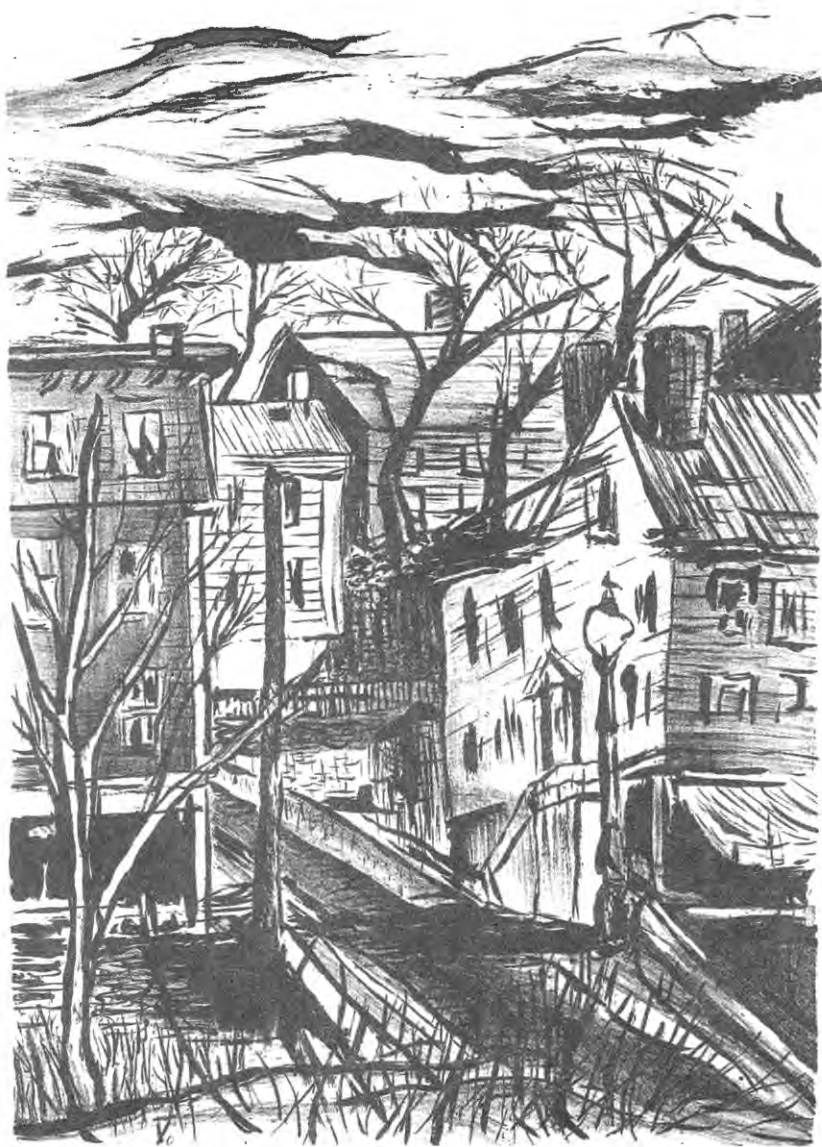




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Notes



VOLUME 14

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NUMBER 3

RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITOR'S COMMENTS	367
REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS AND PEOPLE IN MY LIFE : PART 11 <i>by Harold Tregar</i>	368
THINKING OUT LOUD <i>by Governor Frank Licht</i>	377
JOHN H. CHAFEE: A REMINISCENCE <i>by Honorable Bruce M. Selya</i>	391
MY LIFE AND TIMES IN RHODE ISLAND LAW, POLITICS AND JUSTICE, PART 1 <i>by Honorable Richard J. Israel</i>	400
CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGE FOR JEWS IN RHODE ISLAND: THE ORIGINS OF A STATUTE <i>by Micah Fitzerman-Blue</i>	413
LEE V. WEISMAN (1992) AND AMERICAN JEWISH RESPONSES TO ISSUES OF CHURCH AND STATE <i>by David B. Cohen</i>	429
RABBI LOUIS I. NEWMAN <i>by Philip Miller</i>	443
RHODE ISLAND'S CONGREGATIONAL RABBIS: A PRELIMINARY LIST <i>by Anne Sherman</i>	455
WHAT I LEARNED IN ALABAMA ABOUT YARMULKES <i>by Rabbi William G. Braude</i>	462
REVERAND MEYER ELIJAH SMITH: MOHEL, CANTOR AND TEACHER <i>by Geraldine S. Foster</i>	471
A PROVIDENCE BOY <i>by Sidney Chafetz</i>	486
"MR. RISD" <i>by Michael Fink</i>	500
NEW INTERIORS: A ONE-GENERATION FAMILY BUSINESS <i>by Eugene Weinberg</i>	510
A TRIBUTE TO BONNIE GOLDOWSKY <i>by Melvin L. Zurier</i>	528
50 TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION	530
NECROLOGY	532
FUNDS + BEQUESTS	544
LIFE MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION	545
PHOTO CREDITS	547

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

I am pleased that so many readers enjoyed the previous issue, especially its new design and numerous photographs. Several articles also evoked strong memories. One of the most amazing came from Susan Brown's cousin, a citizen of Ecuador, whom she had known while growing up in Colombia. Having known Cantor Jacob Hohenemser in Germany, he was thrilled by Philip Miller's article.

Most articles in the current issue are grouped by themes. The first focuses on politics and law, the second on clergy, and the third on RISD and artists. I believe, however, that all the articles are closely interrelated.

Jews are everywhere doing almost everything: leaving home, returning home, building homes, embracing tradition, denying tradition, inventing tradition, defending America, seeking justice, running for office, starting businesses, closing businesses, traveling, studying, teaching, growing old, and staying young. We are not a sedentary people!

Once again, I am grateful to the Association's publications committee, especially its chair, Stanley Abrams; Anne Sherman, our devoted office manager; and Bobbie Friedman, our designer. Without devoted writers and readers, our journal would not flourish. Thank you one and all.

George M. Goodwin



REFLECTIONS ON EVENTS AND PEOPLE IN MY LIFE: PART II

BY HAROLD TREGAR

In his previous article, the author wrote candidly and passionately about his youth, his early career, his marriage, and his military service during World War II. Mr. Tregar covered numerous other topics in the autobiography written for his two grandsons. Here is another wonderful excerpt. Although Harold passed away in September, his zestful and zingy words continue to skip and dance.

"FEIVISH, ARE YOU NUTS?"

I was brought up in South Providence. We never thought of it as a ghetto; it was just "the Jewish neighborhood." Yet, there was a clear demarcation between the real poor ghetto and the middle-income neighborhood. That line was Broad Street.

East of Broad Street were all the stores where everyone shopped, for everything from fish to pants. Willard Avenue from Prairie Avenue down was nothing but stores, probably fifty of them: three bakeries, four butcher shops, two fish markets, several groceries, two delicatessens, a dry goods store, a coal company. Within a four-block area, there were four Orthodox synagogues and two *cheders* (Hebrew schools). One short block over was Ash Street, a whole street with nothing but junk shops and old barns. All of the houses were three stories high. (We always lived on the third floor, which was the lowest rent.) With no central heating, hot water came only from a pot on the kitchen stove. So most of the time we went to a public bathhouse, with a towel and soap, to get a hot shower.

West of Broad Street was a totally different atmosphere. The houses were much more elegant. Some few were even one-family homes. More trees; nicer yards; cleaner streets; many yards with garages because many of these tenants had cars. In this area there were two Temples, Beth-Israel

(Conservative) and Beth-El (Reform). Not until I was about twelve years old did I discover this Jewish neighborhood.

" I joined Young Judea, the Zionist youth club, which met at Temple Beth-Israel. That's where I first met Frank Licht and Arthur Hoffman, who would become my closest friends. We also attended Classical High together, where the three of us became the school's debating team. We became as close as brothers.

My friendship with Frank and Arthur opened up a whole new world for me. For the first time, I had friends who were living in a lifestyle I had never even imagined. From my perspective, their families were both "rich." Arthur's father was superintendent of the Miriam Hospital (although he was a mean tyrant to his family). They lived in a brick house! I had always envied any kid who had a father, but I never envied Arthur's. Frank's father owned a big store fixture business and, for those times, he was certainly one of the wealthier Jews. They even owned a summer house in Conimicut Beach. I had never seen one before.

Frank Licht was probably the smartest person I've ever known. He had a mind like a whip. I was always secretly proud of the fact that I could hold my own with him in our endless discussions and arguments, or we couldn't have been such close friends. Even as a kid, he had to be the leader. I think I was as good a debater as he was, but he was the team captain.

We were once riding in his father's car, when I saw him wave to someone on the sidewalk. I asked him who that was. He said, "I don't know him, but I may need his vote some day." So help me, that's what he said. And he was only half kidding. This was at the age of about fourteen. He had a self confidence and drive that made him fun and interesting to be with.

When we were 14 or 16 years old (Frank was a year older than I), we were active in Masada, the Zionist youth group for older kids. Frank was president, and I was vice president. We went to Masada national conventions in New York together, with no hesitation. I doubt I'd have had the nerve to do it without Frank's bravado.

Interestingly, Frank was not a terrific student at Classical. I graduated cum laude, he didn't, but he blossomed when he got to Brown. He captained the debating team. He did well enough to get into Harvard Law, made *Law Review*, and started to show promise for the kind of career he would have.

Arthur went to Providence College and St. Louis University Medical School. He became a psychiatrist. And I went to RISD. So for a number of years we lived in different worlds. But we maintained our friendship.

The years passed. Frank became a state senator, the right-hand man of Governor Dennis Roberts, who made him the state's youngest Superior Court judge. Arthur was in practice out West somewhere. I went into the Army, then I opened an advertising agency, helped found a temple, and became active in many of the same Jewish community organizations as Frank. The difference was that when I became an active member of the board of Jewish Federation, Frank eventually became president. When he finally got married, much later than I did, Eunice was very compatible with his wife, Dorothy, so we resumed our close, active friendship.

By 1968, Frank had become, without question, the leading Jew in Rhode Island. Whenever any group or cause needed a strong spokesman, it turned to Frank. He had been a judge for about 10 years and was becoming bored with it. It just was not enough of a challenge for him. Coincidentally, that year Claiborne Pell was running for reelection to the U.S. Senate, and he couldn't find any decent candidates willing to run for governor on the ticket with him. No one was willing to stick his neck out and run against John Chafee, who was considered unbeatable.

Pell came up with what he thought was a brilliant solution. No Jew had ever been able to run for governor in the state's history for obvious reasons. There was Frank Licht, highly respected in both the Jewish and legal community. He had been a state senator, the right-hand for a former governor, and he certainly knew the political "game." What a perfect fit!

Pell would entice Frank to accept the nomination. He knew Frank had the necessary ego and ambition and would probably have access to a lot of "Jewish money" for a campaign! Pell felt it would be "an offer Licht could not refuse." Of course, he could never beat Chafee, but Pell couldn't care less about that. He would have a very respectable candidate to run with.

So Pell went to Frank and offered to get him the Democratic nomination. It was too much for Frank's ego and ambition to refuse. It meant resigning his lifetime seat on the bench and the easy life of a judge to jump into the toughest fight of his life. Against incredible odds. "OK! I'll do it," he said.

I will never forget that phone call. "Hershel, I'm going to run for

governor against John Chafee!" "What do you think?" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Feivish, are you nuts?"

"And when he called his other close friends, everyone else thought he was crazy! To resign from the Superior Court and to subject himself to a murderous Don Quixote quest, you had to be nuts or you had to have Frank's guts and ego. He had made up his mind. What else could all of us do but think about how we could help?

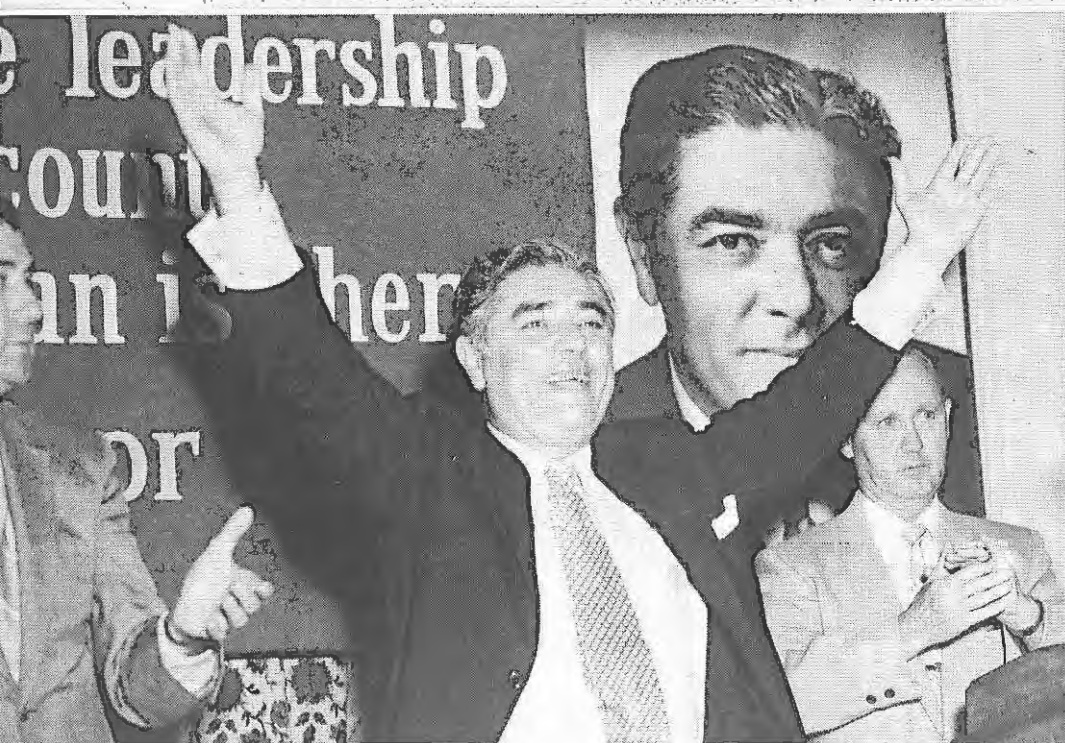
This swarthy little Jewish judge, well known only from the courthouse and Dorrance Street, was going to run against the fair-haired, three-term, popular and unbeatable John Chafee! The darling of the *Journal*, he had actually been seriously mentioned as a possible vice presidential candidate to run with Nixon! The bookies were giving 50 to 1 odds against Licht, and there were not many takers.

But they didn't know Frank Licht and his group of friends. How this "Jewish Mafia," as some called us, helped him is another unbelievable story. It was like nothing anyone had ever imagined, let alone experienced. Probably for the first time ever, the soft sounds of Yiddish would be heard in the venerable halls of the State House. When had anyone resigned as president of Jewish Federation to be sworn in as governor? I can only compare the Jewish community's next four years to a four-year temple dance.

MY BAPTISM INTO THE WORLD OF POLITICS

By the spring of 1968, all of Frank's close friends had finally come to accept the improbable fact that this guy was actually going to run for governor. Now what happens? With a few exceptions, none of us had ever been involved in politics, certainly not at this level. We began to wait for something to happen. Frank had started to lay the groundwork for fundraising, for building an organization, and for filling key campaign positions. As a close associate of former Governor Dennis Roberts, Frank knew the drill.

To begin with, it was apparent that the Democratic Party was not about to waste much money on a sure loser. It was clear that Frank would have to find the seed money for the campaign on his own. Fortunately, the Licht family was in a position to make a substantial start. I never knew exactly how much they put up, but Harry and Julius were not going to let their brother down. And a number of Frank's close friends, who were substantial business-



men, also came up with very generous contributions. These were men like Bob Riesman, Marvin Holland, Joe Thaler, Stanley Grossman, and Sam Kagan.

After the initial shock of incredulity wore off, everyone came to feel, "Wow! Maybe this can actually happen!" "What can I do to help?" I didn't have that kind of money, but I knew I'd find some way to help. (Little did I know what I'd have to do.)

There were two key positions that had to be filled immediately, campaign chairman and press secretary. For the first, Frank appointed Donald Shea, a lawyer who had come to Rhode Island after the 1954 hurricane to settle insurance claims and had stayed on. Don was a very solid, dependable, and shrewd fellow, who had good organizational ability. Then they found a *Providence Journal* reporter, Jack Thompson, to be press secretary. Jack was a bright and ultra-liberal guy, who was fed up with the *Journal* and who liked Frank's liberal record. He was willing to leave his job for this long-shot chance at the brass ring. Remember, at that point the bookies were giving 50 to 1 odds on Chafee, and there were few takers. It took real guts for both Don and Jack to take those appointments. It was also important that neither of them was Jewish.

For years, the Bo Bernstein ad agency had been the Democratic Party's

advertising and public relations counsel. They handled all the major Democratic campaigns. Also, Bo was an old, bridge-playing buddy of Frank's, so it was just taken for granted that Bo would be handling Frank's campaign. But time was passing and nothing seemed to be happening. When we asked, we were told, "They're working on it." May came, and still nothing. Finally, word came that Bo Bernstein had a presentation to make. Hallelujah! We were finally going to get started on our Don Quixote quest!

Frank's entire inner circle, jokingly called his "Jewish Mafia," along with Dottie and Julius Licht and Don Shea and Jack Thompson, assembled in Bo's very impressive viewing room. I can still see it. A large, long room, with three tiers of seats facing a wall of blackboards, and lots of people coming and going. It was definitely a "big agency." One of the art directors was counting full-page newspaper layouts, face down on the boards. Thinking of my small, all-purpose conference room at Goldsmith Tregar, I was sure as hell impressed. When the creative director was finally introduced, everyone waited in hushed anticipation as he began to describe the long-involved rationale that had led him to come up with the slogan for the campaign. With a flourish, the creative director turned each layout over to reveal a variety of layouts, the brainchild of this gang of political "pros."

"Think about it." And that was it! "Think about it" was to be the basis for the campaign.

There was a long, deafening silence. Joe Thaler looked at me; I looked at Marvin Holland; Marvin looked at Bob Riesman; Don and Jack look at each other; and all of us looked at Frank, without saying a word. Finally, Frank broke the silence. "OK, Bo, thanks." "Give us some time to digest this and we'll get back to you." In stunned silence, we all got up and left to meet at Frank's house. On the way, we didn't talk much. What was there to say? I remember thinking, "Am I crazy or stupid or are they?" "Is this really what they suggest to be the basis for a tough campaign, costing close to a million dollars, against a 50 to 1 opponent?"

We assembled in the den. Finally, Joe Thaler said something. Speaking slowly and quietly, he said, "It seems to me, Harold, you'll have to be the advertising agency." "After what we just heard, we certainly can't trust that gang." I couldn't believe what he was saying. I looked around at the others, and no one was laughing. "My God," I thought. "They're serious." I almost fell out

of my shoes.

The thought of my taking major responsibility for the promotion of Frank's campaign seemed ridiculous to me. I'd never done any political advertising in my life. And the thought of my doing something stupid and ruining Frank's chance to be governor scared me to death. I wouldn't even know where to start! I'm usually not a shrinking violet, and I've taken on many new challenges in my business. But this was different. It affected the life of one of my oldest friends. These thoughts raced through my mind as Frank and Dottie came in and Joe repeated what he'd said to me. Frank had been agonizing over his dilemma. There was no question about his reaction to Bo's presentation. But it was understandable that he wasn't prepared to make that kind of decision so quickly. And I was gratified for that.

THE CAMPAIGN

Governor Roberts had put Frank in touch with Joe Napolitan, one of the top political consultants in the country. He worked out of a small office in Massachusetts, supposedly only with Democrats. He was a brilliant political strategist who had recently taken over Hubert Humphrey's foundering presidential campaign. This guy was in demand all over the country, and Frank was lucky to be able to get him.

He came down and spent a day familiarizing himself with the problems we faced. Then he met with the Bo Bernstein crew. He came back with some notes on a single sheet of paper. They began with this: "The first thing I'd do is get rid of that gang of idiots at Bo Bernstein's." "They're a bunch of phonies." "They'll only crucify you." (As I recall, those were his exact words.) Then he listed a number of strategic steps he would take. He was pretty sharp, but his first statement was his most important contribution. It gave Frank the courage he needed to make this crucial decision. Whatever Frank paid him for the day, it was worth it.

The next day, Frank said to me, "Hershel, you'll have to do it." With heartfelt trepidation, I said, "I'll do my best, Frank." And I still couldn't believe what I was agreeing to do. A crazy thought went through my mind: "You might as well ask me to fly an airplane, too." So, I took a deep breath and went back to my office to tell my partner, George Goldsmith, what we had just inherited. He knew exactly how much experience I'd had with political

promotions. He just stared at me, in disbelief.

And that's how it happened.

Of course, I had a lot of help. To supervise production of our TV material we found an experienced consultant in Boston, who prepared some great material to open our campaign. Frank contacted Tony Schwartz, probably the best radio producer in New York. We went to his studio, and it was an experience just watching him work. I had produced a lot of radio material for my clients, so I could truly appreciate the difference.

My responsibility was making the media buys, scheduling the radio and TV spots, producing all the newspaper ads, billboards, and printed material. To put it mildly, it was a wild few months. Since all political advertising must be paid for in advance, there were many times when it was touch-and-go finding the money. It was a good thing I had an understanding partner, because, traditionally, ad agencies do not advance money for political clients. This was different. To me, Frank was not a "client."

Of course I had the help of some very good people. Jay Goodman, a young political science professor from Wheaton College, came aboard as a volunteer. He wrote very well. And, of course, Jack Thompson, who was a fine writer. When it came to Frank's speeches, it was a general collaboration. And there were almost daily speeches. But that was the easy part. Anticipating and figuring out what was expected of me was the toughest part. Satisfying Frank was not easy. He had very high standards, and he never hesitated to drive everyone around him.

The upshot of all this, of course, is history. In November, the bookies who had been giving 50 to 1 odds against us, had to eat their words and pay off! We pulled what the national media called "the biggest upset in the country." Frank Licht, whose name we had to teach people to pronounce (L-I-C-H-T spells LEACH?), defeated the unbeatable John Chafee and became the first Jewish governor in Rhode Island's history.

AFTERMATH

The Jewish community was in ecstasy. It was the first time in America that a man had to resign as president of a Jewish Federation to be sworn in as a governor. And for the first time, the sweet, soft sounds of Yiddish were heard in the venerable halls of the State House. Even the famous portrait of George

Washington in the elegant State Room seemed to smile a little more.

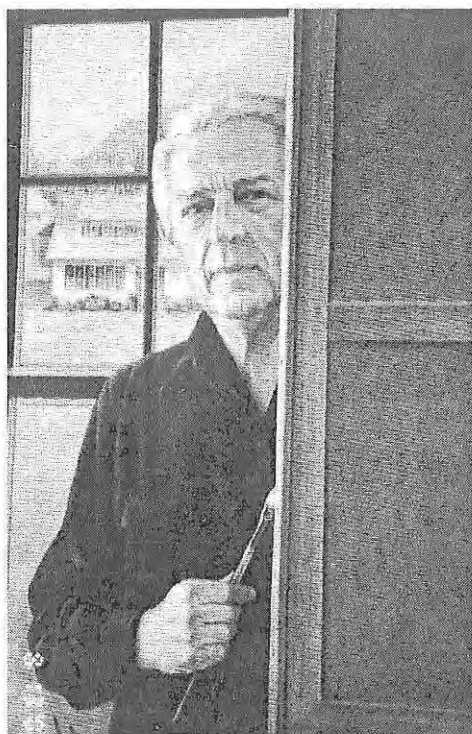
The *Providence Journal* and the Republican Party were in a state of shock. Weeks after the election, the *Journal* was still running editorials touting Chafee. And in Washington, to assuage the disbelief, Nixon appointed Chafee Secretary of the Navy. I guess they felt the poor guy needed a job.

After an illustrious tenure on the Supreme Court, Don Shea retired. Jack Thompson taught journalism at URI for a while. Last I heard, he was sailing around the world in a sloop. Jay Goodman is now a practicing attorney in Rhode Island.

I ran five more successful campaigns: one more for Frank, two for Attorney General Julius Michaelson, and two for State Treasurer Anthony Solomon. In 1992, at the age of 75, I retired from the advertising business and happily went back to painting. I am happiest about the loving portrait I did of Eunice and my last self-portrait.

And the big courthouse in Providence is now called the Frank Licht Judicial Complex. Not bad for a couple of Jewish kids from South Providence.

That's how my friend Feivish baptized me into politics.





1969

THINKING OUT LOUD

BY GOVERNOR FRANK LICHT

By any measure, Frank Licht has been one of Rhode Island's towering Jewish leaders. Best known as the Ocean State's first Jewish governor (1969-1973), he also won acclaim as an attorney, a state senator, and a judge. Shortly before his death in 1987, the Providence County Courthouse and Judicial Complex were named in his honor. Yet, none of Gov. Licht's professional or political accomplishments overshadowed his devotion to Jewish causes and community.

This autobiographical statement is based on two interviews recorded in 1976 for the American Jewish Committee's vast oral history collection. This collection now belongs to the Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library and is used with its permission.

The interviewer was Rita Michaelson, a major civic leader worthy of her own study. A Woonsocket native, she graduated from Pembroke College in 1950 and served as a member of the Brown Corporation during the 1970s. A civil rights activist since the 1960s, she was also the first woman appointed to Rhode Island's Human Rights Commission (by Gov. Licht). For two decades Ms. Michaelson was a hearing officer for the state's Department of Education and served as a labor arbitrator. Somehow, she also found time to be a vice president of the National Council of Jewish Women and a docent at the RISD Museum.

I was born in South Providence on March 3, 1916. My family had come from Russia. Both my mother and father spoke Yiddish very well, Polish, and a little Russian. My father had a brother and some sisters in Providence, and my mother had relatives here. They were married in Providence.

At the time I was born, my father was in the cleaning and pressing business on Washington Street. He had worked in New York City as a cleaner and a presser. We were of very moderate means, but that was true of everybody we knew.

We moved several times when I was a young boy. Our original home

was a three-family house on Gay Street. We moved into an entirely non-Jewish neighborhood. I remember as we were moving my mother was crying because she didn't know where she was going. But my father showed signs of business acumen, and he was going to make a profit on the sale of the house so he could buy another more cheaply.

So we immediately moved to Oakland Avenue in the North End of Providence. But neighborhoods in those years were distinct entities, and my mother didn't like the North End because her friends were in South Providence. I went to Candace Street School.

Somebody at school called me a dirty Jew, and I beat him up, or at least I think I beat him up. The principal called me in and said that the school did not "suffer ruffians." I had to be about nine years old at the time.

Another reason we moved quickly was because there was no *shul*, and there were no persons with whom we had any connection or interest. So my father bought a three-decker house in South Providence, but in a better section, Elmwood. I lived there through grammar school, high school, college, and law school.

Then we moved to the East Side, and I've lived there ever since. I married an East Side girl who lived only a few blocks away from where we live now.

When Dotty and I were married some thirty years ago, we lived with my wife's father. Her mother had died. Then we bought our own home, and we've been living on Elmgrove Avenue ever since.

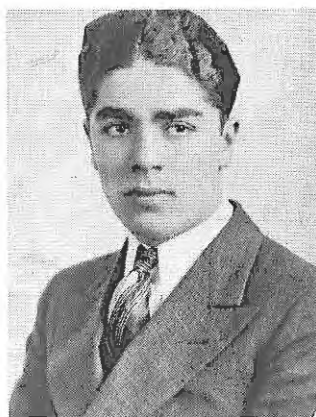
I had what I think was a very excellent childhood. I was very much engaged in synagogue and Young Judean activities. At a very early age, I was a rabid Zionist and became president of the Young Judea Club.

I was a Bar Mitzvah at Temple Beth-Israel, which was a Conservative synagogue. That's a very interesting thing. We started out as Orthodox Jews. This may be unfair, but my recollection is that not too much attention was paid to youngsters. On the High Holy Days, I still remember vividly spending our time on the sidewalk.

So my father became an early advocate of the Conservative movement, which was designed, as far as we were concerned, to interest young people. I recall very vividly again that my father was on the board and then president of Beth-Israel, and I was a *macher* in youth activities. As a matter of fact, I became president of Masada, then national vice president.

In those years, synagogue was central to my life. I spent as much time at *cheder* and in clubs as I did anywhere else. My father was not a very great advocate of sports. He believed that if I had time for anything other than school and *cheder*, I should go to work for him.

Even until this day – my father is 86 and my mother has passed away – he doesn't know one game from another and cannot understand the interest in sports. My father is a very quiet man, but he had a very deep influence and control as far as the activities in which I engaged.



CA. 1934

At Classical High, I was president of the debating club, and I was president of the debating club at Brown. Then I went to Harvard Law School.

I recall that I only applied to Brown. I didn't know much about schools outside of Rhode Island, and I actually lived at home the four years that I went to Brown. That was not unusual for Providence boys or for girls who went to Pembroke.

When I graduated from Brown in 1938, which is many years ago, there was no Hillel. I taught Confirmation class in the Sunday school at Beth-Israel. I've often felt that it was not actually right because I was not a professional teacher. Yet, I seemed to interest the students, and I think I gave a course more in the history of political Zionism than in Bible or anything else.

From the very time I was a youngster, I read everything I could put my hands on about all the great giants in the Zionist movement. As a result of my interest in Young Judea and Masada, I would go along with some of the local Zionists to national conventions. I heard all the great Zionist leaders: Stephen Wise, Abba Hillel Silver, Louis Lipsky, and others.

Of course there were various Zionist groups, including labor and religious. I was a general Zionist. I always had the feeling that whatever decision was made in Israel, I just wanted the restoration of the Jewish homeland. I was president of the Providence Zionist district as a very young man.

I now recognize very definitely that Israel is a sovereign state. American input can only be helpful in the sense of presenting points of view and fundraising. Obviously, no movement outside the country can have any

prevailing voice.

I do think, though, that we have lost a great deal. I had some real heroes in my life, Chaim Weizmann and others. The resurgence of a national spirit was deeper in some of my friends and in myself than in the present generation. There's no question about the pride that all Jews have in the State of Israel, but there isn't the same fervor for the idea.

In the critical days of 1948, although Zionism was a very important American movement, it was not uniformly accepted by the totality of American Jews. It had a very strong voice, and I think to a degree it was helpful and important in the speedy recognition of the State by President Truman. The Zionist movement held many very large mass meetings in which it invited and got public figures to support the idea of the restoration of the Jewish homeland. It has not been influential to that extent since the creation of the State of Israel.

As long as I can remember, I always intended that I'd be a lawyer. What got me interested in the law I cannot say, except that I was a leader in movements and I engaged in debating. I always expected to engage in public and political activity even from the time that I was in high school. I'm not surprised that I ran for governor, but I have never said that I had to do something and then plotted it out.

I was in the State Senate for seven years, beginning in 1949. Paul Robbin, who was a Jew and a Democrat, had represented the East Side. I remember very distinctly that I went to see Mayor Dennis Roberts and asked him if I could run. He was a political leader in the best sense, and his determination would be most effective in my getting the nomination. When I told him that I'd gone to Classical High and to Brown, he said, "That's good." When I mentioned that I also went to Harvard Law School, he said, "That'll never help you." He indicated to me that he'd think about it. When I came back to him within a week, he said I would have the nomination. I didn't know at the time that really nobody else wanted it. It was basically a Republican district, and it's been Democratic ever since.

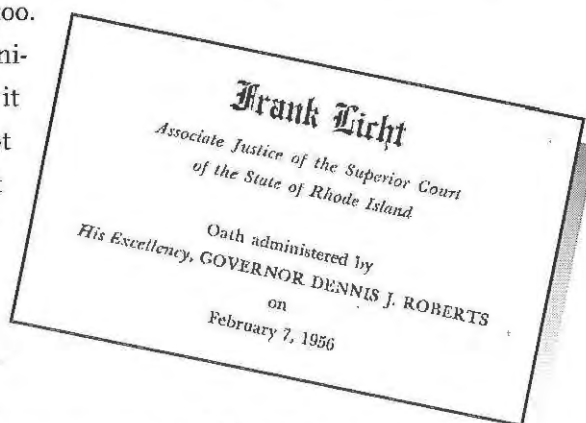
So I was in the State Senate until February, 1956, when Governor Roberts appointed me to the Superior Court. While in the Senate, I think I had a very important relationship with him and with his administration. I did a lot of drafting of some very important legislation. As a matter of fact, I was very

helpful to him in campaigns with writing speeches and doing other things.

I think in the early 1950s, there was a Sunday newspaper article by Leonard Warner. He predicted that one of three men in the Senate would be governor some day. These were George Roche, John Coffey, and me. I don't know whether that put the bug in my head, but he made a very good prediction.

When I had been offered a judgeship, it was the kind of thing that you either accept or you may never get another chance. A great many lawyers aspire to the bench, and I did too.

Being confronted with the opportunity, I did not turn it down. Perhaps it came a little early in my life. I'm not suggesting that a young man can't do the work, because I hope that I was able to do the work, but it's quite young for a man who is throbbing with energy, ambition, and desire.



Not being able to speak out on issues was the most confining part of the judiciary. I spoke about six times a year on behalf of brotherhood, the March of Dimes, health, and things of that nature. But because I was on the bench, I followed a rule, which I think that all judges should and probably do follow to one degree or another, that I would not engage in discussions that were controversial or could bring the court into controversy. And that was not a very satisfying way of speaking. Although people would say it was a nice speech, I never felt fulfilled after any of those speeches. As a matter of fact, I felt somewhat unhappy about not being able to speak out on subjects that I thought were of importance.

At that time, I was still very active in Jewish affairs. I became president of the General Jewish Committee, which later became the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island. I was the leader of Israel Bonds in Rhode Island.

I was president of the Federation when I was elected governor. Then I resigned because I didn't see how I could be both at the same time.

I'll tell you a story about that. I went to see my mother and told her that I was going to resign as president of the Federation. She wasn't sure which was more important – being president of Federation or being governor.



LEADERS OF PROVIDENCE'S GENERAL JEWISH COMMITTEE (FORERUNNER OF FEDERATION) EXAMINE THE DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY OF 1964. L-R: JOSEPH W. RESS, PRESIDENT; ARTHUR J. LEVY, CHAIR, COMMUNITY PLANNING COMMITTEE; FRANK LICHT, CHAIR, DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY COMMITTEE; PROF. SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN, DEMOGRAPHER; JOSEPH GALKIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.

She took an active role in all of my campaigns to the extent that she could. Actually, my whole family took an active role in my Senate campaigns.

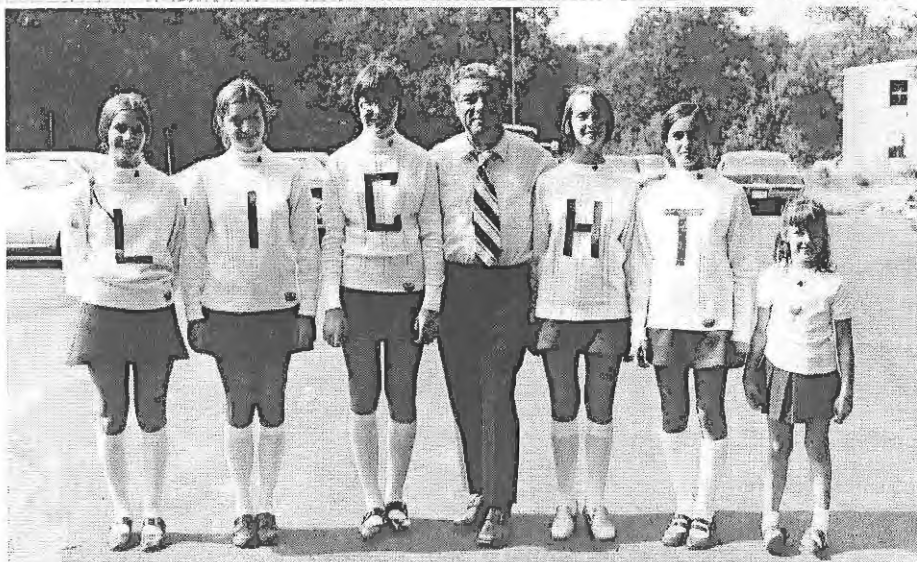
My wife perhaps was the most important campaign worker because she has great organizational talent. Dotty really organized the campaign to the point where we were somewhat of a model for other campaigns. She had voters' lists, workers' lists, telephone numbers, and everything under control. She did more work in my campaign than I did.

Dotty and I met when she was living on President Avenue and I was living on Tabor Avenue. I had been out of law school. She had gone to Classical, graduated from Wellesley, came back, and was working. Somebody invited me out to Ledgemont Country Club, where her parents were members, and I met her. I started going with her, and that was it.

After law school, I had been a clerk to a United States Circuit Court judge, John C. Mahoney. When I finished my clerkship, I didn't have any law office to which to go. There had been a Federal District Court judge, Ira Lloyd Letts, who had resigned from the bench and started his own firm with Andrew B. Quinn. Judge Mahoney said, "Why don't you try Judge Letts' law firm?" He called and made it easier for me. Now the firm is Letts, Quinn & Licht. Both Letts and Quinn are deceased.

In those days, lawyers didn't get paid very much, if anything. I'm talking about Rhode Island, not about the larger cities. I stayed until I went on the bench. After I was governor, I came back to practice in the same law firm.

I was a judge for twelve and a half years. Politics didn't come as easily to me as it would have had I gone from the Senate into a statewide office. In the early days, the business of going out to the factories and shaking hands didn't



"LIGHT GIRLS"

come as easily to me as it did later on, once I got into the swing of things. But the fact that I was a judge gave me a certain credibility as a candidate.

I had been talked to in 1966 and was probably right not to run for the governorship. But in 1968, I had reached the point where I wanted to get back into public life, and I knew the odds were heavily against me. John Chafee, who now is running for the United States Senate, was a most popular governor. Although this is basically a Democratic state, the Republicans captured the lieutenant governor's office, and they were planning to take over all of the state offices.

I became so involved in the campaign that I've never really been able to look back to whether it was a hard decision. It was a hard decision up until the moment I made it. Then, when I made it, it was kind of a relief.

I have a very good friend, Joseph Thaler, who wanted me to go out and shake hands with as many persons as I could. I was nominated in late June and this was July. I said, "Well, this is not the time." But he came to me one day and said, "You come with me." At that time, he had shoe store concessions in Atlantic Mills, so he took me to Olneyville.

The most humbling fact was that Joe Thaler was better known in the mill building than I was. A majority of the people who knew me were favorably inclined to me, but only seven percent of the people knew me. That was a very frustrating situation. Also, my political connection with the Democratic Party had evaporated. So basically, I did not have any political base, and the Republicans had had the governorship for some years.

During the summer and early fall, it was clear to me that I had many, many problems to overcome. I was spending 17 or 18 hours a day campaigning. During the day I would be going through the plants, and at night I would be talking with strategists. It was really not until late in October that I began to see a response to my candidacy, that I began to feel that I had a chance. It was basically because of my personal, direct communication with individuals, shaking their hands, and a very substantial media campaign. I have no statistical data to support it, but I may have shaken hands with a couple hundred thousand people.

It would be easy to say that I was self-conscious about being Jewish. People keep asking me that question. It was not the case. I got great support from city and town chairmen.

I was engaged in Jewish activities, so that it was not a case where anybody had any doubt about my being Jewish. You will recall that in 1970, the Republicans had Richard Israel, a candidate for attorney general who was Jewish. Now, I think that the Jewish population represents about three percent of the state. In that year, the people elected a Jewish governor and a Jewish attorney general, a Democrat and a Republican.

John Chafee was so strong. He seemed unbeatable.

I found that when I was running for the governorship as a challenger or an incumbent that campaigns get down sometimes to one or two issues. To a degree, the advantages of incumbency seem to slip away. While the candidate who is governor wants people to know his entire record, the press and the electronic media are not going to go through his entire record.

