



RIJHA NEWSLETTER

Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association

The family behind our office sign

BY JAIME WALDEN

If you've ever passed by RIJHA's office, you may have noticed the sign that reads: "The Fred, Gertrude, and Henry Regensteiner Offices of The Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association." Like me, you might have wondered about this family.

Using the little information I had, I contacted a synagogue in Augsburg, Germany, to see if they knew more about the Regensteiner family, and they suggested that I contact the Jüdisches Museum Augsburg Schwaben.

The museum proved to be a treasure chest of data, revealing that Fred Regensteiner was

born on Nov. 25, 1891, and grew up in a two-story house at Hermannstrasse 23, in Augsburg. He lived with his parents, Max and Sophie, his brother Ludwig, and his cousin, Leopold Reitlinger.



The Regensteiner and Aufhäuser house at Hermanstrasse 23 in Augsburg, Germany, with the entrance to the Adolf Rosenfelder company to the right.

The house was built by Max's cousin, Julie Aufhäuser, and her husband, Hermann, who lived on the second floor with their four children.

Julie's uncle, Adolf Rosenfelder, started a wholesale business in Zeuggasse, Germany, producing and selling alcohol, vinegar and cigars. After his death, Max Regensteiner, Leopold Reitlinger and Hermann Aufhäuser took over the business and worked there.

Eventually, they moved the business to Augsburg and built a new, larger factory next to the house where they all lived. Fred later became a co-owner of the business with Albert Aufhäuser, Julie and Hermann's son.

At age 47, Fred was arrested during

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RIJHA stalwart Mel Zurier leaves a rich legacy

BY GEORGE GOODWIN

My wife, Betsey, and I met Mel Zurier in the fall of 1987, shortly after our arrival in Providence. We became members of Temple Beth-El, and Mel was its 28th president. We were invited to discuss dues, but I quickly sensed that Mel too would have preferred any other subject.

Fortunately, our conversations changed far sooner than later, but especially after I joined the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association's board in 1995. Mel, already a trustee for three decades, seldom missed a meeting. Only recently did his attendance waver, but he remained a fervent supporter of all of RIJHA's endeavors.

Fortunately, in August, only three weeks before he passed, Mel invited me to lunch at his home. We finished our meal within 25 minutes, but lingered in Laurelmead's café for about two hours. I felt honored to listen to more than a few of Mel's stories, some of which I could have recited by heart.

Wanting to say a little more, he then invited me to his apartment, where I remained another hour.

Having been in Mel's study many times, I was well aware of his admiration of RIJHA's journal, *Notes*. Many early volumes had been bound. Yet one issue, from 2010, was missing. This included a portrait of Mel's youth and early career, which was written by his dear friend Jerry Foster. He explained to me that he had lent his copy to another friend, but this



Mel Zurier, April 30, 1929-Aug. 23, 2024

fellow passed away and his heirs never returned it. So could I please help Mel obtain a replacement?

With the RIJHA staff's assistance, I happily did so, and Mel called me to share his delight.

Our dear friend and I shared another bond only tangentially related to history. We both liked to dress nicely. He always wore a coat and tie – often a seersucker suit – at quite casual gatherings. I liked to remind him that he once accidentally walked off with my raincoat, which had hung on a coatrack at Beth-El. Eventually, he discovered that the garment didn't quite fit, and returned it to me.

I think that the following introduction, which I wrote for Mel's article in the 2019 issue of *Notes*, is still mostly accurate. Once again, I'd like to share it with you:

“Mel has helped lead our Association [RIJHA] for far longer than anybody can remember. Indeed, he joined our board in 1964, when in his mid-thirties. Although Mel became an



Letter from the president

Dear members,

The big news in the RIJHA office is that we and the folks at the Roger Williams National Memorial Park received a \$72,500 grant from the National Parks Service Foundation!

This Inclusive Storytelling Grant will be used by the two groups to continue researching the Hahn family, of Providence, which donated the Hahn Memorial in the park. This research will lead to programs using storytelling to counter antisemitism in Rhode Island.

Those of you who attended our Spring Meeting will remember Park Ranger Andrew Schnetzer's presentation on the Hahn family. RIJHA archivist Sam Turco and Schnetzer collaborated to write the grant proposal. Kudos to them!

