all forget how much the young just need to be listened to!"

If a professor stays around long enough his former pupils may become his colleagues. And if he's very lucky one of his ex-students may become his departmental chairman. That's what happened to Kappy when Mark Spilka took over the chairmanship of the English department in the late 1960s. Spilka once said that Kappy was one of those enviable professors who moves with confidence through all academic assignments. "I once worked with Kap on making up a preliminary exam in the modern period. It took us about two and one half hours to pull together an effective and well-structured exam, and I marveled at the way he was able to pull feasible and imaginative questions alike out of the air with almost magical resourcefulness.

"Kap also happened to have a particular gift for articulate indignation. He could be more effectively, persuasively, and appallingly indignant than any professor I've ever known. Maybe that is the reason for his eternal youthfulness. He could get out of his system, with an amazing command of what he was saying, all those fed-up and outraged feelings which academic flesh is heir to. Also remarkable is the fact that after he had fought his fight and delivered his tirades – whether he won or lost – he would lapse into the most cheerful sweetness of mind and manner imaginable."

Despite the sweetness of which Spilka speaks, Kappy was frequently tormented in mind and heart over the time he was able to give to his three

loves – family, teaching, and writing. With Kap, his family came first. His writing – and he had so much talent – eventually got short shrift. Right in the middle, not too far behind his love of family, came his respect for the teaching profession. It was not surprising, therefore, that during his last year or two on the job Kappy became extremely bitter over the drastic change in the attitude of the undergraduates. This was the start of the student rebellion, and Kap didn't like what he saw or heard. At his retirement banquet he spoke with candor about that period:

"In my maturity I came to know what every teacher comes to know – that teaching is not simply the communication of information and skills but the transmission of human values. Once this transmission becomes the teacher's goal he comes to know the agonies and exaltations of his vocation. He challenges himself in the classroom six to nine times a week, every time he delivers a lecture. He sweats before he begins, rejoices if he feels the current flowing back and forth between him and his students, comes out of the classroom fairly intoxicated if he had touched them alive or else overcome by self-disgust if he has failed. What he really seeks is not communication but communion. And out of such communion between student and teacher true education flows.

"So it is saddening to see on our campus today the violence that disrupts and destroys this communion. Such violence does not merely cut off entrances to offices, classrooms, and libraries, it cuts off the lines of communication between teachers and students, lines which are the prime reason for the University's existence."

Many of Kappy's colleagues felt the same frustrations, but most remained quiet. Kap spoke out in real anger and hostility. Since Kappy had long held the reputation of being an outspoken liberal, his stance both surprised and disappointed some of his liberal friends. A few years later he surprised them again when he stuck by Howard Hunt in the aftermath of Watergate.

It had become a tradition for the Kapsteins to visit the Hunts each year. They were good reunions, with talk of their shared love for fine fiction, reminiscences of days past on College Hill, or maybe some time in front of the TV watching a football game. There was a bond between the liberal Jew and the conservative WASP. And the tragedy of Watergate and Hunt's role in it

didn't break that bond.

"One of the things that kept our friendship warm was that we recognized that our views were miles apart and we shied away from discussing things that might lead to an argument," Kappy said recently. "I guess you could say that our relationship is paternal, or grandpaternal. I do know that what developed over the years was almost like a family feeling. One of Howard's young children tied me to a chair one time to prevent me from leaving."

Hunt was grateful for Kappy's support through the difficult times and discussed the situation with me. "Prying reporters interviewed Kappy about me, their assumption being that Hunt was an unlettered thug. They found it incredible that anyone could say a good word about me, and Kappy said many in my behalf. He was one of only a handful of friends who stayed loyally by me, supporting me during the worst period of my life, helping me to emerge whole from prison. Typically, Kappy honored his principles even though he absorbed criticism for doing so."

Those who know Israel J. Kapstein realize that as satisfying as teaching was to him, there were creative things that he could have done with almost as much satisfaction. He might have been just as happy as a writer or a sculptor or a horticulturist. As a writer he was something of an experimenter moved by an itch to try every kind of writing there is – poems, short stories, novels, plays for children, scholarly articles, translations, and a textbook.

Sometimes when he was hard at work doing the inescapable chores of teaching – correcting hour exams, reading term papers, grappling with final exams – he resorted to temporary relief. Close by in his study were sharp jackknives, a set of small chisels, a variety of sandpapers, and a piece of wood. At his feet were spread newspapers to catch slivers and chips, and with papers and pencils laid aside for the moment he sought relief from words by happily seizing a piece of wood to work on. In the



ISRAEL J. KAPSTEIN



simple, semi-abstract form he followed, Kappy became an accomplished sculptor. "If painting is for the eye and music is for the ear, then sculpture is for the hand," he says.

A man needs fresh air, and his body needs to be recreated. So, Kappy became a gardener. He never grows anything as mundane as carrots or cabbage. He grows flowers – perennials, such as iris, peonies, and lilies and annuals such as zinnias, snapdragons, and marigolds. Who knows, some day, in tribute to his friend Wordsworth, he may put in a host of golden daffodils.

There are also those who claim that Kappy could have achieved a modicum of success as a billiards hustler if the cupboard ever became bare. But that's another story for another time.

These are some of the things Kappy might have done if he had not become a teacher. But he was a teacher, one who loved his profession and his college; and when the hour of parting came, the transition was not easy. Andrews Hall was hushed as Kappy came to the end of his speech and bid his goodbyes to those 400 friends at his retirement dinner.

"One feels the severance from a long familiar and long beloved life, severance from students and colleagues, from habitual comings and goings to one's office and to the libraries, from the walk to the classroom across the campus in all the seasons over all the years.

"Not that the campus is forbidden to me. I'm withdrawing on my own. I haven't been expelled. Just the same, I don't belong to the college now as I used to. At least I don't belong in the special way that put me at the center of the University's life. Now, at best, I must be an attentive observer rather than an active participant in her life. Does this hurt? Yes, it does!"

Kappy is 77 at this writing, still living at Dexterdales Road in Providence, still tackling the typewriter when the spirit moves him, and still carving a niche for himself with his sculpture. He and Stella enjoy the cold winter months, but they enjoy them from the comfort of Longboat Key on Florida's Gulf Coast. Their daughter, Judith, is associate dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Rutgers, and Jonathan is bureau chief of *Business Week* in Johannesburg, South Africa.

"I've been away from Brown for such a long time," Kap said last summer. "I'm even away from Providence for almost half the year. One hopes that people won't forget."



His long-time friend and colleague, Elmer M. Blistein '42, thinks they will not. "His ability as a writer is recognized by all who can read, his perception is honored by all who can think, and his wit is appreciated by all who can feel."



## KAPPY AND STELLA

### BY JUDITH KAPSTEIN BRODSKY

The author graduated from Radcliffe College in 1954 and earned a master of fine arts degree at Temple University. She is Distinguished Professor Emerita in the department of visual arts at Rutgers University. She was the founding director of Rutgers's Center for Innovative Print and Paper, a world-renowned institute for the creation of work by American and international artists. Her etchings and lithographs are in the permanent collections of more than 100 institutions, including the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design.

Judith is grateful for many insights provided by her brother, Jonathan. He graduated from Brown in 1961 and earned a master's degree in journalism at Columbia. He served as a bureau chief of *Business Week* in Brazil, Canada, Italy, South Africa, and northern Europe. He currently resides in Brussels, where he is director of international communication for Lyondell Chemical.

My father, Israel James Kapstein, was born in Fall River, Massachusetts, on January 15, 1904. I am very pleased to celebrate his centenary by writing this reminiscence. I adored my parents, Kappy and Stella. My becoming an artist and a professor, while maintaining an intense family life, is a reflection of their values.

Through a wonderful coincidence, this year is also the 350th anniversary of the arrival of Jews in North America. My father represents a significant aspect of that history. Not only an important teacher and writer, he was also an influential member of the Providence community. While remaining a strong and active Jew, Kappy became a valued, respected and, indeed, beloved figure within the Gentile world. His acceptance within mainstream society contributed to a more democratic, diverse, and richer American culture.

Of course my mother, Stella Cohen Kapstein, played a central role in my father's life. To his dying day, he called her "his bride." She too became a noteworthy member of Providence's Jewish and Gentile communities.



I should say a few words about my father's physical appearance and personality because they were certainly important elements in his ability to transcend social boundaries. He was relatively tall, close to six feet, and he was

strong. Kappy's large muscular body gave him a physical presence. His warmth was immediately apparent to anyone who talked with him even for a few minutes. My father had that gift of making people feel that he really cared about what they were saying. And he did care. Extremely articulate, he also had an original and infectious sense of humor.

When I was a little girl, I wanted to look exactly like my mother, who had a classical Jewish beauty. My parents had artist friends in

Providence who liked to draw her. Several of these artists also painted portraits of my father because they wanted to, not because he asked them.

Kappy was one of those people who could do anything. This is partially demonstrated by the variety of intellectual activities in which he engaged. But he was also a natural athlete: a good tennis player and a terror at the bat. He had a good singing voice but regretted all his life that he hadn't had the opportunity to learn to play the piano when he was young. He tried to learn jazz piano from one of his former students, but at that age it was hard.

## GRANDPARENTS

My grandfather, Barney (Baruch) Kapstein, came to Boston with his older brothers in the late 1880s. They were followed by his parents and younger brothers. The Kapsteins emigrated from Berdichev, a city in the Ukraine. The Nazis destroyed Berdichev's large Jewish population on their march to Kiev. My paternal grandmother's family, the Silvers, emigrated from the border of the Ukraine and the Crimea in the same decade. Not poor, they probably left because of pogroms.

I know little about the Kapsteins before their move to Providence. I do know that my grandfather was considered a good catch because he spoke English without an accent. Barney was not a good provider, however. A charming man, with many friends, he preferred playing pinochle late into the night.

When he had to put bread on the table, he worked in various occupations. His most successful venture was selling elaborate picture frames so immigrants could send family portraits to the old country.

Sometimes, Fanny Kapstein's anxiety about having money to feed the family made her sick. She would go away to stay with other family members. But she had two little babies, Samuel Archibald, later known as "Archie," and John. Two older sisters, Evelyn and Grace, had to leave school to care for the young boys.

My mother's family came from a *shtetl* in Lithuania. There was a long-standing belief that the Cohens were related to the great Gaon of Vilna. My grandfather, Jacob Cohen, landed in Boston, and he was followed a few years later by his wife, Marcella. Her journey involved a stay over in Manchester, England, where she bought copper pots and brass candlesticks. They still belong to our family.

Marcella was actually Jacob's second wife. His first wife, Marcella's sister, had died. Marcella came to Boston with two stepchildren, Mary and Alter, the children of her late sister. Eventually, Jacob and Marcella had nine more children.

My mother, Stella, was born in Hyannis, Massachusetts, on January 4, 1903. She was among the youngest. Her twin brother, who left home as a teenager, settled in New York City. Family legend has it that, during Prohibition, he became involved with the mob and went to jail for counterfeiting Treasury bills.

My grandfather, Jacob Cohen, died when my mother was three. Two of Stella's older sisters, Sarah and Ada, were already teachers, so they supported the family. Indeed, the Cohens moved to Providence in 1916 so that Ada could take a better-paying job. Lillian was also a teacher, so when my mother became a teacher they were known as "the four Cohen sisters." They were looked upon with awe because first-generation girls did not usually go to college.

## JENCKS STREET

When the Cohens moved to Providence, they lived at 5 Jencks Street; the Kapsteins lived at 21. My father was the eldest of six children. Dorothy, the next child, died of diphtheria. My father also had diphtheria, which left him with bad eyesight. He held the usual boy's jobs – errand boy, newsboy, soda



jerk, and mill hand – to bring in extra money for the family.

My father was known by a nickname, “To.” It came from his street call to other boys; “io” was like the present “hi” or “hey there.” My father and mother attended Candace Street School, at the center of their immigrant Jewish neighborhood.

Kappy and his brothers liked to spend time at my mother’s house. Ada played the piano, and my mother’s brothers were fun. The Cohen family’s lively spirit contrasted with the more somber atmosphere of his home. But Marcella, too, sometimes had to rely on others to buy food. She would occasionally borrow money from the omnipresent Jewish charitable organizations to help tide her over. She hated doing this, and was relieved of the need once other children began teaching.

Both my grandmothers kept kosher homes and went to services. Marcella spoke, read, and wrote English and Yiddish and could read Hebrew as well. She translated letters for Jewish women and taught them how to read and write. My father went to *cheder* and, like most boys of that era, hated it. My mother also had a Jewish education because she taught me my first year of Hebrew.

Kappy and Stella were sweethearts by the time they went to Classical High School. While they received a good education, they remembered the nastiness of some teachers all their lives. When I was ready for high school, they sent me to Hope High because they didn’t want to subject me to the treatment they had received. Some of their teachers were still teaching. Six years later, when they sent my brother, Jonathan, to Classical High, their fears were corroborated.

#### UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDIES

My father decided to go to Brown and should have entered in 1921. My grandmother, Fanny, didn’t want him to go to college, however. She felt that it was the responsibility of the oldest child to support the family. One day she asked my mother to come and visit her. Very excited about an invitation from her sweetheart’s mother, Stella got all dressed up for the occasion. Fanny asked my mother to persuade my father not to go to college. Stella, only sixteen or seventeen-years-old, was enormously courageous and faced up to my grandmother. She refused to intercede. Knowing that it was my father’s dream to go to

college, Stella told Fanny that she would not discourage Kappy's aspirations.

Nevertheless, my father had to delay going to college for a year. By working after school and summers, dangerously coupling and uncoupling railroad cars, he had saved enough money for tuition. Kappy was on his way to register and pay his fees when he met his father. Barney asked where he was going and found out about his savings for the first semester. Barney then asked my father to turn over the money because the family needed it. So Kappy worked for Browne & Sharpe as a machinist and on the railroads for another year. Thus, he became a member of Brown's Class of 1926.

Stella went to Rhode Island State College, where she majored in mathematics and was graduated first in her class. Having received splinters during a women's varsity basketball game, she was left with lifelong scars.