But the strategy was dealing with issues. We didn't have a very large paid staff, so we had to have volunteers who prepared position papers for me. Then I would examine them and talk about them. But basically the strategy was to get the necessary recognition, then sell the candidate as a credible candidate, and then to give him issues that could attack the incumbent.

Governor Chafee really did not want to espouse an income tax in Rhode Island. He did it, but he really never fought for it in the General Assembly. Instead, the General Assembly passed what we called "a grab bag of taxes." He wanted to avoid that issue in the campaign, and I told him he couldn't avoid it.

In public statements I said that it was his duty to say where he stood

on the tax question. I offered an alternative called an "investment" tax, which was a very poor name. It was really a dividend and interest tax in lieu of the income tax. So we had a confrontation, which is important in a political campaign. We were able to do that quite successfully.

In October, two things happened. Governor Chafee's daughter, Trudy, fell off a horse, was kicked, and died. So we stopped the campaign. For some time, I really had no interest in campaigning against John Chafee because I felt for him very deeply. I think we stopped for about ten days or two weeks. Obviously, the interlude had some effect on the campaign. But then Governor Chafee came back into campaigning, not because he had his heart in it, but I think he felt that the process had to go on. It's a tribute to his sense of the necessity for the political process to continue.

Once I got back in, it was amazing how quickly the recognition became high again. The last week of the campaign, I began to feel that I had a chance of winning. Governor Chafee had beat the Democratic candidate who preceded me by some 90,000 votes. I knew that I had to make up a great deal of ground to come anywhere near to beating him.

Tuesday was Election Day. The polls in Providence close at nine o'clock. The polls close earlier in the small towns. I was the first Democrat in many years to carry Block Island, so that was a good sign. We were getting our information from the newspaper people, from television, and from runners who had information from the various voting districts.

The ballroom at the Biltmore Hotel became more crowded. There came a point when we saw a difference in the vote compared to 1966. People around me began to say that I was going to win. I was still not prepared to say I was going to win until it was a sure thing. There was a good possibility. Then I turned to my wife, Dotty, and said, "I'm afraid we won." We embraced and kissed.

I wanted to go Governor Chafee's suite. He wouldn't hear of it. He wanted to come to my suite. He came up. I understood his feelings, and he was a gentleman all the way about it. I think his wife came with him. He said some very nice things, and I said some very nice things. It was a short meeting.

Then we went to the lobby. The police had to take me through because the crowds were so immense and so enthusiastic. People wanted to touch me. There was some question as to whether there wouldn't be injuries as we were

trying to get through the crowds.

The victory was such a surprise that it made national news. Some people have told me that they heard of the victory in Europe and Japan. It was something that was considered one of the great upsets.

I was the first Jewish governor of Rhode Island. Of course, Herbert Lehman had been governor of New York, and there may have been one or two others.

My parents, my brothers, our families were all together. It is very hard for me to put into words what I felt. It's a thing that I will never, never forget.

Here was a situation in which I was just a candidate, and all of a sudden I'm governor with immense responsibilities. At that time, I was not thinking about responsibilities, but the euphoric mood is something that is hard to recapture. I had started an enterprise, which was, at best, less than marginal, without organization, without money, without the resources of party power. To go against one of the most popular governors in the country. It was recognized nationally as an amazing feat.

The most distasteful thing that I had to do was to attempt to raise money. It is very easy to raise money for a cause, but it's somewhat unseemly to be asking for money for yourself.

In the beginning, I had friends who felt that this was a hopeless effort. I think some contributed so I wouldn't lose so badly, that it would not be a disgrace. It's amazing how necessity pushes you to do things that you normally would not do.

In 1970, I spent about \$400,000. I felt that the amount of money spent for public campaigns is somewhat obscene. After I left the governorship, I had a Ford Foundation grant, which gave me the opportunity to write a monograph on politics and money.

Then I was chairman of a commission to study campaign expenditures in Rhode Island. They didn't accept all of our recommendations, but we now have a campaign-expenditure law in Rhode Island.

After the first election, we went on vacation and had a great time. I started to think in terms of my inaugural message and what my plans would be now that I had said we were going to do all these things.

We had to have new staff, new people. Even though I'd been in political life earlier, I knew no more about the operation of the various agencies of

state government than perhaps anybody else at that stage. I said I was even having trouble knowing how to use the telephone in the governor's office. But the great thing about government is that things begin to fall into place, and it isn't long before you are in control, to the degree that any elected official is in control.



ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARADE, WARWICK, CA. 1972.

I found it very difficult to get persons whom I thought were highly qualified. I had set my sights very high, but the pay scale in Rhode Island was very, very low. In the Department of Public Works, which is now the Department of Transportation, I think that the director was paid something like \$23,000. Engineers in those years were making \$35,000 to \$40,000 per year. And I wanted to get an outstanding engineer to be head of the department. They wouldn't take the position.

Some wouldn't take the position because I had won by only 12,000 votes. When the absentees and shut-ins came in, it was reduced.

But there are some people who will take state jobs because they believe in the man and because they like government service. They make sacrifices. I found some men and women whom we put into very key positions.

We were very successful in both terms getting through the major portion of our legislation. In our first term, as I recall, the newspapers reported that we got about ninety percent of our legislation through. That is basically



FRANK AND DOROTHY WITH BETH, CAROL, AND JUDY, 1968.

because I had very good working relations with the leadership in the House and the Senate, which were predominantly Democratic. One of the problems being a Democratic governor is that if you propose legislation, people expect that you're going to be able to get it through the General Assembly.

We reorganized state government very substantially, and we needed the help of the General Assembly to do that. I think we improved state services by virtue of that reorganization. I think we made strides in all fields: education, labor, consumer legislation, and attempts to control or at least better police utilities. I would say that the outstanding thing was the tax question.

The governorship is all-consuming. There's an awful lot that is very, very rewarding, and I'm not talking about the pomp and ceremony. But family life pales seriously. You work in the office during the day, then, when you go home, you might be tired, but you get a second lift. Then you go out and campaign or you go out and speak at five dinners.

I think being governor of the state of Rhode Island is more difficult than being governor of the state of New York. When you're governor of Rhode Island, everybody expects that you attend their meetings, their functions, their events. I've been to Westerly, Newport, Bristol, Woonsocket, and Providence in a single evening. People also expect you to attend christenings, weddings, funerals, and Bar Mitzvahs.

I think Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote an essay on compensation, where he said everything you get you have to pay for. The thing you pay for most is the time you take away from your family life. Some public officials may be

wiser in budgeting their time, but I had a more difficult situation. When you win by large pluralities, you can coast a little bit.

• On the other side of the coin, you get to go to some very, very, great events. We were at the White House and the State Department on several occasions. When the governors' conference was held in Washington, it was customary for the President to invite the governors. One time my wife was seated next to President Nixon. She tells the story that she had a chicken that was so very hard that it fell off the plate. The President didn't notice when she picked it up and put it back on her plate.

I can say without any sense of prejudice that Rhode Island is one of the most beautiful states in the country. Just traveling around the state in a helicopter and seeing its sheer beauty from a very low altitude is a great experience.

Then of course, you can't avoid the fact that the sense of being in the middle of the action is very, very rewarding. There is also the fact that what you do has an impact upon people. For example, when it was suggested to me that I ought to cut welfare costs, I knew that there were chiselers. But I always felt that they represented a very small percentage of the people who really needed help. We have poor people in this affluent society. If you do something across the board, you may get at some of the waste, but you also hurt people. Being governor has an impact on what happens to people, whether it's welfare, education, health or anything else.

I think we're all very complex. I can't believe that we experience life without something attaching. For me, it was my childhood, my family background, my own training, my interest in causes, and my social concerns. I was more on the civil side of the calendars than on the criminal side, but I think the bench also had some impact on me.



PRIME MINISTER GOLDA MEIR,
THE GOVERNOR, AND HIS FATHER,
JACOB, JERUSALEM, 1969.



JOHN H. CHAFEE : A REMINISCENCE

BY HONORABLE BRUCE M. SELYA

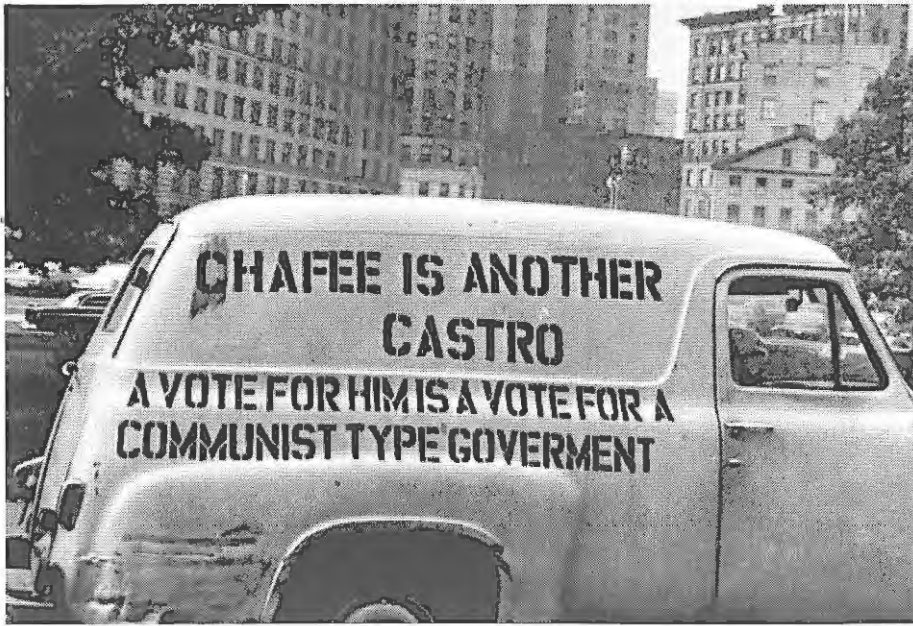
This heartfelt portrait was written by one of the Senator's closest friends and supporters. It demonstrates that Jews have played leadership roles in both political parties and have not necessarily favored Jewish candidates.

Born in Providence in 1934, Judge Selya graduated from Classical High School, Harvard College, and Harvard Law School. He was in private practice from 1960 until 1982, when President Reagan nominated him to a judgeship on the U.S. District Court, District of Rhode Island. He was the first Jew from Rhode Island to ascend to the federal bench. In 1986, President Reagan nominated Judge Selya to a judgeship on the U.S. Court of Appeal for the First Circuit. In 2005, Chief Justice Rehnquist appointed him to serve concurrently as one of three judges on the Foreign Intelligence Court of Review.

In 1964, Judge Selya was an unsuccessful Republican candidate for attorney general. Between 1969 and 1974, he was vice-chair of the Republican State Central Committee. He has taught law at numerous universities and for seven years chaired the board of Bryant University. Among numerous other leadership positions, he was the founding chair of Lifespan, the hospital consortium.

As I grow older, I realize more keenly that a person's true treasure is counted in friends and family. Viewed in that light, I am rich beyond compare. But life is fleeting, and no one is immortal. A painful part of being blessed with length of years is that it forces the survivor to bear witness to the departure – often the premature departure – of those closest to him. One person who remains much in my thoughts, six years after his death, is John H. Chafee (1922-1999).

John Chafee's personal story is an extraordinary profile in courage. When the United States was drawn into World War II, a nineteen-year-old Chafee left Yale to enlist in the Marine Corps. He earned a battlefield commission and fought at Guadalcanal and Okinawa. He returned to Yale to complete



his undergraduate education, then attended Harvard Law School, and became a member of the Rhode Island Bar in 1951.

When a new war erupted, John again responded to his country's call. He resumed active duty, commanding a rifle company in Korea. He then returned to Rhode Island, where he practiced law, settled in Warwick, and began raising a family. In 1956, he entered a different kind of public service when he sought and won election to the Rhode Island House of Representatives.

John and I could not have come from more divergent backgrounds; he traced his roots to the Mayflower, whereas I traced mine to Ellis Island. Yet when we met by chance in the winter of 1960-1961, we bonded instantly. I was a young lawyer, green as grass; John was twelve years my senior and intent on abandoning a comfortable law practice for the rough and tumble of politics. He was – and remained throughout his life – an idealist and a visionary. He saw politics as a means to an end: public service. When he told me of the improbable future that he envisioned – he, as a thirty-something Republican, would run for governor in an oppressively Democratic state – I was captivated both by his spirit and by his daring.

I knew nothing of politics or politicians, but I sensed that this earnest fellow could be a force for good, and I wanted very much to be part of his crusade. My embryonic law practice left me time for extracurricular pursuits, so I signed on as a volunteer. I researched issues, wrote position papers, and the

like. My first project culminated in the composition of a forty-page paper on the pros and cons of the state's armories – a tome that I now believe was never read by any other living person.

Much of the rest is history. In 1962, John Chafee won an epic struggle for the Republican nomination and survived a brutal primary. Then, running as "the man you can trust" – a slogan that was as honest as it was effective – he eked out a victory over the incumbent Democrat governor by a margin of only 398 votes. I was part of the team of lawyers who represented him before the state Board of Elections in what came to be known as the "long count." During that ordeal, I was gratified, but not surprised, at John's grace under pressure.

When John Chafee took office for what would be the first of his three terms as governor, he asked me to join a group of seven men who lunched with him at the State House nearly every Monday to discuss policy initiatives and kindred matters. The *Providence Journal* soon got wind of these sessions and, accurately, if inoriginally, labeled us the "kitchen cabinet." The label stuck.

An argument can be made – and I would be the first to make it – that John Chafee was the finest governor in Rhode Island's long and storied history. He proved to be inspirational, intelligent, creative, enthusiastic, tireless, and honorable. Rhode Island still benefits today from the innovative programs that he pioneered and the forward-looking projects that he conceived. He inaugurated the "Green Acres" program through which the state acquired and preserved hundreds of open-space sites, including such magnificent properties as Colt State Park, East Matunuck Beach, the Ninigret Conservation Area, and Brenton Point. He also put Rhode Island in the forefront of the civil rights movement, introducing and pushing through landmark legislation such as the Rhode Island Fair Housing Act. His achievements in economic development, health care, and infrastructure improvements are legendary.

By 1966, John and I had grown so close that he asked me to chair his gubernatorial reelection campaign. I accepted the offer and he swept to yet



AN INAUGURATION WITH
GEN. LEONARD HOLLAND.



AN INAUGURAL BALL WITH LINCOLN, JOHN, AND GEORGIA.

another victory. Following that triumph, he was elected chairman of the Republican Governors' Association and became, increasingly, a voice for moderation in national G.O.P. circles.

Darker days were on the horizon, however. In 1968, John lost both a daughter and an election. The principal reason for his electoral defeat was that he dared to tell the truth about the pressing need for a state income tax.

I recall, as if it were yesterday, the kitchen cabinet meeting that resolved the handling of the income tax issue. One by one, each of the kitchen cabinet members, myself included (as campaign chair), pointed out the political wisdom of fudging the issue until after the election and only then confronting it. Governor Chafee sighed, smiled wanly, and said in almost a whisper: "Well, that settles it. The vote is 7 to 1. But I'm the one — so next week I will tell the people that the state needs the tax." That was quintessential Chafee: talk straight and let the chips fall where they may. The slogan had gotten it right: he was the man you could trust. That candor cost him the governorship, but it sealed his reputation when, shortly thereafter, his successor proposed, and the General Assembly approved, a state income tax.

In 1969, John joined the Nixon Administration as Secretary of the Navy. He returned home in 1972 and practiced law for three years or so. Our law offices were on adjacent floors in the Hospital Trust Tower. He was an

enormously successful lawyer, but one who did not enjoy his success. He often would say to me, "I don't know how you can do this day after day." He longed to return to public service.

The opportunity was not long in coming. John and I sat in my office in 1975 and heard Senator John O. Pastore announce that he would not seek reelection. John's eyes sparkled, and we both knew, then and there, that he would make a bid for the seat. He went home early that afternoon to discuss the prospect with his beloved wife, Virginia. In typical Chafee fashion—he never could seem to remember to carry money with him—he borrowed bus fare from me for the trip to Potowomut.

I chaired John's successful 1976 Senate campaign. Once he entered the Senate, he found his true vocation. He was thrice reelected and served with great distinction in the Senate until his untimely death. He became one of the most respected figures on the national political scene: a powerful and effective chairman of a major committee, a visionary, a man capable of building bridges between partisan factions, a model of rectitude. His colleagues admired his courage and his independence, respected his judgment, marveled at the depth of his compassion, acknowledged his probity, and envied his sense of self.

John Chafee was a wonderful senator. He worked tirelessly, stood by his principles, drew on his endless store of common sense, and used the force of a warm and engaging personality to compile a remarkable record of accomplishment. His contributions in the areas of health care and tax policy were substantial. His work on the Senate Intelligence Committee drew rave reviews. His most significant efforts, however, were in environmental matters. We owe to him, in large measure, such important enactments as the Clean Water Act, the modern version of the Clean Air Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

I am Jewish, as were many of John Chafee's other friends and advisers (names such as Merrill Hassenfeld, Morton Smith, and Lila Sapinsley spring readily to mind). We often spoke with him about Israel and other matters of uniquely Jewish concern.

John viewed himself as a staunch supporter of Israel and consistently voted for financial aid that was necessary to enable Israel to move forward economically and militarily. He cosponsored Senate resolutions that condemned terrorist attacks in Israel and elsewhere, a resolution urging Arab states to rec-



ognize Israel, and two resolutions expressing the sense of the Congress that United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism, was wrong-headed and should be repealed. In all the time I knew him, his position was one of solidarity with Israel and what it represented.

Solidarity, however, did not mean blind allegiance. Throughout his long career of public service, John Chafee was his own man. That sense of independence occasionally troubled Jewish voters because it led him to vote, for example, against the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995, which mandated that the U.S. embassy be moved to Jerusalem, and in opposition to two controversial bills designed to prohibit arms sales to Saudi Arabia (one with respect to the sale of Maverick missiles and the other with respect to the sale of AWACS). This was John Chafee at his principled best: he knew that those votes were costly to him politically – many more Jews vote in Rhode Island than Saudis or Palestinians – yet he believed firmly that, within wide limits, the Executive Branch, rather than the Legislative Branch, should have the final say in matters touching upon foreign relations. He drew a clear line – he repeated, over and over again, what he said during floor debate on the AWACS legislation: that he cast his vote on the bill believing that "Israel's military dominance in

the area is not going to be altered by this sale. If it were to be altered, I would not support the sale"—and yet, a perception emerged that John was only a "fair weather" supporter of Israel. The perception was false.

False or not, the flames were fanned by an eerie coincidence: every one of John Chafee's four successful Senate races was against a Jewish candidate. In 1976, he defeated Richard Lorber; in 1982, Julius Michaelson; in 1988, Richard Licht; and in 1994, Linda Kushner. In addition, the man who beat him in the 1968 gubernatorial election, Frank Licht, also was Jewish. He thought this odd, but he never took it personally. John Chafee was a man of deep religious convictions and respected the religious convictions of others, whatever their faith.

John Chafee was a modest man. He mingled as easily with cooks as with kings, with plumbers as with presidents, with teenagers as with tycoons. He was the type of fellow who would (and did) sneak away from meetings with high-priced political consultants to play "go fish" with my five-year-old daughter; the type of fellow who would shine his own shoes (and mine, if he had time) before heading over to a meeting at the White House; the type of fellow who would stop his car to retrieve pieces of litter; the type of fellow who was every bit as much at home in Eddie Beard's bar as in Buckingham Palace.

I mention all this because, as I look back over the years, I have come to believe that John Chafee's ultimate genius was that power and glory never changed him. I was privileged to know him about as well as one man can know another—and I never knew him to do anything dishonorable, disingenuous, or mean-spirited; I never knew him to place



his personal agenda above the public good; I never knew him to forgo an opportunity to help a person in need; and I never knew him to forget a friend. Time never muted his candor, altered his self-effacing nature, dampened his spirits, or slowed him in the single-minded pursuit of excellence. He had, in Sir Walter Scott's phrase, the will to do and the soul to dare.

I add to all of this that John Chafee was a man of great passion. He loved his wife and his family; he loved his state and his nation; he loved the opportunity to serve; and he loved the chance to make things better.

To sum it all up, John Chafee was a *mensch*. He used the time that was given to him to make the world a better place. His death is an ominous reminder that, sooner or later, the bell tolls for each of us.

Although John Chafee was an Episcopalian to his core, his life was in the finest Jewish tradition.



JUDGE SELYA

MY LIFE AND TIMES IN RHODE ISLAND LAW, POLITICS AND JUSTICE PART I

BY HONORABLE RICHARD J. ISRAEL

Having written hundreds of opinions as a Superior Court judge, the author now tells us something about the person beneath the black robes. The first part of his colorful narrative culminates with his election to high public office. The second part may culminate with his election to the presidency of Temple Beth-El. Judge Israel's story may seem particularly intriguing because of his deep connections to northern Rhode Island. Of course it is maddening to define him as either a conservative liberal or a liberal conservative. A moderate, he has felt at home in both political parties and within two branches of Judaism.

Sometimes people ask me how a liberal Jewish lawyer ever came to be elected attorney general of Rhode Island on the Republican ticket. It does no good to try to explain that all liberals have not always been Democrats or vice versa. It is a long story, and it involves differences between state and national politics. It also has to do with chance.

MY UPBRINGING

My parents, Fred and Cecile L. Israel, were members of Congregation B'nai Israel, a conservative synagogue in Woonsocket, where I was born on December 9, 1930. Eight years later, our family moved to the mill village of Slatersville in the Town of North Smithfield. I spent my childhood years as a member of the only Jewish family in town. I can honestly say that I experienced no overt anti-Semitism among my boyhood chums and our neighbors while I was growing up in a mix of suburban and rural settings.

My father, who graduated from Boston University Law School in 1926, had a typical, small-town law practice in Woonsocket. Among others, he represented a number of rural clients. I can recall Dad bringing home in-kind



A Woonsocket Call Photo

RICHARD'S FIRST ELECTIVE OFFICE, 1942.
HE SWEARS HIS PARENTS INTO THE JUVENILE GRANGE OF SLATERSVILLE.

fees in the form of eggs, poultry, fruit and vegetables during the depths of the Great Depression. He originated poverty law in our town. I can recall following the news of World War II through a newspaper called *PM*, which I now know to have been more than somewhat left-wing.

I was a Bar Mitzvah in B'nai Israel in December 1943. During my teen years, I was also an active member of the Woonsocket Chapter of AZA, the boys' organization of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization. Foreshadowing, perhaps, my future career in law, politics and justice, I was a winner of national awards in debate and oratory. During the wartime years, when there was a shortage of able young men on the home front and I was still a young teenager, I led a Boy Scout troop to Camp Yawgoog.

At that time, there was no high school in the Town of North Smithfield, where I lived, so I graduated from Classical High School in Providence, along with a coterie of friends from Woonsocket. At Classical, I was a member of the track team and president of the debate club. I graduated cum laude in 1947. Although I studied Latin for four years, I deeply regret never having studied classical Greek in one of the last public high schools to

offer the language for three years.

Although we were regular synagogue members, my family was not at all halachically observant. As was the case of so many children of immigrant parents, my parents were thoroughly assimilated. Nevertheless, taking great pride in their Jewish heritage, they insisted that I receive a Jewish education.

I was, of course, aware of the Nazis' oppression of European Jews from the experiences related to me by members of a number of refugee families who had managed to escape and settle in Woonsocket. Like the vast majority of Americans, Jew and Gentile alike, I had no idea of the full extent of the Holocaust until after the war. I took great pride in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent defeat of the Arab armies mobilized against the infant her.

BROWN UNIVERSITY AND THE MILITARY

After Classical, I enrolled in Brown University, where I majored in English literature. I also studied classical Latin literature. While at Brown, I was a member of the debate team. During my first two years I lived on campus; during the next two years I commuted from Woonsocket in my first car, a 1938 Ford V-8.

In January 1949, I enlisted in the Rhode Island National Guard. There was and still is a military tradition in the Israel family. In 1889, while still a greenhorn, my grandfather, Simon Israel, enlisted to fight for the United States in the Spanish-American War. As a result of his service in Cuba, he was awarded United States citizenship. My grandfather, a proud citizen, could be seen for many years carrying the American flag and leading the contingent of the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Woonsocket's Memorial Day and Armistice Day parades.

My father was too young to fight in World War I and too old for World War II, but in the 1920s he served in the Civilian Military Training Corps. I served in the National Guard for over twenty years, retiring in 1990 at the rank of lieutenant colonel. My son, Eric, who served as a lawyer in the United States Air Force, has carried on a proud tradition of service to our nation.

In 1951, I graduated from Brown magna cum laude and with high honors. I was awarded prizes in Latin and debate. In the fall, I enrolled in Yale Law School.

POLITICS DURING THE 1950's

Several important events stand out in my memories of the early 1950s, now more than a half-century ago. In 1952, for example, I cast my first vote. It was a straight Democratic ballot: Adlai Stevenson for President and Dennis J. Roberts for governor of Rhode Island. Stevenson lost and Roberts won.

During the early 1950s, Senator Joseph McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin, blackened America with his rabid anti-communism. I can recall watching the Senate's Army-McCarthy hearings on television with rapt attention, admiring Joseph Welsh, and his assistant lawyers, as they destroyed this evil demagogue. Today "McCarthyism" is a word; then it was reality.

During this period, characterized by an irrational fear of communism, I was able to observe a failure of justice. Very soon after the development of the atomic bomb by the United States, the Soviet Union exploded its own nuclear weapon. The arms race was on. A scapegoat had to be found for "handing over" the atomic weapon secrets to the Cold War enemy.

Early in the 1950s, the FBI was able to build a case against a Jewish couple, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Julius was a dedicated communist, as was Ethel, but he had been employed at the plant where the first atomic bombs had been built. Both were tried and convicted of betraying American atomic secrets to the Soviets. They were sentenced to death.

At the time, I held real doubt about their guilt and felt that it was wrong to impose the death penalty on either husband or wife. Since then, I have come to believe that Julius was guilty of the charges brought against him, but that Ethel was not, although she surely knew and approved of what Julius had done. Her execution was clearly an injustice. She had probably been charged by the FBI in order to leverage a plea out of Julius.

The faculty and student body of Yale Law School, liberal and conservative alike, were outraged by the convictions and the death penalties. In spite of our protest vigils and petitions, both Rosenbergs were executed by electrocution at Sing Sing Prison in New York on June 19, 1953. If elected in 1952, would "President" Adlai Stevenson have commuted their sentences, as President Eisenhower did not?

More important for the future than the Army-McCarthy hearings or the Rosenbergs' trial and execution was a case making its way through the courts in the early 1950s. This case would change America forever for the better.

In 1951, the Legal Defense Fund of the NAACP, under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall, decided to challenge racially segregated education in America's public schools. Black parents whose children were compelled to attend racially segregated public schools sued the school systems of Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. The parents claimed that racial segregation violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. These cases were argued for the first time before the United States Supreme Court on December 9, 1952 (my 22nd birthday). No decision was forthcoming by the end of the session in July, so the court scheduled re-argument on October 12, 1953.

Needless to say, Yale Law School was abuzz with argument, discussion, and speculation. An overwhelming majority of faculty and students considered racial segregation in public schools to be both immoral and unconstitutional (though there were no black professors and only one black student among us). The question was whether the court would speak with a resounding legal voice to end this deprivation of black Americans' civil rights.

Some people thought that Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson's death on September 8, 1953, before the cases could be argued, proved the existence of a caring God. President Dwight D. Eisenhower appointed Earl Warren, Republican governor of California, to the office of chief justice. The case was re-argued for three whole days starting on December 7, 1953. The legal chatter in the law school corridors and study halls only grew louder and more speculative. I was among those who hoped that the court would declare "separate but equal" no longer valid and would order the public schools of America integrated without further delay.

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court's unanimous opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* was handed down. It struck down racially segregated education in America. Then I graduated confident that I had chosen the right career.

I was admitted to the Rhode Island Bar in November 1954. At the time, my Dad was so disabled by severe arthritis of his cervical spine that he could not appear in court. I enjoyed the distinction of conducting my first trial on the same day I was sworn in by the Rhode Island Supreme Court.

THE 1956 ELECTION

The Korean War ended officially on January 31, 1955, and I was called up for active duty only five days later. By Election Day in 1956, I was a first lieutenant in the United States Army, serving in the artillery at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Everyone just seemed to "Like Ike," and I too cast a military ballot to reelect President Eisenhower.

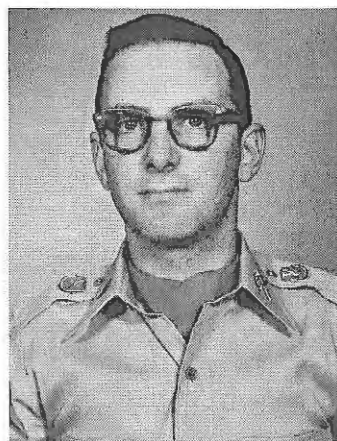
Though I cannot recall how I voted, the election for governor of Rhode Island was very close. The Eisenhower landslide brought Republican candidate Christopher DelSesto within 711 votes of Democratic Governor Dennis J. Roberts, who was running for his third term. Military ballots like mine did not have any effect on the outcome, but when absentee ballots were counted, the lead changed hands. DelSesto was the apparent victor by 427 votes.

Governor Roberts appealed to the Rhode Island Supreme Court, arguing that the absentee ballots should be disallowed. The court ruled in the governor's favor, declaring that a law passed by the General Assembly and signed by him was unconstitutional. Declared the ultimate winner, Governor Roberts was inaugurated in January 1957. It became clear to me from the outcome of this case that, even in a democracy, courts could play a political role. Numerous Rhode Island citizens were deprived of their right to vote by a decision of the state's highest court.

And so in 1957, when I returned to Rhode Island from active duty, I became a member of the Rhode Island Young Republicans. This was primarily my reaction to what I felt was a civic injustice.

EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

While practicing law with my father, then 54, in Woonsocket, I lived in Providence. In 1958, as a resident of its Third Ward, I ran as a Republican candidate for city council. Jacob Alprin, the Democratic incumbent, who was also a Jew and later a distinguished judge of the Family Court, soundly trounced me to no one's surprise.



LT. ISRAEL, 1956

Christopher DelSesto, like me a former Democrat, was elected Governor. This was probably some kind of electoral compensation by a resentful electorate. After his term as governor, DelSesto became a highly regarded justice of the Superior Court.

In 1960, on a whim, I took the civil service exam for the position of chief of the division of workmen's compensation in the State Department of Labor. To my surprise, I achieved the highest score, comfortably ahead of the longtime temporary incumbent. In September 1960, in accordance with the law of the merit system, I was appointed to a probationary term of six months by the DelSesto administration.

The election of November 1960 put the Democrat, John A. Notte, Jr., in the governor's office. I would not have become eligible for a permanent appointment until March 1961, so I was advised by the new Democratic administration that I would not be appointed. It was no secret that I was let go because of my political affiliation. Some you win; some you lose.

It was also of course significant that in 1960, John F. Kennedy was elected to the White House. Many of us Eastern Republicans became known as "moderates." We supported civil rights, protection of the environment, governmental responsibility for the welfare of the disabled, equality of educational and economic opportunity for both sexes, protection from corporate fraud, and other measures generally regarded as "liberal."

We avoided later becoming identified with Barry Goldwater's hopeless and hapless campaign against Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. Some of us, including me, supported most of LBJ's "War on Poverty," especially the institution of Medicare to provide health care for the aged and disabled, even though we had some misgivings about funding specific programs.

In 1960, while continuing to practice law with my father in Woonsocket, I had moved with my wife and three young children to Cumberland Hill in the Town of Cumberland. Among my many pro bono clients were the local chapter of the NAACP and many of its members. I had no political ambitions whatsoever. During this period I was, nonetheless, chosen by my colleagues to serve as president of the Woonsocket Bar Association. I was also appointed by the mayor to serve on a commission to improve race relations.

In 1962, the Republican John H. Chafee understandably enjoyed my whole-hearted support in his campaign to unseat John Notte, who had so

unceremoniously dumped me from the state job I had acquired through merit selection in 1960. As a result, when the Chafee campaign sought signatories to a "Lawyers for Chafee" ad in the *Providence Journal*, I was only too happy to sign on. I could honorably support an honest, hard-working, public-spirited, moderate Republican, especially if it could mean an electoral heave-ho for Governor Notte. In politics, one never forgets to return a favor.

Chafee was elected in a close-call election in 1962. He was reelected by a more comfortable margin in 1964. My campaign activity usually consisted of no more than being listed as a lawyer supporting his candidacy.

ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

In 1966, chance played a hand in my political fortunes. For the third time, my name appeared in an advertisement supporting the Chafee candidacy for governor. Herbert F. DeSimone of Providence was running for attorney general on the Republican ticket with Chafee. He was opposing a Democrat, J. Joseph Nugent, who had hired as a special counsel the lawyer I had replaced in 1960 as chief of the division of workmen's compensation. "What goes around comes around," as the saying goes. DeSimone was swept into office in the Chafee landslide of 1966.

At that time, state law authorized the attorney general to appoint five assistant attorneys general. As a savvy politico, DeSimone tried to appoint an ethnically and geographically balanced quintet. He selected Americo Campanella, an Italo-American from Providence; Robert F. Gammell, a Yankee from Kent County; James S. O'Brien, an Irish-American from Newport County; Charles G. Edwards, a Yankee from Providence County, and me. He wanted a member of his team to come from the Blackstone Valley. As a practitioner in Woonsocket and a resident of Cumberland, I satisfied that geographical requirement.

I think being Jewish did not hurt. I also believe that Bruce Selya, then an active member of the Chafee campaign team, now a senior judge in the United States First Circuit Court of Appeals, might have recommended me to DeSimone based on my membership in the Rhode Island Young Republicans and my repeated appearances in the "Lawyers for Chafee" advertisements in the *Providence Journal*.

And so, in January 1967, I became part of the first Republican attor-

ney general's team since the administration of Governor William Vanderbilt in 1939-1940. All of us assistant attorneys general were sworn in by Chief Justice Thomas Roberts, the brother of former Governor Dennis J. Roberts. Except for some holdovers from the Nugent administration, I was one of the few members of Attorney General DeSimone's staff who had actually represented defendants accused of a serious felony in a trial before a Superior Court jury.



1970

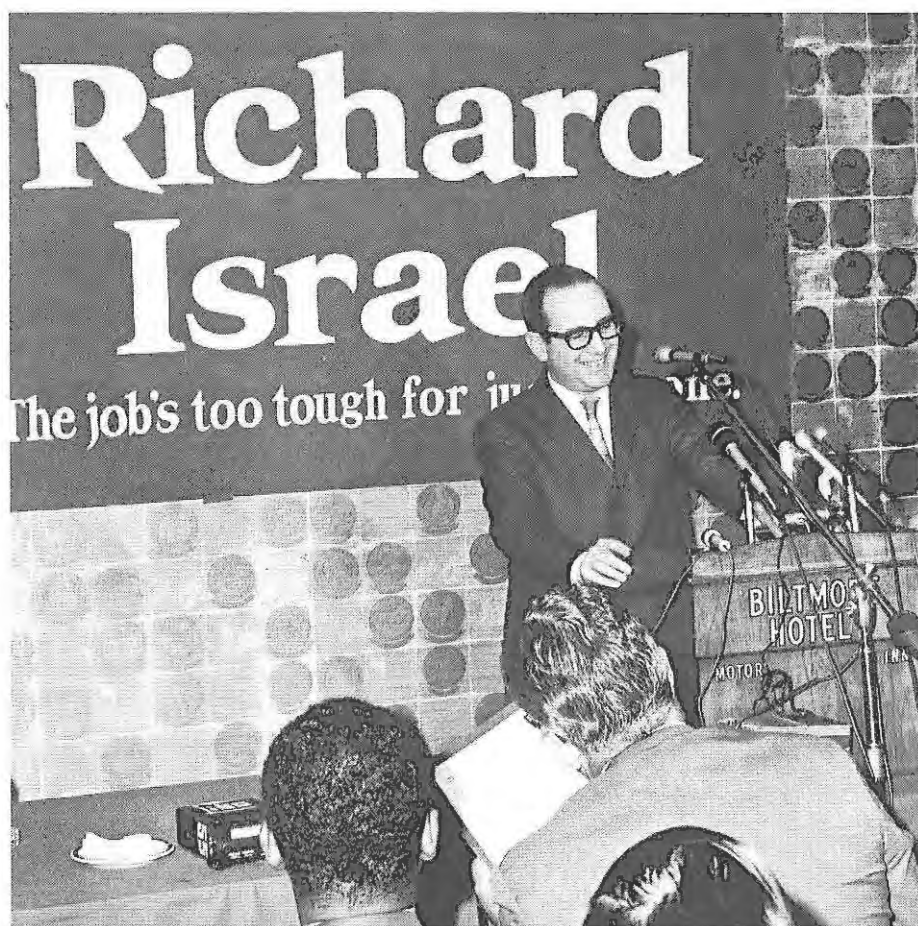
PROSECUTING ORGANIZED CRIME

Soon after taking office, Attorney General DeSimone appointed me to head his organized crime prosecution unit. At first, the unit consisted of one investigator, a retired Cranston city police detective, and me. We later enjoyed support from the Providence police's detective bureau and the state police's detective division.

Frankly speaking, I can now admit that I had no idea of the pervasive influence organized criminals exercised in Rhode Island. Testimony before the Kefauver Committee of the United States Senate in the 1950s had identified Raymond L. S. Patriarca, of Providence, as the kingpin of organized crime in Rhode Island. It was said that he also controlled organized criminal activity in southeastern New England from his vending machine business on Atwells Avenue on Federal Hill.

Organized crime in Rhode Island controlled illegal gambling and loan-sharking and was involved in labor racketeering and the criminal protection racket. In addition, organized crime figures did not hesitate to use extortion, intimidation and murder to enforce their control of criminal activity in New England. Information obtained from illegal FBI wiretaps in the 1960s disclosed that Patriarca's influence reached into the judiciary and high office in state government.

In 1970, after months of investigation, I prosecuted Patriarca on a murder conspiracy charge. The jury convicted him and a number of his underlings for a conspiracy to murder two hoodlums in a grocery store in Providence's Silver Lake neighborhood. These two minor leaguers were said



1970 CAMPAIGN

to have disrespected Patriarca's authority by conducting independent illegal gambling activities in and around Providence. The convictions were upheld on appeal, and Patriarca served out his sentence in prison in Rhode Island.

The trial was a distinctly high-profile public event with extensive coverage by the local and national media. Historical honesty compels me to disclose that the principal witness against Patriarca had concocted some of his testimony at the instigation of his two crooked FBI handlers in Boston. I remain convinced, however, that Patriarca was clearly guilty of authorizing, if not actually ordering, the killings.

MY CAMPAIGN FOR ATTORNEY GENERAL

As a result of the successful prosecution of a Mafia overlord, I became well

known enough in 1970 for Attorney General DeSimone to ask me to run as his successor on the Republican ticket while he ran for governor. I did not have the vaguest idea what running for a statewide office involved. With nothing to lose from my point of view, I accepted.

I had no campaign funds or organization. Everything was new. I gathered a few friends and colleagues in the DeSimone office to serve as my campaign staff. These included Henry Almonte from Cranston, Robert Peterson from Cumberland, Arthur Thovmasian also from Cranston, and Rosemary Pitochelli from Providence, who was a stalwart Republican fundraiser. Soon our skeleton staff was filled out with many devoted city and town campaign chairpersons and volunteers from throughout the state.

Advertising was in the capable hands of David Duffy. We printed pamphlets, bumper strips, lawn signs, and campaign pins. We began to raise funds from friends, family, and other supporters.