The other big news involves the Pareiras' portraits, the oil paintings of Miriam and Solomon Pareira, the first documented Jewish settlers in Providence and the organizers of what would later become Temple Beth-El. While the portraits were given to RIJHA in 2021, we have now signed legal documents to allow Temple Beth-El to display them.

The summer was a busy one for our staff, Jaime Walden, the office manager, and Turco, the archivist. In addition to the National Parks Service Foundation grant, RIJHA applied for several other grants, which we hope to hear about later this fall.

Walden and Turco were also busy putting

together our Fall Program, held on Sept. 22, and the accompanying booklet, "Jews Who Helped Build Rhode Island."

In addition, the archive received a donation from the United Brothers Synagogue, including board meeting minutes, newsletters, programs, financial reports and photographs, for which we are grateful.

After Elizabeth Bakst ended her term as chair of the Membership Committee, it became apparent how important it was for us to have an active committee. Fortunately, David Leach, a member of the committee and a former RIJHA president and active board member, agreed to take on the chair position. Thank you, David!

Marvin Wasser, a retired pediatrician and a life member of RIJHA, has joined the Publications Committee. Thank you, Marvin!

I end this letter on a sad note: RIJHA has lost one of its most ardent supporters, Melvin Zurier, a longtime honorary board member, who died suddenly on Aug. 23, at the age of 95. Zurier was an attorney and was active in a number of charitable and political organizations.

RIJHA Past President George Goodwin has written a moving tribute to Zurier for this issue of the newsletter.

Linda Lotridge Levin

President

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honorary board member two decades later, he continued to offer warm friendship and wise counsel. For example, he has helped define and sustain our relationship with the Jewish Federation and then the Alliance.

“But Mel’s deep involvement with the Association stems from a simple fact: he’s a natural storyteller. This Providence native has been blessed with a keen eye, a sharp wit and an amazing memory.

“Mel wrote his first article in *The Notes* in 1965, when he portrayed Isaac Moses, a perpetual candidate who won only one race, for State Senate, in 1932. Of course Mel remembered hearing Moses speak in 1948, when both men attended the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.

“As a leading Rhode Island attorney, it was also natural for Mel to write two articles during the early 1970s about ‘How Jewish Parties Fared in the Rhode Island Supreme Court.’ ”

With his friend and colleague, Jeremiah Goren, Mel also compiled a key reference tool, a list of the state’s Jewish lawyers who died before 1997.

As soon as I began my editorship of *Notes*, Mel urged me to recruit a writer who could not only update this list but place it within a larger and livelier context. Unfortunately, this has not yet happened, so Mel and I recently recorded several oral-history interviews in which he reflected on generations of Jewish lawyers.



Mel Zurier in the mid-1950s, at the age of 26 or 27.

My favorite of Mel’s articles for *Notes* has nothing to do with the Rhode Island Bar, however. In 1981, he wrote “My Cousin, Mark Twain,” which portrays his quite distant relative, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, who in 1909 married Twain’s daughter, Clara Clemens.

In her 2010 portrait of Mel, Jerry Foster mentioned that, beginning in college, he enjoyed keeping a journal. Many later entries portrayed his extensive travels. His article in the 2019 issue of *Notes*, “Pesach in Ireland, 1978,” is one colorful example.

Planned several months ago, another example of Mel’s travel journals will be published in our 2024 issue. It is a detailed account of a trip that he and his wife, Janet, made to Israel in 1985. By the way, at that time, Mel shlepped around a tape recorder, and a secretary later transcribed his observations.

My hope is that the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association will publish a few more of Mel’s keen and heartfelt ruminations.

‘Jews Who Helped Build Rhode Island’

BY JAIME WALDEN

On Sept. 22, 45 members of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, along with other community members, gathered at the Alliance’s Dwares Jewish Community Center to explore the history of six prominent Jewish-owned businesses that played a significant role in Rhode Island’s economic landscape.

Through engaging presentations, exhibits and a booklet, the event celebrated the entrepreneurial spirit and contributions of the Jewish community to the state’s commercial growth.