My father's college years and his two years in New York City were well documented by Jay Barry's profile in *Gentlemen Under the Elms*. Kappy returned to Brown to become the first student in a new doctoral program in English literature. It is quite remarkable that these Old Yankee professors selected a poor, young Jew, despite the fact that there was some faculty opposition, even from President Faunce. Even more remarkable was the power of my father's personality, which enabled his professors to feel comfortable with his Jewish identity. This was a time when Nicholas Murray Butler, the longtime president of Columbia University, prevented the naming of buildings and schools after Jewish donors. I know that Harvard had Jewish quotas at some of its schools all the way into the 1950s.



STELLA, 1925

## MARRIED LIFE

Kappy and Stella had a small family wedding on December 23, 1928. My mother wore brown chiffon. They took the night boat for their honeymoon in New York. My father was interested in the new extremes in art and literature, so they saw the famous silent movie, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*. In Providence, he was a fan of H. P. Lovecraft, the early science fiction writer, and had sought

him out.

Kappy and Stella entertained a lot in their apartment at 19 Angell Street. My mother wore evening pajamas, and I still have her Japanese kimono. The newlyweds were very up-to-date and "modern." In 1928, a year after Lindburgh's flight across the Atlantic, my father wrote a poem, which won a national contest. It was the first piece for which he became known beyond Brown and Providence.

As a graduate student, my father began his scholarly study of literature. He earned his master's degree in 1929 and his doctorate four years later. Kappy's dissertation was "The Sources and the Development of Shelley's Philosophical Doctrines." He became well known for a study of Shelley's poem, "Mont Blanc," published by the Modern Language Association.

My mother had been teaching in Providence, but as a married woman, she could not continue. Thus, she became a teacher in East Greenwich and rode the trolley car to work. During these years, she met the Silverman family there. Howard Silverman received his Brown degree in 1936. Like many of my father's students, he became my babysitter and our family's life-long friend.

My mother also taught home economics – sewing and cooking – in Saylesville and Manville, mill towns near Pawtucket. The May 13, 1930 issue of the *Pawtucket Times* had a big article about Stella and her students. The students celebrated the end of the school year by wearing the dresses they had just made. The reporter wrote:

One of the features of the course is that it does not teach the children to use the most expensive material. Instead it gives them the idea that even cotton cloth, when properly made into wearing apparel, looks exceptionally well. Another feature is that Mrs. Kapstein has no set course for the girls to follow. In other words, as the styles change, or material is discarded by the noted designers, she also changes her lessons so as to keep the children in with modern dictates. None of the finished dresses displayed yesterday cost more than \$1.57. Some cost as little as 60 cents.

In the cooking classes the girls study the preparation of food and its preservation. Nutrition classes are also part of the course. On the recent tour made by members of the School Committee, the students



served the members with a lunch, entirely planned and prepared by the children. There are 67 girls taking the home economics course. Mrs. Kapstein, to whom is due all the credit for the success of the home economic classes, has been a member of the Lincoln teaching staff for five years.

### EXPRESSIONS OF JEWISH IDENTITY

When I was born in 1933, we lived at 131 Hope Street, not far from Fox Point. My father walked me to the Tockwotton branch of the Providence Public Library. I can't remember if my mother kept a kosher house then. She didn't later, but she always bought meat from a kosher butcher and never served shellfish or bacon. We shopped on Wickenden Street, and Mr. Arrigo, the vegetable man, came to our door.

My mother's respect for Jewish dietary laws on the one hand, and my parents' involvement in modern life on the other hand, show how early the pattern of their lives developed. They were part of both worlds: the traditional Jewish world and the academic world, where all of my father's professors and colleagues in the English department were Christians. Most of his Brown classmates were Christians, as were most of his students. Kappy and Stella maintained Jewish friendships from childhood as well as friendships with their families – such as the Olianskys, Goldbergers, and Briers. Jewish holidays were celebrated in my grandparents' homes, but I would go to Christmas parties in the homes of my parents' friends. Ben Clough was a classics professor at Brown, and his wife, Elsie, was the proprietor of the famous Providence Book Shop. Alexander Robinson was also a classics professor. His wife, Celia Sachs Robinson, whose parents were great art collectors and benefactors of Harvard, had been born a Jew.

In 1939, when my brother Jonathan was born and I was ready to start school, we moved to 16 Eames Street, a block from Temple Emanu-El. Only four years later we moved to 248 Morris Avenue, a three-story Victorian house about two minutes from Emanu-El. During World War II, my father called our house "The Hotel Splendide." My Uncle John, barely 15 when I was born, turned up there when on leave. He piloted B-26 bombers in the North African campaign and then bombed Nazi strongholds in Italy. At times, wives of faculty members who had been drafted would take up residence in the extra



bedrooms. After Fanny Kapstein died, my grandfather Barney came to live with us, occupying the mysterious third floor. Aunt Grace visited from what we thought was the sophisticated world of fashion.

### ANTISEMITISM, ACCEPTANCE, AND ASSIMILATION

The Sawins lived next door to us. Professor Sawin was in the biology department at Brown. Farwell Sawin, about three or four years older than I, was the epitome of a bully. He was the source of my first antisemitic experience. I can't remember exactly what epithet he used, but my father had a long talk with me about antisemitism, emphasizing its stupidity and hurtfulness, but reassuring me that being a Jew was a wonderful thing. When Kappy talked with me about being Jewish, he talked about how positive the religion was. He pointed out Judaism's rationality and morality in contrast to Christianity's mysticism and blind faith.

In the summer of 1938, we occupied two bedrooms in a New Hampshire farmhouse, which belonged to two maiden ladies. The house had neither indoor plumbing nor electricity. It was near the summer home of Professor S. Foster Damon, my father's former professor and now colleague in the English department. He and his wife had helped arrange the sojourn. That summer, my father worked on his major novel, *Something Of A Hero*.

When published by Knopf in 1941, it became a big success. The *Journal Bulletin* ran major articles about the book and my father. Perhaps even more than his personality or his professorship, the novel's success enabled my father to transcend the ethnic, religious, and racial boundaries of the time. Kappy and Stella were invited to join the exclusive Review Club, which consisted of members of the old Providence elite and academicians. They met in formal dress to discuss recent literature. I'm sure that they were the first Jews to be invited. Kappy's acclaim grew further in 1944, when he received a Guggenheim fellowship.

My father continued to write for such magazines as *Story*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Collier's*, but two later novels were never published. His textbook, *Expository Prose: An Analytic Approach*, appeared in 1955.

While still an undergraduate, Kappy began writing for the *Providence Star Tribune* at the invitation of George Potter, an editor who taught part-time at Brown. Kappy wrote about theatre, books, and concerts – anything but polit-

ical opinion because Potter didn't think a college student had much credibility in that area. My father, brother, and I would often visit George and his wife, Erna, who lived in one of the few remaining farmhouses on the East Side. George was an Irish Catholic, and perhaps their shared background as children of immigrants as well as their common interest in writing led to their close friendship.

In the spring of 1942, my father authored a long article about anti-semitism for the *Providence Journal*, where Potter had become an editor. Having refuted each of the traditional accusations against Jews, he concluded:

Jew-hatred. . . is not, therefore, a Jewish problem. It is an American problem. Its solution is not social, or economic, or political, but moral – a problem of personal morality. Only the spiritual decency of individual Americans can solve it. Only a determined effort of the individual to believe in the principles of American democracy and the laws of God can dissolve the poison of hatred. . . If prejudice and hatred disease us, then what good is the defeat of Hitler abroad if we are defeated by Hitlerism at home?

A belief in American democracy was one of the themes in my father's writing. Kappy explained that *Something Of A Hero* grew out of his concern for the survival of democracy in America and against the rise of Hitler and fascism in Europe. His writing shows that he was also aware of the conflict between assimilating to American culture and maintaining a Jewish identity.

In the late 1940s he wrote a short story about that tension. A family on vacation is warmly welcomed at a hotel, until the father registers. Seeing a Jewish name, the clerk says that the hotel does not take Jews. The man becomes upset and wants to vent his anger by cursing the clerk in Yiddish. He tries to think of the curses he knew from childhood, but, to his horror, can't remember them. Caught between two worlds, the father is part of neither.

Although my father could gracefully bridge Jewish and Gentile worlds, he could be fiercely partisan in his Jewishness. At Brown he stood up to antisemitism whenever it surfaced. At one point, the university was going to invite George Lincoln Rockwell, the leader of the American Nazi party and a Brown alumnus, to speak. My father was successful in having the invitation canceled by claiming that free speech did not allow for Nazi ideology, which had been thoroughly discredited.

## FURTHER EXPRESSIONS OF JEWISH IDENTITY

I wouldn't call my father a Zionist in his earlier years. He thought of Judaism as a religion, not as a nationality. During World War II, as news came of the Holocaust, he, like everyone else, was horrified and certainly saw the need for establishing a Jewish state. We had Jewish friends who had managed to leave Europe before the Holocaust. I was encouraged to make friends with their daughters at school. Later in life, when Israel became so embattled, my father became her ardent supporter.

Kappy loved Yiddish literature and Jewish jokes. And he often observed Jewish tradition. My grandmother Fanny died when I was ten, and I remember how deeply my father was affected. That spring and summer, I went to Ma'ariv services with him most evenings. Except for me, the *minyan* was all men.

Faculty salaries were very low. We didn't have a car until 1947, when Kappy won a big prize from *Good Housekeeping* for a short story, entitled, appropriately enough, "The Ship of Pearl." Needless to say, that's how my father referred to his new car. My parents bought their first house with the proceeds from the sales of *Something Of A Hero*. Only in the 1960s, when there was a new generation of scholars, did salaries become decent.

Kappy and Stella didn't have enough money to join Temple Emanu-El, but my mother arranged scholarships for my brother and me to attend Sunday school and Hebrew school. When approaching Confirmation, we were required to attend Friday night or Saturday morning services. To save Saturdays for other activities, we would go on Friday nights. After services, my friends (and their parents) would come back to our house for tea and cake with my parents. Although Rabbi Israel Goldman, Rabbi Eli Bohnen, and Cantor Jacob Hohenemser were good friends, he only rarely joined us for services. While he was never openly critical (and wouldn't have dreamed of making any public criticism of Jewish practice), he thought that modern services were somewhat pretentious and imitative of Christian tradition.

By the early 1940s, when my father was a well-known and highly respected figure in Providence, he was asked many times to give sermons from the pulpits of Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth-El. He loved doing so. It gave him the chance to talk about moral and ethical issues (rather than religious issues) that deeply concerned him.



In great demand as a speaker throughout his life, Kappy was very generous with his time. He spoke before all kinds of groups: hospital boards, book groups, synagogue men's clubs, and the Jewish Family and Children's Service. He couldn't say no, and my mother would scold him for taking on these engagements when he could have been spending time on his writing or at least on projects that paid better.

Stella too could rarely say no. She became the first Jewish president of the Brown University Ladies of the Faculty. Active in various PTA groups, she also worked as a substitute teacher.



WITH JUDY + JON, 1947

One year my father lectured at Temple Beth-El on "Jewish Themes in Modern Poetry." He argued that the Bible's impact on Jews and the world was not only as a religious document but also as a literary masterpiece. He remarked: "While our fathers took for granted the existence of God, His anger and wrath and His relationship to man, today we have suffered a weakening of religious faith. As a result, we feel a sense of loss, a sense of empty seeking for a creative God in the midst of mechanical forces with which we cannot cope. Much of today's poetry, therefore, is the poetry of emptiness of

anguish and inability to recapture faith."

From 1949 to the early '60s, while in summer residence at Camp Walt Whitman, near Piermont, New Hampshire, my father organized and conducted Friday evening services. Arnold Soloway, Brown '46, and his brother, Leon, Brown '43, founded the camp in 1948. Like so many of my father's students, they wanted to continue their relationship with him. Kappy and Stella were invited to participate in any way they chose. They gladly accepted because it allowed my brother and me to enjoy summertime in the mountains. The only camp where they could afford to send me was a Girl Scout camp, which I attended for two weeks when I turned 12 and 13. One summer Jonathan was sent to the Jewish Community Center's day camp.

All of my father's activities at Walt Whitman focused around the spiritual and intellectual development of campers. But he wouldn't have thought



of it that way. Kappy was simply passing on his enthusiasms. He was so successful at teaching because it was a natural part of his life. The campers liked putting on musical dramas or writing for the camp newspaper, but I think it was interacting with my father that they loved.

Somehow, Kappy became interested in whittling, and campers loved this too. From when I was about six, I can remember him sitting on our screened-in front porch, with his jackknife, cutting away. And that is how many people remember him because it was an enthusiasm that lasted the rest of his life. While he always called it “just whittling,” it became far more than that. He became a very sophisticated amateur sculptor. Form – reducing fish, birds, and heads to their elemental shapes – fascinated him.

My father, my brother, and I took long walks together. Those occasions were so special to me. The conversations ranged over many topics, including God. Kappy said if one had doubts about the existence of God, one could live according to the “As if” philosophy of Hans Vainger. One acted “as if” there were a God even if there was no proof of God’s existence. As with campers and Brown students, whenever my father taught us something, it never seemed like teaching. He was passing on important information, but his personality made us want to learn whatever he had to teach. The summer before my junior year in high school, he taught me the fundamentals of German. He taught Jonathan and me to write.



1956

### **MORE INTERESTS**

Kappy’s enthusiasm in so many areas swept us up. To this day, Jonathan and I have that joy in simply finding out about things, a joy which characterized my father. Indeed, my brother became a journalist, a job that paid him for finding out about things.

Kappy became interested in new subjects all the time. An enthusiasm

that became a major activity of my brother's son was rock hunting. He and Kappy purchased some rocks and minerals, but they found many specimens on expeditions to old mine dumps. They traversed New Hampshire and Maine on rock-hunting trips. Their major collection was eventually given to the Roger Williams Park Museum, where it was happily received.