My Democratic opponent was Frank Caprio, a young and relatively inexperienced lawyer from Federal Hill who represented the Thirteenth Ward in the city council. My campaign stressed our respective professional qualifications to hold the office of Rhode Island's chief law enforcement officer. I was well known as the successful prosecutor of the head of organized crime in Rhode Island; my opponent represented the section of the city from which Patriarca ran his organized crime empire. I had years of experience as a trial lawyer; my opponent had barely enough years of practice to qualify as a public defender, let alone attorney general.

I had a reputation as a convincing advocate; my opponent must have felt that he lacked debating skills. Early in the campaign, he disdained to schedule a public debate with me. Later, as I began to pull ahead in the polls, he was more agreeable. He turned out to be a respectable debating adversary. I do not think that the Democratic Party expected its candidate would encounter vigorous opposition. The Caprio campaign appeared to be seriously under funded. Eventually, my fundraising effort was successful enough to permit us to buy advertising time on television. I cannot recall whether my opponent ran any television ads.

My campaign slogan was: "The job's too tough for just anyone." I campaigned on a pledge to improve an already successful and efficient prosecutor's office.



"ISRAEL GIRLS," 1970. DAUGHTER SUSAN IS THIRD FROM THE LEFT.

At that time, as well as perhaps today, a successful statewide campaign depended on more than on the name recognition that television and radio advertising can bring. Rhode Island voters wanted to meet the candidates in person. That meant active campaigning in shopping centers, at factory gates (or inside, when and if we were invited), at fairs, picnic and outings, at public celebrations, and in parades. We appeared in every town and in every ward of every city except for Block Island. I deeply regret this exception, because the voters of New Shoreham consistently supported my candidacies.

During the summer of 1970, I could be found campaigning on the beaches of Rhode Island, passing out pins and campaign flyers. For years afterward, I would encounter people on the street who would remind me that they had first met me at Narragansett Pier, Scarborough or Green Hills. Having never encountered Frank Caprio on the campaign trail, I could not tell if he too campaigned 12 to 14 hours a day.

BEING JEWISH

From time-to-time, I am asked whether my Jewishness was a factor – favorable or unfavorable – in my campaign. Though I had not experienced any anti-

Semitism growing up in Slatersville and in Woonsocket, I was perfectly aware that this vice had not completely disappeared from American life. Yet, I can honestly say that my religion was not in any way an obstacle to high office. Prepared for the contingency, my campaign staff would have alerted me to any suggestion of anti-Semitism. Fortunately, it never raised its ugly head.

I think that my Jewishness was probably beneficial to my candidacy. One of the advertisements in the early stages of my campaign featured the slogan: "Israel is not just a country." We were deliberately seeking to bask in the reflected esteem the State of Israel enjoyed from its victories in the Six Day War of 1967. The ad was designed to encourage the idea that candidate Israel would bring to office the same determined courage that the State of Israel brought against its enemies.

THE OUTCOME

The 1970 Democratic ticket was headed by the perennially popular Senator John O. Pastore, who easily trounced his Republican opponent, John McLaughlin, a former Roman Catholic priest who later became well known as a television commentator. Democratic Governor Frank Licht, whom I did not know personally, managed to squeak past DeSimone for a second term. I won handily over my Democratic opponent, but I was the only Republican elected to statewide office.

Thus, in January 1971, for the first time in Rhode Island history, two of the state's five general officers were Jews. Their election seemed especially remarkable in a state whose population was approximately 80% Roman Catholic.

In subsequent years, two more Jews, Julius Michaelson and Jeffrey Pine, were elected attorneys general. Some years after Frank Licht, Bruce Sundlun, also a Jew, was elected governor of the most Catholic state in the Union.

CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGE FOR JEWS IN RHODE ISLAND : THE ORIGINS OF A STATUTE

BY MICAH FITZGERMAN-BLUE

The author, a native of Tulsa, Oklahoma, graduated from Harvard College in December, 2005. He concentrated in history and literature. An avid writer of short fiction and features, Mr. Fitzerman-Blue was involved with numerous campus publications. Having written a scholarly study of the fortune cookie, he feels well prepared to pursue work as a screenwriter.

More than 60 articles about Newport's Jewish community have been published in our journal. When it appeared that the well had finally run dry, Mr. Fitzerman-Blue offers still another perspective. This challenging study is based on a chapter in his senior honors thesis.

Mr. Fitzerman-Blue shares the 2005 Eleanor F. Horvitz Award for research and writing by an undergraduate or graduate student with David B. Cohen, whose penetrating legal study follows.

Like every other state in the Union, Rhode Island prohibits uncles and nieces from marrying each other on grounds of incest. There is an exception to this rule, and it is for Jews. A bit of colonial legislation has endured two and a half centuries to appear today as Rhode Island General Law 15-1-4. As the statute reads, the rules defining incest for the gentile population: "do not extend to, or in any way affect, any marriage which is solemnized among the Jews, within the degrees of affinity or consanguinity allowed by their religion."

Enacted in the 1760s, the statute is among the earliest examples of individualized justice for religious minorities in American history. But it is a statute that lacks a written history, and a statute whose original context is now forgotten.

Rhode Island General Law 15-1-4 emerged at a specific place and time, and protected the practices of a single community – Sephardic merchant

refugees of the Spanish Inquisition and their recent descendants. This community no longer exists, and consanguineous marriage is a rarity among its descendants. A unique vestige, this statute is a tool both for understanding the nature of Rhode Island's earliest Jewish settlers, who probably arrived in 1658, and for understanding colonial Rhode Island itself—a haven for many religious minorities in the 17th and 18th centuries.

This tolerance of religion, central to the founding of the colony, was reflected in Rhode Island's refusal to attend the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 and in the state's reluctance to ratify the Constitution in 1789. Having endured more than a century of legal tension and debate with the Privy Council of England, the Rhode Island Assembly feared that compliance with a new federal government would mean the invalidation of any number of state laws and pose a serious threat to the religious toleration concretized by decades of legislation. In spite of the explicit ban of uncle-niece unions in English Common Law, such a practice was still protected by the colony for its Jewish community (though at first covertly). Upon joining the Union, Rhode Island might have lost its ability to pass such legislation, depending on the range and intrusiveness of judicial review of state law. The reaffirmation of this law in 1798—the first official codification after ratification—represents a triumph of state's right and speaks to the continued defiance of early Rhode Island as a fiercely independent state and an early bulwark against the perceived excesses of Federalism.

Regrettably, no record of the statute's initial enactment exists. There is no recorded debate, and no journal entries. The first context in which this statute appears is a codification in 1767. It is likely that the statute was enacted a few years earlier, but certainly after 1754 (the last codification prior 1767).¹ Still, there is an historical hole to be filled, and it must be done here by inference and close reading.

CONVERSOS AND CONSANGUINITY

The practice of marriage between uncles and nieces does not begin with the first Jews to settle in Newport. Its roots, in fact, are as old as Judaism itself: both the Torah and Talmud permit and even endorse uncle-niece marriage.

(Who is the ideal man? asks the Talmud: "He who loves his neighbors, he who draws his relative near, he who marries his sister's daughter."²) And yet, it may be more relevant to begin in Spain at the end of the 14th century, as the Christian *reconquista* raged on against Spain's half million Moors, whose emirs had governed in Andalucia for six centuries.

Though it was a war between Muslims and Christians, Spain's sizable Jewish minority would not remain untouched. With blessings (and money) from Rome, the *reconquista* in its latter stages was a holy crusade on European soil whose goal was the religious purification of Spain. In 1391, Christian Spain descended upon its Jews with violence. Massacres in the ghettos (*aljamas*) of Seville, Valencia, Barcelona, and Toledo were followed by the conversion—both forced and elective—of most survivors.³ There had been a small population of converts—*conversos*—before 1391, but this was something else. It was a new class of society, a class whom Spanish Christians distrusted and whose new social mobility and success they grew to resent. Writes Yosef Yerushalmi, "So long as the Jews had remained within their ancestral religion they could also be contained within well defined limits through restrictive laws."⁴ For nearly a century, the door remained open: Iberia's former Jews used their improved status to enter professional sectors from which they had hitherto been barred and, most importantly, to marry into old-Christian families. Such unions were mutually beneficial: for the *conversos*, the old-Christian name provided access and acceptance; for the old-Christian, the *converso* often provided much-needed wealth (the *reconquista* left Spain with a huge national debt).⁵

These arrangements were well and good for Old-Christian beneficiaries, but the bulk of Spanish society perceived the community of *conversos* as "rich and powerful usurpers of positions and privileges to which they themselves aspired."⁶ And upon this perception they acted. To stem the upward advancement of the *conversos*, Spanish communities imposed a caste system, called *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), which limited the professional and marital choices of the "New Christians" living among them. Heredity took the place of religion as the central divide in Iberian society. Citizens were required to produce an extensive family tree to qualify for appointments to civil service

and many professional positions. By the 17th century, the military, many universities, and many monastic and religious orders were closed to *conversos* and their relatives.⁷ The result was, for all intents and purposes, a racially divided society that predates the modern idea of race.⁸

While there is some evidence that consanguineous relations existed before the massacres and conversions of 1391—especially within Spain's smallest Jewish communities—this practice certainly grew along with the *converso* community and the spread of *limpieza* laws. As far as marriage was concerned, the *conversos* were isolated. Once they had become Christians, it was illegal for *conversos* to marry remaining members of the Jewish community. But they were not so Christian as to easily marry into the Old-Christian community either.

Of course, many staunchly assimilationist *conversos* slipped past *limpieza* with the help of doctored family records and calculated (though always risky) intermarriage. But among *conversos*, writes David Gitlitz, "endogamy was the overwhelming preference" and in most instances, the only choice.⁹ Endogamy is not consanguinity. Yet, given the shrinking *converso* population, the fragmentation of communities resulting from emigration, and a persistent desire among many *conversos* to practice Judaism in secret, endogamy became consanguinity. After all, an especially good way to ensure that one's marital choice was a *marrano* (crypto-Jew) was to marry one's relative.

The exact frequency of consanguineous marriages within the *converso* population in the 16th and 17th centuries is impossible to measure. However, a large number of genealogies remain from this period. Toledo, in central Spain, has been the site of much research on the topic of *converso* genealogy because numerous family documents were maintained by the church there. Of course, it would be reckless to extrapolate a blanket statement about the entire *converso* community based on the profile of a single city, much less one subset of people in the city. The groups from which most records come are from the merchant and financial classes, however. It seems reasonable to connect the dots, even, perhaps, at risk of pushing the evidence.

Linda Martz, who has conducted the most extensive research on Toledan *converso* genealogies, notes that "many Toledan merchants and financiers formed marriage alliances almost exclusively with other *conversos* of the

same city, of the same socioeconomic status, and at times of the same family." ¹⁰ While consanguineous marriages were not the compulsory marital practices of the community, Martz is quick to point out how characteristic consanguineous marriages were of the merchant class. Observing one family's genealogy, she notes, "These marriages were typical of merchants of average means, and they created a network of consanguinity so tightly woven as to be virtually impenetrable."¹¹ Another family, the Santa Leocadias, "demonstrates the preference of the majority of the *converso* merchant community: not only did they marry fellow *conversos* of the same occupation, they also married relatives."¹²

Though consanguinity occurred at such a high rate at first due to external forces, *converso* families eventually encouraged such marriages. Indeed, *conversos* harnessed their re-diminished status as an "enabling violation," restoring in secret much of their pre-conversion religious practices.¹³ Not only did it ensure a degree of religious and cultural integrity, but it also prevented expensive dowries from leaving the family. As this population began to thrive in international commerce, consanguinity may not have functioned so differently from good old-fashioned nepotism.

The Jews who arrived in New Amsterdam and Newport from Recife in the mid-17th century were "typical" *conversos* in their marital patterns. David De Sola Pool, liturgist and historian of Shearith Israel, the first congregation in New York, devoted a book to the tombstones of the founding generation. In trying to chart the genealogies of these early Jewish settlers, he encountered a serious problem: "that of inbreeding." This he attributes to the size of the community and the practicability of Jewish marriage in colonial America:

There was too little matrimonial choice in the small town of New York. Sometimes a wife or a husband was found and brought from Newport, R.I., or Philadelphia... At other times marriages seem to have been arranged with Jewish families at more remote points in the United States, in Central America, or even in Europe. Sometimes the problem was drastically solved by marriage outside the Jewish community. But to a large extent, marriages in the New York Jewish community soon became more or less cousin marriages.¹⁴

Like other historians alarmed by the high incidence of consanguinity, De Sola Pool chooses not to consider that, by the time Jews moved to North America, consanguinity was a norm, shaped as much by the pressures of the *converso* experience as the paucity of marital choice in the colonies.

Morris Gutstein, an historian of colonial Jewry and a former rabbi of Touro Synagogue, offers a parallel narrative about the Jews of Newport. He writes, "Social relations among the Jews were close. Their religious bonds and marriages brought them even closer. Jewish marriages were often consecrated in the town. Marriages of close kin were common, though marriages of Newport Jews with Jews from other colonies were not rare."¹⁵

Gutstein does not consider why these Jews married within their families, but Stanley Chyet, writing about Aaron Lopez, the wealthiest Rhode Island Jew (and former *converso*) of the 18th century, hints at a deeper complexity. He suggests that consanguineous marriage was a way to "avoid the threat of exposure that 'intermarriage' would have posed."¹⁶ By "intermarriage," Chyet means marriage with old-line Christians which might have flushed to the surface hybrid religious practice. Chyet does not recognize the role the *limpieza* system played in shaping the *converso* mindset, a pattern that endured beyond the reach of the Inquisition. But he is correct to point to psychological factors. Indeed, the subject of his book, Aaron Lopez, seems to be the case in point. He was both the product of a consanguineous marriage and married to his niece, Anna.¹⁷

All of this serves as background to Rhode Island General Law 15-1-4. Why was there a need for special protection in the first place? Were it not for the widespread practice of uncle-niece marriage (and other, less immediate unions) within the *converso* community—by both necessity and preference—there would be little use for a statute protecting it. There is no evidence that other contemporaneous Jewish communities practiced consanguinity to the extent that the *conversos* did, nor is it a widespread practice among Jews today. While all Jews are protected under this statute today, its initial intent was to protect these *converso* Jews for whom consanguineous marriages was common practice.

LEGAL STATUS IN RHODE ISLAND

Well before Aaron Lopez arrived in Newport with his wife and children in 1740, Rhode Island was already an established haven for religious minorities from across the colonies and other parts of the world. Religious tolerance was central to Roger Williams' mission when he defected from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to found his own colony. In 1652, Williams wrote, "I desire not the liberty to myself which I would not freely and impartially weigh out to all the consciences of the world beside."¹⁸

To be sure, who qualified for a "conscience" may have been debatable, but the message of equality was not lost on Quakers and Baptists and Methodists alike, who began to settle in Rhode Island in the years after its establishment. When Williams wrote the aforementioned statement, it was not mere grandiloquence. He was willing to offer legal protection for his colony's residents, whoever they may be (provided they were not Native Americans). He pledged that "all men of whatever nation soever they may be, that shall be received inhabitants of any of the towns, shall have the same privileges as Englishmen, any law to the contrary notwithstanding."

The case of the Jews, however, points to a powerful ambivalence. Although they were officially welcome in the community, their legal status was not fully resolved. The first test case for complete equality on the part of the Jewish community came in 1684, when a government official issued a warrant for the seizure of goods and the "molestation" of members of the Jewish community. Two representatives from the community, Simon Mendez and David Brown, petitioned the General Assembly to repair damages and return their confiscated possessions. It is the first time Jews are mentioned in the official records of the colony, and to encouraging ends. On the very same day the petition was presented, the Assembly voted that these two men (identified as "associates being Jews") "may expect as good protection here as any strangers being not of our nation residing amongst us, in his Majesty's colony, ought to have, being obedient to his Majesty's laws."¹⁹

Still, while both Williams' covenant and this decision underscore the general acceptance of people from "other nations," Jews were not recognized as citizens of Rhode Island, no matter how long they had resided in the colony

(in this case, for nearly two decades).²⁰ Jews were defined either as “legal aliens” or “resident aliens,” terms that afforded them many of the civil rights of citizens, but neither suffrage nor the right to serve in any public office. It was not until 1750 that the first Jew was naturalized (a *converso* named Moses Lopez). The next case, involving James Lucena, was not resolved until 1761.²¹

And yet the granting of citizenship to two Jews reflected the gradually expanding role of the Jewish community in Rhode Island. In 1705, a Jewish family opened a soap manufacturing business (reliant on the whaling industry for material). By 1710, Jewish merchants branched out into metal-smithing, manufacturing flatware for the Newport community and export. The most lucrative business of all was candle making (also related to Newport’s preeminence in whaling). By the time the first Jew was naturalized, the *converso* Rivera family, who ran the spermaceti candle factory, was among Rhode Island’s wealthiest.

The Jewish community still lacked an institutional presence in the colony, however. While it had purchased a tract of land in the center of town to serve as a cemetery in 1677, the community lacked a spiritual home. No formal structure existed until 1763. It was only after the erection of the synagogue (paid for by wealthy Jewish merchants and by donations from congregations abroad, in Amsterdam, Barbados, and Jamaica) that the legal status of Jews improved markedly.

I do not mean to imply that there is a direct causal relationship between the erection of the synagogue and the passage of marriage protection for the Jewish community. Nevertheless, within a decade of the erection of the synagogue, Rhode Island enacted legislation to protect the marriage “rites” of both Jews and Quakers—communities whose life-cycle events differed from those of mainstream Protestants.²² The statute is an addendum to the marriage laws of the colony, which provides for the public posting of the names of the betrothed and for vows to be solemnized by either an ordained minister or notary public. The law, at the end of “An Act to prevent clandestine marriages,” reads:

And it is hereby further Enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That the foregoing Act, or any Clause thereof, shall in no wise be construed, deemed, or taken to extend to the lawful joining in Marriage of any Persons, according to the Laws, Customs, and Usages of the People called Quakers, according to the Toleration allowed them by Act of Parliament; or to any Persons professing the Jewish Religion, who may be joined together in Marriage according to their own Usages and Rites.²³

As it appears, this law has more to do with the deregulation than the sanction and protection of non-Protestant marriages. The colonial legislature admits that it has no expertise in the marriage practices of either Jews or Quakers, and so does not require that they publicly post the evidence of a ceremony that no one but Quakers and Jews themselves can understand. But there is more to this development than Touro Synagogue. This *laissez faire* stance is indicative of a larger trend in the Rhode Island colony to remain neutral on religious issues such as marriage. A law dating from 1716, for example, prohibits the civil authority from officially supporting any one ministry, and the Anglican Church in particular, when every other New England colony was religiously affiliated.²⁴ "Toleration" may not be the same thing as acceptance, but it was good enough to allow the Jewish community to do as it pleased.

I should note, however, that this law does not explicitly condone consanguineous marriages; the statute merely legitimates Jewish marriages. And it would not be until 1798 that the statute appears as it does today, as an exemption for any marriage which is "solemnized among the Jews" to be performed "within the degrees of affinity or consanguinity allowed by their religion." It could be argued, then, that consanguineous marriage was not in need of protection in 1767 as it came to be in 1798. But this may have more to do with developing social realities.

By the end of the 18th century, Quakers were accepted as mainstream Rhode Islanders, with no need to protect them specifically. Thus, they disappear from the text of 1798. Jews, on the other hand, remained persons of interest, and gave Rhode Island lawmakers an opportunity to clarify the scope of their protection and delve deeper into the intricacies of Jewish marital practice.

Still another reading of the language of this law may reveal the

cunning of the Rhode Island lawmakers with regard to English Common Law. A case brought before the Privy Council in 1721—*Butler v. Gastrill*—ruled on whether a man marrying his wife's aunt (effectively, a man's aunt-in-law) is incestuous.²⁵ The magistrate's ruling hinged on his interpretation of "Statute of the 38 Hen. 9, cap 12" of the English Common Law, which states, "if a Spiritual Court proceeds to impeach or dissolve a Marriage out of Levitical Degrees, then the Temporal Courts are to prohibit them by that Statute, all Marriages that are not out of those Degrees are declared to be good and lawful."²⁶ The question, then, is whether an aunt-in-law falls under the purview of Leviticus, specifically chapter 18, which deals with incest. In the chapter, a man is barred from marrying his own aunt. The Privy Council—here serving as the "Temporal Court"—has no problem extending this law to an aunt by marriage, noting that "the Prohibition touching Affinity must be carried as far as the Prohibition touching Consanguinity."²⁷

But the court did not stop there. The magistrates realized that they had an opportunity to create a rubric by which many future controversial marriages are to be alternately validated or deemed incestuous. They dealt with a union not considered explicitly by Leviticus—whether an uncle can marry his niece. Conceding that "the marriage of the nephew with the aunt is within the express prohibition," they ruled that "the marriage of the uncle with the niece is only implied," but still prohibited by virtue of the incestuousness of its inverse.

For the Privy Council, such a union was a blight on the English family, because "the Uncle might have the same Regard and Command as a Father, and a Niece the same Duty as a Daughter."²⁸ This decision set the groundwork for consanguineous marriages that would remain part of English Common Law until the mid-19th century.

English Common Law, of course, was applied in the Colonies, which would have made for a direct conflict with any statute sanctioning uncle-niece marriages. That the lawmakers did not define exactly what "rites and usages" the Jews were practicing may have been a way to avoid direct conflict with the Privy Council. Even though the Council allowed for so-called "divergent" laws—laws that were required by a specific location in the colony that had no

place in England—a law in direct violation of the “Spiritual Court” (and its temporal interpreters) would have most likely been deemed “repugnant” and “therefore invalid.”²⁹ By keeping the language vague, and pleading ignorance of the actual unions, the Rhode Island Assembly was able to protect the Jewish community while protecting itself from judicial review in England.

As historian Mary Bilder notes, this legal tiptoeing prepared the colonies for their future relationship with a strong federal government. The legacy helps “explain the rapid acceptance of federalism and judicial review of congressional action.... We see it in our commitment to federalism as a conversation between dual authorities and our desire to have clear constitutional prohibitions and fuzzy areas of divergence.”³⁰ Still, Rhode Island would prove to be the most reluctant state to ratify the Constitution; only when threatened with punitive economic sanctions and embargoes did the legislature finally acquiesce.

The rewording of the law in 1798 to identify consanguinity, and not just “usages and rites,” may have been a deliberate challenge to the U.S. Supreme Court—a court whose first case dealt with review of a Rhode Island state law.³¹ Though the federal government has never defined marriage, incest laws would appear in the codes of most states by the end of the 19th century. The Rhode Island statute remains unique—an uncommon instance of extreme religious tolerance and a symbol of Rhode Island’s defiance and independence. It reflects the values and practices of a community that no longer exists, but remains relevant to the ongoing conversation about local practice and national standards.

In that sense, it offers a useful perspective on many of today’s most nettlesome legal and constitutional issues, such as state sovereignty, marital rights, and moral relativism. Throughout the 20th century, Jewish uncle-niece couples from other states have married in Rhode Island, and they have endured legal challenges to their status on returning home. However, cases brought to the appellate level in Maryland (1916), Louisiana (1930) and New York (1952)³² assessed the validity of these marriages with unexpected results. In Maryland and New York, these uncle-niece unions were deemed valid; in Louisiana, the issue was explicitly evaded by the court. These decisions are

especially interesting given the contemporaneous battles over interracial marriage rights in the first half of the 20th century and today's same-sex marriage debate.

This study is only the second dealing with the modern history of Rhode Island General Law 15-1-4. Further research may present a new perspective on the rights of states to define marriage and the constitutional tension between the "free exercise" clause and the "nonestablishment" clause of the First Amendment.

APPENDIX – JEWISH LAW

In order to address a legal provision tailored to the Jewish community, it may be necessary to understand the legal origins of uncle-niece matrimony within the Jewish religion in addition to the cultural and historical origins. Put simply, such a marriage is permitted and even endorsed by scripture and commentary.

Any discussion of Jewish law begins with Torah, particularly the book of Leviticus. Light in narrative, this book deals almost exclusively with the rituals and practices of the Israelites as they made their way to Canaan. Leviticus 18 handles consanguinity. The focus in this chapter is not ceremonial marriage as it is conceived in the Rhode Island statute. No such thing existed for the Israelites, since the Biblical definition of matrimony was not distinct from sexual union or, as it appears here, the "uncovering of nakedness." The chapter contains a detailed litany of prohibited unions on the grounds of consanguinity. I list all of them here to highlight the specificity of the provisions. The scripture considers every permutation of potential incest, summarily banning each:

1. Brother and sister, or half brother and half sister.³³
2. Mother and son (including stepmother and stepson).³⁴
3. Father and daughter (including stepfather and stepdaughter).³⁵
4. Father and daughter-in-law, even if she is no longer married to the son.
5. Grandfather and granddaughter.
6. Grandmother and grandson.
7. An aunt and her nephew.
8. The wife of one's brother (if the brother is still alive).
9. One's wife's sister (while the wife is still living).

Absent, of course, is the prohibition against a man marrying his niece. Note that in item 7, a nephew is barred from marrying his aunt, even if she is the adopted or illegitimate daughter of his grandparents.³⁶ Given the indisputably patriarchal nature of most Levitical laws concerning family and sexuality, this might not come as a surprise. A man marrying a woman from a genealogical rung above him might imply an inversion of the expected power dynamic in a marriage. The absence of a prohibition against uncle-niece marriage, however, is not necessarily an endorsement. Torah itself does not explicitly celebrate an uncle-niece union here, but certainly permits it.³⁷

Rabbinic literature, on the other hand, goes well beyond permission, and endorses it as an ideal match. The Talmud, the centerpiece of Rabbinic literature, is a document tantamount to Torah in terms of its effect on Judaism. It was Rabbinic literature that allowed for a liturgical departure from animal sacrifice, which was the ritual focus of Temple Judaism, and a reemphasis on prayer, good deeds, and above all, text-study as the focal points of Judaism.

In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Yebamot*, a discussion ensues about a man's obligations to his wife. The rabbis mull over the rules-- how often a husband is required to have sexual intercourse with his wife, how many children they should raise, and how he is to maneuver around his wife's menstrual cycle in order to avoid ritual contamination from her menstrual fluid. The discussion moves on to ideals, and one Rabbi offers a short treatise on love and affection: "He who loves his neighbors, he who draws his relative near, he who marries his sister's daughter, and he who lends a *sela* to a poor person when he needs it," this is the person who truly walks with the Lord. The inclusion of this criterion to a list of familiar Judeo-Christian values says a great deal-- about the marital practices of the Rabbis who wrote the Talmud, about how they conceived of their legal/spiritual inheritance vis-à-vis Torah, and what legacy they left to future generations of Jews who pore over the text of the Talmud to this day.

It is important to note first that the Talmud is dialogic, and there are numerous competing, often contradictory, narratives. The Talmud itself is the end result of centuries of discourse. The statement extolling the virtues of uncle-niece love is attributed to the Tannaitic period, between 100 B.C.E and 200 C.E., and might be read narrowly as a reflection of family values in the Jewish community during that time.

A lesser-known Tannaitic text that continues the same subject above suggests that "a man should not marry until the daughter of his sister matures or until he finds one fitting for him." The assumption here is that the niece is the ideal, and a man should marry another woman only if she measures up to the comparison. Rabbinic historian Michael L. Satlow of Brown University characterizes the Rabbis during this period as unequivocally enthusiastic about uncle-niece marriage, but

distinguishes between the marital preferences of Rabbis writing in Babylon and Rabbis writing in Palestine.³⁸

Following the sack of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple at the hands of the Romans in 70 CE, Jews fled en masse across the Jordan River to Babylon. There they flourished, and began to write the legal commentary that would, after seven centuries, emerge as the Babylonian or *Bavli* Talmud. The Rabbis who remained on the West Bank in Palestine also wrote a commentary, and this became the Jerusalem or *Yerushalmi* Talmud.³⁹ Hence, there are two *Talmudim*. However, the *Bavli* is lengthier and more comprehensive, and is generally considered the more important of the two. Nonetheless, both documents offer a glimpse of Jewish life during the Tannaitic period.

Satlow notes that the authors of the Palestinian Talmud favored the marrying of one's sister's daughter for "ideological and economic reasons"—ideological because Judaism is matrilineal and there would be no question about the religious authenticity of the bride,⁴⁰ and economic because a dowry was a considerable expenditure, and it would be better to keep the goods in the family. Rashi, a Jewish scholar writing in the 11th century, posits that this union is a positive redirection of more overtly incestuous impulses or "because the affection a man has for his sister will be extended to her daughter." He assumes that this is a natural urge for men, and wishes that it were used in a way that would not bring shame to the family.

Rabbis writing in Babylon expressed a preference for a match between a man and his brother's daughter. Satlow notes that "despite adherence to the tannaitic laws of matrilineality, Babylonian rabbis saw 'family' as defined through the male line." Thus, the daughter of one's brother was "more 'family'" than his sister's daughter. These distinctions may be interesting in revealing patriarchal subtexts but they do not change the overall endorsement of uncle-niece union. Only the nuances of this topic were open to debate.

Endnotes

¹ Benjamin H. Hartogensis, who wrote the only other history of this statute, claimed that he could not find any mention of Jewish marriage until 1798. Hartogensis, "Rhode Island and Consanguineous Jewish Marriages," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1911), p. 145.

² See Appendix.

³ Further violence and further mass-conversions would occur periodically until 1492, when all of Spain's remaining Jews were expelled or forced to convert. A good overview can be found in: Henry Kamen, *Spain 1469-1714: A Society of Conflict* (Essex, England: Longmill House, 1983), pp. 38-44.

⁴ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: The Iberian and The German Models* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1982), p. 234.

⁵ David M. Gitlitz, *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), p. 244.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁸ For more on the history of the term "racism" as it is used today, see: Williams, Raymond.
⁹ *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

⁹ Gitlitz, p. 246.

¹⁰ Linda Martz, *A Network of Converso Families in Early Modern Toledo: Assimilating a Minority* (Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 74.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112. Martz also delves into the specific genealogy of a family with a penchant for uncle-niece unions: "One example of familial intermarriage involves the daughter of *jurado* Alonso Franco Willareal, Leonor de Cepeda II, who became the second wife of *regidor* Gaspar Sanchez Franco, her uncle. Neither consanguinity nor what must have been the sizable age difference between the couple deterred them from producing three children. In the next generation, the eldest son of *regidor* Gaspar Sanchez Franco, Hernan Suarez Franco Sr., married his great-niece, Inez Ortiz de Leon." p. 215.

¹³ "Enabling violation" is a term borrowed from Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 217.

¹⁴ David De Sola Pool, *Portraits Etched in Stone* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 177-8.

¹⁵ Morris Gutstein, *The Story of The Jews of Newport: Two and a Half Centuries of Judaism* (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1936), p. 45.

¹⁶ Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Life of Roger Williams*, p. 178 in Gutstein, p. 88.

¹⁹ Gutstein, p. 42.

²⁰ Gutstein, p. 43, writes about another trial in 1685: "a similar trial, which not only assured to the Jews the protection which had been given them by the General Assembly, but actually gave them an impetus to trade and to engage in the larger mercantile pursuits. This attracted many new Jewish settlers to the shores of Newport and paved the way for the successful commercial era of the eighteenth century."

²¹ In 1762, perhaps in a backward step, Aaron Lopez and Isaac Eliezer were barred from naturalization. The decision relies on an argument for religious purity in the colony (smacking of Puritanism). "The petition of messrs. Aaron Lopez and Isaac Eliezer, persons professing the Jewish religion, praying that they may be naturalized....Further, by the charter granted to this colony, it appears that the full and quiet enjoyment of the Christian religion and a desire of propagating the same were the principal views with which the colony was settled; and by a law made and passed in the year 1663, no person who does not profess the Christian religion can be admitted freely of this colony." Franklin B. Dexter, *Extracts from the Itineraries and other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D. LL.D., 1755-1794* (New Haven: 1916), p. 52, in Michael Selzer, *Kike!* (New York: Straight Arrow Books 1972), p. 14-5.

²² It would not be until 1794 that Methodist marriages are protected by and sanctioned by the colony. The legislation is worded much like the 1767 law: "Be it enacted by this General Assembly, and by the Authority thereof it is hereby Enacted, that regularly ordained Ministers of the religious Denomination called Methodists, and of every other religious denomination within this state, shall have the same Authority to join Persons together in the State of Matrimony, that assistants, Justices, and Ministers of the several Denominations, particularly named in the said Act, have by Law."

²³ Rhode Island General Assembly, Codification, 1767, article 15.

²⁴ Mary Bilder, *The Transatlantic Constitution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 145.

- ²⁵ *Butler v. Gastrill*. Gilbert Reports 156, 25 ER 110, 1721.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ According to Bilder, a "divergent" law could be applied to the colonies but have no effect on law in England. By contrast, a "repugnant" law would be invalidated as soon as it was discovered. pp. 2-5.
- ³⁰ Bilder, pp. 10-11.
- ³¹ *West v. Barnes* (1798).
- ³² *Fensterwald v. Burk*, *Sizeler v. Sizeler*, and *Estate of May*, respectively.
- ³³ A man is permitted to marry his stepsister, the daughter of either stepparent by a previous marriage.
- ³⁴ Even if the son is not a legitimate child.
- ³⁵ Even if the daughter is not a legitimate child.
- ³⁶ The Rhode Island statute continues with this provision.
- ³⁷ There is one more notable scriptural reference to uncle-niece marriage, found in Joshua 15:16-17, in a discussion of the Israelite general, Caleb: "And Caleb said, He that smiteth Kirjathsepher, and taketh it, to him will I give Achsah my daughter to wife. And Othniel the son of Kenaz, the brother of Caleb, took it: and he gave him Achsah his daughter to wife."
- ³⁸ See Michael Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 2001).
- ³⁹ Even though there was very little Jewish scholarly activity taking place in Jerusalem at the time of writing the Jerusalem Talmud.
- ⁴⁰ According to Jewish normative law (Halakkah), Judaism is matrilineal because it is more difficult to "prove" the identity of a child's father. Today in Israel, for example, the Law of Return only applies to persons who can prove that their mother is Jewish.

**LEE V. WEISMAN (1992) AND
AMERICAN JEWISH RESPONSES
TO ISSUES OF CHURCH AND STATE
BY DAVID B. COHEN**

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On June 20, 1989, Rabbi Leslie Gutterman of Temple Beth-El delivered an invocation and a benediction during graduation ceremonies at Nathan Bishop Middle School in Providence.¹ Prayers by clergy at the city's public school graduations had been a longstanding tradition, but this year was different. Daniel Weisman, whose daughter Deborah belonged to Nathan Bishop's graduating class, had filed suit in U.S. District Court to prevent Rabbi Gutterman's participation. Weisman, a Jew, believed that the prayers violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. In 1990, a U.S. District Court judge agreed with Weisman, ruling that Rabbi Gutterman's prayers, because they were given at a public school graduation, effectively linked government power with religious practice. Later that year, the U.S. Court of Appeals reached the same conclusion after the Providence School Committee filed an appeal. Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its 1992 ruling in *Lee v. Weisman*, upheld Daniel Weisman's view of the Establishment Clause.

The American Jewish responses to *Lee v. Weisman* reveal insights into the shifting viewpoints, concerns, and priorities of American Jews at the end of the 20th century. For much of the 1900s, Jews had traditionally opposed prayer in public schools and supported a high wall of separation between church and state. In particular, mainstream Jewish defense agencies successfully lobbied the U.S. Supreme Court to defeat public school prayer in

the 1960s. In light of this history, how did the American Jewish community react to Lee v. Weisman?

* This investigation will demonstrate that while most Jewish organizations in the 1990s also favored Daniel Weisman's "pro-separationist" position, the American Jewish response to Lee v. Weisman differed from the 1960s cases in two fundamental ways. First, while Jewish organizations had reached a consensus against school prayer in the 1960s, this consensus was challenged in the 1990s by some Orthodox groups, who believed that the separation of church and state had been taken too far and actually posed a threat to their religious freedom. Secondly, despite its legal importance, American Jews seemed to display only a tepid interest in Lee v. Weisman. I will argue that Jews' lack of interest can be attributed both to a newfound acceptance within American society and to a growing concern about their continuity and survival.

DETAILS OF THE CASE

In 1986, Daniel Weisman, an unaffiliated Jew and a professor of social work at Rhode Island College, questioned the appropriateness of prayer when his older daughter, Merith, graduated from Nathan Bishop. Weisman later told the *Providence Journal* that a Baptist preacher had credited Jesus for Merith's accomplishments and had included a minute of silent prayer to acknowledge Jesus' blessings. Weisman stated, "It was one of the few times in my life it became very clear to me what a minority I'm in as a Jew, and I felt very excluded..."²

When Weisman received the program for his younger daughter's graduation, and learned that prayers would once again be components of the ceremony, he called the school to complain. He was told, according to his own words, "You'll be more pleased this time. It's a rabbi, your own faith." Weisman continued to protest the concept of prayers in such a forum, but was told by Principal Robert E. Lee that the graduation would proceed as planned.³

Upset by Lee's defiance, Weisman decided to pursue a legal course of action and turned to the Rhode Island affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). He and his wife, Vivian, also a social worker and an administrator of the local Jewish Community Center, were already active in the affiliate. In 1982, Vivian had been one of four plaintiffs in an ACLU lawsuit that objected to a nativity scene on the steps of Providence City Hall.⁴

The Weismans' decision to file suit came over a quarter century after three landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases that dramatically redefined the role of religion in America's public schools. In 1948, the Court ruled in *McCullum v. Board of Education* that "released-time" programs during the school day that used public school classrooms for religious education violated the Constitution. In the 1962 decision of *Engel v. Vitale*, the Court ruled unconstitutional a state-composed prayer that was recited in public school classrooms. Finally, in its 1963 ruling in *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, the Court struck down devotional Bible reading, including recitation of the Lord's Prayer, in public school classrooms.⁵ Weisman believed that the principle behind these key decisions should be logically extended to public school graduations as well.

On June 16, 1989, several days before the ceremony at Nathan Bishop, the ACLU filed suit on Daniel Weisman's behalf in U.S. District Court. (This was *Weisman v. Lee*.) As a tenured professor, Daniel Weisman did not fear losing his job. Vivian did not enjoy such security, so her name was omitted from the suit. Arguing that prayers at a public school graduation violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, Daniel sought a temporary restraining order prohibiting Rabbi Gutterman's participation.

Chief U.S. District Judge Francis J. Boyle refused to issue a restraining order. Meanwhile, the Weismans found themselves at the center of a brewing local controversy. Weisman said that he received over a dozen phone calls over the weekend before the ceremony. Most were supportive of his position, but others carried anti-Semitic messages. "Somebody called and told me, 'Go back to Israel,'" Weisman told the *Providence Journal*. "I had someone else call me 'scum bag' repeatedly, and another say 'I'm sick and tired of Jews telling Christians what to do.'" ⁶

Despite the nasty calls and mounting tension, Deborah attended her graduation ceremony on the morning of June 20, and Rabbi Gutterman delivered his invocation and benediction as planned. Rabbi Gutterman later said that he phrased his words in such a way as to minimize the possible controversy over his remarks.⁷ Indeed, for much of his 19-year rabbinate in Providence, he had been an advocate for interfaith understanding and cooperation. Nevertheless, the Weisman family remained unsatisfied with the outcome, noting that Rabbi Gutterman invoked the name of God and used the

word "amen." It did not matter to them whether the prayers were nonsectarian; they were in fact prayers.