“Jews Who Helped Build Rhode Island” began with an introduction by RIJHA president Linda Lotridge Levin, who emphasized the importance of preserving and sharing the stories of Jewish businesses that helped shape Rhode Island’s history.

Following Levin’s introduction, audience enjoyed a detailed PowerPoint presentation that offered a glimpse into the history of the six featured businesses: American Tourister, Twin Florists, School House Candy, The Outlet Company, Paramount Optical, and Paramount Greeting Cards. Each of these companies has a unique story reflecting the perseverance, ingenuity and strong work ethic of early Jewish business owners in Rhode Island.

American Tourister started as a modest one-man business and grew into a world-renowned luggage brand, eventually becoming synonymous with durable, high-quality travel



The audience watches a PowerPoint presentation at the RIJHA fall event, “Jews Who Helped Build Rhode Island.”

cases. Twin Florists, a family-owned business, became known for its vibrant floral arrangements and strong community presence. School House Candy was a beloved candy manufacturer, remembered fondly for its sweet treats and candy holders that delighted generations.

The Outlet Company, once a major department store in downtown Providence, became a cornerstone of local retail and media for many decades. Paramount Optical and Paramount Greeting Cards contributed to Rhode Island’s reputation for innovation and quality craftsmanship.

The presentation was complemented by an exhibit from RIJHA’s archive featuring photographs, advertisements and memorabilia from the six businesses, allowing attendees to connect with the past in a tangible way.

To get a copy of the “Jew Who Helped Build Rhode Island” booklet, email RIJHA office manager Jaime Walden at office@rijha.org.

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Kristallnacht, on Nov. 10, 1938, along with 150 other men from Augsburg. He was sent to Dachau Concentration Camp, where about 11,000 Jewish men were imprisoned after the events of that night.

Many of the men were released after proving that they had plans to emigrate, and Fred was among them.

During his imprisonment, his business was sold on Nov. 15, 1938, for far below its value, to the Rappold & Volk Company.

After his release, in 1939, Fred and his wife, Gertrude, fled to England. Their son, Henry, had already been sent to England earlier that year as part of the Kindertransport.

When World War II broke out, on Sept. 3, 1939, about 70,000 German and Austrian residents of the United Kingdom were classified as enemy aliens. Fred and Gertrude were among them. They appeared before a tribunal on Dec. 7, 1939, and were exempted from internment.

In January 1940, the Regensteiner family immigrated to Providence. Henry, who never married, later served in the U.S. Army and lived in Wayland Square for over 20 years.

Two years before the Regensteiner family

arrived in Providence, Ludwig, and his wife, Lisl, had immigrated to Rhode Island from Germany, brought over by Lisl's brother, Ernest Nathan. Ernest and his wife, Pearl, parents to Alan, Richard and Joan Nathan, helped over 40 relatives come to America.

Upon arriving, both Regensteiner families lived with Lisl's parents, Rudolf and Lena Nathan, at 143 Adelaide Ave.

Ludwig became deeply involved in the Jewish community and served as president of the Rhode Island Self-Help Organization from 1944 until 1971, with a brief interruption in the 1950s. RISH, formally established in 1944, assisted Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe in rebuilding their lives in the United States.

Fred and Gertrude made provisions through a trust to provide for Henry throughout his life. After Henry's passing, in 2015, the Regensteiner Family Trust, managed by Norman Jay Bolotow and Fleet Bank (now Bank of America), was directed toward charitable purposes.

In 2017, the trust generously donated \$200,000 to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. In gratitude, its offices were named "The Fred, Gertrude, and Henry Regensteiner Offices."

RIJHA remains deeply thankful to the Regensteiner family, Norman Jay Bolotow and Bank of America for this generous gift.

Donations & Grants

General

Brenda Korn
The Herbert E. Sackett Charitable Trust

In memory of

Geraldine Foster, from the Rob and Mindy
Sherwin Family Fund
Prof. Joel S. Silverberg, from Patricia Brennan
Mel Zurier, from:
Ruth Breindel
Harold & Sara Foster

Grants

The Harold A. Winstead Charitable Foundation Trust

In honor of

Ruth Breindel, from Elizabeth Bakst,
for her 75th birthday.
Ruth Breindel, from Linda Lotridge Levin,
for her 75th birthday.