Another of my father's enthusiasms was gardening, which was reinforced by his devotion to literature. Like the Romantic poets, he saw nature as a spiritual aspect of human existence. During World War II, Kappy grew tomatoes and other vegetables as well as currant bushes, of all things, but mostly he grew flowers: spring bulbs, peonies, day lilies, and roses. His specialty became chrysanthemums. Instead of standard species, he planted spider chrysanthemums, giant football corsage chrysanthemums, and exotic two-toned chrysanthemums. His pinching back excess buds to allow the new ones to flourish was a familiar ritual.

My parents wanted to grow their own flowers rather than purchase them from a florist. Kappy weeded his own garden, which never resembled the immaculately groomed gardens maintained by hired help. His garden was a lush expression of his rugged and boundless energy. Indeed, Stella scolded



CAMP WALT WHITMAN

him for spending too many hours weeding and coming into the house sweaty and exhausted.

#### FINAL YEARS AT BROWN

In *Gentlemen Under the Elms*, Jay Barry wrote about my father's concerns during the late 1960s. Kappy did see a widening rift between faculty and students, but he was mournful rather than bitter. Having known education as a collaborative relationship, he grieved that it had become adversarial. In his opinion, students misunderstood and denigrated the university unfairly.

Though my father had turned down an offer from Brandeis University many years earlier, he did have opportunities to teach elsewhere. For a number of years he was a visiting professor at Rhode Island School of Design, and in 1960-61, under the Smith-Mundt bill, which supplemented the Fulbright program, Kappy was a visiting professor of American literature at the University of Saigon. While he lectured in English and French, my mother taught English to Vietnamese women.

There's a wonderful story about my father's superb linguistic ability. He wanted to converse with a distinguished Vietnamese Catholic priest, who was visiting the university. My father didn't speak Vietnamese, or at least not enough to have a philosophical and literary conversation. Because the priest didn't speak English or French, they spoke in the only language they had in common, Latin.

Kappy and Stella actively socialized with faculty colleagues, United States diplomatic personnel, and many Vietnamese who remained in contact with them long after. They also traveled all over Southeast Asia: to Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Thailand, India, and even to Ceylon (as Sri Lanka was then known). My father's diaries show his characteristic enthusiasm for new learning and new places.

The first attempt to overthrow the newly established government of Vietnam took place while my parents were in Saigon. They hid in their cellar while bombs went off. Kappy became vehemently opposed to the American intervention. Using his credibility as a Smith-Mundt fellow, he wrote letters to Congressmen and the State Department to explain his opposition.



## RETIREMENT AND LEGACY

When Kappy retired in 1969, he didn't hang around the campus because he remembered retired professors who couldn't leave. He said that though he loved his years of teaching, it was now time to do something else. Nevertheless, my parents retained a large circle of Brown friends, whom they saw frequently. These included younger colleagues, like the artist Walter Feldman and his wife, Barbara. In 1976, my father was of course thrilled to receive an honorary doctorate to commemorate the golden anniversary of his graduation.

Upon retirement, Kappy returned immediately to writing poetry. There were ironic poems about contemporary issues, such as the Vietnam War or rampant consumerism. There were lyric poems about the earth and the cosmos, and there were melancholy poems about memory, age, and death. I published some of these poems in a portfolio accompanied by my etchings. In 1971, the portfolio was shown at Brown's List Art Center and at the Snyder Gallery in Princeton, New Jersey.

Kappy had assisted Rabbi William Braude with the translation of *Midrash on Psalms*, which was published by Yale in 1959. Early in his retirement, my father was again invited by his friends, Bill and Pearl Braude, to collaborate on translations from medieval Hebrew. My father became fascinated with these writings. Rabbi Braude would do a literal translation, and then my father would find the appropriate English words and idioms to express a fuller meaning. Kappy knew Hebrew fairly well from his years at *cheder*, but his Hebrew became so fluent that he would often fathom out a word's meaning himself as well as finding its expressive English counterpart. The two men, who were almost exact contemporaries, translated the *Pesikta-de-Rab Kahana* (Rab Kahana's Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festival Days) and the *Tana Debe Eliyahu* (The Lore of the School of Elijah). The prestigious Jewish Publication Society of America published both: the first in 1975, the second in 1981. Through these books my father brought two worlds together: his scholarly mind and his Jewish soul.

My father's retirement years were wonderful. Kappy and Stella's relationship was very close, as it was with their children and grandchildren. My parents spent winters on Long Boat Key, near Sarasota, Florida. The Brown alumni office also invited them on several trips so my father could lecture. My



parents' first trip outside the United States had not been until their fifties.

In 1963, Kappy and Stella moved from 248 Morris Avenue to North Providence. The house they had bought with proceeds from *Something Of A Hero* needed repair and restoration. Instead of undertaking that mammoth task, they moved to a ranch-style house. Though they very much enjoyed a modern dwelling, they felt increasingly isolated. So they returned to the East Side. Their last home together was at 63 Dexterdale Road. My father continued to garden, and my mother continued to run the household. Both provided warm hospitality to family and friends.

In the winter of 1983, my father experienced intense back pain while in Florida. His extreme discomfort led to my parents' early return to Providence. Cancer, which had originated in his lungs, had spread to his bones.

Kappy's last lecture was for the commencement seminars at Brown. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was in the audience because John was graduating that year. She remarked to him how much his lecture had moved her. He was excited and pleased to meet her.

During the spring and summer, Kappy was at Rhode Island Hospital and the Miriam. Responding to his special embodiment of humanity, hospital staff vied to take care of him. Interns, residents, and nurses came by to sit at the foot of his bed, relate their problems, and enjoy his wise guidance delivered with banter and humor, despite the fact that he lay dying. Kappy wrote poetry in the hospital. My mother found his last poem about death and kept it with her for the rest of her life.

His funeral was at Temple Emanu-El. Even though he had been retired for 14 years, the sanctuary was filled. Howard Swearer, president of Brown, was one of many speakers.

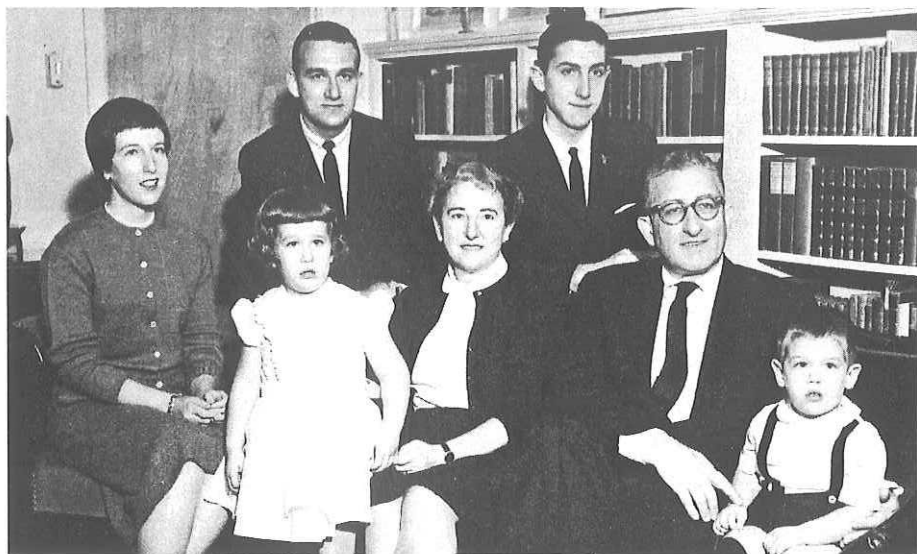
My mother continued to live at 63 Dexterdale Road for several years. We worried whether she would be able to make a life for herself after so many years with my father. But, strong woman that she was, she was determined to do that. Unfortunately, a stroke in 1985 left her with some difficulty in walking.

In 1986, she decided that it would be sensible to move to a retirement community within commuting distance of Princeton, where I lived. Stella became a part of our lives on a daily basis. She made many friends, spent many evenings and all holidays at our house, had the pleasure of knowing her

great-grandchildren, and lived a relatively cheerful existence until her death in 1993.

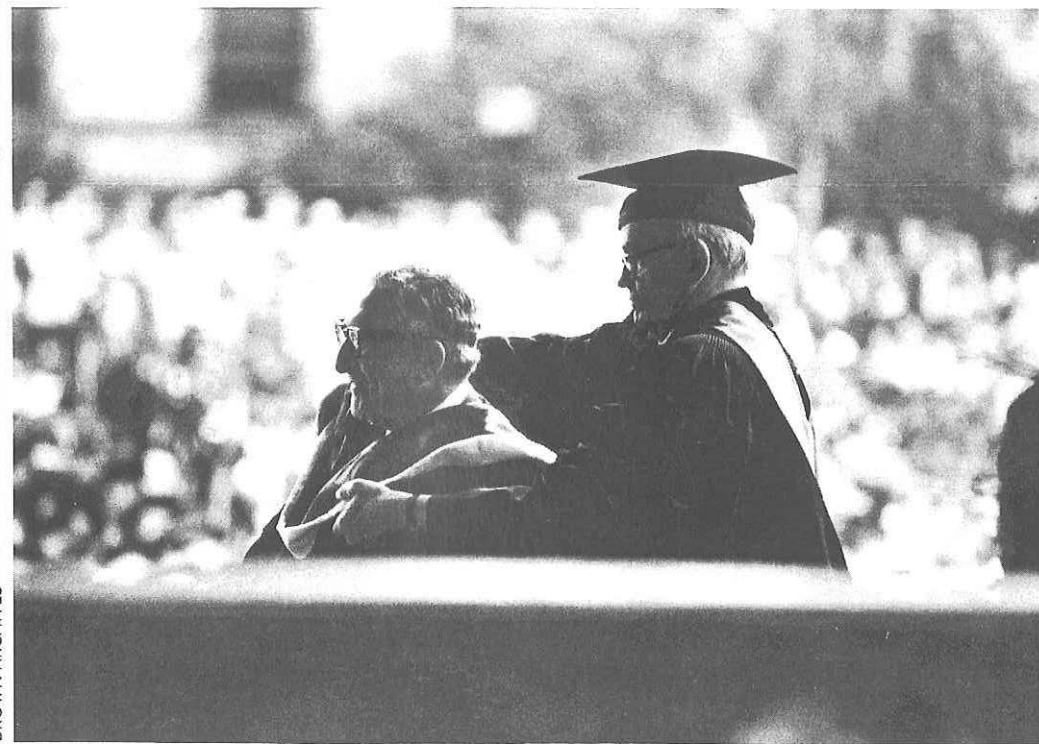
Stella knew that she was dying, but accepted the inevitability with grace and the kind of humor that seems uniquely Jewish. She told us that she had seen Halley's Comet as a little girl and then as an old woman, and it was time to go. Both of my parents are buried in Providence along with many of their family.

My father's intellectual and personal legacy endures in many intangible ways, but there is also physical evidence that gives a sense of his impact at Brown. A bench on the campus bears his name, and a tree was planted in his honor. On the second floor of the faculty club, a photograph is displayed in the Kapstein Room. Most importantly, Brown has an endowed Kapstein Professorship and a Kapstein Scholarship. Grateful students, who became his lifelong friends and admirers and sought to perpetuate his memory, established all of these gifts.



GRANDPARENTS WITH JUDY + DAVID BRODSKY, JONATHAN KAPSTEIN,  
FRANCES + JOHN BRODSKY

Kappy and Stella helped pave the way for Jews to enter the American mainstream. As the first Jewish professor to gain tenure at Brown, others often told my father that he served as a model for them. Not merely a token or shadowy Jew in a Gentile world, he was openly proud of his Jewishness. I believe that my parents moved easily among the Gentile community of the day partly because they never thought of themselves as not belonging. George Santayana's language applies equally to Kappy and Stella. Both were "Something Of A Hero."



HONORARY DOCTORATE, 1976

## THE YOKEN COLLECTION AT BROWN

BY MEL B. YOKEN

Receiving sacks of mail on an almost daily basis, the author is a letter carrier's nightmare. The postmaster in New Bedford has requested a personal zip code for this compulsive yet charming correspondent. In this article Professor Yoken gives some indication of how his collection grew, ultimately swallowing his house. Fortunately, Brown University's Hay Library has come to the rescue of this fervent Francophile. For decades, scholars will try to determine how Yoken brought the world to his corner of New England and what this endeavor meant to all concerned.

I was born and raised in Fall River, where I received an excellent Hebrew and Jewish education at Temple Beth El. Vivid in my mind remains Rabbi Samuel Ruderman, a brilliant, opinionated – and venerated – leader, who dominated the religious scene in the 1950s. I was a Bar Mitzvah and graduated from religious and Hebrew school with a background that would delight even the most observant Jew today. I kept in contact and corresponded with Rabbi Ruderman until his death, and the veneration of my early years turned into quintessential friendship with this outstanding man.

In my lifetime, I have been fortunate enough to correspond with some of the greatest Jewish writers, philosophers, rabbis, artists and politicians of the twentieth century. In addition, I have met – and have become friends with – a good number of them. Many have sent me their books signed and inscribed.

How did I come into contact with such distinguished people? When did this all start? In effect, that's a two-part answer. Firstly, I've always been intellectually inquisitive which, I suppose, is congenital. For example, as a youngster, I was always asking a plethora of questions pertaining to my studies and the world at large. As a teenager, I had a weekly radio show, "Teen Party," on WALE in Fall River. One of the most important segments, for me at least, was when I interviewed a high-school classmate. During my undergraduate years at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I had a regular



interview column in the newspaper. Succinctly, I've always liked asking questions, and still do today.

The second part of the answer simply can be attributed to my voracious appetite for good literature. When I was in college and started perusing French literature, I would read for course work – or leisure and pleasure – some of the celebrated French authors such as Albert Cohen, Max Gallo, Roger Ikor, Eugene Ionesco, Claude Levi-Strauss, André Maurois, and Albert Memmi, who happened to be Jewish. If I didn't understand something or wanted clarification of thought, I wrote the author, which happened to be the case with each of the aforementioned literary figures. For many years I also corresponded with the French statesman, Pierre Mendès-France, and the Nobel laureate and French jurist, René Cassin. I truly never thought about starting a correspondence with some of the greatest Jewish minds of the period, but it happened.