Following Deborah's graduation, Daniel Weisman filed an amended complaint in U.S. District Court that sought to permanently ban city officials from inviting clergy to deliver prayers at Providence's public schools. On January 23, 1990, Judge Boyle, who had allowed the invocation and benediction to take place, ruled that prayer at public school graduations was unconstitutional. "The special occasion of graduation coupled with the presence of prayer creates an identification of governmental power with religious practice," wrote the judge in his decision. "The symbolic union of government and religion in one sectarian enterprise...is an impermissible effect under the Establishment Clause," he ruled.⁸

In reaching his decision, Judge Boyle relied on the Lemon test, which was devised by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1971, when it ruled on a case involving state aid to parochial schools (*Lemon v. Kurtzman*). According to the Lemon criteria, a government practice needed to pass a three-pronged examination in order to be in compliance with the Establishment Clause: "(1) reflect a clearly secular purpose; (2) have a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion; and (3) avoid excessive government entanglement with religion." Judge Boyle ruled that the graduation prayers at Nathan Bishop violated the second part of the Lemon test.⁹ But critics of Boyle's decision felt that the test was too broad. The applicability of the Lemon test to *Lee v. Weisman* became a central point of contention between the family and the School Committee by the time the case reached the U.S. Supreme Court.

Despite the clarity of Judge Boyle's decision, the School Committee decided to appeal. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, in Boston, heard oral arguments in *Weisman v. Lee* on May 10, 1990. On July 23, the Court of Appeals upheld the District Court's ruling in a 2-1 decision.¹⁰ Judge Juan R. Torruella wrote the opinion, and Judge Hugh H. Bownes concurred. Judge Levin H. Campbell wrote a dissenting opinion.

In October 1990, the School Committee decided once again to appeal, this time to the U.S. Supreme Court. A significant number of local critics objected to the latest decision, citing legal concerns and the projected \$50,000 cost of the appeal.¹¹ Nonetheless, the School Committee proceeded. On March 18, 1991, the Supreme Court agreed to accept *Lee v. Weisman*.¹²

After the Supreme Court granted *certiorari*, a number of national organizations (representing religious and secular groups, including some Jewish defense agencies), filed *amici curiae* (friends of the court) briefs in support of or in opposition to the case. Perhaps the most significant of these briefs was filed by the administration of George H.W. Bush. Led by Solicitor General Kenneth Starr, the Justice Department urged the court to rule in favor of the School Committee. Starr demanded that the justices discard the Lemon test in favor of a less rigorous "coercion" test. "Such ceremonies typically occur but once a year," noted the Justice Department. "They are addressed not to children alone but to families as a whole which are a natural bulwark against any coercion."

The Weismans were present on the morning of November 6, 1991, when the Supreme Court heard oral arguments. Attorney Charles J. Cooper, who represented the School Committee, asked the Court to reject the Lemon test. He further maintained that graduation prayers did not lead to governmental coercion in favor of a certain religious view. Cooper yielded the final ten minutes of his half-hour argument to Starr, who argued that graduation prayers, like the presence of God's name on coinage and in the Pledge of Allegiance, were a practice "as old and as enduring as the Republic itself."¹³ But Sandra A. Blanding, who represented Daniel Weisman as a volunteer attorney for the Rhode Island affiliate of the ACLU, contended that any prayer in a school setting was unconstitutional. "If this court were to adopt the city's argument, then graduation ceremonies could open with a Roman Catholic Mass," she asserted.¹⁴

The Supreme Court deliberated for several months before releasing its decision on June 24, 1992. The justices ruled 5-4 in favor of the Weismans. In the majority opinion, Justice Anthony Kennedy, joined by Harry A. Blackmun, Sandra Day O'Connor, John Paul Stevens and David H. Souter, wrote that the Lemon test applied to *Lee v. Weisman* and further, "the prayer exercises in this case are especially improper because the state has in every practical sense compelled attendance and participation in an explicit religious exercise at an event of singular importance to every student."¹⁵ But Justice Antonin Scalia, joined by Byron White, Clarence Thomas, and Chief Justice William Rehnquist, vehemently disagreed. "The establishment of religion clause should not have been interpreted so as to invalidate a longstanding American tradition of nonsectarian prayer at public school graduations,"

wrote Justice Scalia for the minority. "Our Religion Clause jurisprudence," he determined, "has become bedeviled (so to speak) by reliance on formulaic abstractions that are not derived from, but positively conflict with, our long-accepted constitutional traditions. Foremost among these has been the so-called Lemon test." With this 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court effectively banned prayer by clergy at future public school graduations, while at the same time maintaining the precedent of the Lemon test.

NATIONAL JEWISH REACTIONS

Several national Jewish organizations championed the Weismans' position. These included the "big three" defense agencies: the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and the Anti-Defamation League. Marc Stern, representing the Congress, told the *Washington Post* in March 1991 that the case had far-reaching implications that went beyond high school graduation ceremonies. He warned the public that if the Supreme Court agreed with the Justice Department, this could lead to an expanded role of government with regard to religion, including more public aid to parochial schools.¹⁶

The "big three," along with the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC), and a number of non-Jewish religious organizations, filed a joint *amici curiae* brief on behalf of the Weismans. As the central thrust of their brief, the agencies argued that separation of church and state was essential to maintaining religious liberty in America. "Government-sponsored religious observances politicize religion and lead inevitably to intolerance, desacralization, or both," stated the brief.

NJCRAC was an umbrella organization that represented a wide array of Jewish interests, including the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform), the United Synagogue of America (Conservative), the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, other prominent national agencies, and 117 community organizations. Thus with the exception of at least a couple of Orthodox groups who opposed NJCRAC and the "big three," it is fair to say that American Jewish organizations stood firmly behind the Weismans and against any sort of prayer in public school.

The active involvement of the "big three" defense agencies in *Lee v. Weisman* was not new. Though founded between 1906 and 1917, the agencies

began using litigation to advance a strict separationist view of church and state during the postwar era. Jewish defense agencies employed one of their most powerful strategies—*amicus curiae* briefs—during each of the three landmark cases that removed religion from the public schools—*McCormick* in 1948, *Engel* in 1962, and *Schempp* in 1963. During this postwar period, the agencies were backed by a prevailing consensus among American Jews, who overwhelmingly favored the separation of church and state.

This postwar consensus, however, has not been the static viewpoint of Jews throughout all of American history. Jewish viewpoints have evolved over time, and continue to change today. Jonathan Sarna argues that while Jews have never embraced the idea of America as a “Christian” nation, they did, throughout most of the 19th century, prefer the idea of a government neutral to all religions. During the Civil War, for instance, when Jews learned that they could not serve as regimental chaplains in the Union Army, most, writes Sarna, did not raise objections to the concept of a chaplaincy, but rather fought to have Jewish clergy included as well as Christian.¹⁷

But in the late 19th century, as Protestants crusaded to “re-Christianize” America—through efforts such as the attempted passage of a “Christian” amendment to the Constitution—Jews began increasingly to advocate for a secular government that was free from any religious influence. According to Sarna, this idea of strict separationism “soon became the predominant American Jewish position on church-state questions, seconded by one Jewish organization after another.”¹⁸

Despite strong Jewish support for separationism, growing anti-Semitism in the early 20th century forced Jews to keep a low profile on church-state issues. But following World War II, Jewish organizations became increasingly vocal. Naomi Cohen credits this shift in tactics to a new generation of native-born Jews, lessons learned from the Holocaust, pride in the newly established State of Israel, and the legacy of government activism from the New Deal era.¹⁹ This Jewish consensus for separationism, combined with new tactics of emboldened Jewish defense agencies, helps to explain the Jewish response to the school prayer cases of the early 1960s.

THE END OF A JEWISH CONSENSUS?

Just as Jewish attitudes toward separationism evolved between the 1800s and

the 1960s, these viewpoints continued to change between the 1960s and the 1990s. Even though the majority of American Jews in both decades opposed school prayer, American Jewish responses to *Lee v. Weisman* differed from responses to the 1960s school prayer cases in two fundamental ways. First, while Jewish organizations had reached a consensus against school prayer during the 1960s, Jewish organizations were not entirely united over *Lee v. Weisman*.

The primary dissenter in the 1990s was the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA), which represented elements of the Orthodox community. COLPA filed an *amicus curiae* brief with the Supreme Court in support of the Providence School Committee. COLPA focused its brief on the Lemon test, which the group believed could undermine religious protections that Jews currently enjoyed. For example, COLPA feared that an Orthodox exemption to the federal Humane Slaughter Act for kosher butchers—which gave preference to a specific religious practice—might be challenged unless the Lemon test were repealed.

Agudath Israel of America, another Orthodox group, also supported the revision or removal of the Lemon test. Abba Cohen, the organization's Washington representative, declared, "[Lemon's] impact has been devastating [for religion]." ²⁰ Having filed briefs and given statements on both sides of the case (NJCRAC versus COLPA and Agudath Israel), Orthodox organizations were split.

COLPA represented a growing minority viewpoint amongst America's Jews, particularly prevalent amongst the Orthodox, that the complete separation of church and state was hostile to Judaism. Catalyzed in part by strong support for parochial school aid, COLPA was founded in 1965 to give an institutional voice to these "pro-religionist" Orthodox Jews. Since its founding, COLPA has filed *amicus curiae* briefs in a number of church-state cases, and has advocated, among other things, for the display of religious imagery, such as the menorah, on public property, and for the protection of rights of Jews who observe the Sabbath.

While Jews today remain far more "separationist" than the general public, the triumphs of groups like COLPA show the growing institutional strength of those Jews who oppose strict separationism. David Dalin argues that in the 1970s and 1980s, "a Jewish neoconservative consensus began to

emerge," one that supported a role for religious values in public life.²¹ Thus, the mid-century consensus on church-state separation has begun to crumble, and the involvement of COLPA in *Lee v. Weisman*, which contrasts to its lack of involvement in the 1945-1965 cases, is symptomatic of this breakdown. Even though individual Orthodox Jews may have dissented during both periods, this voice of dissent has become more organized, and thus much stronger than it was at mid-century.

APATHY OR SHIFTING PRIORITIES?

The second major difference between the 1960s and 1990s was that Jewish responses to *Lee v. Weisman* in the early 1990s were more apathetic than those to the earlier landmark cases. For example, the 1964 edition of the *American Jewish Yearbook* (jointly published by the American Jewish Committee and the Jewish Publication Society), stated, "The period under review was by any standard a time of great consequence for church-state relationships." The length of the *Yearbook* sections on "church-state issues" during the early 1960s is also very telling. In 1962, 21 pages were devoted to this topic; in 1963, 31 pages; and in 1964, 26 pages. In comparison, the 1994 edition of the publication, which described the outcome of *Lee v. Weisman*, only offered six pages of summary on current church-state news.

Despite its local significance, the Rhode Island Jewish community also exhibited only a lukewarm interest in *Lee v. Weisman*. The weekly *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* did not even cover the oral arguments presented before the Supreme Court in November 1991.²² The lack of coverage becomes more meaningful when compared to similar news articles covering the school prayer cases in the 1960s. The *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*, following the issuing of the *Engel* and *Schempp* decisions in 1962 and 1963, respectively, placed stories about these cases prominently on the front page of its publication. But the *Weisman* decision in 1992 was only covered on page six, suggesting that the editors of the paper did not see this as a major story.²³

So why did most Jews prove to be so apathetic toward *Lee v. Weisman*? A recent survey suggests that while Jewish defense leaders are more pro-separationist than the Jewish public, they are not completely out of sync with their constituencies. For example, 20% of Jews today support the notion of reading nondenominational prayers in public school classrooms, compared with 59%

of non-Jewish Americans. Just 2% of Jewish leaders support the idea.²⁴

There is another possibility why Jews did not actively follow *Lee v. Weisman*. They may have thought that this case was simply not as important as *Engel and Schempp*. But while the issue of prayer at graduations may have been less alarming to Jews than daily classroom prayer, *Lee v. Weisman* had clearly taken on greater legal implications. The George H. W. Bush administration sought to use the case to overthrow the *Lemon* test and completely redefine the Establishment Clause.

A more satisfying alternative to the "legal importance" hypothesis is that Jews in the 1990s were no longer concerned with establishing a place for themselves within American society. In the postwar period, Jews saw separatism as a way of protecting themselves. Naomi Cohen suggests that this commitment may have stemmed from the fact that Jews, even in the 1960s, perceived anti-Semitism to be a real and present danger.²⁵ Steven Cohen also suggests that Jews, as recent arrivals to the suburbs and to the upper-middle class, were still socially segregated from their non-Jewish neighbors and worried about their acceptability within mainstream American life.²⁶

By the 1990s, however, American Jews had finally achieved what had been missing in the 1960s: acceptance and comfort within American society. With this greater acceptance came a new challenge that perhaps eclipsed Jewish concern over separation of church and state: the issue of "continuity" or "survival."²⁷

The 1990 National Jewish Population Study documented what Jews had feared for decades. Not only were Jewish birth rates low, but half of all Jewish marriages between 1985 and 1990 were to non-Jewish spouses.²⁸ The main threat to American Jewry no longer seemed to be hostility and discrimination from the outside world. Rather, it was ever increasing acceptance.

Appendix A: Rabbi Gutterman's Prayers (cited in Lee v. Weisman)

INVOCATION

God of the Free, Hope of the Brave:

For the legacy of America where diversity is celebrated and the rights of minorities are protected, we thank You. May these young men and women grow up to enrich it.

For the liberty of America, we thank You. May these new graduates grow up to guard it.

For the political process of America in which all its citizens may participate, for its court system where all may seek justice we thank You. May those we honor this morning always turn to it in trust.

For the destiny of America we thank You. May the graduates of Nathan Bishop Middle School so live that they might help to share it.

May our aspirations for our country and for these young people, who are our hope for the future, be richly fulfilled.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

O God, we are grateful to You for having endowed us with the capacity for learning which we have celebrated on this joyous commencement.

Happy families give thanks for seeing their children achieve an important milestone. Send Your blessings upon the teachers and administrators who helped prepare them.

The graduates now need strength and guidance for the future, help them to understand that we are not complete with academic knowledge alone. We must each strive to fulfill what You require of us all: To do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly.

We give thanks to You, Lord, for keeping us alive, sustaining us and allowing us to reach this special, happy occasion.

Amen.

Appendix B: The First Amendment

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Appendix C: Case History

Weisman v. Lee, 728 F.Supp. 68 (D.R.I. Jan 09, 1990) (NO.CIV.A.89-0377B)

Decision Affirmed by

Weisman v. Lee, 9008F.2d 1090 (1st Cr.(R.I.) Jul 23, 1990) (NO. 90-1151)

U.S. Appellate Briefs

Lee v. Weisman, 1991 WL 527613 (U.S. May 24, 1991) Brief for the Petitioners (NO. 90-1014)

Lee v. Weisman, 1991 WL 527614 (U.S. Jul. 16, 1991) Respondent's Brief (NO. 90-1014)

Lee v. Weisman, 1991 WL 527616 (U.S. Aug. 16, 1991) Reply Brief for the Petitioners (NO. 90-1014)

Certiorari Granted by

499 U.S. 918, 111 S.Ct. 1305, 113 L.Ed.2d 240, 59 USLW 3464, 59 USLW 3627, 59 USLW 3635, 66 Ed. Law Rep. 34 (U.S.R.I. Mar 18, 1991) (NO. 90-1014)

Judgment Affirmed by

Lee v. Weisman, 505 U.S. 577, 112 S.Ct. 2649, 120 L.Ed.2d 467 (U.S.R.I. Jun 24, 1992) (NO. 90-1014)

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"School Prayer on Trial." *Providence Journal* 3 Nov. 1991: J1.

"High Court Grills Lawyers in R.I School Prayer Case." *Providence Journal* 6 Nov. 1991: A1.

Eisenstadt, Steven, and James M. O'Neill. "Court Upholds Ban on School Prayers." *Providence Journal* 25 June 1992: A1.

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- O'Neill, James M. "School Board Members Press for Appeal of Ruling." *Providence Journal* 23 Jan. 1990: E1.
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I would like to thank Michael Cohen, George Goodwin, Maud Mandel, and Anne Sherman for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ See Appendix A for the full text of Rabbi Guterman's prayers. Appendix B is the First Amendment of the Constitution. Appendix C lists the full citations for the lawsuits mentioned.
- ² D. Morgan McVicar, "Prayer at Graduation Protested Professor Sues to Stop Invocation, Benediction at Providence Rites," *Providence Journal*, 17 June 1989: A1.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ John Castellucci, "Girl Graduates to Applause Despite Protest over Prayers: Parents Feared Backlash after ACLU Complaint," *Providence Journal*, 21 June 1989: A3.
- ⁵ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Introduction: American Jews and Church-State Relations: The Search for 'Equal Footing,'" in *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience*, by Jonathan D. Sarna and David G. Dalin (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 21, 23.
- ⁶ Tom Mooney and John Castellucci, "School Ritual Includes Prayers," *Providence Journal*, 20 June 1989: A3.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Judy Rakowsky, "Judge Rules Prayers at Graduation Illegal," *Providence Journal*, 9 Jan. 1990: A1. Coincidentally, Rakowsky was a member of Beth-El.
- ⁹ Steven Eisenstadt, "Prayer Ban Returns Battle to Home Turf," *Providence Journal*, 24 Mar. 1991: A1.

- ¹⁰ Judy Rakowsky, "Court Upholds Ruling Against Mention of Deities," *Providence Journal*, 25 July 1990: A3; Steven Eisenstadt, "School Prayer on Trial," *Providence Journal*, 3 Nov. 1991: J1.
- ¹¹ Deborah Barfield, "School Board Votes to Take Prayer Issue to U.S. High Court," *Providence Journal*, 23 Oct. 1990: B1.
- ¹² D. Morgan McVicar, "Court to Hear R.I. Prayer Case," *Providence Journal*, 18 March 1991: A1.
- ¹³ Steven Eisenstadt, "High Court Grills Lawyers in R.I. School Prayer Case," *Providence Journal*, 6 Nov. 1991: A1.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Steven Eisenstadt and James M. O'Neill, "Court Upholds Ban on School Prayers," *Providence Journal*, 25 June 1992: A1.
- ¹⁶ McVicar, *Providence Journal*, 18 March 1991.
- ¹⁷ Sarna, "Introduction," in *Religion and State in the American Jewish Experience*, 7 and 12.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.
- ¹⁹ Naomi Cohen, *Jews in Christian America*, 123 and 125.
- ²⁰ *American Jewish Yearbook* (Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee and Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 111.
- ²¹ Dalin, "Jewish Critics," in *Jews and the American Public Square*, 296 and 298.
- ²² See *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*, 31 Oct.-21 Nov., 1991.
- ²³ See the following issues of the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* located in the RIJHA archive: vol. XXII, no. 40 (12 Dec. 1947); vol. XXIII, no. 1 (12 Mar., 1948); vol. XLVI, no. 4 (6 Apr., 1962); vol. XLVI, no. 5 (13 Apr., 1962); vol. XLVI, no. 16 (29 Jun., 1962); vol. XLVII, no. 16 (21 Jun., 1963); vol. LXXVII, no. 32 (2 Jul., 1992).
- ²⁴ Peter Steinfelds, "Beliefs: Jewish Views on Separation of Church and State Grow More Complex When It Comes to Politics," *New York Times* 12 Aug. 2000.
- ²⁵ Naomi Cohen, "An Overview of American Jewish Defense," in *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society*, *Op. cit.*, 43.
- ²⁶ Steven M. Cohen, "Religion and the Public Square: Attitudes of American Jews in Comparative Perspective," Center for Jewish Community Studies <http://www.cjcs.net/survey.htm>
- ²⁷ Jonathan D. Sarna, ed. *The American Jewish Experience* (2nd ed.; New York and London: Homes & Meier, 1997), 348.
- ²⁸ Harvey Sicherman, "Uncertain Steps: American Jews in the New Public Square," in *Jewish Polity and American Civil Society*, *Op. cit.*, 196.



CA. 1940

RABBI LOUIS I. NEWMAN

BY PHILIP MILLER

The author, a Providence native, created a vivid and heartfelt portrait of Cantor Jacob Hohenemser of Temple Emanu-El in the last issue of our journal. Here he profiles a Providence-born rabbi who became one of the most accomplished Jewish leaders of his generation. Dr. Miller, the long-time librarian of Hebrew Union College's Klau Library, is another Jewish professional who has made his mark in New York City. His deep understanding of the American rabbinate, Zionist politics, and human nature illuminates the life and career of a brilliant and complicated person.

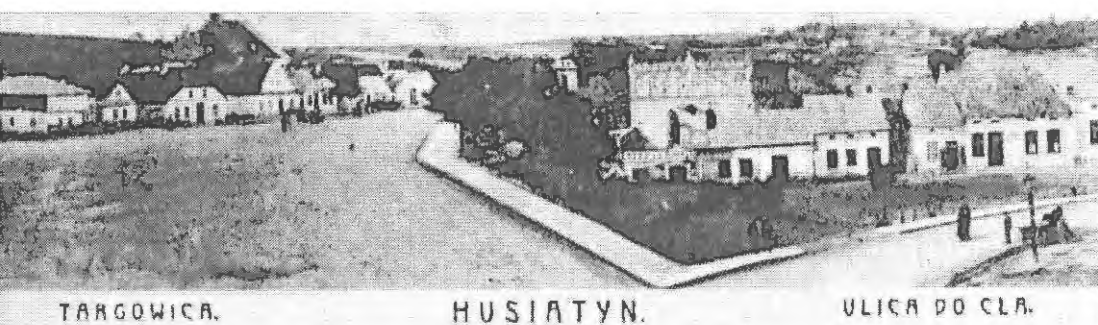
In 1974, shortly after I began working at the library of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, I visited Anna Rouslin (née Rosen), my maternal grandmother in Providence. During our conversation, she suddenly asked if I knew "Rabbi Newman." I said there must be several Rabbi Newmans in New York, but I did not know one personally. "The important Reform rabbi," she insisted. "Rabbi Louis I. Newman?" I asked. "Yes! Leibel Newman. Do you know him?" My grandmother sank into pensive silence when I told her that he had passed away about two years earlier. "How did you know Rabbi Newman?" I asked, for she had never left Providence, and I was unaware that Rabbi Newman had any connection to Rhode Island.

"He and his older sister, Annie, were our next door neighbors on Charles Street, and we often played together." She then told me that though her family was hardly wealthy, his family was poorer, and that he often ate at the Rosen family's table. She said distinctly, "My father always called Leibel Newman a *ben bayis*." (Meaning that he was as good as a member of the family.) I do not know what surprised me more, that they had been playmates on Charles Street in the 1890s or that my grandmother, who had little formal Jewish learning, knew this Hebrew/Yiddish expression.

FAMILY AND SCHOOLING

Rabbi Newman was born in Providence on December 20, 1893 and died in

New York City in 1972. Both his parents came from towns southeast of Lvov in Austrian Galicia. Paul (Pinhas) Newman (1862-1944) was from Husiatyn. Antonia (née Hecker) was from Brody. Coincidentally, my maternal grandmother's mother came from a town near Brody. Because Louis Newman was so proud of his *Galitsyaner* origins, most people had absolutely no idea that he had been born in Rhode Island.



POSTCARD OF PAUL NEWMAN'S ANCESTRAL TOWN, 1906.

Paul Newman entered the United States in 1878 and was naturalized in 1891. During this period, most Jews living on and near Charles Street in the North End were from Austrian Galicia or the neighboring Russian province of Podolia. Louis' father was a petty businessman who tried his hand at several enterprises, none very successful. At one time he manufactured or sold corset clasps, the U.S. patent for which was issued in 1910. By 1913, however, Paul

departed for the San Francisco Bay area, where his son had settled. Paul spent his final years in Los Angeles. My grandmother had neglected to mention an obvious reason why Louis Newman spent so much time with the Rosens. His mother, who suffered from tuberculosis, died in Denver in 1898. That city's Jewish Hospital, which opened in 1890, was already well known for the treatment of respiratory ailments. Around 1900, Paul married Theresa Berger, who had been born in Germany. She too predeceased him, in 1938.



PAUL NEWMAN'S PARENTS
ON A VISIT TO PALESTINE.

BROWN AND GRADUATE STUDIES

Louis Newman was educated in Providence's public

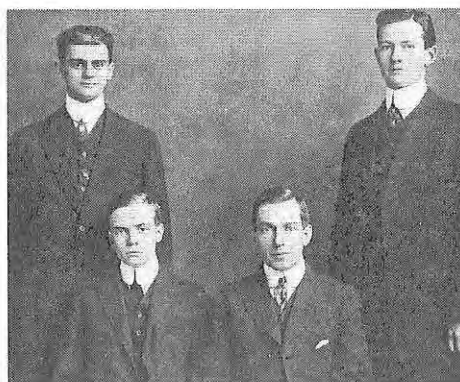
schools. Perhaps following his sister Anna (1892-1978), he attended Warren Street Primary School, Peace Street Primary School, and Point Street Grammar School. Anna attended English High School (later known as Central High School), which had a commercial program. Louis attended Classical, the elite college preparatory high school across the street.

Following his graduation from Classical in 1909, Newman entered Brown University, which was still very much under the aegis of the Baptist church. He seems to have excelled at everything. The Brown yearbook (*Liber Brunensis*) for 1913 lists his numerous achievements.

During his freshman year, Louis won both the President's Premium in Latin and the Hicks Premium in French. He placed second in the Misch Premium in German, which had been established by Cesar Misch, a Jewish businessman in Providence. During his sophomore year, Louis was involved with the gymnastics team, Sock and Buskin (the drama society), the glee club, and the mandolin club. During his junior year, while continuing with the drama and music clubs, Newman was vice president of the German club. He won the 1800 Discussion Award (also known as the Gaston Medal), the Hicks Inter-Class Debate Award, and the Bishop McVickar Prize in Biblical Literature.

As a senior, he was president of the German club and vice president of the Cercle Français. He was also a speaker at his commencement, although it is not clear if he was valedictorian or salutarian. No doubt the most brilliant Jewish undergraduate to attend Brown before World War I, he was probably well known among the University's 900-member student body.

It is not altogether clear why Newman moved immediately to California. Family lore tells of him following a young woman to whom he was briefly engaged but did not marry. More likely, he enrolled in graduate studies at Berkeley to be near a favorite professor. In 1912, Gilbert Chinard (1881-1972) had left Brown for the University of California. (One of the most distinguished professors of French language and literature in the United States, Chinard later taught at Johns Hopkins



BROWN DEBATE CLUB, 1913.
LOUIS IS STANDING AT LEFT.

and at Princeton.) There is documentary evidence that Newman remained in contact with Chinard through the years. Perhaps Chinard was the first of several "strong personalities" who served both as a mentor and as a senior colleague.

At Berkeley, the Providence native also studied under William Popper (1874-1963), one of the era's most distinguished scholars of Semitics. Newman earned his master's degree in 1917. The following year, the University of California Press published his thesis on parallelisms in Amos. Though dated today, it remains a landmark of biblical scholarship.

While a graduate student, Newman was the national president of the new Menorah Society, an organization preceding Hillel that sought to organize and promote Jewish life among college and university students. And it was perhaps through Menorah that Newman became acquainted with two of California's most prominent rabbis, Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin (1890-1984) of Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles and Rabbi Martin A. Meyer (1879-1923) of Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. To some extent Meyer and Newman were colleagues, because the graduate student served as "rabbi" of the First Hebrew Congregation in Berkeley.

EARLY PULPITS

Like Rabbi Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949) of the Free Synagogue in New York, Rabbi Meyer saw the synagogue as a locus of social action and responsibility. Indeed, Rabbi Meyer recommended the young Newman when Wise was seeking an assistant. After a brief apprenticeship with Wise, Newman became the spiritual leader of the Bronx Free Synagogue. This was another congregation whose pulpit was uncensored by and unfettered from its governing board. Newman remained at Bronx until 1921.

Never having attended a rabbinical seminary, Louis Newman was privately ordained in 1918 by a rabbinic tribunal made up of Rabbi Meyer, Rabbi Wise, and Rabbi Wise's associate, Rabbi Sidney Goldstein (1879-1955). Unique in their day, these three rabbis shared a vision of an American Judaism shaped in an American milieu, the synagogue as an instrument for social change, and Zionism. While many rabbis would eventually embrace these causes, Newman upheld them from the outset of his meteoric career.

Indeed, in 1922 both Rabbis Goldstein and Newman were among the

founders of Rabbi Wise's seminary, the Jewish Institute of Religion. Intended to be pan-denominational, the Institute emphasized the three points mentioned above, namely, American acculturation, social action, and Zionism. Newman was also a member of the Institute's fledgling faculty.

In 1921, Rabbi Newman began serving as the spiritual leader of Temple Israel in New York City. But in 1924, he was called back to San Francisco to succeed his mentor, the late Rabbi Martin Meyer, in the pulpit of Congregation Emanu-El.

This was a momentous year for two more reasons. In May, Newman received his Ph.D. from Columbia University. His dissertation, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*, was dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Meyer. On June 13, Rabbi Newman married Lucile Helene Uhry (1904-1972), a Hunter College alumna, with Rabbi Wise officiating at Temple Israel.

RETURN TO SAN FRANCISCO

In August, just as Newman began his six-year tenure in San Francisco, Emanu-El broke ground for its new building. Not only was the 31-year-old rabbi intimately involved in the synagogue's design, but he also raised \$1,300,000 necessary to complete the project. At that time, it was perhaps America's most ambitious and costly synagogue. Less than two years later, in April 1926, on the twentieth anniversary of the famous San Francisco earthquake, the new sanctuary, seating 5,000, was dedicated. In 1927, the American Institute of Architects recognized it as one of the finest buildings in Northern California. Indeed, it was the first of three great synagogues constructed during the 1920s. The others were Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles (1928) and Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York (1929).

What made San Francisco's Emanu-El unique at that time was the "Temple House," an area within the synagogue complex for social and athletic activities. Influenced by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan and his notion of "Judaism as a civilization," Newman felt it imperative that the synagogue remained the locus of Jewish life. He strongly opposed "secular Jewish" organizations, such as the nascent "Jewish community center" movement, even though this ultimately lost him friends and supporters. Rabbi Meyer had permitted Boy Scouts to hold meetings at the temple on Friday nights. Rabbi Newman strongly opposed these meetings because they violated the spirit of the

Sabbath and distracted the young people from worship. But Emanu-El's board of trustees did not agree, and the meetings continued.

During his six-year tenure in San Francisco, Rabbi Newman surely contributed to the congregation's tremendous growth. There were 565 families before his arrival, 890 families at the end of 1926, and over 1,000 families in 1929. In 1925, before the new sanctuary was completed, the Yom Kippur service held at the Civic Auditorium drew over 8,000 worshippers.

But New York was always the center of Louis Newman's religious and cultural world. Indeed, there is a story of Rabbi Newman's going with Cantor Reuben Rinder to buy a piano, and Rabbi Newman asked the salesperson how much shipment to New York might be.

RETURN TO NEW YORK

At the end of 1929 he tendered his resignation, effective the following summer, to assume the spiritual leadership of Congregation Rodeph Sholom. It had just dedicated its new sanctuary on West 83rd Street close to Central Park West. Rodeph Sholom would be Rabbi Newman's spiritual home for more than 40 years. Leading this congregation had to have an additional special meaning for Rabbi Newman, for its rabbi from 1875 until 1896 was none other than Rabbi Aaron Wise (1844-1896), father of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise.

Having remained on the board of the Jewish Institute of Religion throughout his stay on the West Coast, Rabbi Newman was able to resume his close personal relationship with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Indeed, Newman taught homiletics at the Institute, which, located at 40 West 68th Street, was within walking distance of Rodeph Sholom.

During the 1930s, while Stephen Wise led a heroic effort to boycott products from Nazi Germany, Newman was staunchly by his side. Indeed, Newman was such an acolyte that Wise was reputed to have said, "When I run my fingers through my hair, my dandruff falls on the shoulders of Louis Israel Newman." (Although this sounds less than complimentary, the person who told me this anecdote claimed that it was meant in a positive vein.)

There was great turmoil within the Zionist movement. For example, Vladimir Jabotinsky challenged the position taken by David Ben Gurion, who wanted to end the Nazi boycott because it threatened his efforts to rescue German Jews. Rabbi Wise sympathized with Jabotinsky, but Ben Gurion

demanding that Wise cut all ties to Jabotinsky. This threatened the World Jewish Congress, led by Wise, from becoming marginalized within the Zionist movement.

(Wise's compliance with Ben-Gurion's demand to distance himself from Jabotinsky was somewhat illusory, however. Many years ago, as I was cleaning out the original Jewish Institute of Religion building on West 68th Street before the College-Institute moved to West 4th Street, I came across boxes of cancelled checks from Rabbi Wise's and Mrs. Wise's separate accounts. And there I found Mrs. Wise's cancelled checks made out to Jabotinsky.)

Although Wise publicly repudiated Jabotinsky, Rabbi Newman remained an outspoken Revisionist. His relationship with Wise may have suffered as a result. The 1936 catalogue of the Jewish Institute of Religion, printed in 1935, shows that Newman's term as a trustee lasted through 1937. The 1937 catalogue, printed in 1936, does not show Newman's name, leading one to suspect that Newman may have resigned. Yet Newman occasionally contributed to *Opinion*, a magazine edited by James W. Wise (Rabbi Wise's son) that was published until 1956.

At a time when few Reform rabbis publicly identified themselves as Zionists, Rabbi Newman was both a co-founder of the American Friends of a Jewish Palestine and a supporter of the *Irgun* (the Jewish underground in Palestine). (My information comes from an individual who had been a student at the J.I.R. and was distantly related to Rabbi Newman through his stepmother.) Supposedly, Rabbi Newman used Rodeph Sholom as a collection point for weapons smuggled to the *Irgun*.

So close was Rabbi Newman to Jabotinsky that when he came to America to raise money for arms and immigration to Palestine, Jabotinsky came to Newman's apartment at 271 Central Park West for dinner and a place to rest. Moreover, Newman's office was one of Jabotinsky's mailing addresses in New York City.

Needless to say, Newman's association with Jabotinsky met with strong resistance from Rodeph Sholom's lay leadership. According to family lore, Newman was told that he should not use the synagogue as a location for his "radical" political activities. His energies were better spent in the congregational work for which he was justly beloved. With family pressure on him to keep his job, the rabbi compromised by moving his office for Zionist activities

to a bench in Central Park, across the street from Rodeph Sholom. Some congregants may have viewed Rabbi Newman as a Zionist agitator, much like the British Embassy did in the 1930s. In a cable to London, he was described as "a fine man who has fallen into dubious company."

After Stephen Wise's death in 1949, his Jewish Institute of Religion merged with Hebrew Union College, which was located in Cincinnati. The debt that J.I.R. brought to the merger was so great that it almost bankrupted the College. Nelson Glueck, president of the College and then the merged institution, decided to reduce the status of the New York facility perhaps in preparation to its closing. Rabbi Newman led the storm of protest from New York City's Reform community.

In 1955, having withheld their symbolic and financial support from H.U.C.-J.I.R., Rabbi Newman and several colleagues founded an alternative seminary, the Jewish Academy of Religion. But in 1956, when Rabbi Glueck agreed to maintain the J.I.R., Rabbi Newman resigned from the Academy. (The Academy still exists.)

THE WRITER

A prolific even indefatigable writer, Rabbi Newman authored and edited many books across a wide range of topics for scholars and lay readers alike. As was mentioned above, the University of California published his M.A. thesis in 1918. Seven years later, Columbia University published his doctoral dissertation, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*, a work of over seven hundred pages.

Some of Rabbi Newman's additional books were: *Richard Cumberland: Critic and Friend of the Jews* (1919), *Anglo-Saxon and Jew* (1923), *A Jewish University in America?* (1923), *Temple Emanu-El Pulpit* (two volumes, published in 1926 and 1928), *Hasidic Anthology* (1938, reprinted 1944, 1963, and 1987), *Sermons and Addresses* (seven volumes, published between 1941 and 1954), *The Eternal Temple* (1942), *The Chief Rabbi of Rome Becomes a Catholic* (1945), *The Talmudic Anthology* (1945), *Biting on Granite* (1946), *Prayer in Our Times* (1947), *Trumpet in Adversity* (1948), *No Alternative* (1949), *Pangs of Messiah* (1957), *Women at the Wall* (1958), *What Does God Mean To You?* (1959), *The Little Zaddik* (1961), *Maggidim and Hasidim* (1962), and *The Jewish People, Faith and Life* (1965).

INTERPRETATIONS OF JUDAISM

Where did Louis Newman fit within Judaism's denominational movements? While some critics thought that he was better suited to the Conservative movement, he definitely saw himself as belonging to Reform. Yet, he could not be easily placed within either movement.

Although an accomplished Hebraist, Newman did not denigrate worship in English. Indeed, he encouraged creativity, both in word and music. Where he parted company with many Reform rabbis was his insistence that Jewish values came before secular American ones. Consequently, he opposed intermarriage. At San Francisco's Emanu-El, however, he was unable to overturn Rabbi Martin Mayer's acceptance of it.

Newman's Judaism was more concerned with social justice than legal precedent or minutia. Yet, his view of women's roles was more conservative than one might have expected from a Reform rabbi. And where the Reform movement had stood squarely behind public education, Rabbi Newman established the Rodeph Sholom Day School in 1970. (To this day, it is the only Reform Jewish day school in Manhattan.)

Newman's participation in and recognition by Reform institutions was ambivalent. Although he belonged to the Central Conference of American Rabbis for 50 years, he seemed more of a "book member." He was not deeply involved with committees and never served as an officer. For all that Stephen Wise meant to him, and his support of Wise for decades, Newman never received an honorary degree from the Jewish Institute of Religion. And his animosity toward Nelson Glueck definitely precluded his ever receiving an honorary degree from Hebrew Union College.

A MAVERICK

In researching this article I found very few rabbis still alive who knew Rabbi Newman. An elderly gentleman, who had interviewed for a position at Rodeph Sholom, described Newman as having "a strong will and a sharper tongue." Others have agreed, adding that it was possible that these traits became stronger as he grew older. Age may have been a factor, but Newman had always been considered a maverick. For a man of such strong opinions and strong ideals, being liked took a back seat to being right. Yes, Newman had high expectations, but none higher than those to which he held himself.

One might ask if Newman saw himself as Wise's successor at the Free Synagogue. In 1949, Newman was 56 years of age and had served Rodeph Sholom for two decades. His career was nothing but successful. Alas, Wise designated Edward Klein (1913-1984), a gentleman of the next generation, as his successor. This is not the place to address such questions, but what would Newman have gained by leaving the prestigious position he had built at Rodeph Sholom? And what was the financial status of the Free Synagogue in comparison to Rodeph Sholom?

Newman, like Wise, was not an alumnus of Hebrew Union College or the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. But where Wise was an institution unto himself, the scene after his death was quite different. Key pulpits became largely the domain of "old boys," with no place for anyone "outside of the club," least of all a maverick.

If there was a dominating rabbinic presence after Wise, it might have been Israel Goldstein (1896-1966) of B'nai Israel, New York City's oldest Ashkenazic congregation. He served this Conservative synagogue virtually his entire career, from 1918 until his retirement in 1960. Goldstein was both a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and a mainstream Zionist leader, but he was also known as a shameless self-promoter.

It is useful to mention Rabbi Goldstein at this point because he was one of many individuals responsible for making Brandeis University a reality. There are those who feel that Rabbi Newman's book, *A Jewish University in America?* (1923), had provided the ideological basis for its creation. There is no evidence, however, that Newman actually participated in its establishment in 1948. Indeed, only three years later, Rabbi Goldstein wrote a book, *Brandeis University: A Chapter in Its Founding*, in which Rabbi Newman was mentioned as one of many advocates for a Jewish-sponsored university. In 1976, when Abram Sachar, chancellor of Brandeis, wrote *A Host at Last*, an "official" history of the institution, Rabbi Newman was not even listed in the index. In 1953, however, Newman had delivered the graduation address.

A GIANT

As indicated previously, Louis Newman was drawn to men of strong personality, character, and beliefs. These included Professors Gilbert Chinard and William Popper, Rabbis Martin Meyer and Stephen Wise, and the political

activist Vladimir Jabotinsky. By 1950, however, this generation of leaders was gone. Newman, who once stood with and in the shadow of giants, saw himself surrounded by mere mortals.

For Louis I. Newman was certainly a giant. In 1942, at its 174th commencement, Brown University awarded him an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Though not yet 50 years old, he had made such a mark that he was the first Jew so honored. The citation read, "The world, richly endowed with material things, squanders even those in war for want of spiritual resources equal to its responsibilities. Because in a time of moral confusion, you have been steadfast in faith, because you have uplifted the hearts of men and fortified their spirits, your Alma Mater delights to honor you." During the postwar era, Newman was also invited on at least two occasions to preach in Sayles Hall, Brown's chapel.

Aryeh Leib Yisrael ben Pinhas Newman was felled by a stroke on 9 March 1972 and was buried at Union Field Cemetery in Queens. His wife, Lucille (Miryam bat Yitzhak), who succumbed to cancer on December 20, 1972, was laid to rest beside him. The couple had reared three children, the oldest of whom, Jeremy Uhry Newman, graduated from Brown in 1946.

The history of the Jews in 20th-century America is still being written. No doubt a project of vast complexity, it will provide material for articles, books, dissertations, and sermons for decades, if not centuries. Rabbi Louis I. Newman is probably not as well known as such seminal rabbis as Leo Jung, Mordecai Kaplan, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Abba Hillel Silver or Stephen S. Wise. Yet, in the end, he will have to be reckoned among New York City's most important rabbis and probably a national Jewish leader. This astonishing lad from Charles Street surely merits a full biography.

My thanks to the following persons for their assistance, their knowledge, but especially their memories: A. Stanley Dreyfus, Jacob Dienstag, George Goodwin; Alfred Gottschalk, Gunther Hirschberg, Lesley Uhry Keating; I. Edward Kiev (z"l), Sarah Newman Levy, Jeremy Newman (z"l), Saul Newman, Harry M. Orlinsky (z"l), Anna R. Rouslin (z"l), and Paul M. Steinberg (z"l).

My thanks to the following institutions whose archival holdings immeasurably enriched my research: Brown University, Congregation Rodeph Sholom, and the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

For information on the years Rabbi Newman spent at Congregation Emanu-El, see *Architects of Reform: Congregational and Community Leadership, Emanu-El of San Francisco, 1849-1980* (Berkeley: Western Jewish History Center, Judah L. Magnes Memorial Museum, 1980).



RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF RABBIS, 1963

TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: JOEL ZAIMAN, EMANU-EL; ROBERT LAYMAN, BETH-ISRAEL;
PESACH SOBEL, AM DAVID; JEROME GURLAND, BETH-EL; DONALD HESKINS, SINAI;
CHARLES RUBEL, BETH SHOLOM; HERSCHEL SOLNICA, SHAARE ZEDAK.

BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: ABRAHAM CHILL, SONS OF ABRAHAM; ELI BOHNEN,
EMANU-EL; SAUL LEEMAN (PRESIDENT), TORAT YISRAEL; PESACH KRAUSS, B'NAI
ISRAEL; WILLIAM BRAUDE, BETH-EL; NATHAN ROSEN, BROWN HILLEL.

RHODE ISLAND'S CONGREGATIONAL RABBIS : A PRELIMINARY LIST

BY ANNE SHERMAN

Who would have imagined that nearly 200 rabbis have served the Ocean State's myriad congregations? For whatever reasons, most have served only briefly. Sixteen rabbis, however, have served a single congregation for 20 years or longer. Seven rabbis have served for 30 years or longer. Rhode Island's longest serving congregational rabbi was William Braude, who led Providence's Beth-El for 42 years.

Of course the most basic problem compiling this list was determining who in fact were rabbis—congregational or not. Various kinds of clergy have used the title "Reverend," and rabbis are not necessarily graduates of seminaries or members of national organizations. A rabbi employed by a small congregation does not necessarily serve full-time. Likewise, a rabbi with professional standing could work on a voluntary basis. Visiting rabbis, who have served only on Holy Days, were excluded.

As a preliminary list of rabbis, obtained from a wide variety of reliable (and perhaps unreliable) sources, there are surely errors of commission and omission. No disrespect was intended. Readers are urged to contact the Association to rectify any errors.

Anne Sherman has served as the Association's caring and loyal office manager since 1991. She proudly points out that she has worked successfully with six presidents. A native Rhode Islander, she has been affiliated with Temples Beth-El and Sinai. She is currently a board member and an officer of Hillel at the University of Rhode Island.

Congregations are listed by their current or last locations and by their most recent names. The years they were founded are included.

BARRINGTON**HABONIM**, 1963 (*began as Barrington Jewish Center*)

Richard Weiss	1963-1964	James Rosenberg	1974 to present
Robert Schenkerman	1965-1973		

BLOCK ISLAND**SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF RUTH**, 1986 to present – *never had rabbi***BRISTOL****UNITED BROTHERS**, 1900 to present – *never had rabbi***CRANSTON****SINAI**, 1958

Donald Heskins	1961-1964	George Astrachan	1978-1999
Jerome Gurland	1964-1978	David Lipman	1999-2003
		Peter Stein	2003 to present

TORAT YISRAEL (*began as Cranston Jewish Center Club, 1942; then Cranston Jewish Center; became Beth Torah, 1966; merged with Beth-Israel, Providence, 1981, to form Torat Yisrael*)

Julius Goldberg		David Rosen	1984-1996
Saul Leeman	1957-1974	Stephen Parnes	2001-2003
Gerald Zelmeyer	1981-1983	Amy Levin	2004 to present

MIDDLETOWN**SHALOM**, 1961

Baruch Levine	1963	Emanuel Goldsmith	1967
Stanley Dreifuss	1964-1966	Marc Jagolinzer	1974 to present

NARRAGANSETT**BETH DAVID**, 1961 to present – *never had rabbi***NEWPORT****AHAVATH ACHIM**, 1917-1981

Jacob Bernstein	1917	Jacob Bernstein	1934-1937
Benjamin Janovsky	1918	Enoch Berman	1939
Jacob Bernstein	1919	Heinrich Katz	1941-1946
Benjamin Janovsky	1920	Samuel Haas	1947-1950
Julius Block	1921	Zalman Frankel	1952
Jacob Bernstein	1923-1926	Benjamin Miller	1952
Abraham Freedman	1928-1933	Jack Gniwesch	1953-1959
		Theodore Lewis	1970-1971

JESHUAT ISRAEL, 1756 (*also known as Touro Synagogue since 1854*)

Abraham Mendes	1883-1893	Benjamin Lichter	1910-1912
Henry Morais	1900-1901	David Brodsky	1920
Jacob Seidel	1902-1905	Julian Shapo	1921
Bernard Rosengard	1906-1909	Saul Bailly	1923-1926

Alter Abelson	1926-1927
Jacob Seidel	1928-1932
Morris Gutstein	1932-1943
Jules Lipschutz	1943-1949

Theodore Lewis	1949-1985
Chaim Shapiro	1987- 1996
Mordechai Escovitz	1996 to present

PAWTUCKET

OHAWE SHOLAM, 1905

A. Lakeb	1924-1925
Abraham Schisgal	1925-1932
Jacob Goldman	1932-1940
Aaron Goldin	1940-1962
Joseph Rothberger	1964-1966
Chaim Raizman	1967-1970
Yaakov Uvsitsky	1973-1976

Philip Kaplan	1978-1979
Yitzchok Dubovick	1981
Chaim Pearl	1983-1985
Herschel Worch	1992
Mordechai Torczyner	1997-2001
Nosson Schuman	2001-2002
Boaz Tomskey	2003 to present

PROVIDENCE—EAST SIDE

BETH-EL (*began in 1855 as Sons of Israel; merged with Sons of David, 1874, to form Sons of Israel and David; also known as Temple Beth-El since 1911*)

Jacob Voorsanger	1877-1878
Morris Sessler	1887-1892
David Blaustein	1892-1898
Bennett Grad	1899-1901
Henry Englander	1905-1910
Nathan Stern	1910-1915
Sidney Tedesche	1916-1917
Simon Cohen	1917-1919
Samuel Gup	1919-1932
William Braude	1932-1974

Albert Bilgray	1937-1945
Jerome Gurland	1958-1964
Herman Blumberg	1964-1970
Leslie Gutterman	1970 to present
Lawrence Silverman	1985-1988
Susan Miller	1988-1990
Sidney Helbraun	1990-1995
Michael Cahana	1995-2000
Jonathan Blake	2000-2003
Sarah Mack	2003 to present

BETH SHOLOM (*relocated Ahavath Sholom, 1949; became Temple Beth Sholom of Congregation Ahavath Sholom, 1962; merged with Sons of Zion to become Beth Sholom-Sons of Zion, ca. 1978; known as Beth Sholom since ca. 1985*)

Morris Silk	1949-1952
Reuven Siegal	1955
Jake Freedman	1959
Charles Rubel	1962-1964
Marc Jagolinzer	1970-1971
Herbert Rosenblum	1972

Samuel Kenner	1972
Ira Korff	1974
Marc Jagolinzer	1974-1975
Jacob Rubenstein	1977-1984
Shmuel Singer	1984-1989
Chaim Marder	1990-1995
Mitchell Levine	1995 to present

CHABAD OF COLLEGE HILL, 2002

Mendel Laufer	2002 to present
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CHABAD OF RHODE ISLAND, 1979

Yehoshua Laufer	1979 to present
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EMANU-EL, 1924

Israel Goldman	1925-1948	Alvan Kaunfer	1975-1982
Harry Bittman	1928-1940	Wayne Franklin	1981 to present
Eli Bohnen	1948-1973	Daniel Liben	1982-1991
Joel Zaiman	1973-1980	Alvan Kaunfer	1991 to present

MISHKON TFILOH, 1962

Emanuel Lazer	1963-1979	Yechezkel Yudkowsky	1998 to present
Philip Kaplan	1980-1987		

PROVIDENCE – NORTH END

AGUDATH HAKOLEL, 1895 (*"Russian Shul;" merged with Avavath Achim, 1911, to form Beth David*)

Moses Rabinovitz 1903-1905

ANSHE KOVNO, 1890 (*merged with Beth David, 1962*)

Morris Drazin until 1962

AVAVATH ACHIM, 1903 (*merged with Agudath Hakolel, 1911, to form Beth David*)—*never had rabbi*

AHAVATH SHOLOM, 1897 (*"Howell Street Shul;" relocated 1949; see Beth Sholom, East Side of Providence*)

Nathan Rabinowitz	1880-1899	H. David Bachrach	1926-1934
David C. Bachrach	1903-1926	Morris Silk	1939-1952

BETH DAVID, 1911 (*formed through merger of Agudath Hakolel and Avavath Achim; merged with Anshe Kovno, 1962; merged with Beth Am, Warwick, 1980, to form Beth Am-Beth David; became Am David, 1984*)

Itzhik Leib Levin	1911-1940	Jesse Schwartz	1954-1959
Eliezer Poukpo	1940-1942		

SONS OF JACOB, 1896

Samuel Kessler	1917-1923	Morton Berkowitz	1949-1959
Isaac Bick	1923-1929	? Galensky	1960-1962
Abraham Schechter	1932-1936	Morris Drazin	1971-1988
Carol Klein	1941-1947	Yitzchok Dubovick	1989-1991
		Abraham Jakubovicz	1991 to present

SONS OF ZION, 1875 (*"Orms Street Shul;" merged with Beth Sholom, ca. 1978 to become Beth Sholom-Sons of Zion; known as Beth Sholom since ca. 1985*)

Solomon Feinberg	1882-1887	David Lecht	1927-1928
Nathan Rabinovitz	1887-1899	Osher Werner	1931-1936
Hayim Bachrach	1900-1904	David Werner	1936-1954
Israel Rubinstein	1904-1926	Morris Drazin	1962-1971

PROVIDENCE – SOUTH SIDE

BETH-ISRAEL, 1921 (*merged with Beth Torah, Cranston, 1981, to form Torat Yisrael*)

B. Leon Hurwitz	1921-1922	Maurice Mazur	1931
Morris Schussheim	1922-1929	Morris Schussheim	1933-1961
Jacob Sonderling	1929-1931	Robert Layman	1962-1963
		Jacob Handler	1964-1981

CHEVRAH BETH YISROEL ANSHE AUSTRIA, 1906 (*"Robinson Street Shul;" merged to form Shaare Zedek, 1954*)

Philip Keller	1920-1950
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MACHZEKAS HADAS, 1907 (*merged to form Shaare Zedek, 1954*)

Baruch Goldenberg	1909-1912
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SHAARE ZEDAK-SONS OF ABRAHAM (*began 1954 as Shaare Zedek; merged with Sons of Abraham, 1967, to present*)

Leon Chait	1955
Hershel Solnica	1962-1965

SONS OF ABRAHAM, 1938 (*merged with Shaare Zedek, 1967, to form Shaare Zedek-Sons of Abraham*)

Nathan Taragin	1938-1940
Abraham Chill	1943-1967

SOUTH PROVIDENCE HEBREW CONGREGATION, 1898 (*"Russian Shul;" merged to form Shaare Zedek, 1954*)

Edward Grossman	1912-1934	Chaim Porille	1928-1934
Zelig Finkel	1926	Yehoshua Werner	1934

TIFERETH ISRAEL, 1910 (*"Romanian Shul;" merged to form Shaare Zedek, 1954*)

Max Cohen	1914-1922
Israel Sivowitz	1932-1934

WARWICK

AM DAVID (*began as Beth Am, 1954; merged with Beth David, Providence, 1980, to form Am David; to present*)

Pesach Sobel	1959-1964	Milton Kroopnik	1981-1983
Norman Valley	1967-1969	Richard Leibovitz	1984-1987
Joseph Langer	1970-1972	H. Scott White	1987-1991
Bernard Rotman	1972-1979	Nechama Goldberg	1993-1997
Solomon Gordon	1980	Leo Abrami	1998-1999

CHABAD OF WEST BAY, 1994

Eliezar Levy	1994-1998
Yossi Laufer	1999 to present

WEST WARWICK

AHAVATH SHALOM, 1919 to ca. 1995 – *never had rabbi*

WESTERLY**SHARAH ZEDEK, 1908 to present**

Samuel Lynn	1910	?	Robinson	1924-1928
Herman Singleman	1914			

WOONSOCKET**B'NAI ISRAEL, 1904 to present**

Abel Hirsch	1917-1919	Pesach Krauss	1953-1967
Phineas Israeli	1919-1924	William Kaufman	1967-1981
Benjamin Bokser	1930-1932	Joel Chernikoff	1982-1991
Murray Alstet	1932-1936	Michael Wasserman	1991-1993
Abraham Silverstone	1936-1940	Vicki Lieberman	1993-1998
Aaron Tofield	1940-1948	Sylvan Kamens	1999-2002
Felix Aber	1948-1953	Samuel Barth	2002-2003

B'NAI JACOB, 1939-1967— never had rabbi

RABBIS WHOSE CONGREGATIONAL AFFILIATIONS (IF ANY) ARE UNKNOWN
(based on city directories)

PROVIDENCE — NORTH END

Jacob Alperovitz	98 Douglas Ave.	1908
Philip Blazer	9 Lippitt Ave.	1934-1950
Jonah Coplan	15 Camp St.	1934
Morris Coplan	389 North Main St.	1895
Oscar Dinkin	87 Goddard St.	1936-1944
David Einstein	23 Howell St.	1926-1948
Simon Goldsmith	39 Hawes St.	1907-1920
Osher Lipis	9 Shawmut St.	1917-1926
Samuel Robinson	45 Vernon St.	1920-1946
Abraham Rosenbloom	43 Hawes St.	1914-1917
Julius Schutzman	233 Chalkstone Ave.	1905-1908
Louis Shafstein	204 Chalkstone Ave.	1920-1924
Abraham Solotist	31 Common St.	1936
David Star	372 North Main St.	1884
Joseph Sternberg	12 Goddard St.	1932-1934
Michael Wechsler	377 North Main St.	1909-1910
Israel Yammuder	69 Douglas Ave.	1922-1926

PROVIDENCE — SOUTH SIDE

Solomon Goldberg	199 Willard Ave.	1909-1910
David Rosenberg	12 Robinson St.	1910-1912

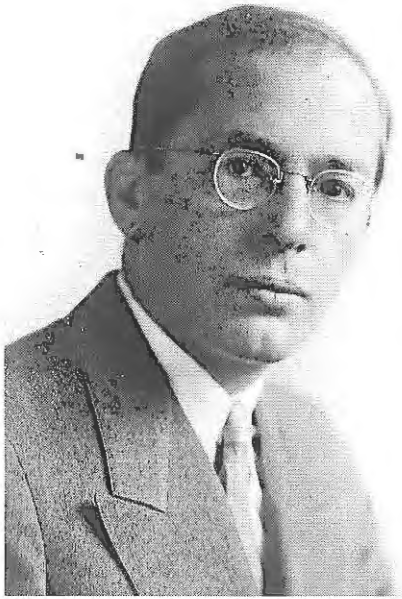
WHAT I LEARNED IN ALABAMA ABOUT YARMULKES

BY RABBI WILLIAM G. BRAUDE

This sermon, delivered on Rosh Hashanah, 5726 (September 27, 1965), was one of Rabbi Braude's most memorable. Published here on its 40th anniversary, it honors Jewish involvement in the never-ending struggle for human rights and focuses attention on the ever-changing role of tradition within liberal Judaism. Yarmulkes have become *kippot*, women and gays have become rabbis, and congregations have welcomed intermarried couples. Among countless additional changes, the Holocaust has become a paradigm of modern Jewish history. Last but not least, Jews have moved to the South in large numbers.

On November 10, 1939, the Nazis celebrated what in their never-never language they called Crystal Night. During the black hours of that night, they burned or demolished stone by stone every Synagogue in Germany. A week or so later, we at Beth-El decided to have a service of grief and sorrow for the Synagogues that were destroyed. To the special service we invited all Jewish refugees in Providence.

On that Friday night, about ten minutes before the service was to begin, a man then active in the Congregation rushed into the little room at the rear of the Temple where I sat: "Did you give permission to these people to wear hats?" The fact was that until that instant, I had given no thought to the headgear of our guests – the refugees. I did not know whether or not our guests chose to wear hats, to put on Yarmulkes, or not to wear either. And so my response to the question which sounded to me like "When did you stop beating your Mother?" was indirect. I began to say: "But these people are our guests. They have suffered so much. Whether or not they choose to wear their hats, surely we do not wish to add insult to the injuries they had already suffered." But my interrogator was implacable. "Answer my question. Did you or did you not give permission to these people to wear their hats?"



CA. 1932

To this day, I do not know the outcome of the battle of the hats. I was too choked up with pain. Involuntarily I thought of comparable demands – of Cossack officers saying to Jews, “*Shapka dolo!*,” “Off with your hat,” of SS men saying, “*Hut ab, Jude.*” So when I walked into the Temple I did not look. My head was reeling; my eyes were filled with tears. To this day I do not know, whether ushers took it upon themselves to tell our guests to remove their hats and whether some of the refugees left in protest. Whatever happened to the hats worn by our guests, that service for me at least was indeed a service of grief and sorrow.

At the time of the incident I just described, I did not know that the man who demanded our guests remove their hats was wrong on every count – as a host, as a Jew, and as a member of this Congregation. The truth was that he departed sharply from the practice with regard to hats agreed upon by the entire Congregation. That man did violence to the spirit of moderate Reform which historically characterizes this Congregation. Except for a period of 30 years more or less – and for this statement I have the authority of David C. Adelman, the historian of our Congregation – Sons of Israel and David has followed a course of moderate Reform. Thus in the Constitution retained until recent years, there was a proviso that Confirmation must be on *Shavuot*, that when a father wants to have his boy taught how to put on *tefillin*, the school is expected to provide the proper instruction. And on the High Holidays it was not until 1905 that the Jastrow prayer book of moderate Reform – indeed Conservative vintage – was given up.

But the true character of the Congregation was evinced particularly in the decision with regard to the wearing of hats. There were in the 1890s some Reform Congregations which prohibited their people to wear hats. But in those years, in the 1890s, Sons of Israel and David wisely left the practice of wearing hats to the option of the individual, Rabbi or layman alike. Here I would like to quote the editor's remarks from the official *Organ* of the Congregation published on April 24, 1896:

"Now that the wearing of the hat has become optional, I should like to know as to which stand the Rabbi must now take. Which wing of the Congregation is he to represent in the future? Will he be obliged to do as the majority of the members will henceforth do? Or does the Rabbi, too, come under the heading of 'optional,' and will therefore be allowed to act in a way he pleases? My own opinion is that he will continue to appear in the pulpit in his cap all the time. He is such a great woman suffragist, and like the ladies, he will surely worship with his hat on."

I may add that some families in the Congregation who moved to other parts continued to wear hats at religious services. Evidence of this I saw last spring (April 29, 1965) at the funeral of Martha Simon Marks, a woman of over 90 and one of the few lateral descendants of one of the incorporators of the Congregation. All of her children were confirmed in this Congregation. At her funeral when I walked into the room where the family was sitting, I saw her five sons wearing hats or Yarmulkes. Presumably the five sons carried on the tradition set by their father in the 1890s who, as a member of this Congregation, continued to wear his hat during the hours of worship.

A few moments ago I said that except for a period of 30 years, the spirit of this Congregation was one of moderate Reform. I think I can demonstrate this assertion. Radical Reform at Beth-El prevailed roughly between 1900 and 1930. In 1932, when I was asked to come as Rabbi, the winds of moderation were again in the air. Henry Englander, my mentor and predecessor in this pulpit, knew my basic tendencies better than I knew them myself and said so privately to the late C. Joseph Fox and J. Jerome Hahn, who, at the time, were decisive in the affairs of the Congregation. For that matter in the remarks I made at the time of my installation on October 7, 1932, I charted far more than I knew the course of moderate Reform which in subsequent years I was to follow in my thinking and in my practice.

With your permission, I will cite the words I spoke at that time from the pulpit on Broad Street.

"Standing in your presence, my beloved Master, and in the presence of this Congregation, I do pledge my love to the people of Israel, wherever they be, whether in the lands of the East or those of the West; whatever they be, whether adorned with patriarchal beards or clean of visage, whether arrayed in flowing oriental robes or fitted out in

severe European cloth, whether speaking strange tongues or uttering the familiar syllables of our childhood. All of them are our flesh, our blood, our life. We cannot escape them; they cannot escape us. We are held together by the invisible but enduring bonds that make Israel a people eternal."

"Standing in your presence, my beloved Master, and in the presence of this Congregation, I do pledge my loyalty to the immemorial traditions of the people of Israel, to the sacred language— that vehicle of man's noblest aspirations now revitalized for ever greater achievement. I do pledge my loyalty to the customs and practices that have ever been our ethnic and ethical integrators, to the ideals of lore and learning that have ever been luminous in the darkest of centuries, to the conceptions of justice and righteousness that have ever been the foes of oppression and misdoing."

Anyone sensitive to the overtones in words will detect in them a reaching out to the entire Congregation of Israel—to Israel's enduring expressions which characterize moderate Reform, the classic posture I repeat of this Congregation. It was gratifying to me last June when I stated my views on the Sabbath, on dietary laws, and similar matters to colleagues in the Rabbinat (all or most of them, by the way, products of Reform Congregations), the response was more than merely affirmative. But I shall speak about these conversations at another time.

At this time I would like to say that our Congregation's posture of moderate Reform is the one prevailing more and more throughout the country and indeed throughout the world. On the matter of wearing hats with which I began, let me give you the results of a questionnaire conducted by Rabbi Leonard Winograd, the Reform Rabbi of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, sent to 711 Rabbis, almost four hundred of whom responded. The question, and the responses, were as follows:

1. Do you wear a head covering during religious services?
Yes—35 percent. No—65 percent.
2. Do you wear a head covering at a funeral or wedding if requested? Yes—94.5 percent. No—5.5 percent.
3. At your services are head coverings forbidden?
Yes—4.05 percent. Optional? 89.36 percent. Required?
6.58 percent.

(*National Jewish Monthly* published by B'nai B'rith, Passover issue, March, 1964, p. 26).

Moreover, and for this I have the authority of my friend Rabbi Jacob Shankman, President of the World Union for Progressive Judaism: In every liberal congregation throughout the world—South America, Europe, Africa, Asia—the overwhelming majority of the worshippers wear their hats.

But it was on the highway—on U.S. Route 80—between Selma and Montgomery, Alabama that the deep significance of the Jew's wearing his Yarmulke came to me. Some of you may remember that on Wednesday, March 24, 1965, Rabbi Saul Leeman of Cranston and I were among the marchers from Selma to Montgomery. On that day, the two of us, he quite readily and I somewhat reluctantly wore our Yarmulkes. The reason: to protect our heads from sunburn and to identify ourselves as Rabbis. We succeeded on both counts. From all sides, white and black alike, men and women greeted us with, "Shalom, Shalom." Young Jews, their eyes aglow, came up: "We are glad to see Rabbis with us." A professor of philosophy from Berkeley who did not look Jewish came up: "It means so much for one of my background to see Rabbis participating in the March!" One white man, a rugged blonde, a Gentile said: "Before you Rabbis are through, you will convert the entire Christian nation."

And so in the midst of this atmosphere of camaraderie Saul Leeman and I marched on. Then Sandy Rosen, a fellow Rabbi from San Mateo, California, coming up from behind me, greeted me with the words

שלום חבר. I looked up at him. He, too, was wearing a Yarmulke. Knowing that he was a Reform Rabbi, I asked him: "Do your people wear Yarmulkes?" He replied: "No. But all our colleagues who came to Selma throughout their stay there wore Yarmulkes." "And the Negroes"—Sandy Rosen went on to tell me—"took to the Yarmulkes, began wearing them and calling them freedom caps." Then the Rabbis proceeded to bring in large supplies of Yarmulkes which they distributed to many of those on the freedom march. Thus the one-legged man, a white man, who walked the entire distance from Selma to Montgomery, got himself a Yarmulke which he wore from time to time. At the service in Selma on Saturday, March 27, 1965, which followed the killing of Viola Gregg Luizzo, the mother of five children, the Associated Press report

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stated, that many of those present, white and black alike, wore Yarmulkes. On the other hand the segregationists began calling these head coverings "Yankee Yarmulkes." (See Temple Israel of Greater Miami Bulletin, April, 16, 1965.)

Here is how my colleague and pupil Maurice Davis put it in a sermon:

"We returned to the church, and I noticed that all the Reform Rabbis were wearing yarmulkes. When I questioned this, I was told, 'It is our answer to the clerical collar.' Clergymen of every denomination, from Roman Catholicism to Unitarianism, were wearing clerical collars to show that they were clergymen. Rabbis of all branches of Judaism were wearing yarmulkes."

"People keep asking me why I decided to go to Alabama. I'm not sure that even now I know the answer. I think I went to Alabama to worship God!"

To me, one striking aspect of Rabbi Davis' statement is that when he went to worship God, he found that willy-nilly he had to wear a Yarmulke.

Let me cite one more incident. Not long ago, as you know, there were demonstrations in Jerusalem protesting the arrival of a German Ambassador in Israel. Policemen in the hundreds sought to keep the demonstrators in line. Among the demonstrators there was an old Jew who stumbled and fell and his Yarmulke tumbled off his head. At the sight of the Yarmulke on the ground a policeman stopped, reached for it, and reverently placed it on the head of the old Jew.

The action of the policeman harried in the performance of his duties who stopped to put a Yarmulke on the head of an old Jew symbolizes once again the deep significance for the Jew of covering the head during worship. And so when the Cossack officer or the Nazi would say to the Jew: "Shapka dolo!" or "Hut ab," he knew instinctively what he was doing. He was reaching for the spiritual jugular of the Jew.

On the other hand consider with me for a moment the significance which the hat's removal achieved among Jews in the United States during the last hundred years or so. I discussed the question with one or two colleagues. (One of these, by the way, was an older man and one of the most distinguished men in the Reform Rabbinate. He said that if he were to start again he would



CA. 1982

put a Yarmulke on his head.) I, for one, fail to have discovered any spiritual significance in the removal of the hat. As a matter of fact, it seems to me a purely negative symbol. Some people in Reform Congregations seem to feel that they discharge their entire duty as Reform Jews by removing their hats. That is all they have to do. No Sabbath. No holidays. No prayers. No Jewish knowledge or practice or even personal integrity. Remove your hat and you are a good Reform Jew and you go to heaven. That, to be sure, is the common notion. On the

other hand, the thoroughly schooled Reform Rabbi, James G. Heller, whose father Max Heller was also a Reform Rabbi, in his biography of Isaac M. Wise, says the following:

"The liberal Jew certainly does not consider it a sin to keep the head covered. (p. 568) Or to put it in simpler terms: A young woman brought up in the Reform Congregation in Wheeling, West Virginia and a graduate of the Connecticut College for Women said to me: 'I like the Yarmulke. It makes you feel that you are a Jew. I like traditions.'"

Friends: Today marks the beginning of my 34th year as Rabbi of this Congregation, my 35th year in the Reform Rabbinate, my 41st year as part of the Reform movement. On this day I intend to perform a solemn act which I believe to be in keeping with the historic spirit of this Congregation. To atone for the hurt inflicted upon the refugees who innocently came to us as our guests; to atone for the hurt inflicted on many other innocents who were told sometimes not too politely to remove their hats; to identify myself with what I consider to be the growing maturity in the Reform movement and above all to identify myself with the spirit of our people throughout the world who associate worship with the covering of the head (Indeed some would have it that Yarmulke means **יֵרֵא מַלְכָּא** "mark of reverence for the King in heaven"). Both as an act of atonement and as a symbol of identification with my Jewish brothers throughout the world, I solemnly place this Yarmulke upon my head as I say

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך
העולם שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, who has sustained us, kept us in life, and brought us to this season.

After Rabbi Braude placed a yarmulke on his head, so did many congregants who had carried them in their pockets.



RABBI BRAUDE SPEAKS AT THE FAREWELL SERVICE TO THE BROAD STREET SYNAGOGUE ON APRIL 16, 1954. PRESIDENT WALTER SUNDLUN IS SEATED TO HIS RIGHT. WOMEN WEAR HATS BUT MEN ARE HATLESS.



CA. 1920

“REVEREND MEYER ELIJAH SMITH: MOHEL, CANTOR AND TEACHER BY GERALDINE S. FOSTER

Do you think it is easy writing about a *mohel*? Geraldine does so masterfully, sharing her warmth and learning. Rev. Smith, no ordinary *mohel*, possessed an abundance of skills and talents. His additional gifts included humility, patience, and wisdom. As this article makes clear, Rev. Smith's harmonious ways still reverberate in the hearts of many.

Circumcision, one of the oldest surgical procedures, has always been a religious rite for Jews. The origins of *Brit Milah* (Covenant of Circumcision) are found in Genesis 17:9-12. The ritual was thus bound up with the promise that the seed of Abraham would inherit the Land of Canaan.

It is written that Abraham circumcised himself, his 13-year-old son Ishmael, and all the males of his household. Because God changed Abram's name to Abraham, *Brit Milah* also became the ritual when a Jewish boy officially receives his Hebrew name. Isaac was circumcised by Abraham on his eighth day, so *Brit Milah* ordinarily takes place at that time.

Among a Jewish father's obligations is to have his son circumcised. The *mohel* (circumciser) was the one to whom the parent turned, although any Jew, even a female in the absence of a male, could perform the procedure.¹ It was expected that the *mohel* should be well versed in the tenets of Judaism and rigorously trained in matters of asepsis and technique.

The main participants in the ceremony of *Brit Milah* are the father, the *mohel*, and the *sandek*, who is privileged to hold the child. Also included in the ritual is the spirit of the prophet Elijah, who is welcomed as “the angel of the covenant.”²

As one of a Jewish community's functionaries, a *mohel* is considered a *kele kodesh* (a sacred vessel). The other functionaries (with their Hebrew

titles) are: *rabbi*, *hazzan* (cantor), *shammash* (sexton), *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), *mashgiach* (supervisor of Kashrut), and *sofer* (scribe).³

EARLY MOHELIM IN RHODE ISLAND

Newport's colonial Jewish community did not have a *mohel*. This posed a problem not only for parents of native-born boys but also for Jewish settlers who had been forced to live as *conversos* in Europe and wanted to return to Judaism. They could call on the appropriately named Abraham I. Abrahams, a *mohel* in New York, but he was not always available given his livelihood as a merchant. Months could go by before he could respond in person. Between 1756 and 1767, however, he did circumcise several members of the Lopez family whose ages ranged from seven months to 56 years.⁴ A page from Abrahams' circumcision register also shows that on October 27, 1767, he performed four procedures in Tiverton.⁵ The first to be circumcised was Abraham Lopez, aged 56. The others were his sons: Moses, 20; Samuel, 24; and Jacob, 17.

The Newport community finally obtained its own *mohel* in 1772. *Hazzan* Moses Seixas, best known for his letter of welcome to President Washington written in 1790, corresponded with Abrahams. Each step of the circumcision procedure was described. Seixas's set of implements was made in New York by Myer Myers, a Jew who was one of the era's leading silversmiths. Only the circumcision shield survived, but it is the unique example of a circumcision implement from 18th-century America with a documented history.⁶ Myers' mark is easily legible at the top of the shield.

Solomon Pereira and his wife, Miriam, who arrived in Providence from Holland in 1838, became the city's first permanent Jewish settlers. In 1854 he became a founder of Rhode Island's second congregation, Sons of Israel, which in 1877 affiliated with the Reform movement and eventually became known as Temple Beth-El. The congregation's earliest records were destroyed by a fire in 1876, so no information exists regarding early *mohelim* and circumcisions.



But there were surely boys. The Pereiras, for example, had 12 children. As of 1877, there were approximately 105 Jewish names (of men) listed in the Providence directory. By the turn of the 20th century, there were approximately 8,000 Jews living in Providence,⁷ but there is no record of a *mohel* in Rhode Island.

But how can *mohelim* be identified through published records? There was certainly no professional listing in city directories. Providence's first Jewish newspaper, *The Chronicle*, was not published until 1919. As Anne Sherman's article in this issue of *The Notes* demonstrates, it is extremely difficult to identify Rhode Island's early congregational rabbis.

In 1904, David Orlansky, a highly regarded scholar, arrived in Providence. He served as a *mohel*, a *hazzan*, and a *shochet* for 25 years until his death in 1929 at 53 years of age.⁸

REVEREND SMITH (1887-1974)

The eldest son of Shlomo Moshe and Pesse (Eisen) Shmid, Meyer Elijah (Meir Eliahu) was born in Remagola, Lithuania, on November 15, 1887. His paternal grandfather was known as *Yankel der Hazzan* (Yiddish: Jacob the Cantor). Indeed, his paternal and maternal ancestors had been *hazzanim* and *shochetim* for six generations, and his maternal ancestors had been *mohelim* for many generations.⁹

NEW YORK CITY. CANTOR SMITH
MAY BE THIRD MAN FROM THE
LEFT.



Shlomo Moshe Shmid had studied with one of three cantors who introduced Western musical notation to Lithuanian *hazzanute* (Hebrew: cantorial music). He, in turn, taught his son. Yisroel Brown recalls seeing music that his grandfather, Meyer, wrote when he was 12 years old. The notes and words were written from right to left but in Western notation.

As was customary, Meyer began *cheder* (Hebrew school) at three years of age. By six, he began singing in his paternal grandfather's choir. When the family moved

to Kursham, the 10-year-old was admitted to its prominent yeshiva. He sang in the choir until entering the Yeshiva Ketana in Kovno (today's Kaunas, Lithuania). Yisroel Brown learned that his grandfather, an excellent student, received a blessing from many sages: "May you always be a Jew of virtuous character."

To supplement their father's meager income as a *shochet*, Meyer and his two brothers spent summers giving concerts of cantorial music in numerous towns. Meyer was the soloist, his brothers formed a choir, and Shlomo served as business manager.¹⁰

When Shlomo lost his work as a *shochet*, the Shmid family moved to Beisagola, where they met the Langman family. In 1905, due to deteriorating political, economic, and social conditions, the Langmans left for America (where they changed their name to Long). Chana (1888-1971), already engaged to Meyer Smith, remained behind to care for an ill sister. With the latter's recovery, the two girls joined their family in Boston.

Meyer, a student at the Ponevitz Yeshiva, arrived in Boston a year later, when he was about 19. He had already performed his first circumcision at age 16. He had been taught by his father, who was also a *mohel*. Before leaving for America, Meyer found a handbook to begin learning English. His knowledge awed fellow immigrant passengers.

Soon after arriving in Boston, Meyer was joined by one of his brothers. Both went to NYC and worked for a short time in the garment industry. Meyer's grandson, Remmie Brown, recalled seeing a huge pair of shears acquired at this time. The Smith brothers rented an apartment close to the elevated railway tracks. Meyer's daughter, Eva Zucker, recalled a story about how he was always awakened at 2:00 a.m. When trains stopped running, he was disturbed by the silence.

Meyer and his brother visited Long family members in Illinois and Minnesota. According to his notes, Meyer returned to Boston in 1907 and was employed as *hazzan* of the Vilna Synagogue in the city's West End. Three years later he and Chana ("Annie") Long were married. In 1911, Gittel, the first of six children, was born. Meyer, who by this time had acquired the title of Reverend, studied circumcision with his friend, Cantor David Dubinsky, who was dean of Boston's *mohelim*. Cantor Dubinsky's letter of commendation and recommendation was donated to our Association's archives.

EARLY YEARS IN PROVIDENCE AND HARTFORD

In 1911, having become *hazzan* of Congregation Ahavath Shalom, "The Howell Street Shul" in the North End, Rev. Smith brought his family to Providence. When interviewed in 1967, he stated that he was the first *hazzan* who trained his choir for an entire year. It was customary to choose choir members immediately before the High Holy Days. He was also justly proud that "for the first time in its history the synagogue, which had about 1400 seats, was filled and extra seats had to be provided when he and his choir participated in the services." This attendance was equaled only by the appearance of the opera star Igor Gorin.¹¹

In 1911, Rev. Smith performed his first *Brit Milah* in Providence. This was for the son of a member of the Reform congregation, Temple Beth-El.¹² To share his love of learning, Rev. Smith also served as a teacher for the *Hevra Shas* (Hebrew: adult classes in Talmud) of Ahavath Shalom.

In 1912, the Smiths' second child, Jacob Samuel ("Jack"), was born in Providence. Soon thereafter, the family moved to Hartford, where Rev. Smith accepted a position at Congregation B'nai Yeshuran. Little is known about his service there. Hartford is better remembered as the birthplace of Eva in 1914 and Sarah in 1916.

RETURN TO PROVIDENCE

In 1917, Providence's North End called again. Rev. Smith became the first full-time *hazzan* of B'nai Zion, "The Orms Street Shul." In an article in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, Beryl Segal wrote that Rev. Smith made an impact throughout the congregation "with the exuberance of youth."¹³ As a "scholar of eminence," he also chaired the *Vaad Hachinuch*, the congregation's education committee. Every morning following services, Rev. Smith taught a lesson of Mishnah. With Rabbi Yisrael Rubinstein, he helped conduct *Shabbat* afternoon study sessions of Talmud. In his 1967 interview, Rev. Smith speculated that he had given 75% of Rhode Island's Jewish boys under 45 years of age their first Hebrew lessons.¹⁴

Even after retirement, Rev. Smith continued his daily habit of teaching a page of Gemara. Before his final hospitalization, he studied pages for the next two weeks. According to his grandson, Rabbi Yisroel Brown, he passed away when he would have about reached the last page.



PROBABLY "ORMS STREET SHUL"

Two more Smith children were born in Providence: Miriam in 1919 and Abraham in 1922. Abraham ("Remmie") was killed in action during the last year of World War II.

Eva Zucker and Miriam Brown recalled summer days when their father rehearsed with his choir at home. He wanted everything perfect for the High Holy Days, when he wore a white *kittel* (Yiddish: robe) and a tall, white satin *kippah* (Hebrew: head covering). Rabbi Israel Rubinstein and the officers of the congregation wore top hats.