I've been lucky enough to have been invited to – and have attended – many literary events over the years that have honored Jewish writers of countries in addition to France. I've also been lucky enough to have interviewed a good number of these luminaries, many of whom were Jewish. Amongst the thousands of letters are those written to me by Jewish American notables such as Bruno Bettelheim, Edward Dahlberg, David Dubinsky, Louis Finkelstein, Rube Goldberg, Robert Gordis, Chaim Gross, Mordecai Kaplan, Meyer Levin, Sol Liptzin, Bernard Malamud, Jacob Marcus, Leo Rosten, Isaac B. Singer, Isaac Stern, and Louis Untermeyer.



L TO R : DOLA BEN-YEHUDA, MEL YOKEN, CINDY YOKEN,  
SOL LIPTZIN, UNKNOWN, JERUSALEM, 1993

While visiting my good friend, Professor Sol Liptzin in Israel in 1993, he introduced me to his friend, Dola Ben-Yehuda, the daughter of Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the pioneer par excellence of modern Hebrew. Dola and I exchanged letters for several years.

Because correspondents often become good friends, many of the letters are candid, forthright and extremely rich in detail and content. Due to the sheer breadth of epistolary material, many other “household” names are represented in this archive, which thoroughly amazes me every time I view it.

In addition, my collection has numerous letters by preeminent Jewish figures from political, artistic and historical fields such as David Ben-Gurion, Louis Brandeis, Golda Meir and Camille Pissarro, which I purchased 30 to 40 years ago.

I taught French for three years at Newton High School, in Massachusetts, during the early 1960s, then decided to pursue a Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. I received my degree in 1972, six years after I had commenced teaching at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. I have been a French professor for over 40 years and have enjoyed every moment of teaching.

The study of foreign languages is indeed one of the most important – and necessary – disciplines in our curriculum. Not only does the study of languages enhance a student's mind, it increases an awareness of other peoples and their cultures. It can also translate to better job opportunities. I have always been committed to giving each student a positive and direct experience in the classroom and, in that respect, I feel that I have succeeded – and unequivocally. Being passionate about literature, culture and language, I have emphasized these all-important subjects in the classroom along with critical thought and cultural analysis. My letters, written predominantly in both English and French with a smattering of Spanish and German, represent these goals and reflections.

I teach a wide variety of subjects, from beginning French to advanced seminars on Quebec and French literature. This experience has given me an overview of French language and literature and enabled me to read – and teach – hundreds of French and Quebec authors with whom I regularly correspond as friends and colleagues. We all have the collective goal to ensure that these rich and beautiful literatures remain dynamic, and are continued to be taught throughout this century and beyond.

Foreign languages bring a human and humane touch to our social, business and diplomatic world. A person who speaks another language has a much better understanding of the foreigner's culture and mentality. Since I read, write and speak French as well as English, I can enter the mind of one who reads, writes and speaks *la belle et douce langue française*, and have done exactly this through my letters to individuals whose language is French. Language is indeed the vehicle par excellence of expression; therefore, it is imperative to know at least one foreign language thoroughly in today's fast-shrinking world.

Many of my own students have attained a master's degree, and a few have attained a Ph.D. in French. A good number of them are currently teaching French, both in secondary schools and universities. Several of these former students have worked, or are working, in consulates and embassies (Azores, Bosnia, Cape Verde and Quebec, among others). I am additionally proud to note that a good number of my former students have studied in such prestigious universities as Middlebury's École Française in Vermont, and at Université de Montréal, McGill, and Laval in Quebec. Others have studied at the Sorbonne, Université d'Aix, Université de Grenoble, and Université de Pau in France.

Having received my master's degree from Brown, I decided that its world-renowned John Hay Library would be the most suitable repository for my voluminous collection. My letters, books and manuscripts will be preserved together, in the Yoken Room on the third floor. (Indexes and a data base of my collection, so important to collectors and researchers, are currently being developed.) As a professor and scholar, I feel reassured that my unique archives will be displayed and preserved under one roof for future generations.



GARSON KANIN, RUTH GORDON, MEL YOKEN  
AT U MASS DARTMOUTH, MAY, 1973

## MY ALMA MATER: THE CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK BY STANLEY M. ARONSON '43

Dr. Aronson is the second, youthful octogenarian who has written for this issue. The author of several splendid articles in *The Notes*, he is also known for his frequent columns in the *Providence Journal* and the *Jewish Voice & Herald*. Within the world of medicine, his career as a writer exceeds the rubric of "prolific." He has authored more than 400 scientific articles and a dozen books.

Dr. Aronson was an eminent pathologist and medical educator long before his appointment to the Brown faculty in 1970. Two years later he became the founding dean of its medical school, a post he held until 1981. As a University Professor of Medical Science, Dr. Aronson continues to serve as a consultant to, advisor for, and board member of medical societies and health centers throughout Rhode Island and around the country. He has been a visiting professor in Brazil, Britain, Canada, India, Israel, and Mexico.

Some 65 years ago I was privileged to attend a very different kind of college, one that established no criteria for admissions other than objectively measured intellectual ability and placed no financial burdens upon its students other than their ability to pay for transportation and lunch. There were also free books for those who could not afford them. This was The City College of New York, often called "CCNY;" and to a few hundred thousand young, ambitious but impoverished Jewish youngsters in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was the only escape from the sordid tenements of New York. Indeed, CCNY was a cornerstone of my education, which enabled me to pursue a career as a physician and become a medical educator.

In my generation, multitudes of children of working-class, Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were brought into America's robust middle class. Huge numbers of City College alumni became professionals, government officials, and industrial leaders. City College, whose story begins in 1847, was the catalyst that facilitated this amazing and profound social transformation.





AT 17 years

## BACKGROUND

New York City, in 1847, was a major metropolis of about 650,000 souls, this hemisphere's largest city and its burgeoning center for commerce, banking and maritime transportation. It boasted of two centers of higher learning: Columbia College, founded in 1754 as an Episcopalian institution called King's College; and the University of the City of New York, founded in 1831 and based in Washington Square. The latter institution,

later called New York University, offered a radically innovative curriculum, which included the physical and biological sciences. The combined student complement of these two institutions was only 247, certainly inadequate to meet the leadership demands of the greater New York region.

The years 1847 to 1849 were also transformative in Europe. Most of the monarchic nations of the continent underwent revolutions incited in some measure by a French-inspired spirit of secular enlightenment, by a growing and restive mercantile class, and abetted by devastating droughts, famines and cholera epidemics, particularly in Ireland. The turmoil and political instability in Europe resulted in large numbers of Irish, German and Bohemian residents migrating to the New York, where they sought political freedom and the opportunity for better lives.

Virtually all schools in the United States were then under strict denominational control. However, in 1805 a system of free, nonsectarian elementary schools was begun in New York City, the first such program in the nation. Indeed, the concept of universal, tax-supported education was first realized and enunciated in New York. In 1829, for example, Robert D. Owen, one of the leaders of the Working Men's Party, proclaimed: "Next to life and liberty, we consider education the greatest blessing on mankind."

The Public School Society, a private civic group advocating the expansion of a system of free elementary and secondary schools and led by an enterprising merchant named Townsend Harris, urged the New York City Board of Education to create a broader, post-secondary, nonsectarian educational enterprise to meet the commercial needs of an expanding city. (Harris would later become this nation's first ambassador to Japan.)

## BEGINNINGS

On a wintry January evening in 1847, Harris formally recommended to the Board that it establish a free college, a Free Academy, open to all qualified students derived from the city's secondary school system. "The courses of studies to be pursued," declared Harris, "will have more especial reference to the active duties of operative life, rather than those more particularly regarded as necessary for the Pulpit, Bar or the Medical Profession." He stated further: "The laboring class of our fellow citizens may have the opportunity of giving to their children an education that will effectually fit them for the various departments of labor and toil by which they will earn their bread."

Historians have noted that Townsend Harris had offered his stirring and radically innovative manifesto appealing for a free and democratic educational entity for the working masses three months before Marx and Engels issued their *Communist Manifesto* in Europe. Despite intense opposition to Harris' unprecedented proposal of a collegiate education for anyone, it won the endorsement of the Board; and eventually, through a referendum, the support of the public. "History," said one newspaper commentary, "was to prove this day memorable for American higher education."

Many of the city newspapers, however, remained vehemently opposed to the establishment of an egalitarian institution of higher learning. It was contrary, they declared, to the hierarchical nature of humanity; by broadening the base of college education, it necessarily diminished its worth; furthermore, it was an outrageous waste of funds. William Cullen Bryant, editor of *The Evening Post*, stated, however, that "The Academy will give us intelligent mechanics, whose influence among our people, extending throughout the Union, cannot fail to elevate our national character."

The Free Academy was erected on Lexington Avenue between 22nd and 23rd Streets. The building was four stories high, of red brick and with four elegant Gothic towers. It was modeled after a town hall in the Netherlands to remind all of the city's Dutch heritage. Construction of the edifice was completed by New Year's morning, 1849; and on January 15, 1849, 272 eager young men formally applied for admission. Following rigorous written examinations, 143 were duly admitted. And this institution, under a succession of names, has continued to fulfill its declared mission without interruption.

Classes in history, belles lettres, mathematics, and languages occu-

pied six hours each weekday. On Saturdays, the students sat for exercises in drawing, phonography (stenography), and declamation. And within a few years, classes in moral philosophy, chemistry, physics, experimental sciences, political economy, and civil engineering were added to the curriculum. Intramural debates on subjects such as the morality of slavery were an essential element of the undergraduate classroom activities.

An atmosphere of strict discipline characterized the initial years. Indeed, the first few principals (as the presidents of the Academy were known) were West Point graduates who countenanced no permissiveness. Horace Webster, the first principal, declared that he learned to value "work done squarely and unwasted days." Because the college provided no dormitories, the extracurricular campus life was minimal. Other than intramural debates, little attention was paid to sports or to coeducational social ventures.

#### **A NEW NAME AND A WOMEN'S COLLEGE**

After the Civil War, the Free Academy changed its name to The College of the City of New York, and in 1869 a parallel women's college, in the beginning called the Normal School, was established. Its first academic leader was Dr. Thomas Hunter. The school would eventually be called Hunter College of The College of the City of New York. Hunter was the first institution of higher learning, anywhere in the world, to offer a free, unencumbered academic education for women.

The decade following the Civil War also saw the college develop a worthy motto – *Respice, Adspice, Prospice* (look to the past, observe the present, and work for the future) – as well as collegiate colors (lavender and black). City College was now presided over by General Alexander Stewart Webb, a hero of Gettysburg.

Fathers of City College students, during the last few decades of the nineteenth century, were generally American-born, petty shopkeepers, clerks or civil servants. A small minority were Jewish, and most of these were of German origin. By 1890 about one-fourth of the graduates became teachers, a third entered law and the remainder sought careers in medicine, journalism and the clergy. Amongst the graduates in the late nineteenth century were many who achieved lasting fame in their respective disciplines. There were, for example, George Washington Goethals, builder of the Panama Canal;



Joseph Hertz, chief rabbi of the British empire; Dr. Joseph Goldberger, discoverer of the cause and cure of pellagra; Dr. Ira Remsen, internationally known chemist and president of Johns Hopkins University; John Pope, a leading architect who designed the Jefferson Memorial; and Bernard Baruch, international financier and presidential advisor.

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the CCNY student body had increased to 2,807 and the old 23rd Street building was no longer adequate to meet their educational needs. After many disappointments and periodic legislative hostility (many believing that too many people were now benefiting from a higher education), a new site was finally selected. On July 18, 1895, the Board agreed upon a property between Amsterdam Avenue and St. Nicholas Terrace, along West 138th Street, a commanding site 135 feet above the Hudson River and overlooking much of Manhattan. The plans for a new "People's University" called for a group of handsome structures, clustered around a modest quadrangle, in English Collegiate Gothic style with resplendent gargoyles.

#### ENTERING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Under the creative presidency of John Finley, begun in 1904, CCNY grew into an imposing municipal university. The new campus, with splendid buildings honoring such academic leaders as Townsend Harris, Edward Shepard, and Ogden Doremus, was opened in 1908.

Immigrants, principally from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe, had now altered the ethnic profile of the second largest English-speaking city in the world. Close to one million Jews, fleeing imperial Russia and the eastern provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were now struggling to survive in the crowded ghetto called the Lower East Side. And City College became a faithful microcosm, a sensitive weather vane, reflecting these newer ethnicities of the changing city.

To the newly arrived Jews, City College represented an unanticipated blessing for their children; it provided an open door to both economic and social advancement. In the reflections of Professor Duggan, "Few foreigners absorbed democratic views more readily than the Jewish students." And further, "No teacher could have had a finer student body to work with. They were studious, keen and forthright. They did not hesitate to analyze any subject to



its fundamentals regardless of tradition or age."

However, the "increasingly Semitic character" of the City College student body led to some unfortunate happenings. For example, the national headquarters of the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity withdrew its charter to CCNY because "the Hebraic element is greatly in excess."

## GRADUATES

In the early decades of the twentieth century, CCNY graduates assumed an increasing civic role as lawyers, judges and legislators. Such distinguished jurists as Felix Frankfurter and Samuel Rosenman contributed materially to the judicial fabric of this nation.

In later decades, CCNY graduates have populated (some say overpopulated) the ranks of the civil service, particularly in New York state, including a succession of mayors, governors and members of Congress. Alumni have served as district attorneys and counselors of law throughout the Northeast. CCNY graduates have dominated the ranks of high school and college teachers over a similarly wide area.

Still other alumni, such as William Park, Edwin Brill and Jonas Salk, have provided leadership in the fields of public health and medical science. In addition, eleven of those who attended City College during the 1930s have been awarded the Nobel Prize in one or another of the sciences. Four of the laureates in medicine have been women. Rosalyn Sussman Yalow, a daughter of Eastern European immigrants, was responsible for the discovery of radio-immune assay diagnostic systems; Gertrude Elion was another first-generation American whose parents had fled pogroms. Elion's research in nucleic acid metabolism has led to the discovery of such chemotherapeutic agents as azathioprine.

Not only in the sciences did City College alumni excel. Some leading writers included Upton Sinclair, Bernard Malamud and Paddy Chayefsky. Ira Gershwin and Yip Harburg become immortal lyricists; Eli Wallach, Zero Mostel, and Edward G. Robinson became stars on stage and on the silver screen.

## THE 1930S

A demographic survey of the entering classes of 1938 and 1939 showed that

most City College students were now first-generation Americans. (Only 17% of their fathers were born in this country.) Further, over 80% of students declared themselves Jews. The number is likely much higher because many other students declined to declare any religion.

The no-frills educational ambience (if it can even be called an ambience) that characterized the City College of the 1860s prevailed for much of the twentieth century. This was especially true during the Depression. The institution was a place of hard work with neither opportunity nor encouragement for recreational and social pursuits, which enriched collegiate life on so many residential campuses.

Saturday night dances were held occasionally in two converted brownstone dwellings on St. Nicholas Avenue. These were gatherings with the sophistication of a junior high prom. The young Hunter College women who were invited often came en masse, but it was tacitly understood that each one was to be escorted to her home at the completion of the dance, shortly before midnight. Male students dreaded the possibility that they might be required to escort Hunter College students to some forsaken corner of the Bronx and then take a few more hours to return to their homes in Brooklyn or Queens. Drinking, beyond coffee or soda, was unheard of; and the word "drugs" signified little more than some needed medication.

City College possessed no dormitories; nor did many of its students live within walking distance. In truth, it was a university tethered to Manhattan's subway system. And to understand the special alchemy that separated CCNY from other centers of higher education, one begins by observing the daily routine of the typical student. Every morning between eight and nine, some ten thousand poorly dressed students poured forth from the IRT subway on upper Broadway or from Amsterdam Avenue buses to descend upon a relatively compact campus occupying about four city blocks. The inner quadrangle, dense with students, consisted of a flagpole, a few heroic statues, a large bronze bust of Abraham Lincoln, a scattering of benches and a modicum of poorly tended lawn.

The typical student clutched a large briefcase stuffed with his textbooks, notes, and lunch. The briefcase substituted for a locker, an amenity not yet adopted by the college. There were neither parking lots nor garages since none of the students possessed vehicles (and indeed, there were few faculty-

owned cars).

Undergraduate classes commenced at nine (engineering and certain chemistry laboratory classes an hour earlier). Skipping or cutting classes was an unheard of eccentricity, and if a student were absent from a class it was assumed that he was gravely ill. The classrooms themselves were little different than the city's high school rooms, except that the seats were not fixed to the floor and the writing surfaces of the old chairs were frequently carved with the initials of former students. The college corridors were drab, poorly illuminated and gothic in spirit. There were no adornments except for an occasional bulletin board for the listing of student grades.

The college administration was singularly free of such student resources as personal counseling, curricular planning, financial aid, job recruitment or career advisement. There was an open hostility between the senior administration and the socially inept but politically sophisticated student body. President Frederick Robinson, who habitually carried a furled umbrella, would often strike students who might obstruct the path to his office. *The New York Times*, in the mid-1930s, had even published photographs of Robinson's fury when confronting picketing students whom he regarded as rabble.

## POLITICS

And if neither sports, beer drinking, nor coeducational dalliances provided diversion for City College students, there were politics. Debating, picketing, and outdoor partisan rallies were the extracurricular lifeblood of students throughout the 1930s. The student body was aggressively attentive to the news, and newspapers were avidly read. Far from a tranquil academic enclave, City College was a highly politicized arena.

If there was one interval during the school day, which was unique to the college, it was the student lunch hour. At noon, thousands of students, clutching their brown bags, descended upon the cavernous basement in Shepard Hall. This hallowed territory was called "The Alcoves" because the enormous room was lined with U-shaped alcoves each seating about a score of students surrounding an elongated oaken table. By tradition, each alcove was assigned to one or another ethnic or political persuasion. There were alcoves for Zionists, Democrats, Socialists, Communists, the Dante Alighieri

Society (for students of Italian descent), Republicans (a sparsely habited alcove), the Frederick Douglass Society (for African-Americans), and a dozen or more spaces representing yet other ideologies, religions, creeds, cults or convictions.

Lunch was rapidly consumed so that two sought-after activities might then commence. First were the intense debates, usually scheduled during the previous lunch hour, between two or more of the alcoves. Subjects were typically political; for example, the Spanish Civil War or the spread of fascism in Europe were subjects for intense inquiry. And the second lunchtime preoccupation was ping-pong. Each alcove table was cleared so that ping-pong tourneys might then take place.

#### THE FACULTY

Classes were uncompromising and demanding, taught by a competent but unfriendly faculty. There was little fraternization by the American-born professors, who probably longed for a more conventional, more assimilated, more socially mature student body.

Many, perhaps most, of the students were bilingual. They spoke English on campus and Yiddish at home. And the Yiddish persisted in German-language classes, much to the dismay and fury of the faculty. However, while there was a palpable Yiddish subtext to student life at City College, there was little strictly religious activity on campus. The High Holy Days were observed but little more. And there were no chapels, Jewish or otherwise. Nor were there any synagogues within walking distance of the college.

Grades were determined solely by written examinations with no extenuating circumstances tolerated. A C-minus average, or poorer, for two consecutive semesters led to automatic expulsion.

The faculty, mainly, was indifferent to (or at least undemonstrative about) the swirl of political events in Europe or elsewhere. However, some younger professors, especially in the English and chemistry departments, were more vocal in their views. Legislators in Albany, ever vigilant to "the corrupting influence of leftist thinkers," formed a joint legislative committee (the Rapp-Coudert Committee) with investigative powers. And in 1940, this committee conducted hearings on campus to identify Communists and fellow travelers in the City College faculty. These were perilous times, with the



careers of many scholars destroyed or interrupted.

During this interval, when unconventional thinking was widely viewed with apprehension, an outstanding British scholar, philosopher and mathematician, Sir Bertrand Russell, was invited to City College to give a course on sentential calculus, his specialty. Along with many students, I immediately enrolled for the course only to learn later that a person from Brooklyn had brought legal action against the Board of Higher Education (which controlled CCNY) to forbid Russell from conducting classes lest his permissive philosophy contaminate the thinking of the vulnerable City College students. Russell, tragically, never taught his class on mathematical logic to City College undergraduates.

#### GRATITUDE AND PRIDE

Memories fade or become distorted after an interval of sixty-six years. Therefore, after four painful years at City College, what remembrances are most vivid, most authentic for a typical graduate such as me?

Foremost, a sense of enduring gratitude, knowing that were it not for City College I would be obliged to forego a college education for want of tuition moneys. The average City College student such as me would have experienced a sense of pride in having been blessed with a highly disciplined, comprehensive education designed and to some measure self-assembled because there were no mentors, guides or faculty to function as advisors.

And what else? I also experienced a sense of collective pride in knowing that I was a small part of a horde of eager scholars, rough-hewn in many ways, who, within a single generation, elevated the immigrant Jewish population and moved it into the mainstream of American life. Indeed, City College, sometimes called the "secular Yeshiva of the West" or "Harvard on the Hudson," was an unparalleled blessing, a *mitzvah*.

Has CCNY had any tangible influence upon Rhode Island, where a comparable institution did not exist? There are now about 70 City College graduates living in the state, among them a handful of physicians and dentists. And at Brown, have CCNY graduates played some meaningful role? Suffice it to say that during the late 1970s, the Dean of the College, the Dean of the Faculty, and the Dean of the Medical School all held degrees from The City College of New York.

## SHERLOCK HOLMES, JEWS AND RHODE ISLAND

BY ALBERT SILVERSTEIN

The author was born in Graz, Austria, in 1935. Four years later, as part of the *Kindertransport* program, he was sent to England, where he was reunited with his parents. In 1940, the family moved to the United States. Professor Silverstein was reared in Florida, and was educated at Cornell, Yale, and the University of California at Berkeley.

An experimental psychologist with particular interests in learning, memory, and motivation, he has taught at the University of Rhode Island since 1964. He was a founding board member of URI's Hillel Foundation and has been deeply involved with the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island for four decades.

In addition to a good mystery, Professor Silverstein enjoys classical music and tennis. Indeed, his article is both measured and playful. As teenagers are fond of saying, "Get a clue!"

### I

A worldwide fellowship is bound together by a fascination with and admiration of Sherlock Holmes. Almost anywhere, one can encounter a fellow Sherlockian eager to discuss the adventures of literature's most famous detective. While much of this fellowship is informal and casual, there are also a number of Sherlock Holmes societies dedicated to celebrating, analyzing and debating the details of Holmes's career in a more organized and scholarly manner, but always in an atmosphere of friendship and good humor. There are 189 such societies in the United States alone and another 88 in 22 countries, including the venerable and erudite Sherlock Holmes Society of Jerusalem. (Contact Moshe Nalick, Kiryat Telshe-Stone 114/3, D.N. Harei Yehuda, Israel.)

The oldest of the Holmes societies is the Baker Street Irregulars (BSI), named after the London street urchins whom Holmes employed to obtain information about the criminal activities in which he was interested. "They are my irregular forces, Watson." "They go everywhere, see everything, overhear every one," said Holmes. The Irregulars first met in New York in 1934,

making them one year senior to London's Sherlock Holmes Society. It never seemed to disturb the Irregulars that they were named after a group of children described by Watson as "a band of scoundrels, beggars, and dirty ragged little street Arabs with high voices and bare feet." By tradition, other Holmes societies (excepting the London group) call themselves scion societies, acknowledging the Irregulars' primacy.

Both the Irregulars and the London society have included many illustrious members from all walks of life (FDR and Harry Truman were members of the BSI), and have published scholarly journals for many years.

In the New York society's *Baker Street Journal*, issues of concern to Sherlockian devotees are addressed and debated. Membership in these groups, and some of the other more venerable societies, is by invitation and depends upon relevant accomplishments in the Holmesian domain, but most scion societies are happy to include anyone who wishes to join.

Being a psychologist, I know what is on the reader's mind at this point: are there any Rhode Island scion societies? Indeed, yes, there have been two. The first was The Dancing Men of Providence (named after the cipher story of the same name), and it consisted of a group of eight erudite men, a number of them Brown University professors, who distinguished themselves with several learned essays published in the *Baker Street Journal*. They first met on February 6, 1946 in the Bohemian surroundings of the Providence Art Club, founded appropriately in 1880. (The first Holmes story was published in 1881). That evening a "221 B" sign hung on the door-knocker of the Art Club to represent Holmes and Watson's address on Baker Street, and a mysterious cipher was placed on the sundial, just as it was in the story. The Dancing Men, recognized as a scion society with the encouragement of the Baker Street Irregulars, flourished until 1957, when their founding leader, Dr. Roland Hammond, died.

In 1971 another group formed around the University of Rhode Island.



MR. HOLMES DISGUISED AS  
PROF. SILVERSTEIN



Eventually known as The Cornish Horrors, it flourishes to this day. I have the honor to be one of the founders of this group and am very proud of our 33 years of continuous activity. Two other founders, Jan Prager and Jack Miller, were Jews, and our membership has remained about half Jewish. Several members of The Dancing Men joined our group, which is coed and has an informal and whimsical ambience. And we welcome any new participants who admire Holmes. While ours is a predominantly Rhode Island group, we draw participants from across the Northeast, from New Jersey to New Hampshire. They are attracted by our reputation for rollicking fun.

For many years our meetings were held at the Whispering Pines Lodge at URI's Alton Jones campus, a wonderfully rustic retreat. Our most recent assemblies have returned full circle to the Providence Art Club. We have also held our revels in other exciting venues, such as Newport's "Beechwood," Gillette Castle overlooking the Connecticut River, and a specially commandeered steam train of the Connecticut Valley Railroad.

## II

As a boy I read and loved all the Holmes tales and saw the Basil Rathbone-Nigel Bruce films based on them. To this day I find the narrative of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* one of the most exciting mystery/suspense novels of all time, with its sinister, brooding setting, its complex characters, its hint of the supernatural and its surprising plot twists. Many of the shorter tales are also wonderful structures: especially "The Five Orange Pips," "The Speckled Band," "The Sign of Four," and "The Devil's Foot" (nicknamed by Holmes "The Cornish Horror"). But my deepest attachment was to Holmes himself, for I found him to be one of the most appealing and mysterious characters in all of literature.

My first inkling that there was an exotic and arcane world of Sherlock Holmes societies and their occult doings came when I was a sophomore in college. I shared an apartment with a strange little fellow who seemed to know everything about all things esoteric. He also played the violin in his dressing gown while pacing up and back in our sitting room. He brought to my attention the fact that many great scholars in a variety of disciplines (including several Nobel laureates) had taken it upon themselves to investigate and clarify obscure points in the Sherlock Holmes canon, as if this were a serious and



legitimate intellectual enterprise.

I was immediately hooked, for I could imagine no finer pursuit in life than to spend my time delving into the byways and unresolved controversies surrounding the legend of the great man of Baker Street. But my college life afforded me few opportunities to investigate such doings, and there was not at the time a scion society at Cornell. But once in graduate school, to clear my brain of professional studies, I would dredge up books of essays written by these scholars on Sherlockian topics and peruse issues of the *Baker Street Journal*, which found their way to the shelves of the Berkeley Public Library. My enchantment with this seriously whimsical scholarship grew with each passing month.

"The writings about the writings," as this form of scholarship is referred to by insiders, began as early as 1912 with Ronald Knox's "Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes," later reprinted in his book *Essays in Satire*. In that essay, Knox satirically applied to the Sherlock Holmes saga the new methods of textual scholarship that had invaded biblical exegesis. Specifically, Knox compared various outrageous theories about Holmes and Watson and reached absurd conclusions about them based on internal analyses of the texts. In one of the wittiest analyses, which concerned Holmes's putative theory of life after death, Knox contrasted the approaches of French and German schools. He used as evidence such items as where Holmes kept his correspondence, tobacco, and other possessions, and what religious holidays he failed to observe. Knox concluded that Holmes's true theory was like that of the Buddhists' view of reincarnation.