The choir consisted of a boy soprano, a tenor, a baritone, and a bass. His sons, Jacob and Abraham, as well as his grandson, Yisroel Brown, participated at various times. Rev. Smith taught Jacob and his grandson, Remmie Brown, to be cantors. He also wrote much of his own music, which included, according to Eva Zucker, "the teary kind." He usually wrote new music for a

portion of the High Holiday service. Sondra Smith Meyer explained that those melodies still resonate with her and that she misses singing them with her synagogue choir in Sacramento.

"People tell me what a great voice he had," Cantor Remmie Brown stated. "He did not have an operatic voice but knew how to surround himself with beautiful arrangements. His arrangements were great and suited his voice." Cantor Brown uses some of his grandfather's arrangements at Temple Sinai, where he has officiated for a quarter century. At all family weddings, now celebrated by a fourth generation, Rev. Smith's music for the *Sheva Berakhot* (Hebrew: Seven Benedictions) is sung. He also wrote music for *Kaddish*. Rabbi Yisrael Brown explained that his grandfather taught the family *Shabbat* melodies he had learned from his own father and grandfather. Many of these are sung at family *simchas* (Hebrew: celebrations) in Israel and America.

About 1937, while attending a convention of cantors, Rev. Smith heard some colleagues discussing their tenure. Most had been with congregations for only three or four years. Rev. Smith mentioned his longevity, more than 20 years in the same post. The cantors asked, "Doesn't the congregation get tired of you?" They knew that a *Shabbat* service with a *hazzan* usually lasts three hours or more. Rev. Smith answered, "The *Shabbat* meal and the families are waiting so I make sure the service never finishes late. If the rabbi speaks, I cut down the *hazzanute* so everyone gets home on time. I also try to use more familiar melodies and less *hazzanute* so that the congregation can participate more rather than listen to a concert." Rabbi Brown recalled that his grandfather, always conscious of others, never emphasized his own accomplishments.

Rev. Smith remained at B'nai Zion for 23 years. In 1940, he became *hazzan* of Congregation Ohawe Shalom in Pawtucket. After retiring in 1955, his son Jacob, who had been a member of its choir, succeeded him for the High Holy Days.

The Rhode Island Board of Rabbis honored Rev. Smith with a *Melaveh Malke* (Hebrew: post-Shabbat celebration) on his 80th birthday. The evening, which featured tributes and a musical program, concluded with a rendition of *Sim Shalom* (Hebrew: Prayer for Peace). Composed by the guest of honor, the melody was sung by a quartet of cantors: Norman Gewirtz of Beth-El, Ivan

Perlman of Emanu-El, Jacob Smith of Ohawe Shalom, and the Reverend himself.

CAREER AS MOHEL

Though officially retired as a cantor since 1955, Rev. Smith continued his duties as a *mohel*. He performed approximately 8,000 circumcisions before retiring in 1967 at 80 years of age.¹⁵ Indeed, Rev. Smith is now best remembered in Rhode Island for this communal service.

Melvin Zurier, a prominent Providence attorney, told an amusing story in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* about representing Rev. Smith, who had been injured in an automobile accident.¹⁶ Zurier recalled that the opposing lawyer asked Judge Frank Licht to disqualify himself on the ground that the judge may have been circumcised by the plaintiff.

Rev. Smith was meticulous about his instruments and scrupulous about cleanliness. He wore a surgical gown and a face mask and insisted that the *sandek*, who held the child, also wear a face mask. "Before a *brit*," Miriam Brown stated, "he would lay out his instruments and inspect them. Then he would carefully pack them in his black bag." Susan Zucker remembered that the bag always gave off the pungent odor of iodoform, an antiseptic.

"If the *brit* was to take place on *Shabbat*," Mrs. Brown explained, "he would go the day before to leave his bag and the white surgical gown because he would not carry packages on *Shabbat*. He never drove a car, so either he would take a trolley or someone would drive him. Then on *Shabbat* he walked to the house or the hospital where it would take place."

Eva Zucker recalled that, whatever the weather, her father would often walk from the East Side to the hospitals or Cranston. In hot or inclement weather, he frequently arrived drenched. Esther Kaplan's nephew, Alan, who was circumcised on a Friday, remembered that Rev. Smith walked over the next day to make certain that the baby was all right.

Cantor Rennie Brown recalled that people would tell him that they considered it an honor to drive his grandfather to a *brit*. After obtaining his license at age 16, Robert Smith would frequently drive his grandfather. Mr. Smith recalls Rev. Smith's standard quip to mothers: "The sixth one is free."

At one time, it was not unusual for mothers to remain at Providence Lying-In Hospital (now Women and Infants) for 10 days to two weeks. Consequently, circumcision took place in a special room set aside for that

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purpose. Members of the medical staff often came to see Rev. Smith's technique. When Eva Zucker gave birth to her son in Pawtucket Memorial Hospital, however, an entire ward was cleared for his *brit*. It was a most unusual occurrence for that hospital, so doctors and nurses came to watch.

Rev. Smith worked quickly. Mrs. Brown recalled that a family member wanted to photograph the exact moment of a circumcision, so he asked that Rev. Smith tell him "when." By the time the photo was snapped, however, Rev. Smith had already finished.

According to an undated newspaper article belonging to Sarah Friedman, Rev. Smith performed the first *brit* on Nantucket. He already had an engagement for that day, and a car and ferry trip would have taken five

hours. So the Zlotien family chartered a plane, and Rev. Smith arrived after a flight of 30 minutes. This was the first time he had flown. The name of the plane, Remmie Brown recalled, was *Yankee Clipper*.

Rabbi Yisroel Brown explained that many times his grandfather would receive calls from parents before a *Bar Mitzvah* to verify a boy's Hebrew name. On one occasion he received a call from Portugal. A young man from Rhode Island serving in the American army had become engaged to a Jewish girl from Lisbon. Before allowing the marriage, her family wanted to make certain that he was indeed Jewish. Rev. Smith searched his records and told their rabbi when his *brit* had taken place, his Hebrew name, and those of his parents and grandparents. The wedding was celebrated by all.

AT HOME

The Smith children attended the Talmud Torah at B'nai Zion. After dinner on Saturday afternoons, the Reverend would review the week's Torah portion with his children, neighborhood children, and eventually with grandchildren. He provided the lesson; Mrs. Smith provided the refreshments. Answers to questions were based on texts but also in ways that children could understand.

Sarah Friedman explained that when the family gathered for dinner, only Yiddish was spoken. Not only did her father want his children to know the language, it was the only language their maternal grandparents spoke. She recalled, "If one of us said something in English, he would reply, '*Ich ken nit farstayn* (I cannot understand).'" So the remark was repeated in Yiddish.

"The house at 41 Pratt Street had elastic walls," Eva Zucker stated. "It was the gathering place for the whole family—grandparents, aunt and uncles." Miriam Brown recalled, "All the holidays were celebrated there. The house was like a hotel. There was always room for everyone."

Eva Zucker explained that Passover was a major family gathering. "My father made a big *tzimmes* (Yiddish: a stew but here meaning a fuss) out of the search for *hametz* (Hebrew: unleavened bread) *erev Pesach* (Hebrew: eve of Passover)," she remembered. "Mother would hide crumbs and father would go around with a feather to collect them. We children would trail along behind him to help. All the children had chores to do to help with the cooking and setting up. In the afternoon prior to the meal, we children had to take a nap because it was expected we would be awake for the whole evening. The *seder*

was also a learning process with portions and discussions of the *haggadah* (Hebrew: the reading at Passover). When the door was opened to admit *Elijah Hanavi* (Hebrew: Elijah the Prophet), Joseph and Louis Rubinstein would walk in. No one knew how they timed it so perfectly. The next day we would compare with other children to see who had the longest *seder*."

Later, when the Smith children married and held *sedarim* of their own, they still returned to their parents' home for the last part and singing. Michael Smith recalled that though a *seder* would last three or four hours, the 35 or 40 participants would remain at the table. "Nobody," he said, "ran around." Sondra Meyer recalled that everybody had a part. "When I became a teenager," she commented, "I was a bit nervous but *Zaidie* (Yiddish: grandfather) made me feel I was doing well." Robert Smith remembers that younger children brought bowls of water for the washing of hands. The bowls were placed on tables extending through two rooms. Jacob Smith's three children recalled that their father was a bit of a rebel. At a *seder* he liked to ask questions that would irritate his father. Nevertheless, Rev. Smith answered patiently.

Jacob tried out for and was accepted on the Hope High School football team. Because games were held on Friday nights, his parents did not allow him to participate. Jacob played the clarinet. Although he was accepted at the Julliard School of Music in New York City, family finances required him to attend Providence College for a year. Then he majored in science and played football at the College of William & Mary in Virginia. Jacob earned a master's degree at Rhode Island College.

GRANDCHILDREN'S ADDITIONAL MEMORIES

The Smith grandchildren agree that in the Reverend's mind there was no such thing as a foolish question. "As I look back," Susan Zucker said, "I realize that he epitomized the manner of the responses to the four sons of the *haggadah*." She recalled his words, "*Mein kind* (Yiddish: my child), our sages discussed just that sort of thing." He would go to a shelf, take out a book, point to a passage, and say, "Here they discussed the same thing, the pros and the cons." Rabbi Yisroel Brown recalls that his grandfather was very careful to return each book to its place. He could find any book, even in the dark.

The Brown children always lived very close to Rev. and Mrs. Smith, so

they saw them almost every day. "My *Zaidie* made each grandchild feel as if he or she were special," Betty Kramer said. "He spent a great deal of time with all of us, and he always kept us informed of our cousins who lived out of town. He and my *Bubbie* (Yiddish: grandmother) imbued in us a great sense of family."

Rabbi Yisroel Brown commented, "We were brought up by *Zaidie* not on Goldilocks, Snow White, or Peter Rabbit, but on stories from the *Aggadah* (Hebrew: non-legal portions of *Talmud*) about Abraham, David, Solomon, Elisha, and Eliahu Hanavi, and on great Torah scholars like Rashi, Rambam, and the Vilna Gaon." "When we studied together," Betty Kramer recalled, "he always had a story to tell related to the lesson." "That was the way I learned best," she acknowledged. Because Michael Smith was not a willing student, his grandfather paid him a penny for each word of Hebrew he learned.

To become a Bar Mitzvah, Robert Smith studied with his grandfather. He took two streetcars from his home in South Providence to the Smith home on the East Side. Rev. Smith made certain that Robert knew the *trop* (Hebrew: cantillations) so that he could chant any Torah reading.

"He was very patient," Cantor Remmie Brown stated. "I was not the ideal student, but he knew how to reach me. He was very understanding and loved his grandchildren. He came to my Bar Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El, even though he was Orthodox. He was not rigid. He had great respect for Rabbi William Braude (Reform) and Rabbi Eli Bohnen (Conservative) because they were scholars. Sometimes, they would call him for information."

Remmie Brown explained that his first cantorial position was at Temple Beth-El, when he substituted for Cantor Norman Gewirtz during a sabbatical. "My *Zaidie* was very proud that I was there," he recalled. "We would sit together and go over some of the music."

Cantor Brown continued: "When I was first married, I was working seven days a week. Obviously, having me work on *Shabbat* was not something he was happy with. He asked, 'If you had a choice, if you did not have to do it to earn a living, would you work like this?' I answered most probably not. He said, 'What was important was what was in my heart.' I taught school for 30 years and was not able to go to morning *minyan*. Now that I am retired I do, and I wear a set of my *Zaidie's tefillin* (Hebrew: phylacteries). That's the whole idea of what's in one's heart."

Cantor Brown's youngest child and only son is named Meyer Elijah.

He was born in 1975, a year after Rev. Smith's death.

Sondra Meyer recalled the days when she was a student teacher at John Howland School on the East Side. Once a week she would go to her grandparents' home at 126 Rochambeau Avenue and enjoy a specially prepared lunch. She proclaims, "There was never a time when I did not learn something from *Zaidie*." Cousin Warren Kantrowitz agreed, adding, "There was never idle chatter."

Susan Zucker remembers Rev. Smith saying, "However much you believe and practice, do it 100%, from your whole heart." She had a different kind of relationship with her grandfather because she spent much time with him during her teen and young adult years, often in discussion. Under his tutelage and by his example, she realized that there was a logic, a natural flow to the tenets of Judaism. Susan also saw her grandfather as a friend, who was never old in his outlook and helped her deal with personal issues.

Reverend Meyer Elijah Smith always wore black because he felt it was appropriate as well as dignified. Appropriateness and dignity also described his actions. He lived and taught his children and grandchildren to live as if one's actions reflected on one's family and on the whole family of Israel.



ANNIE + REV. SMITH WITH EVA BROWN GREENBERG
AT REMMIE + MARJORIE BROWN'S WEDDING, 1967

INTERVIEWS

Eva Smith Zucker, June 22, 2005.

Cantor Rennie Brown, July 1, 2005.

Sarah Smith Friedman, telephone interview, July 3, 2005.

Betty Brown Kramer, telephone interview, July 4, 2005.

Miriam Smith Brown, telephone interview, July 5, 2005.

Susan Zucker, July 6, 2005.

Rabbi Yisroel (George) Brown, electronic correspondence, July 10, 2005.

Esther Kaplan, telephone interview, July 18, 2005.

Sondra Smith Meyer, telephone interview, August 9, 2005.

Dr. Robert Smith, telephone interview, August 9, 2005.

Endnotes

¹ Leonard V. Snowman, "Circumcision," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1972 ed., V, p. 570.

² Birnbaum, *A Book of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1964), p. 102.

³ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁴ Malcolm Stern, "Newport Jewry: Whence and Whither," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, V (November 1970), p. 321.

⁵ Jonathan D. Sarna, "Colonial Judaism," in David L. Barquist, *Myer Myers: Jewish Silversmith in Colonial New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), figure 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, catalogue entry 62, p. 152.

⁷ John S. Gikerson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence: 1820-1940* (Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 280.

⁸ Mayer S. Abramowitz, *Chachmei Yisroel of New England: A Pictorial History of the New England Orthodox Rabbinate* (Worcester: Nathan Stolnitz Archives, 1991), p. 69.

⁹ Cantor Rennie Brown created a definitive genealogy of the Smith family, a copy of which is found in the Association's archives.

¹⁰ Celia Zuckerberg, "Board of Rabbis to Give *Maleveh Malke* in Honor of Reverend Meyer Smith," *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*, December 22, 1967, p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Beryl Segal, "Congregation Sons of Zion: The Orms Street Synagogue," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, IV (November 1965), p. 261.

¹⁴ Zuckerberg, *Op. cit.*

¹⁵ Zuckerberg, *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ Melvin L. Zurier, "Sons of Zion Synagogue: Memories," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, XI (November 1992), p. 237.

A PROVIDENCE BOY

BY SIDNEY CHAFETZ

Now an emeritus professor, the author taught art at Ohio State University from 1948 until 1982. His prints, executed in a rich variety of media, have been widely exhibited in America and abroad. In the fall of 2005, Prof. Chafetz enjoyed an extensive retrospective at the Columbus Museum of Art. His work is found in the collections of more than 20 museums. Brown University and the RISD Museum own important examples. This essay illustrates another facet of Prof. Chafetz's artistry, his skillful use of words.



SELF-PORTRAIT
[WOODCUT], 1956

I have lived in the Midwest now for more than half a century, but I have always considered myself "a Providence boy." Although I am now in my eighties, when people ask where I am from, I continue to say, "I'm a Providence boy."

I was born in Providence on March 27, 1922 to Isaac and Dora (Gabrilowitz) Chafetz. I have the fondest memories of being a part of a large, loving, extended family with my parents, maternal grandparents, aunts, uncles, and several (actually 21) first cousins.

In Providence at the time, the wealthy Jews lived on the East Side and the "frummies" lived around Prairie Avenue in the North End. Poor and middle-class families like ours lived in the Smith Hill, Orms Street, Douglas Avenue, and Eaton Street neighborhoods. Only Uncle Philip and Aunt

Edith Gabrilowitz and their sons, Irving and Bill, lived in the Prairie Avenue neighborhood of South Providence. The rest of us lived within easy walking distance of each others' homes.

PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS

My parents and grandparents were Russian-Jewish immigrants. My mother's father, my grandfather Abraham Gabrilowitz, came to the United States around 1900. He stayed with his sister, *Tante* Shafner, in New London, Connecticut, where her husband, Samuel, had a prosperous furniture store. My grandfather, an ordained rabbi and scribe, moved to Providence to open a business on North Main Street, where he sold religious books and related ritual items. Cousin Bill Gabrilowitz suggests that Abraham went back to Novordruk at least twice, during which time he fathered two more daughters and arranged passage for his family to join him in Providence.

Isaac Chafetz, my father, came through Ellis Island in 1913 as an 18-year-old bachelor. Like so many other immigrants, he hoped to prosper and bring over the rest of his family, a widowed father and five siblings. Sadly, it was never to be.

I've always wondered how my father came to Providence. After going through customs, immigrants were encouraged to leave crowded New York City. I know that his only relative in the United States was Kalman Chafetz, who came in 1905. By the time my father arrived, Kalman had a family and a prosperous dry goods store in Milford, Massachusetts. I am certain that Kalman was of assistance. *Landsmen*—the Cokens, Jenkins, Fines, Heikens, Helfands, and other earlier immigrants—helped new arrivals.

FATHER'S FURNITURE BUSINESS

How did my father get in the furniture business? I am guessing that the Joseph Marcus furniture store on North Main Street might have given jobs to newly arrived, unskilled immigrants. I remember my father as a big-boned,



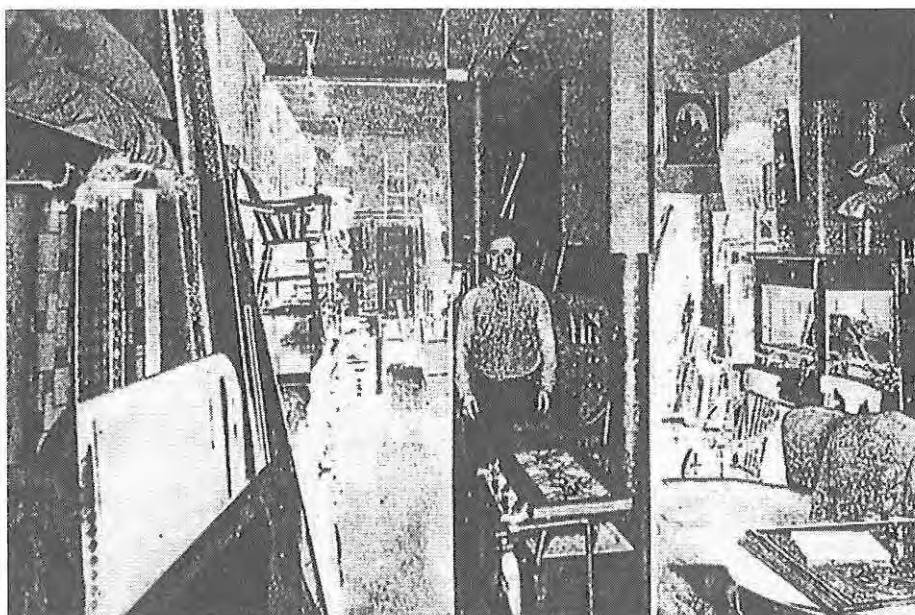
FAMILY [PHOTO ETCHING], 1981

powerful man who could have indeed helped move furniture. In any event, my earliest memories are of time spent at his large new-and-used furniture store on North Main Street.

Before I was of school age, my mother and I would walk from our State Street tenement to Smith Street, cross Canal Street to North Main, and spend time in my father's store. I believe I learned to read at an early age from the many books, stored in glass-doored bookcases, that father bought and sold. The engraved illustrations fascinated me, and the story of Florence Nightingale remains vivid in my memory. Whenever I became restless, my mother would give me paper and pencil and tell me to "make a picture." To my eyes, the store was huge, as were my father and his helper, a kind Turkish man named Zolfi. He would whittle boats for me out of scrap wood. The freight elevator was both intriguing and frightening.

NORTH MAIN STREET NEIGHBORHOOD

Cousin Irma (Cohen) Silverman remembers that in 1928 we all watched Al Smith's presidential campaign parade down North Main Street from the front of the store. We would also visit next door to Bessie and Sam Levine's tailor shop. Across the street, next to the Episcopal Cathedral, we would also make



REMBERANCE, 1928 [PHOTO ETCHING], 1980



GRANDFATHER GABRILOWITZ
[COLOR WOODCUT], 1952

purchases and have conversations at Klibanoff's Dry Goods and Zaidman's Print Shop, which sold New Year's and Bar Mitzvah cards with Hebrew and English texts. Except for the end building, which was retained for park headquarters, the entire block where father's store stood was demolished to create the Roger Williams National Memorial.

North Main Street continued uphill and was called Constitution Hill, the location of many Jewish shopkeepers. Where Charles Street began, Lester Millman's father had a gas station with a pit and a hydraulic lift. Near the base of the hill, Aunt Annie and Uncle Sam Kloner had a bakery. I spent many an afternoon playing among the ovens and the flour sacks with my cousins. We would eagerly watch the pastries being withdrawn from the ovens on long wooden paddles and got to taste jelly doughnuts still hot. Farther up the hill was *Zaidie's* store. (I later learned that my grandfather, with his rabbinical training, tutored his oldest grandsons, my brother Joe and my cousin Syd Cohen, for their Bar Mitzvahs.)

We could go directly from the back of the store up the hill to my grandfather's house at 22 Benefit Street, which was built in 1843. *Zaide* was only the third owner of that grand house, and it is now listed on the National Register of Historic Homes. The Cohens—Uncle Morris and Aunt Sophie and their children, Syd, Irma and Davey—lived on Pratt Street, parallel to Benefit. We played “hit the bat,” “caught between bases baseball,” and other games on the empty lots on many streets.

Across from *Zaide's* was Louie's Delicatessen and Sherman's Fish Market that had live fish in shallow tanks. Barney Goldberg's Drug Store was a landmark at the top of Constitution Hill. Barney was also a politician who was evidently responsible for getting out the Jewish vote. A limo was always

sent to take my parents to the polls on Election Day.

My grandfather's Benefit Street house was the center of our family holidays and parties, joyous events all, but the Passover seders were especially memorable. The men would bring sawhorses and planks up from the basement to set up as banquet tables. All the women would pitch in with cooking and serving. We younger children used the big rooms and the hallway banister as our playground. In the fall, eating outdoors in the big leaf-covered *succah* was a special treat.

A "WEALTHY" FAMILY

Throughout my early childhood, I thought we were a wealthy family. But the "wealthy" home we lived in on State Street was, in fact, a third-floor, two-bedroom coldwater flat. My older brother Joe and I shared one bedroom, and our parents had the other. It was not unusual to have a stray cousin or an unmarried aunt sleep on a cot in the kitchen/family room. A coal stove served both as a cooking appliance and a heat provider. Though we had a parlor, it was used only in the warm months. There was a narrow pantry with sink and cupboards and a window that opened to a clothes line for hanging out the wash.

For hot water, there was a Vulcan heater, a cylindrical, enameled, cast-iron contraption whose gas ring had to be lit with a match. Sponge baths were the norm, but for the holidays we would use the city bathhouses that offered soap, towels, and showers for pennies. The men used to go to the *schvitz* on Candace Avenue.

Horses and wagons were ubiquitous in the neighborhood, and there were stables behind the tenements. Manure was everywhere. Drivers delivered milk and ice; fruit and vegetables were bought from various peddlers. In winter, milk would freeze and pop out of glass bottles. An ice cream vendor, who drove a small truck, would arrive ringing his bells. Finding a nickel to stop him and buy a treat could make a boy's day happier.

We all kept kosher homes, but I remember that on many Saturdays my mother and several of her five sisters would meet downtown and have lunch at a Chinese restaurant. Only the youngest sister, Faye, was American born, and we always referred to her as "The Yankee." But all of the sisters spoke and wrote well in English. My father spoke with an accent, and I recall him using a "v" instead of a "w" in his words.

Aunt Faye was a free spirit who might appear out of nowhere to eat with us and sleep over. The downtown movie theater was Faye's, and my aunt told all of us young cousins that it was, indeed, her movie house.

Except for Uncle Phillip's family, we were all members of the Orms Street *Shul*. I remember proudly walking there with my parents and my brother Joe. We would sit downstairs and the women sat upstairs. We shopped for new clothes for Rosh Hashonah. On Yom Kippur I recall hearing the wailing and moaning of the old women and the smell of their ammonia-soaked handkerchiefs. Sniffing the ammonia was supposed to keep them from fainting from lack of food and water.

My father was a profound music lover, especially the violin. During his early, prosperous years, he would take Joe and me to hear Mischa Elman, Yehudi Menuhin, and other performers. I remember him lovingly scraping the finish off of child-size violins, then revarnishing and restringing them. He started Joe, cousin Syd Cohen, and other youngsters on these instruments. Joe played in the school and JCC orchestras. He also sang in *Chazan* Smith's choir well into his thirties.

THE DEPRESSION

By the time my younger brother, Lester, was born in 1929, in the midst of the Depression, my father had lost his business and was a very sick man. We had moved from State Street to a tenement on Douglas Avenue and finally to 6 Mansfield Street. This was another two-bedroom, cold-water flat where my family lived until my father died in 1947.

(My mother was a widow for six years until she married Norman Gottlieb, a widower from Jackson Heights, New York. They were introduced by her New York cousin, Rosie (Cohen) Silverman. Mother lived in New York until Norman died, after which she returned to Providence, where Joe and his family and her sisters still lived. She passed away in 1985 when she was 85 years old.)

The Depression affected our entire extended family. Aunt Annie and Uncle Sam Kloner lost everything—their bakery and their home. Bill (now Rabbi William) Kloner told me that he remembered seeing their entire household goods being put out on the sidewalk, and that he slept at our Mansfield Street tenement that night.



GRANDMOTHER GABRILOWITZ
[COLOR WOODCUT], 1952

In 1930, *Zaide*, *Bubbe*, and their youngest, unmarried daughter, Faye, moved to Detroit, where, my grandfather believed, business prospects would be better in the small towns on both sides of the border.

Only two uncles had jobs. Morris Cohen was a grocery salesman for Blue Mountain Foods, and Louis Gleckman drove a delivery truck for Hathaway Bakery. They were the only family members who had automobiles. Uncle Phillip peddled fruit and vegetables from his horse and wagon.

Sunday outings to Goddard Park or Narragansett Beach would be made in the two uncles' automobiles with as many grown-ups and kids as could be jammed in. I often chose to stay home and try to make art in our empty flat.

We all had working papers at age 14. I delivered newspapers each morning before school.

The entire family was supportive. In 1929, Aunt Lil, Uncle Lou, and infant Ernest moved into our flat on Mansfield Street. How four adults, Joe, two infants, and I all managed with only two bedrooms is amazing, but somehow we survived the worst years of the Depression.

In 1932, Joe's Bar Mitzvah took place at the Orms Street *Shul*. Afterwards, the extended family continued with a party and gifts at Mansfield Street. My Bar Mitzvah three years later was an entirely different story. With the family in dire straits, we couldn't afford *cheder* tuition. My instruction stopped, although I continued to go to class. Mr. Gereboff wouldn't teach me, but he still seemed to enjoy coming up behind my desk and poking me between the shoulder blades with his stick and pulling my ear. I did not progress beyond learning to read Hebrew.

When it came time for my Bar Mitzvah, I got up very early on a Thursday and went with my father to the morning *minyan*. I read my portion of the *Haftorah*, the old men and my father congratulated me over schnapps and cake, and I walked to school. No fountain pens.

Because my father could no longer pay synagogue dues, he stopped going to services. Those who couldn't afford tickets were allowed to sit with the apostates and vagrants at the back. This my father was too proud to do.

Eventually, New Deal legislation created jobs and my father worked as a laborer on WPA (Works Progress Administration) projects. Later, when war was imminent, he built Quonset huts. My brother Joe graduated from high school and forewent college to work full-time to help out the family. But the family needed my help, too.

When I was in the 10th grade, my father became disabled and my mother said I would have to quit school and work to help the family survive. I had just started classes at Hope High while the new Mount Pleasant High School was being built. I was heartbroken, but I went to work at the Challenge Super Market at City Line Avenue.

After a few weeks, however, a Jewish charitable agency heard of my family's plight and provided some funds for us. It enabled me to return to school. I became a better student and graduated from the new Mount Pleasant High in 1940.

BECOMING AN ARTIST

I always knew I wanted to be an artist but was vague as to what being an artist entailed. In public school I was always recognized as being talented and was excused from repetitious art assignments, but I was basically rudderless. It wasn't until I enrolled at Mount Pleasant that I received useful instruction from two responsible teachers. Ms. Goodwin and Clayton Smith introduced a small group of us to the work of current and historical artists.

I do remember going to Saturday morning classes at Rhode Island School of Design, where an instructor, not a regular faculty member, improvised assignments without critiquing our work. It was basically "busy work."

Beginning in 1940, I attended RISD on a full scholarship and a National Youth Administration work program. Actually, it never occurred to me that there were other schools to study art. The instruction was structured

and disciplined. I especially enjoyed and benefited from the materials and techniques classes in which we studied the works of key Old Masters and gained a lasting appreciation of their art.

Among my many friends in the freshman class were several Jewish students. These included Lewis "Bud" Rosen, Herb Fink, George Cohen, Miriam Beerman, Adele Feldman, and Joyce Swirsky.

WORLD WAR II

I entered RISD that fall well aware, however, that the United States would be going to war. My family read the *Forward*, the Yiddish daily, which detailed news about the Nazis' treatment of European Jews long before the mainstream press. For that reason alone, I looked forward to serving in the military. I went so far as to take the Navy's pilot exam, but failed the eye test. Then, in my second year at RISD, I was drafted.

For a city kid who had never camped or held a gun, basic training in Muskogee, Oklahoma was both fascinating and sobering. Had I remained with the 88th Infantry, my chances of survival would have been very slim. It suffered heavy casualties during the invasion of Italy and the liberation of Rome.

Fortunately, I received training in a combat engineers' battalion with the 99th Infantry at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas. After D-Day, we were sent to the Belgian-German border. The war was winding down, so we did not expect to see any combat.

On December 16, 1944—a freezing, albeit sunny day—my company was cutting down trees to make a supply route well away from a main road. When we heard firing, we went to see what was happening. There were German tanks and troops. We headed back into the woods, where we remained for three days until we could return to our own lines. There followed a standoff with the enemy artillery only 300 yards away. While my foxhole companion had his hand mangled, I escaped with torn clothing and a dented helmet from shell fragments.

On Christmas Day, 1944, when overcast skies finally cleared, our planes attacked the enemy's front lines. Our outfit, "The Battle Babies," had withstood Hitler's last attempt for victory.

I was sent to England for three months of treatment for frostbite and

exposure. After I joined the 4th Infantry in Wurzburg, Germany, the war in Europe ended. I returned to America, expecting to be sent to Japan. But then we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, and there was no need.

There is nothing moral about war. Humans kill other humans – civilians as well as soldiers.

NEW YORK AND PROVIDENCE

When I returned to the States, I went immediately to New York to become “a famous painter.” Having experienced rough combat in terrible winter weather, I found cold, dirty, inhospitable Greenwich Village lacking in romance. I used to visit the famous artists of the day – Morris Kantor, Adolph Gottlieb, and Philip Evergood – in their studios. One day DeHirsch Margulies put his arm around me and said: “Kid, your generation will have opportunities that mine never had. You have the G.I. Bill. Go finish school, and see what will happen.”

That was all I needed to be convinced to return to Providence and RISD. The school had changed to a degree-granting institution during the war. I was told that, with the G.I. Bill in effect, I would have to be enrolled as a beginner. Arguing strongly that I should be permitted to start my third year, I produced a portfolio containing an abundance of drawings I had made in the service. (With the Army’s “hurry-up-and-wait” system, I had time to make pencil drawings on small pads that I kept in my knapsack.) I also had photos of “Just Kids,” my exhibition of English, French, Belgian, and German children that was shown during the winter of 1945 in London’s USO Rainbow Center in Piccadilly Circus. The exhibition was arranged by a Red Cross aide who had seen my work while I was in an English hospital being treated for frostbite.

Finally, I was permitted to enter my junior year at RISD. George Cohen and Herb Fink had to repeat the second year. Herb and I enjoyed a friendly rivalry as outstanding students. He always won the “first,” and I was the runner-up.

An advantage of RISD was its Museum. Dr. Heinrich Schwartz, the print and drawing curator, took an interest in my studies. Schwartz, a Jewish refugee and a former curator in Vienna, showed me many of the valuable works in his care and was very supportive. He was in correspondence with a fellow Viennese refugee, Oskar Kokoschka, and shared with me Kokoschka’s

prints and drawings that he purchased for RISD. Schwarz purchased a student work of mine for the museum and arranged a small exhibition for me at Brown University's Faunce House.

FRANCE

Having finished my studies at RISD in two years, I had time remaining on the G.I. Bill. In 1947, many European artists began returning home from safe havens. I learned that the American School at Fontainebleau would reopen that summer, so I applied and was accepted for study. I was reluctant to leave Providence because of my father's poor health, but my family and his doctors urged me not to forgo a wonderful opportunity. A month after arriving in France, however, I received a telegram telling me of my father's fatal heart attack. I experienced a period of guilt and remorse over not being at home with my family.

Fontainebleau proved to be a great learning experience. I excelled in my studies and was awarded the prize for best student. With that stipend, I bought my first work of art, a Rouault etching of a young female nude.

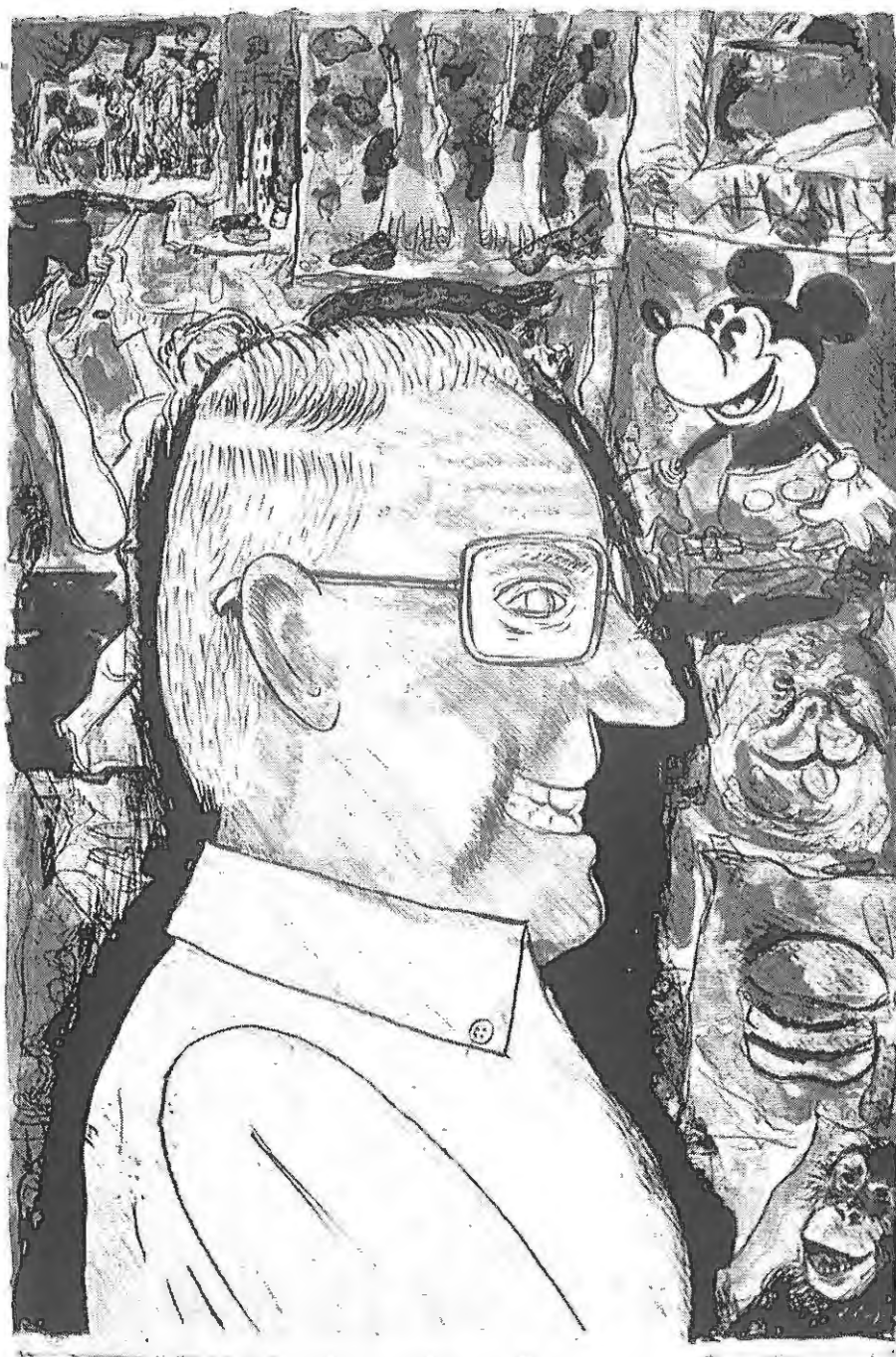
Following the summer session, my wife and I moved to Paris. We rented an apartment near the Danube metro stop, on the eastern fringe of the city. I had one year of French at Mount Pleasant and learned enough to get along. I spent a great deal of time in the Louvre and made a study of a Gauguin painting there.

I also enrolled in the Académie Julien, which provided models, easel space, and critiques by individual arrangement with the *professeur*. I also made my first drypoint etchings, a simple method of scratching marks into a metal plate. I had them printed in small editions by professional printers for a modest fee.

In the spring of 1948, Fernand Léger returned to Paris from New York and was persuaded to open classes by a diverse group of European art students who were dissatisfied with École des Beaux Arts. When I learned about the class, I signed up. Through his instruction and my RISD training, I was able to reach a higher level of achievement and maturity.

OHIO STATE

I learned that teaching jobs were available in American colleges, so I sent out



SELF PORTRAIT [LITHOGRAPH], 19887

a few resumé's. On the basis of my European postgraduate studies, I was hired as an instructor at Ohio State University and arrived in Columbus in October, 1948.

The School of Fine and Applied Art at OSU had a welcoming and congenial faculty. I joined a cadre of talented young men who, like myself, were returning veterans. I was the only one who had not been an Ohio State student, but it was an exciting group to be a part of.

There was no discernible anti-Semitism. In fact, there were several Jews on the faculty: Sid Kaplan in art history; Manny Barkan in art education; and Joe Schwarz, Roy Lichtenstein, and I in studio art. Although we acknowledged our Jewishness, it was not in the forefront of our everyday activities. We seemed readily accepted.

I believe that at the time there may have been 200 Jews throughout the entire university faculty and staff. Rabbi Kaplan at Hillel provided our families with facilities for Passover and other holidays as well as a Sunday school. There were many Jewish students at Ohio State and other Midwestern universities before New York began its state university system.

THE COLUMBUS COMMUNITY

The Columbus Jewish community was welcoming, and we were invited as honored guests to many homes, mainly in the eastern suburbs. There were several synagogues, a Jewish Community Center, and a Jewish grocery and bakery.

There was one memorable incident in the early 1950s. A distinguished Jewish professor of marketing successfully challenged the restrictive covenant which excluded Jews from owning homes in a wealthy, northwestern suburb. There did not appear to be a hateful backlash against the Jewish community when a court ruled in the professor's favor. Many of his colleagues could not understand, however, why anyone would want to live in a community where he knew he was not welcome.

REMAINING AT OHIO STATE

As time went on, I had many opportunities to teach at other colleges, but my department made clear its desire to retain my services.