Many others have followed in Knox's footsteps; some have been very talented and not a few highly amusing. For example, Rex Stout, the author of the Nero Wolfe stories, argued persuasively that Watson was a woman (because no male friend would have nagged Holmes the way Watson did in Victorian London).

In the main, Holmes scholarship falls into four general categories. The first is fleshing out the details of the lives and circumstances of Holmes, Watson, and the major protagonists in their adventures. For example, how much money did Holmes earn and spend during various phases of his career? Where did he go to school and college? What sort of music did he play on his violin?

The second category of Holmes scholarship is elaborating on the characters' beliefs, attitudes and accomplishments. For example, what religious beliefs, scientific theories and political and social attitudes did Holmes and Watson hold? What is the location of Holmes' published writings?

The third category of Holmes scholarship attempts to resolve incongruities and omissions in the Holmes canon about dates, times, places, personae and factual events. For example, why did Holmes disappear and pretend to have died at the Reichenbach Falls when he knew that the villainous Colonel Moran was aware that Holmes had survived? How many times did Watson marry? How could Holmes remain so fit when he took so little exercise? Who was the enigmatic "Lowenstein of Prague?"

The fourth and final category of Holmes scholarship seeks to clarify many of the bizarre-sounding cases that Watson mentions only in passing. These include, for example, "The Giant Rat of Sumatra," "The Politician," "The Lighthouse," and "The Trained Cormorant." Then there is my favorite, "The Case of Isadora Persano," which refers to "the well known journalist and duelist, found stark staring mad with a matchbox in front of him, which contained a remarkable worm, said to be unknown to science."

Shortly after I took a faculty position at the University of Rhode Island, I noticed that in the first published story about him, Holmes had expounded a theory of forgetting. This theory, which was remarkably similar to an explanation currently held by experimental psychologists, was based upon interference from competing information. Moreover, Holmes told Watson about it over a decade before such a theory appeared in the psychological literature. I saw in this my chance to join the ranks of the elect and submitted a paper to the *Baker Street Journal*. It was published in 1964, and the following January I was invited to attend the annual festivities of the Baker Street Irregulars in honor of Holmes' birthday. In the intervening years I have missed attending this celebration only three times. The pawky fun I have experienced there is beyond description.

Like all cult groups, the BSI has its rituals, conventions and shared beliefs. Key among them is the idea that Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street and Dr. John H. Watson, "late of the Indian Army," are real people. It was the latter, not Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote most of the stories because they were entitled "reminiscences." Doyle, of course, was well acquainted with

Watson but scarcely knew Holmes. Thus, Doyle's role is respectfully referred to as that of "literary agent" and sometimes "editor" of the stories. Though admirers of Watson's literary craftsmanship, we know that as a biographer he was the despair of typesetters. He seldom checked proofs against his original manuscripts; his handwriting was hopeless; and his memory for details often had serious gaps. Moreover, a Victorian discretion often made it seem necessary for him to veil a name, place date or exact nature of an event. But it is precisely these failings of Watson's which have given Holmesians so many opportunities for the inexhaustible game of weaving consistent accounts out of inconsistent materials.

The Irregulars' rituals include special toasts to important persons within the canon, the reading of the "Musgrave Ritual," (from the story of that name), the singing of songs composed for our celebrations, and arcane phrases and whimsical jests. Today there are some 300 Irregulars who have been invested with their Victorian shilling (the wage paid by Holmes to his street urchins), and some 175 attend the annual banquet. This is a far cry from the early days of the society, when a handful of literary types at the old *Saturday Review of Literature*, led by Christopher Morley, formed the group to "keep green the memory of the master." Many of the old timers yearn for those simpler, less formal days. Still, to quote Morley in 1946, "There have been, of course, occasional hard-minded observers who thought it silly for a group of grown men to dally so intently over a literature of entertainment for which even its author (sic!) had only moderate regard."

### III

Yet, there is ample evidence that the reading world at large regards the Holmes saga as more worthwhile than foolish. Having been translated into 56 languages, the stories have been read by more people than any other work in the English language save the King James Bible. What is more, the spin-off from this saga has been enormous. At latest count, there have been 168 motion picture and television films and 23 major plays. Thousands of avid admirers have written the kind of scholarly and analytic articles to which I have referred. In the words of Edgar Smith, the founder of the *Baker Street Journal*, "Never has so much been written by so many for so few." Clearly the saga of Sherlock Holmes, like some other great literary narratives, has out-



grown and overwhelmed the intentions of its putative author.

This leads us directly to the question: what is it about the Sherlock Holmes saga that charges it with such universally irresistible appeal? For obvious reasons, more Holmesian inquiry has been directed to this question than to any other. I always began "The Legend and Methods of Sherlock Holmes," my interdisciplinary honors seminar at the University of Rhode Island, with a discussion of it. Naturally, no definitive answer has been forthcoming; each commentary depends upon a particular theory of the functions of literature. Yet a careful examination of the stories does allow us to describe some of the most distinctive features of the saga and to reflect upon the impact that these features can produce on a reader. Taken this way, the 56 short stories and four novels comprise an epic narrative of the deeds of a truly heroic figure.

Indeed, I would argue that Holmes is the last true Hero of Western literature: larger than life, which he grandly bestrides; greater than the law, which he sometimes shapes to his own moral purposes; and fallible only in his own eyes, which perceive the nature of existence from an appropriately tragic pinnacle. Did Doyle set out to produce such a heroic epic? Very likely not, according to his own account. But the series of Doyle's puzzle stories emerged that way nonetheless.

Today, we are unable to create heroes. We are too cynical: too painfully aware of the relative forces of culture and circumstance that form human personalities. We are too overwhelmed by the necessary incompleteness of all descriptive narrative to create for a character a convincing set of characteristics that is both modern and unequivocally heroic. Above all, it is the scientific attitude toward explanation that renders the traditions and conventions of heroism implausible for us. If all events, even human action, can be accurately described and scientifically explained, then on what grounds can we sustain an acceptance of someone who is, though tainted by human flaws, able to stand apart from and above the run of ordinary existence? But most of us wish we could. We long to believe in the Hero's detached commitment to Humanity and in the meaning that the Hero's action brings to life.

Ironically, it is science itself that provides Holmes with the weapons for his heroism. The hallmark of Holmes's heroism is not valor nor loyalty nor faithfulness; it is reasoning. He achieves the Enlightenment ideal of demon-



strating through the principles of scientific reasoning that we can make sense of the confusion we face; we can break through the uncertainty which life perpetually presents to us.

Repeatedly, Holmes shows that if we can overcome the sloth of habitual thought and the tyranny of accepting conventional authority or common hearsay, we can use our own observations and our empirical imaginations to formulate and test reasonable hypotheses. Holmes is able to read the signs that events have left upon the world, and he gives us hope that we can achieve similar successes.

So Holmes is a much more recognizable hero for us than Ulysses or King David or King Arthur or Roland or El Cid. Even his tragic flaws, his pride and his disdain for emotion, are scientific in their origin. So we can be convinced that the forces he leads will ultimately triumph over evil, without requiring miracles.

Another reason that the canon is able to make Holmes so convincingly heroic is that Dr. Watson is so ideally suited to the task of displaying his friend as "the best and the wisest man I have ever known." We easily recognize through Watson the best in each of us. He is loyal, intelligent, sensitive, charming, steadfast, modest, courageous, gentle, wildly romantic, and admirably resourceful. So, when Watson reveals Holmes's amazing talents as something like special gifts, we can readily believe them.

Our susceptibility to this belief is both the measure of Watson's skill as a craftsman with words and his stature as a man. Watson not only fleshes out the nature of Holmes in successive adventures, but he also depicts the atmospheres and environments through which Holmes moves and conspires to make up his heroic odyssey.

Watson's blend and balance are just right for sustaining our conviction. The commonplace is relieved by the bizarre. The terrifying is succeeded by the comforting. So much in the stories, which seems at first demonic, turns out to be explicable, even (dare I say?) "elementary." We are spellbound by the power of Watson's account of the unknown menace lurking on the Dartmoor or in London's dense yellow fogs and equally captured by the depiction of safety in the cozy rooms at 221B Baker Street. The terrain over which Holmes extends the umbrella of his protection is largely a snug and familiar England, but the power he wields is infused with the majesty of exotic lands. Again and

again we receive hints that he has dealt with problems of international significance in almost all of Europe, in Tibet, in Persia, in Sumatra, and in America. Once, Watson wrote that Holmes had drowned and was crushed in the seething chasm at the Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland. But, after several years' hiatus, Watson gave his readers the gift of one of the most dramatic reappearances to be found in literature. It turned out that Holmes had not perished at Reichenbach after all; after a three-year absence Holmes revealed himself to be still among the living.

Returns are among the most precious of literary episodes, and every variant of them contains a sure formula for eliciting delight (much the way that one's ear is delighted by the recapitulation of the main theme in a sonata movement). We can scarcely believe what is about to happen, that the return will really hold. When it does and the tension is released, there is the sinful secret that we share briefly with the protagonists, from which the rest of the world is excluded. Finally there is the profound contentment of being able to start over again: debts cancelled, iniquities pardoned, warfare accomplished.

Watson's description of Holmes's return in the "Adventure of the Empty House" is a masterly blending of these elements. Woven into the fabric of a further adventure, it climaxes with the capture of the murderous Colonel Sebastian Moran ("the second most dangerous man in London").

But, more to the current point: Holmes's return following the prior certainty of his demise forms the basis for a resurrection myth. This myth symbolizes the indestructibility of the Hero. Whether primitive or sophisticated, all societies celebrate at least one such resurrection myth, a formulaic episode (partly symbolic, partly historic) that serves to justify the belief that life is redeemable and that the universe is orderly. Holmes's resurrection, unlike that of most myths that are tinged with religion, including that of Jesus of Nazareth, is achieved in an entirely naturalistic manner. But its power is no less great for its realistic basis. It opens up for us the vision of renewal of hope, the ability to make oneself clean and powerful anew and the promise that good friends will always be reunited.

For Watson, this renewal of hope was especially important. In 1894, he was still grieving for his deceased wife and dearest friend and living without the moral courage that gives life a purpose. He was merely serving his time and doing his duty as a doctor with a stiff upper lip. What Holmes's

resurrection provided Watson is what it has provided for countless readers: it brought the electricity of life back into their veins and confirmed their Hero's stature.

#### IV

The reader may well wonder: which characters or events within the Holmes canon refer to Jews and things Jewish? The answer is: hardly any at all. In nearly 2,000 pages of text, there are only five times that any Judaic citation can be found, and none of these has any substantial thematic relevance. This paucity may be significant. Let us consider the instances.

Historically, the first reference to Jews occurs in "A Study in Scarlet," the very first published Holmes tale. In the early days of Holmes and Watson sharing lodgings at Baker Street, Holmes receives a number of nondescript visitors related to his profession (as yet unrevealed to Watson). One of them, a "sallow, rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow" who called several times turned out to be Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard. Another was a "gray-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew peddler, who appeared to me to be much excited."

The second reference to Jews occurs in a "A Scandal in Bohemia." Watson looks up the heroine of the story, Irene Adler, in Holmes's indexed file and finds her biography "in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes."

The third reference occurs in the "Stock Broker's Clerk." The central figure of that story, a less than endearing, sharp-tongued Cockney youth, describes the man who came to offer him strange employment. He is a "middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man with a touch of the sheeny about his nose."

The fourth reference to Jews occurs during a break in the action of "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box." When discussing violins with Watson, Holmes remarks "with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas (sic!), at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings."

The final reference to Jews is found in a case called "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place." Sir Robert Norberton, the villain of the piece, asserts, "I am deeply in the hands of the Jews." Norberton means by this that he is deeply in debt to moneylenders. His crude way of expressing it is con-



sistent with his generally violent and unsavory character.

Why is Doyle so sparing with Jews? Though Doyle was a spiritual man and a spiritualist, he did not often find a place for religion in his narratives. The one exception is Mormonism, whose followers are described in "A Study in Scarlet" as sources of evil. But Doyle treats them more as a secret terrorist society than as a religious group; his abhorrence of all secret societies is a recurrent theme in the Holmes stories.

Nevertheless, Doyle does not avoid mentioning religious (or ethnic) issues. In "The Adventure of the Golden Pince Nez," for example, Professor Coram, a central figure in the case, is a scholar of Coptic Christianity. He is writing a work that he claims will undercut the basis for established religion. And Holmes himself is studying a medieval, monastic palimpsest when he is called into the case. The scarcity of references to Jews in a series of crime stories probably demonstrates Doyle's fundamental opposition to bigotry.

Keep in mind that references to Jews in popular novels of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras are generally unflattering. Our brethren are portrayed as untrustworthy, unsavory, foreign, self-promoting and inclined to dishonesty even by generally liberal-minded authors. This reflects the widespread salon anti-Semitism of the times. Doyle avoids this. Though there are frequent references to debt and moneylenders in his stories, they are generally not about Jews. Even Sam Brewer, whom Norberton horsewhipped nearly to death in "Shoscombe Old Place," was probably not Jewish. (His address on Curzon Street makes it unlikely.)

Watson's use of terms like "Jew broker" or "Jew peddler" does not signal anti-Semitism. The polite use of "Jewish" was not yet in vogue. Such terms are no different than calling someone a Greek broker or an Italian peddler. More likely, given the precarious situation of most Jews in Victorian society and the harsh perceptions that abounded, Doyle was determined to avoid playing into these stereotypes. He succeeded in his aim by limiting his reference to Jews in a series of adventures highlighting crime and malfeasance.

Despite a scarcity of references to Jews in Doyle's other works, there may also be fuller expressions of sympathy for our people. The best example may be found in the following excerpt from the fifteenth chapter of his fantasy novel, *The Lost World*. The narrator describes the conquest of "ape-folk," who



become "a servile race under the eyes of their masters." "It was a rude, raw, primeval version of the Jews in Babylon or the Israelites in Egypt," he explained. "At night," the narrator continues, "we could hear from amid the trees the long-drawn cry as some primitive Ezekiel mourned for fallen greatness and recalled the departed glories of Ape Town."