All the rest, as they say, is history. I taught for 40 years, primarily at Ohio State but with numerous stints at other colleges and universities. I won

two Fulbright Fellowships—one of which enabled me to return to Paris and study with the foremost printmaker in the world, Stanley Hayter. I became a printmaker and was eventually able to start a strong printmaking program at Ohio State. In 1966, I was invited to return to RISD to develop its printmaking program. But I was a full professor and tenured and didn't want to leave Columbus. My friend Dadi Wirz, a Swiss artist I had met at Hayter's studio, went instead and developed an outstanding program.

I am now an emeritus professor. I have a studio provided by Ohio State away from the hurly-burly of the main campus, and I still work at my art each day. I maintain friendships with two of the men I met at RISD some 60 years ago: George Cohen, who grew up in Providence and had a fine career in graphic arts, including a long tenure at Ohio University; and Bud Rosen, who grew up in Newport and became a very successful designer and businessman in New York City. He is spending his retirement achieving great satisfaction as a watercolorist.

FAMILY

I am a husband, a father, and a grandfather. I have traveled the world and exhibited my art and taught throughout the United States and Europe. Yet, deep down, I know that whatever I have achieved harkens back to my immigrant parents and grandparents, who strove so mightily to make this country a home for their children. Their countless sacrifices enabled my brothers and me to become successful. Joe took evening classes at Brown and became a licensed civil engineer. Lester earned a Ph.D. in pharmacology at the University of Wisconsin on an Air Force ROTC scholarship. Having spent many years in research in the pharmaceutical industry, he eventually became a professor of pharmacology at the University of Missouri. Our numerous cousins also established successful careers.

Three years ago, I completed a large series of prints based on my family, which I called "Coming to America ca. 1900." It was shown at the Providence Jewish Community Center. We combined it with a Gabrilowitz family reunion. There were more than 100 of us, four generations from Abraham and Rachel Gabrilowitz's grandchildren to their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. I will never forget it.

I am still, at heart, "a Providence boy."

"MR. RISD"

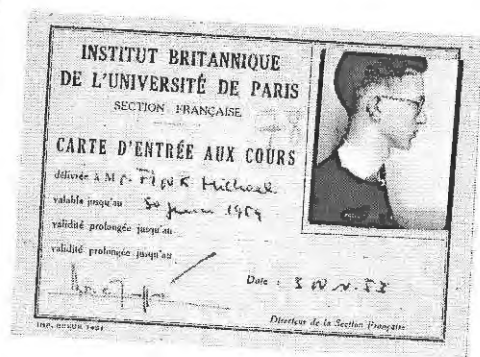
BY MICHAEL FINK

Michael is both omnipresent and elusive. While anchored to the Ocean State, he belongs to another time and place. He is constantly busy: reading, chatting, listening, observing, imagining, and wondering. Though also a writer, he allows some of his most precious thoughts to evaporate. Here Michael wistfully reflects on his half-century reign as the Boulevardier of Benefit Street.

In the summer of 1957, following my undergraduate years at Yale and at the Sorbonne and a master's degree at Harvard, I returned home to Providence. I was at loose ends after my adventures away and abroad, letdown from high hopes and romantic dreams. My uncle, Herbert L. Fink, was a professor of printmaking at Rhode Island School of Design, and he introduced me to President John Frazier. He offered a fine opportunity for a young person doing graduate work at Brown to create liberal arts courses.

Somehow I was able to juggle a variety of influences, from "New Criticism" to existentialism to pantomime, to teach the basics of reading and writing to art students. They came from a wide range of backgrounds—farmland, milltowns, and stately homes in noble places like Newport. My own taste in literature of that era ran to J.D. Salinger and James Thurber.

After my first year as a part-time instructor of English in the freshman foundation program, I was asked to teach sophomore courses in American and world literature. These were required courses with established syllabi and texts. I spent the summer of 1958 catching up on the essays of Emerson and Thoreau and on the novels of Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Steinbeck. For "World Lit" we used a one-volume



anthology that dashed the reader from Homer through Dante and Shakespeare. My job was to make each excerpt lively and useful to the studio-bound.

Our department head, Edwin I. Lamont, maintained a salon next door to the Providence Athenaeum, just across the street from our lovely RISD library. I gave him a group of chairs from my grandfather's factory, Fink Brothers. My uncle, Samuel R. Fink, re-upholstered them. It was somehow surreal and marvelous to sip my host-boss's powerful Negroni cocktails on such familiar childhood thrones while wearing the tweed suits I had bought at J. Press in New Haven.

Having taken drawing classes at RISD as a small boy, my new role gave fresh meaning to things, places, and persons I had taken for granted. RISD seemed to open up to me, and I am forever grateful to my uncle for turning the knob on the door to my future, to my vocation. I built a life in familiar but newly strange surroundings.

George Troy, book editor of the *Providence Journal* and husband of my colleague Wes Troy, sent me books to review. He selected either French "New Wave" novels, nature lore or books of Jewish historical interest. These reviews gave me a scholarly outlet to add credibility to my RISD credentials. While I hoped that my annual contract would be extended, the pay scale in those early years was so meager that I looked for other employment. I worked for a year as a copywriter for the Bo Bernstein advertising agency. I think my students were slightly shocked to discover my secret schedule. I had endeavored to instruct them in the poetic art of suggestion and evasion instead of the salesman's narrower focus and persuasive skill.

In the summer of 1962, following Pearl Braude's kindly and timely suggestion, I visited Kibbutz Sasa in the Galil in Israel, and also wrote for George Troy a piece on the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Stanley Haste, editor of the RISD alumni bulletin, asked me to describe for his seasonal magazine my sojourn in the Holy Land. I was actually rather shy about announcing my religion within the context of a college, perhaps especially an art college. But once my story appeared in print alongside my snapshots, President Frazier summoned me to his office, not to criticize but to congratulate. He reassured me that if I chose to be a writer, I could use my post at RISD as a base of operations. I believe that my professional life began with that article!



MICHAEL FINK
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MIKE FINK

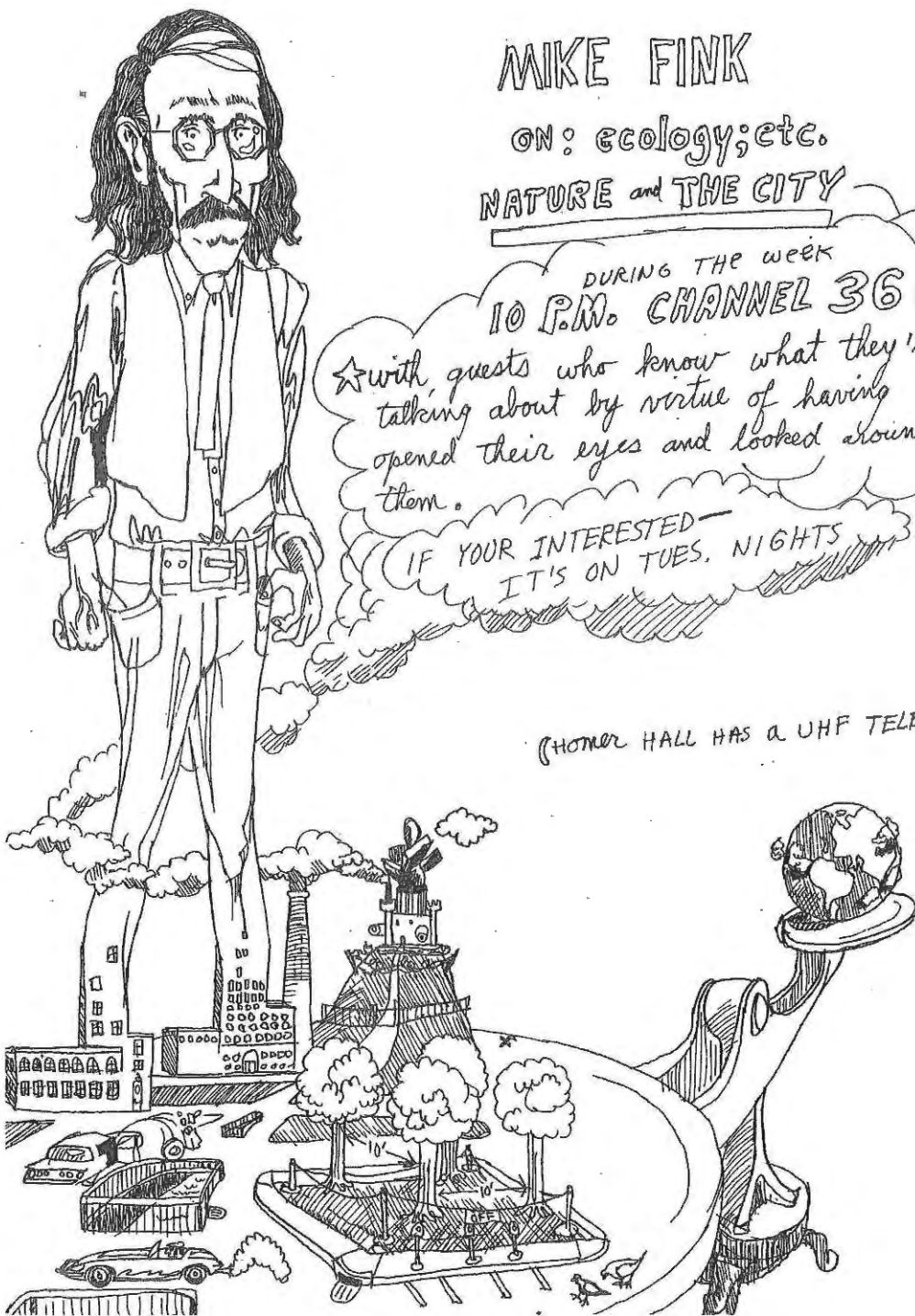
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A STUDENT DRAWING

I have introduced and crafted a number of courses born from my earliest, youthful interests. For example, in the summer of 1963, I took my little canoe under the downtown streets and paddled through the sewers and along the diverse rivers that flowed clandestinely in every direction. I called my course "*Nature and the City*" and put on a series of television shows under that title for Channel 36.

I have also taught "The French Novel," "French Cinema," "Victorian and Edwardian Literature," and, perhaps most notably, "The Literature of Minorities." For that course, put together during the protest years of the late 1960s and early '70s, I was able to invite Isaac Bashevis Singer to my classroom, and also to address an audience of the entire college and the Providence community as well. He proved to be a great hit with everyone.

Since his visit I have been privileged to be able to bring many distinguished Jewish artists and writers to our campus. I played host, chauffeur, and valet to Art Spiegelman, author of the *Maus* graphic books, and Roman Vishniac, the biologist-photographer. Other Jewish guests were the artists Maurice Sendak and Leonard Baskin (with whom I lunched at the Star Deli on Douglas Avenue); Stephen Jay Gould, the late Harvard poet-scientist; and Ruth Gruber, the journalist who wrote *Haven* and photographed the refugee ship, *Exodus*, for *Life* magazine.

I have invited very many Holocaust survivors living in Rhode Island to speak. With my colleague Peter O'Neill, longtime head of the film department, I directed and produced *Here We Live Again*, a film about our local survivors. This project received funding from the Rhode Island Foundation and the Rhode Island Council on the Humanities.

The elective I teach each spring is now openly titled "The Jewish Narrative." It includes the work of Elie Wiesel, Neal Gabler's history of Hollywood, and even the collected cartoons and essays of Al Capp.

I have also taught a course on journalism, which celebrates the range of local publications eager to accept the words and the sketches of my RISD disciples. What does "publish" mean? My first-born daughter, Emily, thought it meant "stapled." We write for our "public," a world of readers who make up an invisible community. The writer preserves his legacy in boxes, cabinets, and trunks. This is perhaps as absurd as most human activity – or as poignant.

My students have had all kinds of family backgrounds. Some had

relatives who were active Nazis; others were children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. There have also been citizens of Arab countries that despise Israel.

My students have been marvelous companions both actual and metaphorical. Elaine had the wildest, reddest hair I had ever seen. Her tresses were like a torch of inspiration, especially on rainy, gray days. She had green eyes and enjoyed going barefoot on the brick sidewalks even on cold days. I wrote a small piece about the way she personified RISD (and not Brown) for the *Brown Alumni Monthly*.

In 1971, I had a student who had just returned from service in Vietnam. Rob asked me to lend faculty support for the Vietnam Veterans Against the War. My first duty was to go and fetch the young John Kerry from his home in Lexington. He inspired my class, delivered an address at the Unitarian Church on Benefit Street, and earned the respect of the RISD community.

Later in the 1970s I took my turn as English department head, but I left that post to serve as director of the European Honors Program in Rome. Of course my wife, Michael, and Emily came with me, but Lilly and Reuben were not yet born. RISD's headquarters in the Palazzo Cenci is located in the heart of the Jewish community, actual and historical. Like the Finks, the Jews of that quarter were in the furniture business. I re-did our school office with chairs and tables from these shops, and re-upholstered wingchairs from our Cenci attic.

From the Portico d'Ottavia the Jews had been deported during the War, and the synagogue there has a museum which tells the story of the Jews of Rome. My wife, and Emily, and I discovered the ancient but always fresh Jewish delicacy of the quarter—the Jewish artichoke. No, not the Jerusalem artichoke, but a large, rose-shaped vegetable deep-fried and served in the kosher restaurants. This artichoke is a living reminder of the Jewish presence in Rome since the time of the Caesars. I showed a film, *The Gold of Rome*, a late neo-realist movie that narrates the fate of the deported Jews who died in Auschwitz.

My auxiliary career as a columnist began with my return from Rome. I published the story of our year in Italy and went on to write about Jews in other lands. I described the Ethiopian Beta Israel, once called *Felashim*. I

travelled to the Sephardic synagogues of the Caribbean, including Curaçao, Barbados, Surinam, and St. Thomas, and compared them to our Touro in terms architectural, historical, and philosophical. I visited what is left of Jewish centers in Cape Verde, the Azores, and Lisbon and Belmonte on mainland Portugal. Just recently I visited the little temples in Charleston, South Carolina and in Savannah, Georgia. My task is to find a way to fold these pilgrimages poetically into my RISD classes.

My role as a columnist began by editing and contributing stories to our college publications. For a now defunct alternative weekly called *The Eagle*, I wrote a series called "The Hummingbird." These short features had the backward look of a hummingbird's wing, a miniature scope, and a sense of migratory progress. Next, I wrote a regular biweekly column for "Lifebeat" in the *Providence Journal*. From 1985 to 1987 I was editor of *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* and much later served on the Association's board of directors. Throughout the 1990s, I wrote full-page stories for the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald*. More recently, I have reviewed films, videos, and books for a number of Barry Fair's publications: *Providence Monthly*, *East Side Monthly*, and *Prime Time*. I am also writing for Jim Vickers' new entertainment biweekly, *Motif*.

Writing keeps me busy and before my public, which consists primarily of folks who hang out at coffeehouses. My column for *Providence Monthly* features each café. I try to retain something of the flavor, the conversation, and the details of those pleasant and stimulating quarter-hours that punctuate my day.

I agree with President Lawrence Summers of Harvard that anti-Semitism has found a new path in institutions of higher learning. It comes not from reactionary sources, but strangely from the liberal imagination! I feel that my courses in Jewish history have proved quite timely. Instead of demo-



INTRODUCING A MAE WEST FILM:
A STUDENT'S DRAWING.

nizing Israel, I celebrate its existence as a symbol and as a state. Instead of marginalizing Judaism, I find philosophical, spiritual, and artistic centrality in its condition.

This year we toasted a *l'Chaim* to Jewish visual arts at our RISD Museum. Two galleries presented sculptures, paintings, and photographs from the permanent collection. I am of course drawn to the photographs of our longtime colleague and co-founder of the photography department, Aaron Siskind.

My most immediate effort has been to document the career of my uncle, Herbert Fink, now retired in Rockport, Maine. With colleagues Merlin Szosz and Peter O'Neill, I videotaped an interview for the RISD library. We toasted its premier at the Providence Art Club. With Kate de Carvalho, a former graphics student, I made an artist's book about Uncle Herb. A three-dimensional object combining images and text, it too was donated to our library.

I am proud of other students for their great success. For example, Martha Coolidge and Gus Van Sant, who became movie and television directors, took my class on Hollywood history, called "With a Pen of Light." In that film series I celebrate the creation of such beautiful sights as the close-ups of Greta Garbo and the siren-songs of Marlene Dietrich (Both were the pipe dreams of Jewish directors—Mauritz Stiller and Josef Sternberg). I have screened the great classics and renowned films, nearly forgotten, in the RISD Auditorium, the Museum, and elsewhere in Rhode Island. Often these screenings delve into a particular theme or mark a special occasion.

There are many students one loves and remembers very fondly not for what they have done but for their dreams and their devotion to learning for its own sake. Some smiling students visit my office on a friendly and frequent mission, sometimes bearing a coffee for me. Other students may bring a sheaf of sketches, a journal, a roll of film or a video to share and discuss. They imprint something of themselves upon me. Each one is like a figure in a Chassidic tale, sent as an angel to confront me on my path, either asking me a question or offering an answer to my own quest and question. I don't expect a lifetime friendship, only a request for a recommendation.

But in fact by now most of my closest chums are former students. I bet this is true for most professors. It isn't really what I say or do that counts. It's what they project that lasts. My office is a wild profusion of things left by

my students: their projects, their posters, their postcards, their souvenirs. The RISD Alumni Association named me an honorary alumnus.

• An even greater honor, and just as gently absurd, came from Rhode Island Holocaust survivors. I was recognized as an honorary survivor. I also received the Holocaust Memorial Museum's "Never Again" Award.

I am proud of the Metcalf Media Award I received from the *Providence Journal* for an article about the noble and heroic activities of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux, who in 1940 issued visas to Jews escaping Europe. With the Sousa Mendes Society of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, I visited his birthplace in Portugal.

I was honored by the National Council of Jewish Women for an article in the RISD alumni magazine about Korean students and their contribution to our culture.

My close friend, Joel E. Freedman, who owned the State Cinema in Stamford, Connecticut, brought RISD and me much honor when he dedicated nearly 300 classic and recent films to our library. I am especially pleased by the collection's numerous Jewish connections. Barbra Streisand's movie, *Yentl*, was based upon Isaac Bashevis Singer's story. I consider *Bambi* to be the most Jewish of all Disney movies because it was written by Felix Slaten, who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp.

RISD's architecture department has always credited me with rescuing Carr House, a grand Victorian building on campus, from demolition. My office happened to have been located there. Students staged a sit-in and established a coffee shop by bringing in tree stumps for chairs and tables, a battered tin coffeepot, and a hotplate. As the faculty adviser to the student newspaper, I also wrote a few intemperate, critical letters. Some additional hot words voiced at meetings may have been responsible for the first of three attempts to discredit my teaching. Nevertheless, it endured and thrived, or so I like to think.

I leave out some of the anguish of 50 years of trying to say just the right thing, to pose the proper problem, to get things started and keep them going. It hasn't always been easy. When reading course evaluations at the close of a semester, I stare into a very straightforward mirror that shows every wrinkle. When a department chair, a division chair or a provost gives an annual review, I look at the lay of the land as the decades rush over a cataract.

Once I chose to adapt studio assignments to a writing class. I hired

nude models—male and female—to pose on a table. My pupils were to write as if they were drawing. I called my class “Drawing with Words.” Administrators were shocked that I had crossed the line from classroom to studio. I had to get the union to defend my freedom of expression.

Harsh words have been written about the elective courses I have taught in film history and in Jewish memoirs. But I have never lost a battle.

At the start of my life at RISD, I was a youngster protected by my innocence. I have reached another phase when the dignity of my long tenure protects me. The middle years, as Thurber wrote, are the years on a trapeze. I can honestly say, however, that I look forward to every day in search of another chance to meet destiny.

My favorite fable from our Torah is about Balaam and his little burro. He doesn't see the angel before him on the cobbled, twisted street, but the gentle creature does. Balaam strikes the burro when he slows his gait. “Look and see!” the beast of burden declares. Balaam is ashamed and learns three moral lessons. Listen with respect to those who work for you. Be kind to animals. Pay attention to the inner voice within you. My students carry me throughout this half-century journey. I try to pay attention to their talents and ideas. And, somehow, they are already within me.

What, then, is art? And what of the life of an artist or an art teacher? I enjoy the difficulty of the question and the impossibility of an answer. Art demands discipline and knowledge, but it also defies definition. Sometimes form flows easily from genius or even talent. At other times beauty is the reward of enormous energy and patience. Some of us learn by osmosis or even good fortune, mere luxurious luck. Through RISD I have come to admire all these contradictions which go into the making of a lovely thing, a marvelous mix.

There is almost no separation of home and office, play and work, mood and action. Almost fifty years have gone by, and I have become known as “Mr. RISD.” I have no immediate plans to retire. I guess for now I'll leave it at that.



HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL
SERVICE, 1997

NEW INTERIORS : A ONE-GENERATION FAMILY BUSINESS BY EUGENE WEINBERG

Perpetually departing for or returning from an engagement, Gene Weinberg runs a marathon as if he were a sprinter. Both energy and optimism have led to his personal accomplishments and his professional success. Here Gene adds a chapter to the story of Jewish commerce in Rhode Island. He also touches on such recurring themes as immigration, military service, education, and housing. Still another focus is recreation.



Many friends are aware of my interests in bridge, tennis, skiing, music, travel, and teaching English. Others may know of my involvement in Temple Beth-El, a *havurah*, and this Association.

Not everybody is aware of how I earned a living, however. The story of my business—how it began, prospered, and ended—is written primarily for my children, grandchildren, and their descendants and secondarily for others who may like to know more about our family's first century in America.

New Interiors arose from new opportunities in this country but also from generations of family businesses. In 1987 my brother, Gerald, and his son, Alan, completed an extensive genealogical study, which indicates that our paternal ancestors (some with Asiatic features) lived in the Ukrainian town of Medviedovka, 170 miles southeast of Kiev. Several members of the Vanacourov (later Weinberg) family, who intermarried with the Gorbokofsky family, were furriers. The first Weinberg who emigrated to America was my Uncle



HYMAN AND ANNA WITH WALTER, EUGENE, AND GERALD, 1943



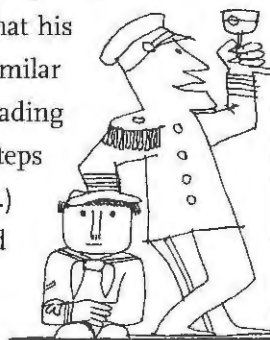


Nathan (1884-1942), who arrived in New York City in 1905 and settled there. Nathan's cousin, Morris (Tolchinsky) Levine (1877-1953), settled in Providence, where he opened a fur store on Broad Street near Chestnut in South Providence.

My father, Hyman (1891-1972), who had begun rabbinical training, arrived at Ellis Island in 1908. After various unsuccessful jobs, including a stint as a salesman of cloth remnants in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, he came to Providence to work with his Uncle Morris. In 1914 my father married his Ukrainian-born cousin, Anna Gorbokofsky (1895-1976), who had emigrated in 1911. Gerald determined that our parents lived together or separately in more than 25 homes in this country.

For three years Dad operated a cigar, candy, and magazine store at 326 Broad Street. By 1922, with funds borrowed from Hebrew Free Loan Association of South Providence, he opened the Canadian Fur Shop at 461 Westminster Street. He later moved to 419 Westminster, at the southwest corner of Empire Street. His advertisement in the city directory proclaimed that he offered "the most complete line of fur coats, coats, coatees, cap sets, separate scarfs and muffs." The advertisement also stated that his shop bore "no connection with any other fur shop of similar name," which was, no doubt, Sam Dick's Canadian Fur Trading Company at 38 and 42 Empire Street. (This shop was only steps away from Weinberg's, the fur shop belonging to Uncle Sam.)

The youngest of four siblings, I was born in the old



Miriam Hospital, on Parade Street, in 1927. Gerald had been born in 1915, Walter in 1923. Our sister, Shirly, born in 1921, died of blood poisoning at only 13 months.

By the time I was born, my father's business had prospered. The family had moved from 4 Chester Avenue to 84 Ontario Street, both in South Providence, to 138 Arnold Avenue in Cranston. This home was a three-story duplex, each unit with eight rooms, across the street from Leon Samuels, who had founded the Outlet Company with his brother, Joseph, in 1894. Feeling flush in 1927, my father had also purchased his first automobile. Indeed, around 1929 Dad expanded his store to 427 Westminster and then opened a satellite shop on Snow Street, which also carried women's dresses.

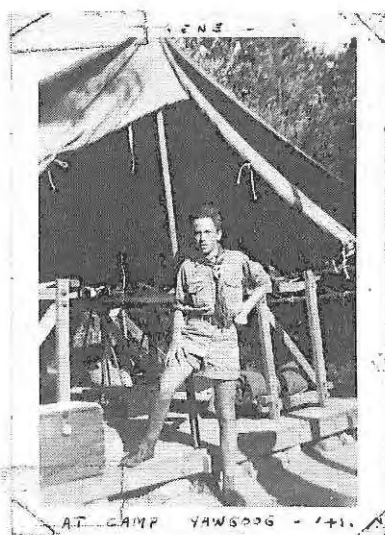
The Depression changed all that. By 1932 father went bankrupt. Many of our personal belongings were auctioned. Until 1941, we lived in seven different apartments, including one in Warwick and six in Providence.

One benefit of all this turmoil was the opportunity (indeed, the necessity) to make new friends. Throughout my life, I have enjoyed meeting all kinds of people from many parts of the world.

My religious education took place at Temple Beth-Israel, the Conservative congregation on Niagara Street in South Providence. My Hebrew teacher was Morris Shoham, a strict but fair disciplinarian, who had also instructed my brothers. My fond memory of Rabbi Morris Schussheim and of my Bar Mitzvah in 1940 is as clear as ever.

Temple Beth-Israel was important to me in another way. It sponsored Boy Scout Troop 10, which I enjoyed for many years. December 7, 1941 is particularly memorable, for on that day I completed scoutmaster training at Camp Yawgoog. Years later, had I not read an advertisement in *Boys Life*, I probably would not have known about the cabin in New Hampshire that I rented for my honeymoon.

Throughout my years at Classical High School, as war raged around the world, I anticipated military service. In 1944, during my senior year, I prepared to join the Navy or Merchant



EUGENE WEINBERG



Marine. I wanted perfect vision without wearing glasses, so when I read about an ophthalmologist in Boston who fitted contact lenses, I made an appointment for these new miracle devices (without my parents' knowledge). I could wear them only for four hours at a time and had to use a suction cup to remove them.

Having passed my eye exam with 20-20 vision, I reported for duty on May 11, 1945. My induction letter told me to bring my shaving kit, six dollars, and nothing else. I was sent to the Merchant Marine's training facility at Sheepshead Bay, New York.

After a freighter trip to Newport News, Virginia, I embarked on my big adventure. In July, 1945, one month before the bombing of Hiroshima, I sailed on the aptly named *S.S. Kettle Creek*, a War Emergency Tanker, to the Pacific. A Jewish chaplain, S. Joshua Kohn, wrote to my parents that I was in "good health and in good spirits." Adding that I had been given a Bible and a prayer book, he said, "Just pray to God for his safe return to port." Upon exiting the Panama Canal, blackout conditions prevailed. Fortunately, the ship's gun crew never fired its weapons, and my vision never blurred while piloting the vessel.

One of the voyage's most memorable experiences was rescuing a Filipino family in shark-infested waters in the Straits of San Bernardino, near the entrance to Manila. I documented this event and others with my Kodak Brownie camera. After many months in the Pacific, we sailed to Aruba, England, and finally home.

Realizing that I would not have enough money for college, I enlisted in the Army. As a result, I would qualify for the G.I. Bill.

Once again, with aid from Hebrew Free Loan of South Providence, my father had begun to rebuild his fur business. Nevertheless, my parents and my brother, Gerald, struggled to pay his \$400 annual tuition at Brown University, which he had entered in 1933. After his sophomore year he was told, however, that inadequate finances and religious prejudice would prevent him from fulfilling his dream of becoming a doctor. Gerald accepted an "honorable dismissal" and worked at the Canadian Fur Shop while taking night courses in accounting at Boston University. He left for New York City, where he found accounting jobs and attended City College at night. Shortly after earning his degree in 1942, he enlisted in the Air Force, where he served four harrowing

years as a meteorologist in Europe.

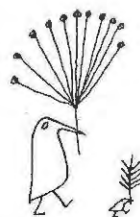
In 1945, thanks to the G.I. Bill, Walter, a bomber pilot who flew 50 missions over Europe, entered Brown University as a second-year student. He had begun his studies at the University of Michigan, where he was sent by the Army.

After training in the Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, I was sent back to the Pacific, to the Army's communications center in Naha, Okinawa. This building had been a Japanese prison. Naha was not so remote that Jews could not enjoy a "strictly kosher" Passover seder, however. Harold Herskowitz, a private, served as our *mashgiah*. Proper eating utensils were procured through a medical supply depot. The matzo probably came from an American base in China. All these preparations and the Jewish camaraderie meant a great deal to my buddies and me.

In the evenings I was able to begin my higher education at the Army's Okinawa University Study Center. I took courses in math, psychology, and literature taught by officers who had been professors. Our classrooms were Quonset huts, which of course reminded me of Quonset Point, Rhode Island, where they had originated.

In September, 1947, at 20 years of age, I was able to enter Brown. This was an exciting time to be on campus, for veterans were mixed with recent high school graduates. One classmate was Larry Spitz, 15 years my senior. A well-known leader in the steelworkers' union, he made frequent trips to Pittsburgh.

I belonged to Tower Club, a Jewish men's organization.





TOWER CLUB, 1948

Some of my wealthier friends enjoyed the luxury of belonging to a Jewish fraternity.

While majoring in English and American literature, I enjoyed studying Shakespeare with Professor Israel Kapstein. During my third year, I was accepted to law schools at Boston University and the University of Miami. I decided, however, to remain at Brown and complete my bachelor's degree.

A more important decision was made after my third year of study. On August 14, 1949, I married Arline Kerzner, who had been two years behind me at Classical High. We met at a party that I happened to crash. I was dumbfounded when she gave me her telephone number. Arline began her studies at the University of Rhode Island, then transferred to Brown, where she became a member of my class, 1951. Due to our financial circumstances, however, Arline was forced to drop out.

Many years later, she completed her bachelor's degree in psychology at URI. In 1980, she earned a master's in social work at Boston College. Today she continues her work as a family therapist.

Though I said it was an exciting time to be "on campus," I could not afford to live there. Instead, I resided with my parents at 112 California Avenue



in Edgewood and commuted by streetcar or bus to College Hill. Arline and I lived for a year with my parents.

Unfortunately, when we thought about furnishing a home, we could not find any modern pieces to our liking in Rhode Island. I casually mentioned the idea of opening a contemporary furniture store to my brother, Walter, who, following his graduation from Brown, had begun a graduate program in psychology at the University of Iowa. He soon returned to Providence to work with my father. Walter recommended his friend, Ida Guny Millman, an interior design graduate of RISD, as a potential partner.

A few problems stood in the way of beginning a business, however. First, I had very little money. Second, I had no experience with furniture.

As a teenager and then again as a Brown student, I had worked part-time at Canadian Fur Shop doing odds-and-ends. I picked up and delivered coats, called up customers to solicit business, did some radio advertising, and occasionally accompanied my father on buying trips to New York. We would take a sleeper car to Penn Station or an overnight ship on the Colonial Line. Unlike Gerald, I never learned to cut or sew furs (or more than a few words of Yiddish).

In 1951 it seemed evident to me that downtown Providence did not need any more furriers. In addition to fur departments at the Outlet Company, Shepard's, and Gladdings, there were at least 14 furriers on Westminster Street alone, including: Allen, Coken, Dick, Goodwin, Harris, Jay, Jeanne, Lesley, Levine, Martin, Penguin, Salk, Scott, and Tolchinsky. At least half of these businesses had Jewish owners.

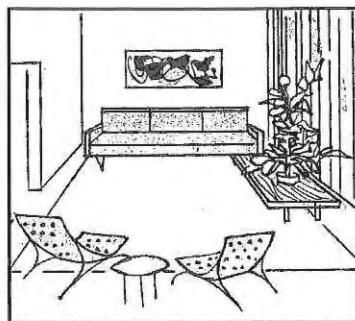
Gerald was employed in Providence as an accountant, and Walter was working for our father. I declined Dad's invitation to join Canadian Fur. Several close relatives remained in the fur business: Uncle Sam whose shop was at 236 Westminster and Uncle Harry and his sons, Hyman and Marcus, whose shop was at 385 Westminster. I could never figure out why the three brothers had separate businesses and how each could make a living.

During the early 1950s, Dad sold his business to a furrier from New York, and my parents moved to Buzzards Bay, where they operated Sunrise Cabins with Uncle Sam. In 1965 my parents moved to Miami, where they owned some income property. After my father's death in 1972, my mother returned to Providence.

In 1951, determined to learn about the world of modern furniture, I subscribed to two magazines, *Furniture Forum* and *Interiors*. On many weekends Arline and I visited leading stores in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York. While some of the owners and managers gladly shared information, others showed us to the door.

The idea of selling modern furniture in Rhode Island may not have been a radical idea, but it was certainly a challenging one. Aaron Roitman, who had entered his father's business at 160 South Water Street, was Providence's premiere furniture dealer. He carried some modern pieces but his merchandise consisted primarily of period styles, be they French, English or American. Another well known dealer who carried modern pieces was Herman Lazarus, who owned Woodrow's, at 765 Westminster in Hoyle Square, near Classical High. Many other Jews were in the furniture business, including the Bliss, Homonoff, and Marcus families.

I am not sure that I fully appreciated the fact that, in 1951, modern





FIRST LOCATION, 39 FRANKLIN STREET

anything was not a high priority in New England. Yet, my father's store, designed in the Moderne style during the 1930s, already seemed passé. Frank Lloyd Wright was considered a modern master, and New York's Museum of Modern Art featured buildings and furniture by such Bauhaus architects as Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, and Mies van der Rohe. Their American work was still miniscule and known only to aficionados, however.

Walter decided to join Ida and me in our quixotic venture. The name we chose was New Interiors. I had saved \$2,000 from the Merchant Marine and the Army, and I borrowed \$2,000 from my father (which I would dutifully repay). Pooling our resources, the three of us came up with the magnificent sum of \$10,000. Both Walter and I contributed \$4,000, and Ida put in \$2,000. She and Lester already had a child, so she wanted to work part-time. The three of us signed a contract on May 1, 1951 (the anniversary of the



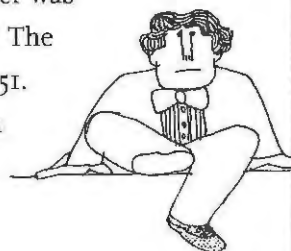
Russian Revolution).

Lester, who was studying architecture at RISD, designed the New Interiors logo, which suggested a person seated in a chair. His logo lasted the life of the business.

Before opening our store, we hunted for lines of furniture. Rapids Furniture in Boston, a leading wholesale distributor, sold us the Paul McCobb planner group, a much-heralded modular line. After several trips to New York, we eventually secured many other leading contemporary lines, such as Herman Miller, Knoll, Jens Risom, Harvey Probber, and Dunbar. In later years we also purchased many gift lines, such as Russell Wright china, Karhula crystal, and Gense stainless steel flatware as well as fabrics from Kohnweiser, Schiffer, and Laverne.

After an exhaustive search for a store location, we signed a lease for 1,500 square feet at 39 Franklin Street. This space was located off upper Westminster Street, just before Hoyle Square. Aaron Krasner was our landlord, and we agreed to a rent of \$400 per month. The grand opening of New Interiors was set for September 6, 1951.

Unfortunately, there were many problems with





our new store. First and foremost was the fact that there was no place to receive deliveries. Who knew? We would arrange to meet trucks on the sidewalk and unpack the furniture ourselves.

Nothing could be done about the showroom's uneven floor, but there were other notable mishaps. Ida thought that hemp, being inexpensive and a neutral color, would make a fine floor covering. Only after it was laid did we discover that it emitted a very strong, offensive odor (because it was not properly cured). This was one of life's dark moments.

Our crack design staff (the three of us) decided that the showroom needed an unusual, eye-catching feature. Walter knew Stanley Charron, whose family was in the metal fabri-

cating business, so we commissioned a large, rectangular fish tank for the center of the store. The day before the opening, we were horrified by the smell of dead fish. The tank's copper liner had killed them. So our eye-catching feature quickly became a planter.

Another problem concerned lighting. We installed double aluminum fixtures, but could not afford switches to activate them. Consequently, each light had to be turned on and off with a long pole. With a ceiling at least 12 feet high, one had to be very steady and sober to light up and darken the showroom. It took 15 minutes at the beginning and end of each day.

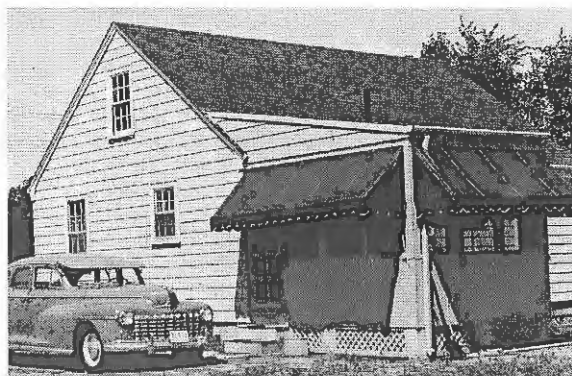
After five months, Ida sold her share of the business. Fortunately, she continued as a freelance interior designer.

Arline and I were able to purchase a small house at 68 Arcadia Avenue in Cranston for the princely sum of \$8,600. The mortgage of \$41 per month was partially guaranteed by the G.I. Bill. Arline assisted with sales and bookkeeping until 1952, when Robert was born.

The early years of New Interiors were as exciting as they were frustrating. Given no other choice, Walter and I quickly learned at least the rudiments of the furniture business. For example, we sought numerous ways to promote

New Interiors.

We displayed the work of such well-known contemporary painters as Garabed der Hohanessian, Maude Morgan, and Donald Outerbridge. The art critic Frank Pemberton gave us a full-page spread in the *Sunday Journal* of September 16, 1951.



CRANSTON HOME

Having obtained a film from the Museum of Modern Art, I would lecture about design to women's groups. Little did they know (or perhaps they did!) that I was only slightly more knowledgeable than they were.

A memorable incident occurred in 1953, when I was invited to talk about Eames chairs on Channel 16, one of Rhode Island's early television stations. Having taken a chair to the TV studio, I claimed that it was virtually indestructible. After that pompous pronouncement, I struck the plastic chair with a hammer. It cracked! Luckily, the viewing audience was very small.

In later years, New Interiors placed advertisements in many local newspapers, including *The Echo*, read by Italo-Americans. Our slogan was "Pacesetters in Modern Furniture." We also bought ads in programs for the Rhode Island Philharmonic, chamber music concerts, and Junior League events. In addition to buying ads for Trinity Rep, Barker Players, and Pawtucket Players, we lent furniture for props. Eventually, our mailing list became an invaluable publicity tool.

A key turning point in our business occurred when the new Temple Beth-El was built on Orchard Avenue. Both Walter and I knew Pearl Braude, whose husband, William, was of course the congregation's rabbi. When construction was moving rapidly forward, we offered to supply furniture at slightly above our cost. Needless to say, we sensed that this bold new structure, when completed in 1954, would bring us much visibility. It did.

We had presented a proposal to Percival Goodman, the Temple's architect, who was impressed by such lines as Herman Miller and Jens Risom. Thus, New Interiors was able to furnish Beth-El's social hall, upstairs and downstairs lounges, and rabbi's study. (A large administrative office came

many years later.) Unbelievably, a Howard Nelson clock in Rabbi Braude's outer office remains in its original place above a doorway. It is now a collector's item.