All of Doyle's biographers agree that he was an extraordinarily fair-minded and determined man. Throughout his life he championed a number of causes and victims of persecution. Two of the more famous instances were the Edalji and Slater cases. George Edalji, a black, Parsee vicar of a rural parish, was falsely convicted of mutilating horses and cattle. Doyle finally managed to have him pardoned.

The Oscar Slater case was a tougher nut for Doyle to crack. On December 21, 1908, a wealthy, elderly lady, Marion Gilchrist, was brutally murdered. The only object missing from her Glasgow home was a diamond brooch. When the police discovered that a pawn ticket for a diamond brooch had been offered for sale by a German-born Jew, Oscar Slater, they issued a warrant for his arrest. On December 25, Slater and his mistress departed for Liverpool; they sailed to New York the next day. The police cabled New York to arrest Slater on arrival. It turned out that the brooch Slater had pawned was not Gilchrist's and that he had arranged for the trip to New York weeks before the murder.

The remainder of the police case against Slater was equally unconvincing, but prejudice against him was boiling. Demonized not only for his Jewish and foreign background, he was reviled because of his unsavory activities in running gambling clubs. Even one of the senior officers investigating the case, Detective Lieutenant John Trench, had serious doubts about Slater's guilt, but was forbidden to speak publicly. Against the advice of his American lawyer, Slater waived extradition proceedings and returned to Scotland for trial on May 3, 1909. In Scotland, where majority verdicts are the rule, Slater's jury convicted him by a vote of nine to six. He was scheduled to be hanged on May 27, but on May 26 the Secretary for Scotland, Lord Pentland, responded to 20,000 petitioners for a reprieve. He commuted Slater's sentence to life imprisonment.

Doyle, who was approached by Slater's lawyers, saw through the tissue of inconsistencies in the prosecution's case. The writer's letters and arguments

heavily influenced public opinion. After all, Sherlock Holmes could not be wrong! In August of 1912, Doyle published his booklet, *The Case of Oscar Slater*. Lieutenant Trench took his worries to a Glasgow solicitor in March 1914, and the case for suppression of evidence in favor of Slater was heard in a secret inquiry. The verdict was not altered, however. The persecution of Trench in public life was the only palpable outcome.

But the new evidence resulted in the Slater case becoming a veritable crusade for Doyle. In 1928, after sixteen years, he finally succeeded in obtaining Slater's release. Doyle also contributed to the latter's compensation fund. "Imagine," Doyle was heard to say, "nineteen years of imprisonment mainly because he was a German Jew."

ANNUAL MEETING OF BAKER STREET IRREGULARS, NEW YORK CITY,  
JANUARY, 1981. ARROW POINTS TO PROFESSOR SILVERSTEIN.



## V

As a Sherlockian, a founder of The Cornish Horrors, and a Jewish resident of the Ocean State for over forty years, I am persuaded that I must now more specifically inquire into the curious connection of Sherlock Holmes to the Jews of Rhode Island. This connection is strangely reminiscent of "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time," recorded by Watson in the adventure called "Silver Blaze." Holmes was investigating the mysterious disappearance of the champion race horse of that name and the killing of its trainer just outside the stable. After Holmes examines the crime scene and comments on it, Inspector Gregory asks him if there is anything else worth





calling attention to. Holmes then recommends considering "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." When Gregory objects that the dog did nothing in the night-time, Holmes answers, "That was the curious incident."

The point of Holmes's bon mot is that sometimes an absence of an observable event has special significance. In the case of the "Silver Blaze," because we know that there was activity at the stable which resulted in the horse's disappearance and the trainer's death, the dog's doing nothing means that this activity was the work of someone familiar to it. The absence of any observable connection between Holmes and Rhode Island's Jewish community may also have special significance.

Let us consider what may be the relevant facts for that significance. First, in the last reported case of Holmes's career ("His Last Bow") he was called out of retirement by His Majesty's Secret Service on the eve of the First World War to thwart the designs of a dangerous German espionage ring. Approaching his sixtieth birthday, Holmes established a false identity as an Irish American named "Altamont" and insinuated himself into the ring of agents run by the notorious Von Bork. Having produced a wealth of disinformation for the Germans, Holmes succeeded in trapping the entire ring. Previously, Holmes had to establish his anti-British credentials by operating within a network of secret Irish societies in America. He was brilliant in Chicago, established his name in Buffalo, and then moved on to other north-eastern cities with large Irish American populations. Surely the substantial Irish communities in Boston and Providence attracted Altamont's attention. Holmes must have spent considerable time in both cities.

Second, it is well known that Rhode Island's leading newspaper at the time, the *Providence Journal*, under the editorship of the Australian-born and English-educated John Rathom, was the most staunchly pro-British paper in America. Indeed, in her splendid analysis of America's entry into World War I, Barbara Tuchman asserts that the *Journal* was the "mouthpiece" for Captain Guy Gaunt, who headed British Naval Intelligence in the United States. Beginning in 1915, the *Journal* was the first paper that informed American readers about German espionage agents operating on our shores.

The crowning blow against pro-German and pacifist sentiment in the United States came from the disclosure of the notorious Zimmermann telegram. Zimmermann, the German foreign minister, using American diplo-



matic cable lines, urged his agents in Mexico to offer the Mexicans a profitable alliance if they would attack the United States from the south. Having broken the German codes, British Intelligence passed the information to the United States. There can be no doubt that American public opinion quickly shifted from neutrality in March of 1917, when our newspapers, led by the *Journal*, uncovered this outrage. So how did the *Providence* paper get its exclusive information?

Third, American Jewish opinion during the war was strongly pro-British, especially among Zionists in the Northeast. In 1917, the Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, had galvanized American Jews, even those with German backgrounds. Moreover, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, one of the most revered figures in world Jewry, was known to be an influential scientific advisor to the British government in its war efforts. Weizmann could have easily visited Providence, a beehive of Zionist activity, during several trips to New England. Though the *Providence Journal* had no significant Jewish influence on its editorial board, many of its principal advertisers were Jewish, as were some of its reporters.

With this factual background in mind, the following tantalizing hypothesis emerges. It seems implausible after Von Bork's capture that His Majesty's government would have allowed Sherlock Holmes to resubmerge himself in retirement. The credibility and connections that "Altamount" had established in the United States were simply too good to go to waste. Likewise, America's sympathy for the British war effort was too important to ignore. What more important goal could there have been in the service of such sympathy than providing American readers with timely and detailed accounts of Germany's espionage?

On the one hand, "Altamount" could not have risked direct contact with the *Providence Journal* or any known British sympathizers. On the other hand, members of the Jewish community could serve Holmes as perfect go-betweens for the delivery of such information to the newspaper.

I am grateful to George Goodwin for providing me with the following clue to the probable identity of such an accomplice for Holmes's activities. In an article published in the 1971 issue of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, Dr. Seebert Goldowsky wrote that his father, Bernard Goldowsky (1864-1936), was the first Jewish detective in Rhode Island. Bernard Goldowsky had been a

Pinkerton's agent and had worked undercover in New York City and Boston before being sent to Providence, where he eventually set up his own agency. We know from "The Valley of Fear" that Sherlock Holmes had a sympathetic rapport with the Pinkerton agency, and he may well have come to know Goldowsky for that reason. Dr. Goldowsky wrote that his father was not merely aware of the pro-German sentiment in Rhode Island during World War I, especially among German Americans in the jewelry industry, but he specialized in investigations of jewelry manufacturers. Dr. Goldowsky also wrote that his father was well acquainted with John Rathom, the editor of the *Providence Journal*. On April 30, 1918, Rathom's newspaper ran the headline, "Nine Providence Germans Arrested as Spies." All nine were German Americans from the jewelry industry. Dr. Goldowsky was convinced that his father, a staunch patriot and a fervent Zionist, was the principal source of information for the *Providence Journal* story. Bernard Goldowsky could not be properly credited, however, because this would have compromised his investigations.

In 1908, Rhode Island's first Jewish detective purchased a family home near the Broad Street entrance to Roger Williams Park. The address was 64 Baker Street, which was later changed to 224 Baker Street. Could there be any clearer indication of the connection between Goldowsky and Holmes? Of course, it must be perfectly clear why Holmes could never refer to his activities in Rhode Island and why the absence of all such direct references virtually guarantees the existence of such a connection.

## RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

### 50TH ANNUAL MEETING

*Sunday, May 2, 2004*

Maxine Goldin chaired this milestone meeting, held at the Jewish Community Center at 2 p.m. More than 125 members and guests attended. A motion to wave the reading of minutes carried. Ms. Goldin read congratulatory proclamations sent by Governor Donald Carcieri, Mayor David Cicilline, and Bernard Fishman, executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Society. Alan Litwin congratulated the Association on behalf of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island.

Noting the importance of this year's meeting, President George Goodwin commented, "How proud we are of our founders, and how proud they would be of us." Past presidents were recognized, as were three outstanding volunteers: Jerome Spunt (also a past president), Maurice Cohen, and George Levine. Dr. Goodwin also reviewed some of the year's programming highlights. These included several excellent speakers, a permanent photographic exhibition created for Tamarisk assisted living residence, and a model bus tour of Jewish Providence for religious school students. He also described several upcoming programs to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the American Jewish community.

Treasurer Jack Fradin gave a brief report, in which he identified endowment funds, gifts donated for Heritage Harbor Museum, additional contributions, and current operating expenses.

Stanley Abrams, chair of the publications committee, thanked Leonard Moss for his six impressive years as editor of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*. Unfortunately, Prof. Moss was unable to attend, but he sent his good wishes. Mr. Abrams gave an update on the Association's anthology, *The Jews of Rhode Island*, which will be published in October.

Eugene Weinberg, chair of the nominating committee, reported on the new slate of officers and board members. The nominations were accepted unanimously. In his customarily authoritative and humorous manner, Melvin Zurier installed the new and returning board members. Dr. Goodwin announced his two presidential appointees: Prof. Paul Buhle of Brown and Prof. Michael Fink of RISD.

Ms. Goldin introduced Prof. Phil Brown of Brown, who delivered the 34th David Charak Adelman Lecture. He spoke passionately about his most recent book, *In the Catskills: A Century of the Jewish Experience in the Mountains*, and autographed copies for Association members.

Lillian Schwartz and Anne Sherman coordinated a festive reception. The annual meeting would have been incomplete without Sam Stepak's services as photographer.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Charlotte Penn*  
Secretary



## NECROLOGY OF MEMBERS

OCTOBER 16, 2003 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2004

**BERSTEIN, ISADORE**, born in Providence, was the son of the late Jakob and Rose (Wallach) Berstein.

He had been the proprietor of the former Acme Bag Company and the former Ruth Realty Company.

Mr. Berstein was a life member of the Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, the South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, and Chased Schel Amess Association. He was a member of Temple Emanu-El, the former Temple Beth-Israel, and a founding member of Congregation Shaare Zedek.

He is survived by his wife Dorothy B. (Bornstein) Berstein, two daughters, Rose Sue Berstein and Jane C. Berstein, and a son, David L. Berstein.

Died in Providence on May 28, 2004 at the age of 86.

**BOJAR, WILLIAM**, born in Lodz, Poland, was a son of the late Leo and Amelia (Lifschitz) Bojar and husband of the late Beatrice (Topp) Bojar. He had lived in Providence for most of his life. He was a 1933 graduate of Brown University with a degree in engineering.

Mr. Bojar was president and owner of the former Bojar Company for 60 years. He was an honorary life trustee of Temple Beth-El and a member of its Brotherhood. Mr. Bojar was a life member of our Association.

He is survived by two sons, David M. and Richard Bojar.

Died in Providence on July 12, 2004 at the age of 91.

**COEN, BARBARA J.**, born in Rochester, New York, was a daughter of Marcia (Jacobson) Solomon and the late Theodore Solomon. She was a graduate of Simmons College and lived in Providence before moving to East Greenwich.

Mrs. Coen was an advocate of special education, a board member and docent of the Providence Preservation Society, chair of the East Greenwich Special Education Advisory Committee, and was honored by the Rhode Island Autism Project in 2004.

She was a member of Temple Beth-El, the Simmons College Club of Rhode Island, the Providence Handicraft Club, "Ladies that Lunch," and was president of the Rhode Island chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women.

Besides her mother, she is survived by her husband, Cary Coen, two sons, Matthew and Andrew Coen, and a daughter, Sara Coen.

Died in Boston on August 23, 2004 at the age of 57.

**COHEN, SYDNEY** was a son of the late Robert Maurice and Sophie (Gabrilowitz) Cohen. He was a graduate of Rhode Island College of Education (later known as Rhode Island College).

A teacher for 26 years at Chariho High School, he retired as head of its English department. He had been a sports writer and editor of the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*.

Mr. Cohen was an army veteran of World War II. He retired from the Army Reserve as a lieutenant colonel, and was a member of the Reserve Officers Association and the Jewish War Veterans.

He was a trustee of the Rhode Island College Foundation, secretary and president of the Alumni Association's executive board, and honorary chair of the Alumni Fund. In 1993 he was named Alumnus of the Year, and in 2002 he was named the Alumni Association Partner in Philanthropy on National Philanthropy Day. A member of the Society for American Baseball Research, Mr. Cohen also participated in the reenactment of the Blue and Gray Baseball Game on the 100th anniversary of Major League Baseball.

Mr. Cohen was a member of the Jewish Community Center's Olympic Club, a commissioner of the Jewish Softball League, and in 1989 was inducted into the Rhode Island Jewish Athletic Hall of Fame. He was a member of Temple Torat Yisrael and Touro Fraternal Association.

He is survived by his wife, Goldie (Soorkis) Cohen, and two daughters, Marsha Cohen and Jody Alves.

Died in Providence on October 20, 2003 at the age of 85.

**FAIN, NORMAN MYRON**, born in Providence, was a son of the late Alfred A. and Elizabeth (Stoneman) Fain. He was a graduate of Rhode Island State College (later known as the University of Rhode Island).

An astute businessman, he was chairman of Apex Tire and Rubber, which was begun by his father. Later specializing in plastics and chemicals, the company became known as Teknor Apex. Mr. Fain also led Apex, Inc., the discount department store chain, which was also headquartered in Pawtucket. Another business interest was Tower Iron Works in Providence.