I believe that the Temple is as awe-inspiring today as when it opened. I am particularly moved by the sanctuary's soaring space.

Institutional clients would of course become essential to our success. For example, we furnished fraternity lounges at Brown, the new student union at URI, apartments for retired priests at Providence College, the central branch of the Providence Public Library, the downtown bus station, and Butler Hospital. We were also pleased to do business with Episcopal and Christian Science churches.

Walter and I knew that New Interiors had turned a corner in 1955, when we moved to a new space at 680 North Main Street in Randall Square. This location came with a small warehouse and a receiving area for trucks. Our expansion required a manager to coordinate operations, so we hired Bob Brown, who had worked for Contemporary Interiors in Brookline. We would receive residential and commercial jobs all over New England.

Our new leaflet proclaimed, "You owe yourself, your company or profession an up-to-date interior setting that will do you proud." Before there was such a thing as a "mission statement," we said, "Our job is to create smoothly functioning areas done with taste, understanding, and imagination." It did no harm to add that preliminary layouts and estimates were "on the house." With



SECOND LOCATION, 680 NORTH MAIN STREET

New Interiors' move to Randall Square, we were able to offer a further inducement: "deferred payment terms."

So who were our typical customers? Naturally, our merchandise appealed to a wide range of shoppers and clients: from those with modest budgets to others with quite ample means. We stayed open Wednesday and Thursday evenings and held occasional receptions on Sunday afternoons. Of course Saturdays were our biggest days.

Not surprisingly, New Interiors attracted many young professionals and business people, our friends among them. I think that our customers understood almost intuitively that good design was refreshing and rewarding. It could bring them comfort and enrich their daily lives.

In 1954, not dissuaded by the movie *Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House*, Arline and I decided to build our own dream house. Having acquired land on Maplecrest Drive in a wooded area of Greenville, we purchased a pre-fabricated home from Techbuilt. It was quickly assembled under a contractor's supervision.

I had probably read about Techbuilt in a furniture magazine; our house was only the third of its kind in Rhode Island. It was less expensive but far more spacious than a custom-built home of comparable quality. Our family felt so comfortable playing outdoors and relaxing indoors that there was little time for the new-fangled distraction of TV. Alexandra, our dachshund, also craved attention.

Walter and I were involved in all aspects of running the business. Following the flip of a coin, Walter served first as president. We had complete confidence in each other's judgment.

To keep up on furniture trends and styles, I would attend furniture fairs in New York City, Montreal, and North Carolina. A turning point came in 1961, when I made the first of many buying trips to the Scandinavian furniture fair. Originally located in Fredericia, Denmark, it moved to Copenhagen.



SWITZERLAND, 1986

I hired an agent to handle imports.

During the early 1960s, Arline and I would attend the five-day fair and then travel elsewhere in Europe. We particularly enjoyed a voyage from Naples to New York on the *Leonardo da Vinci*.

Having created a Scandinavian gallery within New Interiors, we hoped to hire a young Scandinavian manager. After placing an ad in Copenhagen's largest newspaper, we made an offer to a young female architect, but she later changed her mind. Consequently, we hired a young Norwegian woman, Edna Jorgensen, who was working for Ashby Dean, a gift store on Thayer Street! She later married our manager, Bob Brown.

Strangely, I did not meet Aaron Roitman, Providence's leading furniture dealer, until we crossed paths in Fredericia. He had not participated in the Rhode Island Furniture Association, but eventually we became friends, especially through our love of music. Aaron enjoyed the distinction of becoming Denmark's honorary consul in Rhode Island.

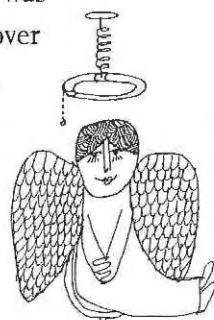
Though we were quite happy with our home in Greenville, Arline tired of the constant *shlepping* to Providence. The children were enrolled at Henry Barnard School, and then came Hebrew lessons. We rented out our country home for a year before finally deciding to sell it.

In the fall of 1963, the day President Kennedy was assassinated, Arline and I moved to our third home, a large Colonial-Revival abode at 257 Olney Street near Hope. This was the Abbie H. Potter House, built in 1900 for a widow. In 2000 we threw a centennial birthday party. The apartment over the garage seemed as large as our first home in Cranston.

Despite its traditional exterior, we furnished and decorated our home in a relaxed, contemporary style. I would say that our tastes are "eclectic," representing a thoughtful combination of old and new.

In 1965, after a decade at Randall Square, New Interiors was ready for a move to its third location. After an agonizing search over many months, we purchased a two-story commercial building at 603 Pawtucket Avenue, on the Providence-Pawtucket line. Originally a Ford showroom, this building was later a First National supermarket. We hired Irving Haynes to redesign the building to accommodate our needs.

To smooth the transition to a much larger space, we





SLACKS RESERVOIR HOME

initially rented the basement to Brodsky's, a toy retailer located across the street. Fortunately, our business prospered, so we transformed the lower level into a showroom. Our close friend, Morris Nathanson, designed an unusual series of platforms and staircases (as well as many of our graphics). Later, we built a two-story addition to the rear of the building, giving us a total of 30,000 square feet for display and storage. This was twenty times the size of our first store!

The year 1965 was memorable not only because of the new store. We celebrated Robert's Bar Mitzvah at Temple Beth-El by taking all three children (Richard was 11 and Susan 9) on a five-week driving trip to California. Maxine, our second dachshund, stayed behind.

Though our Olney Street house made commuting to work a breeze, we still had our hearts in the country. In 1961, even before selling our Greenville home, Arline and I purchased a two-and-a-half acre, waterfront property on Slacks Reservoir in Johnston. Only 25 minutes from Providence, it felt like the woods of Vermont, New Hampshire or Camp Yawgoog.

In 1966, we were able to construct a three-level vacation home designed by my friend and Classical High classmate, Norton Salk. Built of

cedar paneling, the retreat featured two redwood decks, a fieldstone chimney, and gorgeous views through enormous windows. This rustic yet elegant dwelling, a true dream house, was the subject of a full-page story in the *Sunday Journal* of August 11, 1968. Richard and his wife, Marcella, are the new owners, and they have planned a major addition to this, their full-time residence.

A particularly enjoyable measure of New Interiors' success occurred in May, 1974. With dealers from around the world, Walter and I were invited by the famous designer Paul Cadovius for a week's tour of his facilities in Denmark, where he manufactured wall units, lighting fixtures, and rugs. We had become Cado and Royal System's largest dealer in New England. Denmark's scenery was breathtaking, especially a view of Himmelbjerget, the country's highest mountain.

New Interiors was successful for simple reasons. We worked hard, sold quality products, and cultivated a loyal clientele. Also, our timing was just right. Not merely a fad, New Interiors rode the crest of a new and positive idea.

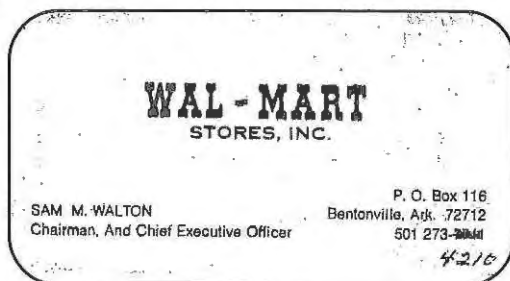
Perhaps there was something quite special about our business. Surrounding ourselves with beauty, we encouraged others to do the same. We promoted a way of living rather than the appearance of a "life style."

Walter and I never felt the need to establish a small chain of furniture stores or become a "super store." Heaven forbid! We were quite happy where and as we were.

But I did manage to play tennis with Sam Walton. A mutual friend arranged it when Walton visited Rhode Island. It was a close match. Over drinks he asked me how many furniture stores I owned. Walton was astonished by my answer, as I was by his more than 200 Wal-Marts. He gave me his private card and invited me to a rematch in Bentonville, Arkansas. Unfortunately, it never happened.

Gerald died in 1989, and Walter, who suffered poor health for years, passed away in 1990. Long before we asked ourselves what our father had asked us: would our children want the business?

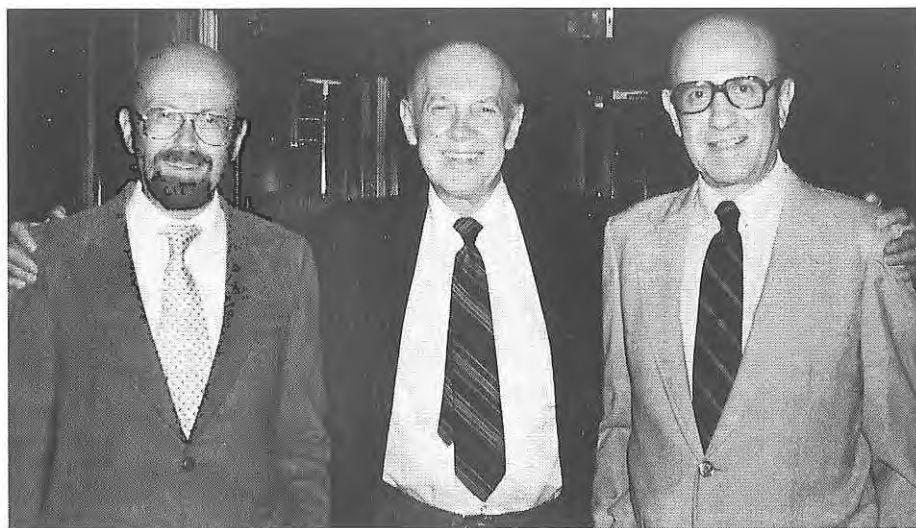
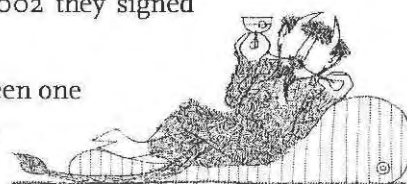
They too went their separate ways. Bob, a Brown



graduate, became a pediatrician and lives with his family in upstate New York. Inspired to some degree by New Interiors, Richard studied at RISD and became an architect and then a computer *maven*. Susan, who graduated from Boston University, lives with her family in Cranston and is a sales representative for a large gift company.

In 1993, after 42 years in the furniture world, I sold the business. Sadly, a new owner could not build upon New Interiors' success. Within two years, three brothers—Barry, Alan, and Michael Field—leased the building for a franchise of Gold's Gym. In 2002 they signed their third lease.

Though busy as ever, retirement has been one of the best times of my life. And now I have discovered a new career—as a writer.



EUGENE, GERALD, AND WALTER, 1985

A TRIBUTE TO BONNIE GOLDOWSKY

BY MELVIN L. ZURIER

For decades, Gertrude "Bonnie" Goldowsky, who passed away on March 24, was a pillar of our Association. Indeed, it would be impossible to imagine our success without her loyalty and involvement. This tribute is based on remarks delivered by Mr. Zurier on May 21, 1990. He too has been one of our Association's and community's most caring and effective leaders, worthy of a comprehensive study in these pages.

I cannot tell you what a pleasure it is to be present this afternoon for the Seventh Annual Recognition Award by the Miriam Hospital Women's Association.

You all know Bonnie. I am sure some of you know her longer and better than I. You all know the public Bonnie and all of her accomplishments and activities. She is without equal as the premiere volunteer worker in this community.

Bonnie's public volunteer work goes back to her days with the Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. Her involvement with the Miriam Hospital, following her marriage to Seebert, has lasted more than 40 years. She also has been involved for long periods with the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, Temple Beth-El, Hadassah, the Jewish Home, and the Harvard and Radcliffe Club.

I first met the Goldowskys about 20 years ago, when Arthur Levy got me involved in the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. I say the Goldowskys because my contact has always been with both Bonnie and Seebert. In my mind, they have always been inseparable in thought as well as in presence.

My first contact with Bonnie and Seebert remains with me. Both were no-nonsense type of people. Both were very, very, smart. Both were extremely conscientious to the point of being meticulous.



As I got to know both, I came to realize how devoted both have been to our community. Their devotion has commanded my respect, my admiration, and indeed, after so many years, my real affection.

And what are the reasons? Bonnie and Seebert are real people. Their motivation has always been most unselfish. They have an overwhelming concern for excellence, which translates into concern for the minutest detail.

Bonnie has said that volunteer activity is its own reward. She has never asked for personal credit for what she has done. She also regrets very much that there are fewer volunteer workers today. It is a sad fact that, in this age of careerism, volunteer work is pooh-poohed by many young people. What a shame that they are missing out on some of the finest things that people can

do—helping worthwhile causes.

You all know Bonnie to be an attractive, perfectly groomed lady. Seebert confided to me, “She was a gorgeous girl. We were not married until 13 years after we met, and I didn’t deserve her.” Seebert adds, “Bonnie is exquisitely sensitive, extremely conscientious, and can make a nice matzo ball soup.”

But there is more to Bonnie than this. In her devotion to Seebert, to her late sister and brother, to her late and beloved sister-in-law Bea, and to her family and friends, she is a model of what it is to be thoughtful and caring. No one could have someone more loyal, more honest, or more dependable as a friend.

I am proud of the Miriam Hospital Women’s Association in recognizing all these wonderful traits in presenting this award to Bonnie. In honoring her today, you are honoring someone who has a lot to teach all of us. I could not agree more that this is an honor Bonnie richly deserves.



RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

50TH ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, April 17, 2005

President George Goodwin welcomed 100 members and guests to the first meeting of the Association's second half-century, held on a sparkling afternoon at the Jewish Community Center. Reviewing the past three years of his presidency, Dr. Goodwin took pride in the publication of *The Jews of Rhode Island* and various programs celebrating the 350th anniversary of the American Jewish community. He expressed disappointment about Heritage Harbor Museum and urged Association board members to reactivate the membership committee. He also encouraged closer ties between the Association, synagogues, day schools, and the Bureau of Jewish Education. Dr. Goodwin thanked numerous volunteers for making his presidency a joy and an honor.

Treasurer Jack Fradin gave a brief report, showing that income during 2004 had exceeded expectations. The surplus was largely due to a bequest, gifts, and endowment income.

Stanley Abrams, chair of the publications committee, praised the publication of the Association's anthology and congratulated Dr. Goodwin for his first issue as editor of *The Notes*. On behalf of the board and membership, Mr. Abrams presented Dr. Goodwin with a gift in recognition of his presidency.

In Eugene Weinberg's absence, Mr. Abrams, vice chair of the nominating committee, presented the new slate of officers and board members. The nominations were accepted unanimously. Once again, in his engaging manner, Melvin Zurier installed new and returning board members.

Stephen M. Brown spoke about his goals as the Association's new president. He would like to develop a genealogical program, in which seasoned researchers guide beginners and computer technologies are maximized. Mr. Brown also envisions stronger educational programs in cooperation with religious schools. His two presidential appointees, Ruth Breindel and Anita Steiman, are highly accomplished educators.

Rather than the traditional lecture, this year's David Charak Adelman program consisted of a panel discussion on "Writing Jewish Books." The three

panelists were Mark Binder, an author of children's and humor books; Prof. Lynn Davidman of Brown, a sociologist specializing in religion and feminism; and Prof. David Gitlitz of the University of Rhode Island, who has written numerous books on Spanish literature, crypto-Jews, and pilgrimages as well as a Sephardic cookbook (with Prof. Linda Kay Davidson). George Goodwin moderated the lively exchange of opinions and insights.

Susan Brown, Lillian Schwartz, and Anne Sherman coordinated the collation, and Mr. Abrams took photographs. Association members enjoyed a stimulating afternoon.

Respectfully submitted,
Charlotte Penn
Secretary

NECROLOGY OF MEMBERS

OCTOBER 1, 2004 – OCTOBER 15, 2005

ABEDON, LILLIAN, born in New Britain, Connecticut, was the daughter of the late Barnard and Sara (Gimel) Stein and the wife of the late M. Louis Abedon. She was a graduate of Simmons College.

Mrs. Abedon was a member of Temple Emanu-El and Hadassah.

She is survived by a daughter, Roberta A. Levin, and a son, Michael.

Died in Providence on February 22, 2005 at the age of 97.

ADLER, IRVING, born in Providence, was the son of the late Fred and Esther (Kotlen) Adler.

During World War II, he served with the Army in Europe. His duties included that of a bugler.

In 1950, Mr. Adler established Adler Hardware on the site of his father's Army and Navy store on Wickenden Street. Later, he co-owned the business with his brother, Carl. A Cranston residence since 1950, he was a founding member of Temple Torat Yisrael and a Life Member of RIJHA. A devoted Zionist, he visited Israel eight times.

He is survived by his wife, Eleanor (Kramer) Adler, two sons, Jacob and Harry, and a daughter, Kayla Campbell.

Died in Providence on July 28, 2005 at the age of 85.

BERNHARDT, BERTRAM L., born in Boston, was a son of the late Samuel and Rosetta (Cohen) Bernhardt and the husband of the late Helene (Doing) Bernhardt. He was a vigorous athlete who graduated from Boston University. He and his wife lived together in only one home, on Elton Avenue in Providence.

Mr. Bernhardt worked for Teknor Apex for 33 years, serving as a vice president for six years. In 1974, he returned to the investment business as a securities broker with Smith Barney CitiGroup and retired at the age of 90.

Mr. Bernhardt was involved with numerous communal organizations. He was president of Temple Beth-El from 1955 until 1960 and active in its Brotherhood. In 1989, the Temple's new history gallery was named in his and his wife's honor. He chaired the campaign to build a new Jewish Community Center, which was dedicated in 1971.

Mr. Bernhardt was a president of the Pawtucket Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce and active in the United Way. He was a chair of the Anti-Defamation League and in 1970 received the American Jewish Committee's Chaim Gross Award. He was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Died in Providence on May 5, 2005 at the age of 98.

CHAZAN, HELENE S., born in New York, was the daughter of Hannah (Grabel) Nasoff and the late Hyman Nasoff. She was a graduate of Buffalo State Teachers College.

She was an interior designer who resided in Providence for more than 35 years.

Mrs. Chazan was a member of Temple Beth-El.

She and her husband, Dr. Joseph A. Chazan, were major collectors of contemporary art and encouraged many Rhode Island artists and craftsmen. Highlights of their extensive collection were displayed this year at Rhode Island School of Design's Museum of Art, which they generously supported.

Besides her mother and husband, she is survived by a son, Michael, and two daughters, Kimberly Zwetchkenbaum and Kathy Starr.

Died in Providence on April 19, 2005 at the age of 68.

EDWARDS, KNIGHT, born in Providence, was the son of the late William and Mabel Knight. He graduated from Brown University and Harvard Law School. During World War II, he served as a Naval officer.

Mr. Edwards was a partner in the law firm of Edwards & Angell.

He was a trustee of Brown University, a member of the Brown-Tougaloo Committee, and active in the Brown Alumni Association. Mr. Edwards was also a chair of the Providence Public Library, a deacon of Central Congregational Church, and a commodore of the Saunderstown Yacht Club. He was a contributor to these pages.

Survived by his wife, Jean (Tanner) Knight, a daughter, Barbara Diamond, and two sons, William and John.

Died in Providence on August 21, 2005 at the age of 81.

ENGLE, M. LEONARD, born in Providence, was the son of the late Ida (Schwartz) and Joseph Engle and the husband of the late Joan (Hassenfeld) Engle. He attended Providence College and served in the Navy during World War II.

Mr. Engle worked for Hasbro for over 40 years, ultimately serving as corporate vice president for worldwide procurement.

He was a supporter of the Miriam Hospital, Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, and Camp JORI. A lover of synagogues, he belonged to Temple Emanu-El, Congregation Beth David, Temple Shaare Zedek, and Touro Synagogue. Mr. Engle was a Mason, a member of Ledgemont Country Club, and a member of the Breakers Country Club in Palm Beach.

Survived by two sons, Jim and Rick, and a daughter, Judith Clifford.

Died in Providence on July 21, 2005 at the age of 78.

FACTOR, SYLVIA, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Harry and Mollie (Sales) Katz. She was a graduate of New England Conservatory of Music and sang professionally for over 40 years.

A Rhode Island civil servant, she retired as manager of the Department of Employment Security's Warren office.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El, sang in its choir, and participated in its Leisure Club. The indispensable secretary of RIJHA's board of directors from 1993 until 2001, she eagerly supported all of the Association's endeavors.

Survived by her husband, Sidney Factor, two daughters, Maxine Kingsbury and Judith Factor, and a son, R. Maxwell.

Died in Providence on August 28, 2005 at the age of 83.

FAIN, ALFRED, born in Providence, was a son of the late Nathan and Lena (Salk) Fain. He attended Northeastern University.

For more than 50 years, Mr. Fain was co-owner, with his twin brother, Leonard, of Fair's Department Store.

Mr. Fain was a member of Temple Emanu-El and Jewish Family Service and served on the allocation committee of the United Way. The Fain brothers were the first honorees of the Wanskuck Boys Club of Providence. Mr. Fain was a charter member and a president of the North End Businessmen's Association and also belonged to Ledgemont and Kirkbrae Country Clubs.

Survived by his wife, Sylvia (Kniznik) Fain, and a son, Larry.

Died in Providence on February 11, 2005 at the age of 91.

FIXLER, RUTH, born in Brooklyn, New York, was the daughter of the late Thomas and Matilda (Siegel) Cohen. She was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Brooklyn College.

Mrs. Fixler, a retired management consultant, served for five years as secretary of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island and spoke at several General Assemblies. She was a founding member of Federation's Women's Alliance and served as secretary of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Mrs. Fixler was a member of Temple Emanu-El and was an officer of the Rhode Island Holocaust Memorial Museum. A former member of the Association's board of directors, she chaired an extensive planning study that was completed in 1990.

Mrs. Fixler is survived by her husband, Arthur, a daughter, Nancy Abrams, and a son, David.

Died in Providence on November 22, 2004 at the age of 73.

FLINK, ELLIS M., born in Providence, was a son of the late Abe V. and Rose (Goldstein) Flink. He graduated from M.I.T. and served in the Army during World War II.

Mr. Flink was president and treasurer of B. Flink & Sons, a food distribution company founded by his grandfather, and later a senior vice president of the Flagstaff Corporation.

He was a member of Temple Beth-El.

Survived by his wife, Rose (Lisker) Flink, a son, James, and a daughter, Joanne Silver.

Died in Providence on May 4, 2005 at the age of 91.

FRANK, BEATRICE, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Isadore and Sophie (Forman) Samdperil and the wife of the late Maurice Frank.

Mrs. Frank was a voracious reader with special interests in geography and meteorology. She was also a sports fan and an animal lover.

With her late husband, Mrs. Frank established scholarships at Providence College and the University of Missouri's School of Journalism. The Franks were supporters of the 100 Club of Rhode Island, which aided families of police officers and firefighters who died in the line of duty. The couple gave anonymously to help many others.

Mrs. Frank was a member of Temple Beth-El, Hadassah, Miriam Hospital Women's Association, and the Order of the Eastern Star. She was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Survived by two daughters, Fay Rozovsky and Ann Goldstein, and by Judy Montgomery, whom she considered a daughter.

Died in Johnston on July 6, 2006 at the age of 86.

GELCH, MELVYN M., born in Brooklyn, New York, was the son of the late Abram and Ida (Friedman) Gelch. He was a graduate of John Hopkins University and of Harvard University Medical School and served as a medical officer in the Naval Reserve.

Dr. Gelch, who practiced neurosurgery at Rhode Island Hospital for 37 years, was appointed associate clinical professor of neurological surgery at Brown University Medical School in 2001. He was on Rhode Island Hospital's board of governors and was president of its Staff Association. He established the Kameny Lectureship in Geriatric Medicine.

In 1981, Dr. Gelch was elected to the Providence Home Rule Charter Commission and served as its chairman. Two years later, the electorate passed a revised version of the Home Rule Charter. Elected a delegate to the Rhode Island Constitutional Convention, he was instrumental in the establishment of an ethics

commission.

Dr. Gelch served on the boards of Dorcas Place Parent Literacy Center and Temple Beth-El.

Survived by his wife, Joan (Kameny) Gelch, two sons, Hugh and Stefan, and two daughters, Ilene Benghiat and Diane Simons.

Died in Providence on February 6, 2005 at the age of 69.

GERTSACOV, AGNES, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Israel and Tillie (Orleck) Garfinkle.

She was the owner and operator of Woodman's Jewelry for more than a half-century, retiring at the age of 87.

Ms Gertsacov was a member of Temple Beth-El, Temple Emanu-El's Leisure Club, South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, and Hamilton House.

Survived by a daughter, Joan Gertsacov Smith, she was also the mother of the late Alan Gertsacov.

Died in Providence on December 25, 2004, one week shy of her 104th birthday.

GOLDOWSKY, GERTRUDE "BONNIE," born in Boston, was the daughter of the late Solomon and Annie (Price) Nisson and the wife of the late Dr. Seebert J. Goldowsky. A graduate of Radcliffe College, she was active in the Harvard-Radcliffe Club of Rhode Island.

Mrs. Goldowsky was a member of Temple Beth-El and sang in its choir. She belonged to the National Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah. In 1990, Mrs. Goldowsky received the 7th Annual Recognition Award from Miriam Hospital Women's Association. She was a Life Member and board member of RIJHA. Her skills as a proofreader, editor, and indexer were among many she lavished on the Association.

Died in Providence on March 24, 2005 at the age of 94.

HARRIS, HAROLD J., born in Providence, was a son of the late William H. and Ruth (Make) Harris. He graduated from Brown University.

For nearly a half-century, Mr. Harris was the chief executive officer and president of William H. Harris Furs, which was established by his father in 1908. He also served on the boards of The Fairchild Corporation and Capital Properties.

Mr. Harris was a member of Temple Beth-El. He served on the endowment committee of Jewish Federation of Rhode Island and was active in Hospice Rhode Island, Project Aids of Rhode Island, and First Night Providence. He belonged to the University Club and the Carnegie Abbey Club.

Survived by his wife, Nancy (Siegal) Harris, and two daughters, Elizabeth Baird and Amy Talkow.

Died in Providence on September 28, 2005 at the age of 76.

HOFFMAN, HERTA, born in Bruenn, Austria (now Brno, Czech Republic), was the daughter of the late Alfred and Hilda (Engelmann) Pisk, who perished at Auschwitz. She was the wife of the late Bruno Hoffman. She came to the United States in 1939.

Mrs. Hoffman owned the Arcade Infants' and Children's Shop until 1954, when the floods of Hurricane Carol forced her to close.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El.

Along with her husband, she established the Rhode Island Self Help Program for fellow émigrés. Never diminished, her spirit of caring was shared with countless individuals and many organizations, including Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, Jewish Community Center, Jewish Family Service, Kosher Meals on Wheels, Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the International Institute of Rhode Island. Her numerous tributes for volunteer work included NCJW's Hannah G. Solomon Award, the first presented by the Rhode Island section.

Died in Warwick on May 29, 2005 at the age of 90.

KAPLAN, ROBERT M., born in Sayre, Pennsylvania, was the son of the late Ben and Lee (Blostein) Kaplan. His father was the radio editor of the *Providence Journal*. By the time Robert graduated from Providence College, he was an accomplished musician.

During World War II, Mr. Kaplan served as an Army medic in Europe and as a conductor of military orchestras.

Devoted to the performing arts, Mr. Kaplan was a choral director on and off Broadway. His hit shows included *Finian's Rainbow* and *High Button Shoes*. Also active in radio and television, he was highly regarded for his work on *Your Hit Parade*. Mr. Kaplan was a guest director of shows at Brown University, Barker Players, Orleans Arena Theatre, and was a founder of Trinity Repertory Company. He was president of Patapak, a packaging manufacturer, and a member of Temple Beth-El.

Survived by his wife, Susan (Adler) Kaplan, two daughters, Deborah Cohen and Patricia Bowen, and a son, Jonathan. He was the father of the late Bruce Kaplan.

Died in Providence on May 31, 2005 at the age of 84.

KENNER, SYLVIA, born in Ellington, Connecticut, was the daughter of the late Samuel and Minnie (Saligson) Cor and the wife of the late Frederick Kenner. She was a graduate of Pembroke College.

Mrs. Kenner was a member of the women's associations of the Jewish Home for the Aged, Miriam Hospital and Brandeis University. She also belonged to Temple Beth-El, Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, Hadassah, Kravitz Performing Arts Center in Palm Beach, and the Florida Ballet. She was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Survived by a son, Harris, and a daughter, Kathy Kenner.

Died in Cranston on February 6, 2005 at the age of 87.

LICHTMAN, SHIRLEY ROTKIN, born in Providence, was a daughter of the late Harry and Mae Sarah (Blazer) Norman and the wife of the late Ralph Rotkin and the late Dr. Herbert Lichtman. She graduated from Katharine Gibbs School.

Mrs. Lichtman was a member of Temple Beth-El, Miriam Hospital Women's Association, Hadassah, and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Survived by a daughter, Marjorie Gold.

Died in Providence on December 25, 2004 at the age of 83.

MACKTEZ, PHILIP J., born in Cleveland, was the son of the late Louis and Frieda Macktez and the wife of the late Shirley Macktez. In 1924, he moved with his family to Woonsocket, where he remained until retirement. While a student at Boston University, he played trumpet in a jazz band.

Mr. Macktez was president of Loumac Textile Corporation, Millville Realty, and Shirlaine Packaging.

He led numerous Jewish organizations. He was a board member of Congregation B'nai Israel for 30 years, including 10 as vice president and 20 as chairman of the Chevra Kaddisha. In 1963, Mr. Macktez was recognized as Man of the Year by Woonsocket's chapter of B'nai B'rith. He also served as president of Woonsocket's Israel Bond Drive and was an area vice president of Jewish Federation of Rhode Island.

Mr. Macktez was president of both the Jewish Home for the Aged in Providence and Shalom Apartments in Cranston. He was also active on the boards of Jewish Family Service and the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island.

An avid golfer, he belonged to Winnescuket, Kirkbrae, and Ledgemont Country Clubs.

Survived by his wife, Shirley (Strasmich) Macktez, and two daughters, Ruth Landow and Maxine Rosenthal.

Died in Providence on January 23, 2005 at the age of 89.

MACKTEZ, SHIRLEY, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Max and Tema Strasmich. She graduated from Hope High School and spent most of her married life in Woonsocket. She and her husband later lived in Providence and in Palm Beach.

Survived by her husband, Philip Macktez, by five days, and their daughters.
Died in Providence on January 18, 2005 at the age of 86.

MARGOLIS, ANNA, born in Fall River, was a daughter of the late Mark and Ida (Lipsky) Davidson.

Mrs. Margolis was a saleslady at City Hall Hardware in Providence.

She was a member of Congregation Shaare Zedek and its Sisterhood.

She is survived by her husband of 77 years, Joseph Margolis, and was the mother of the late Michael Margolis.

Died in Providence on June 1, 2005 at the age of 95.

MILLEN, MAX S., born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, was the son of the late Jacob and Rose Millen.

He served in the Army's Rainbow Division during World War II and was involved in the liberation of Dachau. He received the Bronze Star.

Mr. Millen was an executive officer of What Cheer Foods Company in Providence.

He was a member of the Jewish War Veterans and a former member of Temple Emanu-El.

Survived by his wife, Shirley (Swartz) Millen, a daughter, Reesa Belin, and a son, Mathew.

Died in Middletown, Connecticut on June 3, 2005 at the age of 85.

PEARLMAN, BEN, born in Fall River, was a son of the late Israel and Ida (Mines) Pearlman. He graduated from the University of Michigan.

During World War II, he served as a Navy lieutenant in the South Pacific.

Mr. Pearlman was the third-generation owner of Sterling Shoes of Warwick.

He was a member of the Cranston Jewish Center, president of the Warwick Rotary Club, and a sponsor of the Edgewood Little League. He was an avid sportsman.

Survived by his wife, Sara Doris (Doctor) Brown Pearlman; four sons, Theodore, Richard, Michael, and Bruce Comstock; and three daughters, Ellen Beltz, Nancy Pearlman, and Martha Rollins. He was the father of the late Joyce Wien.

Died in Peace Dale on May 4, 2005 at the age of 82.

SHINDLER, P. SUSAN, born in Providence, was a daughter of the late Chaim and Zlotta (Goldstein) Shindler.

She was the owner of Abbey Telephone and Secretarial Service.

Ms. Shindler was a member of the Miriam Hospital Women's Association, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, B'nai B'rith, Temple Emanu-El's Leisure Club, and the Rhode Island Holocaust Memorial Museum. She was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Died in East Providence on November 21, 2004 at the age of 96.

SUGARMAN, MITCHELL F., born in Providence, was the son of the late Max and Estelle (Rubin) Sugarman. He was active in Boy Scouts and served in the Merchant Marine during World War II.

Following his father's death, Mr. Sugarman left Brown University to operate the Max Sugarman Memorial Chapel. In 1970, after selling the chapel, he opened Mount Sinai Memorial Chapel, also on Hope Street, which he ran for two decades. Under new owners, the Sugarman and Sinai funeral homes merged and were managed by Mr. Sugarman's daughter, Jill.

He was a member of Temple Beth-El, Temple Emanu-El, Touro Fraternal Association, Providence and South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Associations, and both the Redwood and Masonic Grand Lodges. Mr. Sugarman was well known for his optimism and sense of humor.

Survived by two daughters, Kari Jackson and Jill Sugarman.

Died in Providence on May 6, 2005 at the age of 77.

TANNER, ELEANOR, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Harry and Rebecca (Glassner) Geffner and the wife of the late Lewis M. Tanner. She attended Pembroke College and participated in Brown University's Learning Community.

Mrs. Tanner and her husband owned Tanner Management Corporation of Providence and Boston.

She was a member of Temple Beth-El and its Sisterhood and the League of Women Voters. She was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Mother of the late Marjorie Harrington and surrogate mother to Marjorie's daughter, Rebecca, she is survived by a son, Ronald.

Died in Providence on December 11, 2004 at the age of 83.

TILLES, NORMAN DONALD, born in Baltimore, Maryland, was the son of the late Ellis and Lillian (Morganstein) Tilles. He was a graduate of the University of Maryland.

A lieutenant in the Army Air Force during World War II, he served as Rhode Island's commander and then national commander of the Jewish War Veterans.

He was president of Tarlov-Tilles Group, an insurance agency.

Mr. Tilles was a tireless and fearless volunteer for Jewish and civic affairs. He served as president of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island from 1987 until 1990. As national president of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) from 1995 until 1998, he traveled around the world to help Jews and others in need. He was also a member of the state's Select Committee on Race and its Advisory Committee to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

A theatre lover, Mr. Tilles was involved with a group of amateur players who performed at the Jewish Community Center. In 1964, he helped found and later served as an officer of Trinity Repertory Company, which became Rhode Island's outstanding professional theatre group and one of the country's best regional companies. Mr. Tilles chaired the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts and was active in Brown University's Learning Community.

He was a member of Temple Beth-El.

Survived by his wife, Florence (Trinkel) Tilles, a son, Jack, and two daughters, Donna Stahl and Sandra Tilles.

Died in Providence on July 20, 2005 at the age of 84.

TREGAR, HAROLD I., born in Providence, was a son of the late Samuel and Fannie (Leibo) Tregar and the husband of the late Eunice (Jacobs) Tregar. He was a natural storyteller whose personal experiences, whether humorous or harrowing, continued to amaze him. A gifted artist, he was a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design. He drew and painted portraits, often of family members, for nearly 70 years.

During World War II, Mr. Tregar was a lieutenant in the Army's Medical Administrative Corps and served in the European and Pacific theaters.

He was a co-owner of the Goldsmith-Tregar Advertising Agency. Following its merger with Fern-Hanaway Advertising Agency, Mr. Tregar became vice president. He was a public relations consultant to several candidates, most notably his childhood friend, Governor Frank Licht.

Mr. Tregar was a founding member of the Cranston Jewish Center, which became Temple Torat Yisrael, and served as its first president. He was a vice president of the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island and a member of Crestwood Country Club.

Survived by a son, Jack, and a daughter, Betsy Tregar.

Died in Providence on September 6, 2005 at the age of 88.

WASSERMAN, ARNOLD B., born in Providence, was a son of the late Herman and Esther (Kotlen) Wasserman. He was a graduate of Hanover College and lived most of his life in Cranston.

During the Vietnam War, he served with the Army Reserve's 455th General Hospital.

Mr. Wasserman was the owner and president of the Day-O-Lite Manufacturing Company in Warwick.

He was a president of Cross State Trail Ride, Inc., a member of the Maswansicut Riding & Driving Club, and a Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Rhode Island. He was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Survived by two daughters, Lindsay and Tori, and a son, Adam.

Died in Burlington, New Jersey on February 15, 2005 at the age of 60.

WATTMAN, FRANCES SINGER, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Isadore Singer and Sophia (Villar) Singer Wachter and the wife of the late Irving Wattman. At Classical High School, she was the founder and editor of *The Classical Review*. She graduated magna cum laude from Pembroke College and earned her master's degree in library science at the University of Rhode Island.

Mrs. Wattman was a librarian of the Broad Street School in Providence and was the founding librarian of the Jewish Home for the Aged.

She was a member of Temple Emanu-El.

Active in the Pembroke College Club, Mrs. Wattman held an annual tea party to welcome members of the freshman class. She was also active in Brandeis University Women's Association, Red Cross, and was a Girl Scout leader for 25 years. She belonged to Hadassah, Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, and was a Life Member of RIJHA.

Mother of the late Steven Wattman, she is survived by two daughters, Judith Schubert and Marjorie Lang.

Died in Providence on December 28, 2004 at the age of 86.

ZAIDMAN, IRVING J., born in Providence, was the son of the late Getzel and Sima Zaidman and Anna Zaidman and the husband of the late Doris (Cohen) Zaidman.

He served in the Army Air Force during World War II and was a manufacturers' representative for 30 years.

Mr. Zaidman cared in countless ways for the Jewish community. He served for 20 years as president of the United Moses Chitan Fund. As president of Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, he was primarily responsible for the gala celebration of its 75th anniversary. Mr. Zaidman was also president of the former Ladd School Parents' Association and of Temple Emanu-El's Leisure Club. He was a treasurer of the Chased Schel Amess Association, a board member of Jewish Family Service and of Temple Torat Yisrael, and was active in the Nathaniel Greene Masonic Lodge and the Jewish War Veterans.

He was the father of the late Rae and Stephanie Zaidman.

Died in Providence on June 14, 2005 at the age of 83.

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TREGAR ARTICLE: Licht Family, p. 371; Tregar Family, p. 375

LICHT ARTICLE: Licht Family; portrait on p. 376 by Arnold Newman

CHAFEE ARTICLE: Chafee Papers, Archives of University of Rhode Island;
Judge Selya, p. 398

ISRAEL ARTICLE: *Woonsocket Call*, p. 400; Israel Family

NEWMAN ARTICLE: RIJHA

RABBIS ARTICLE: RIJHA

BRAUDE ARTICLE: Archives of Temple Beth-El; photo by Fred Kelman, p. 469

SMITH ARTICLE: RIJHA, pp. 1, 7, 10; Smith + Brown Families, pp. 3, 4

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BACK COVER: Licht Family



CONGREGATIONAL RABBIS

(LEFT TO RIGHT) TOP ROW: LEON CHAIT, SHAARE ZEDEK; ISRAEL RUBINSTEIN, SONS OF ZION; JAMES ROSENBERG, HABONIM 2ND ROW: LESLIE GUTTERMAN, BETH-EL; MORRIS SCHUSSHEIM, BETH-ISRAEL; WAYNE FRANKLIN, EMANU-EL 3RD ROW: ELI BOHNEN, EMANU-EL; SARAH MACK, BETH-EL; ABRAHAM SCHECHTER, SONS OF JACOB BOTTOM ROW: ABRAHAM CHILL, SONS OF ABRAHAM; MARC JAGOLINZER, SHALOM; CHAIM SHAPIRO, TOURO



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