Mr. Fain was one of the most distinguished community leaders of the postwar era. He was president of the Miriam Hospital and served on the boards of Brown University, Rhode Island School of Design, the University of Rhode Island Foundation, the Rhode Island Foundation, the Providence Journal Company, the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, and Temple Beth-El.

Mr. Fain received numerous honors, including the Award of Distinguished Service to Medical Education from Brown University, an honorary doctorate in business administration from the University of Rhode Island, and the

President's Fellow Award from Rhode Island School of Design. The health center at Miriam Hospital was named in honor of Norman and Rosalie Fain, as was the sanctuary of Temple Beth-El. As chair of the Temple's building committee, he oversaw the construction of a landmark example of modern architecture, which was dedicated in 1954.

Despite these achievements, Mr. Fain was known as a quiet and modest individual.

He was a member of the University Club, Ledgemont Country Club, and the Governors Club in West Palm Beach, Florida.

Mr. Fain is survived by his wife Rosalie (Branower) Fain, two daughters, Wendy Feldman and Martha Roberts, and a son, Jonathan Fain.

Died in Providence on November 1, 2003 at the age of 89.

**FRANK, MELVIN SUMMER**, born in Providence, was a son of the late Haskell and Belle (Summer) Frank. A resident of Providence for most of his life, he also had a home in Jupiter, Florida.

Mr. Frank was an executive of Union Paper Company for several years. He served in the Navy during World War II and the Korean War. He was a graduate of Brown University and a member of the Brown Alumni Association.

He was a leader of Rhode Island Israel Bonds and the Rhode Island Memorial Holocaust Museum. He was a trustee of the Miriam Hospital and a member of Temple Beth-El and Temple Emanu-El.

Mr. Frank is survived by his wife Eleanore (Lewenberg) Frank, a son, Gary Simon, and two daughters, Leslie Haduch and Laura Mainelli.

Died in Providence on September 27, 2004 at the age of 79.

**HALSBAND, SUMNER B.** was a son of the late John L. and Freida (Abrams) Halsband. Having lived in East Greenwich for most of his life, he recently moved to the Tamarisk assisted living residence.

Mr. Halsband was a graduate of East Greenwich Academy and attended the University of Rhode Island. He was a Navy veteran of World War II. He was the owner of a fishing-lure manufacturing company and Tempo Designs of East Greenwich.

He was a president of the East Greenwich Rotary Club, a founder and president of the East Greenwich Preservation Society, and a member of the Providence Camera Club.

Mr. Halsband was a member of Temple Beth-El and a former member and cantor of Temple Sinai.

He is survived by his wife Shirley (Rakatansky) Halsband, a son, James M. Halsband, and a daughter, Susan Marshall.

Died in Warwick on May 5, 2004 at the age of 83.

**MEHLMAN, LESLIE LUNIN**, born in Boston, was a daughter of the late Louis and Marion (Rosenblatt) Lunin. She lived in Barrington for 34 years before moving to Warren in 1999. She was a summa cum laude graduate of Mount Holyoke College and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Mrs. Mehlman taught Latin in the Lincoln and East Greenwich school districts. She was a member of and teacher at Temple Habonim.

A board member of Jewish Family Service, Mrs. Mehlman was also a member of Hadassah, the National Council of Jewish Women, and Miriam Hospital Women's Association. She was a life member of our Association.

She is survived by her husband, Dr. Edwin S. Mehlman, and three sons, Jeffrey, Brian, and Erik Mehlman.

Died in Providence on March 31, 2004 at the age of 66.

**MIRMAN, LOUIS**, born in Russia, was a son of the late Isaac and Hannah Mirman. He lived in Newport for many years before moving to Providence and later to Florida. He was an Army veteran of World War II.

He was treasurer of Atlantic Knitting Corporation.

A board member of the Friends of Touro Synagogue, Mr. Mirman was a member of Ledgemont Country Club, Temple Beth-El, and Temple Sinai in Delray Beach, Florida.

He is survived by his wife, Miriam (Finkelstein) Mirman, a son, Michael Mirman, and a daughter, Barbara Mirman.

Died in Delray Beach, Florida on January 8, 2004 at the age of 96.

**RIESMAN, ROBERT A.**, born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, was the son of the late Joseph G. and Sadie (Finkelstein) Riesman. A humanitarian, he was devoted to his alma mater, his state, his country, the Jewish people, and Israel.

Mr. Riesman was a 1940 honors graduate of Harvard University. A highly decorated veteran of the African and European theaters during World War II, he completed his active service as a lieutenant colonel. From 1963 until 1969, he served as a civilian aide to the Secretary of the Army. He received the Distinguished Civilian Service Medal, the Army's highest civilian award.

In 1945 Mr. Riesman joined the family business, Royal Electric Company. Following its sale in 1961, he became president of Carol Cable Company. He retired in 1968 to pursue private interests.



Mr. Riesman's involvement in local, regional, and national organizations was far-reaching. He was president of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island and was active in the Miriam Hospital, Israel Bonds, and the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. He was a member of the Jewish War Veterans and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. In honor of his devotion to Harvard-Radcliffe's Hillel Foundation, its new building was named the Riesman Center.

Mr. Riesman served numerous worthy causes beyond the Jewish community. In 1972 he was chair of the United Way of Southeastern New England, and in 1976 he received the Brotherhood Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews. Three years later he received the first Distinguished Citizen Award from the Providence Rotary Club. Active in the affairs of Providence College, he received an honorary doctorate in business administration. He also served on the board of overseers of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

A dynamic force in Democratic politics, Mr. Riesman was active in state and national campaigns. A close friend of Senator Claiborne Pell, he was also an advisor to Senator Jack Reed, who described him as "a great American and one of the most cultured, decent men I have ever met." Rabbi Wayne Franklin of Temple Emanu-El said, "He was a giant of a man, extremely wise and generous with his wisdom."

Mr. Riesman was an honorary trustee of Temple Emanu-El and a life member of our Association.

He is survived by his wife, Marcia (Stone) Riesman, a son, Robert Riesman, Jr., and a daughter, Jean Riesman.

Died in Providence on June 2, 2004 at the age of 85.

*(Correction)*

**ROSEN, BENTON H.**, born in Providence, was a son of the late Max and Ida (Glogos) Rosen. He lived in Providence for many years before moving to Pawtucket. For nearly a half century, he maintained a summer residence on Mashnee Island, Cape Cod.

Mr. Rosen was a 1936 graduate of Rhode Island State College (later known as the University of Rhode Island). He served in the Army as a captain during World War II. He was president and co-owner of Franklin Supply Company.

An author and lecturer on Wedgewood Commemorative Ware, Mr. Rosen was president of the Wedgewood Society of Boston and served on the board of governors of the Wedgewood International Seminar.

Mr. Rosen was a board member of the University of Rhode Island Foundation and received the Alumni Association's RAM Award in 1976. He was a 32nd-degree Mason.

Mr. Rosen was a member of Temple Beth-El. He was a president and a life member of our Association and wrote several articles for this publication.

He is survived by his wife, Beverly (Starr) Rosen, and a daughter, Susan Hirsch. He was the father of the late John Starr Rosen.

Died in Pawtucket on November 23, 2002 at the age of 88.

**ROSEN, HERBERT LEWIS "RUSTY,"** born in Providence, was a son of the late Max and Ida (Golgos) Rosen. He lived in Pawtucket for the past 50 years.

Mr. Rosen was co-owner of Franklin Supply Company, retiring in 1981.

A graduate of Brown University, Mr. Rosen loved books and learning. He was involved with the Brown Community for Learning in Retirement for more than two decades. He was active in the John Bartlett Society and had been a tutor at Martin Luther King School.

Mr. Rosen was a member of Temple Emanu-El. A life member of our Association, he served as assistant treasurer since 1994.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara (Feital) Rosen, and a son, Max Paul Rosen.

Died in Providence on June 30, 2004 at the age of 86.

**SILVER, EVELYN MACIE,** born in Laurel, Mississippi, was a daughter of the late Nathan and Anna Fine. She was educated at Newcomb College of Tulane University. A resident of Hollywood, Florida, she summered in Middletown.

Mrs. Silver was a member of Temple Beth-El, its Sisterhood, Miriam Hospital Women's Association, Hadassah, and American ORT. She was president of the Rhode Island Cerebral Palsy Association.

Mrs. Silver was the widow of Irving J. Fain and was active with him in the civil rights movement. She is survived by her husband, Dr. Carol Silver, a daughter, Elizabeth Fain, and a son, Lyle S. Fain.

Died in Hollywood, Florida on May 24, 2004 at the age of 93.

**SILVERMAN, EUGENE JOSEPH,** born in Providence, was the son of the late John and Jeanette (Schoenfeld) Silverman. A former resident of Greenfield, Massachusetts, he lived in Cranston for four decades.

He was a co-owner of the former Gene Arthur Ford and president of Elmwood Dodge.

Mr. Silverman served as a master sergeant in Europe during World War II.

He was a former member of Temple Sinai, Quiddnessett Country Club, and Crestwood Country Club.

He is survived by his wife, Irma (Cohen) Silverman, two sons, Stephen D. and Peter H. Silverman, and a daughter, Robin B. Sciarcon.

Died in Providence on February 12, 2004 at the age of 83.

**SOLOVEITZIK, HAROLD B.**, born in Westerly, was a son of the late Solomon and Buni (Leibovitz) Soloveitzik. He was a 1935 graduate of Rhode Island State College (later known as the University of Rhode Island) and received his law degree from Boston University in 1938. He served in the Army Air Force during World War II as a radio operator in North Africa.

Mr. Soloveitzik practiced law for almost 60 years in his beloved Westerly. A town solicitor in Richmond and on Block Island, he also represented many homeowners' associations in South County that sought to preserve beaches and limit commercial development. He was president of the Washington County and Rhode Island Bar Associations.

Mr. Soloveitzik was honored by various organizations, including the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, the National Conference for Community Justice, the Narragansett Council of Boy Scouts, the Rhode Island Foundation, and the University of Rhode Island.

Mr. Soloveitzik was a member of Congregation Sharah Zedek and was a life member of our Association.

He is survived by a niece, Bonnie Light, and a nephew, Charles Soloveitzik.

Died in Westerly on June 4, 2004 at the age of 90.

**TORGAN, SOFIA**, born in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, was the daughter of the late José and Ana (Goldstein) Brandel. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Pembroke College of Brown University and earned a master's degree in social work from Simmons College. She was a social worker and later a federal court interpreter.

Mrs. Torgan served on the board of Jewish Family Service and was an officer of the Miriam Hospital Women's Association. She was a member of Temple Beth-El.

She is survived by her husband, Dr. Philip Torgan, two sons, David and John Torgan, and a daughter, Emily Torgan-Shalansky.

Died in Providence on August 19, 2004 at the age of 69.

**WACHTENHEIM, EUGENE**, born in Czechoslovakia, was the son of the late Joseph and Priscilla (Schwimmer) Wachtenheim. He was a cum laude graduate in law of Charles University in Prague. He lived in New York before moving to Providence in 1948.

Three years later Mr. Wachtenheim founded Merchants Overseas, Inc., an importer and distributor to the jewelry industry. He served as chairman of its board until his death.

He was a member of Temple Emanu-El in Providence and Temple Beth Tikveh in West Palm Beach. He also was a member of Roosevelt Lodge of Masons, the Aurora Civic Association, Ledgemont Country Club, Club Collette in Palm Beach, and the Delaire Country Club in Delray Beach, Florida.

He is survived by his wife Polly (Schoenfeld) Wachtenheim, two daughters, Linda Schwarz and Denise Lewis, and a son, Stanley J. Wachtenheim.

Died in Providence on September 6, 2004.

**WATTMAN, IRVING**, born in Providence, was a son of the late Lewis and Betty (Huttler) Wattman. He lived in Providence most of his life before moving to Palm Beach in 1994. He maintained a summer residence in Rhode Island. He was a 1937 graduate of Providence College.

He succeeded his father as the owner of W & W Jewelry Company and was a partner in the former Spitz-Wattman Realty Company until his retirement.

Mr. Wattman was an honorary life member of Temple Emanu-El and a member of Temple Emanu-El in Palm Beach. An officer of B'nai B'rith, he was also a member of Redwood Lodge of Masons, Touro Fraternal Association, Friends of Touro Synagogue, and the Jewish Federations of Rhode Island and Palm Beach.

He was a life member of our Association.

Mr. Wattman is survived by his wife, Frances (Singer) Wattman, and two daughters, Judith Schubert and Marjorie Lang.

Died in Providence on January 22, 2004 at the age of 88.

**WINTMAN, MILTON J.**, born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, a son of the late Samuel H. and Katherine (Lodge) Wintman, and husband of the late Shirley (Kaufman) Wintman. He had lived in Providence for most of his life before moving to Pawtucket in 1989. He attended Boston University.

An Army veteran of World War II, he earned two Purple Hearts in the Battle of the Bulge.

He was the proprietor of the Providence Newport Distributing Company until his retirement 15 years ago.

Mr. Wintman was a member of Temple Emanu-El and Touro Fraternal Association.

He is survived by a daughter, Susan Levy, and a son, Lewis Wintman.

Died in Providence on March 8, 2004 at the age of 82.



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SOUTH PROVIDENCE HEBREW CONGREGATION (DATE UNKNOWN);  
WHO IS HARRY FISH?

## ERRATA

In last issue's article, "The Brothers of Phi Epsilon Pi," Daniel Robinson was survived by a daughter, Carol Robinson, not a son. Daniel's mother was Bertha Schoenberg, not Schwenberg.

Goldie Cohen has pointed out that the article by Sol Koffler, also in the last issue, was probably derived from an interview conducted by her late husband, Sydney. The interview, from the early 1980s, was intended as an article in the *Federation Voice*. The article was never published, however.





BERNARD M. GOLDOWSKY  
PRIVATE DETECTIVE



SUSAN HAHN BROWN AND HER GRANDMOTHER,  
BABETTE FRANK, BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA 1943