



Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association NEWSLETTER

Volume XXI, Number 3

November, 2008

President's Message

By Stephen Brown

We look forward to another busy year beginning with our Fall Meeting in October, followed by our Florida Meeting on January 18, 2009, and ending with our Annual Meeting on May 3, 2009. All of these events will have interesting speakers and will bring you up to date on our activities. For the third year, our Florida meeting will be held at Temple Shaarei Shalom, a Reform congregation in Boynton Beach. We expect to have a good turnout, including members that live year-round in Florida, as well as the "snowbirds" who winter in Florida. If you plan to be there, please notify Anne Sherman, so that you will receive an invitation.

This year's issue of the *NOTES* is in its final stages; and for the first time we have to select among the articles submitted, in order to insure that the size of our publication stays within our publication budget.

We are also pleased to mention that thanks to a generous gift from the Salmonson Family, we will host a large display area in the new Heritage Harbor Museum being built in downtown Providence. The building that will include the Museum is still under construction and "opening day" should be in about two years. Our thirty-foot display area will be on the second floor, across from the area assigned to the Smithsonian Institution. This will allow us to display many of the pictures, documents, and other items that we have received over the years, many of which have long been hidden away in our archives. The display will periodically be changed and updated, and will appeal to not just the Jewish community, but to all groups and individuals who visit the Museum.

Again, we look forward to your being active with our group and hope that you will think of us, should you have appropriate items to donate for our safekeeping and display.

2008 Award Winners

By George Goodwin

At our Fall meeting, RIJHA announced the co-winners of the Eleanor F. Horvitz Award. This award recognizes an outstanding essay written by an undergraduate or graduate student on any aspect of Rhode Island Jewish history. The winner receives a \$1,000 prize, and the essay is published in the Association's annual journal. Previous Horvitz Award winners have been students at Brandeis, Brown, Harvard, Tufts, Wellesley, and URI.

This year's first co-winner was James Roberts, a native of Liverpool and an Honors graduate of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. He is presently writing his doctoral dissertation in history at Johns Hopkins University. His article, which will appear in the 2008 issue of the "Notes," is titled "The Jamaican Misadventures of Aaron Lopez's Son-in-Law and Factor, Abraham Pereira Mendes." Mr. Roberts spent many months conducting research in New England libraries, and his article evolved from his study of Lopez's account books at the Newport Historical Society.

The second co-winner was Barry Stiefel, a native of Ann Arbor who earned a bachelor's degree at Michigan State University and a master's in urban planning at the University of Michigan. In May he received his doctorate in historic preservation at Tulane University. His article, "Touro's Place Among Synagogues of the British Empire Prior to 1776," was based on a chapter in his dissertation. Dr. Stiefel was the lead author of an article in the 2007 issue of "The Notes" about three of the oldest synagogues in the Americas: Touro and those in Recife, Brazil and Victoria, British Columbia. Presently, he is a visiting Assistant Professor of historic preservation at the College of Charleston.

The deadline for submitting essays for the Horvitz Award is July 15, 2009. For additional information, please contact Anne at: 331-1360 or at rjhist@aol.com.

IN OUR OFFICE AND ARCHIVES

By Anne Sherman

Over the past months, the RIJHA office received many acquisitions. Dorothy Eisenstadt from Columbia, South Carolina, sent the original programs from the dedication exercises for the following RI Memorial Squares: Bard-Primack, Cutler-Abner D. Suvall and Israel J. Korenbaum. Mrs. Eisenstadt sang the National Anthem at each dedication.

Rabbi James Rosenberg recently received a call from Father Joseph Santos informing him that the Veterans Hospital in Providence was removing all religious items from the hospital. Rabbi Rosenberg brought many items to our office. They include a candelabra, donated to the hospital from the Reback-Winsten Post of the Jewish War Veterans, and pamphlets from the Jewish Welfare Board explaining how to conduct Shabbat and holiday services for Jewish Chaplains. Also donated was the plaque from the Chapel wall which reads "This Chapel is dedicated to the memory of all men of the Jewish faith who served their country to preserve liberty and human rights - Presented by R.I. Post 23 Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America and Auxiliary October 7, 1951."

Again we thank Florence Markoff for giving us another wonderful oral history. This tape recorded the voice of Ursula Weimersheim telling her story of her life in Germany during World War II.

Brian Jones, retired *Providence Journal* writer, is writing the complete history of The Miriam Hospital from Mary Grant in 1895 to the latest addition of the Victor and Gussie Baxt wing. He is researching our very large collection of material from the Hospital. It includes 3 large scrapbooks that date from 1895 to 1952 assembled by the Women's Association. We also have the minutes of the Board of Trustees from 1926-1937 in bound books, and 14 boxes on the hospital and 8 boxes on the Women's Association that Mr. Jones has gone through sheet by sheet. Our files contain information about many people referenced in the documents. The *Notes* have been invaluable thanks to Dr. Seebert Goldowsky. Because we have all the *Jewish Herald*s and the candid columns that Beryl Segal wrote about the Miriam, it has made the research easier. Mr. Jones is planning to be with me for many more months. He is quite pleased with all the material we have on the Hospital.

2008 Issue of *The Notes*

By George M. Goodwin

What a wonderful predicament: too many articles! Weight may be the decisive factor as to how many articles must be saved for the 2009 issue.

Every time I think that there's not much more to be written about colonial Newport's Jewish community, I am delightfully surprised. In the 2008 issue, there may be as many as five articles. Who knew that Aaron Lopez was a patron of John Goddard, the renowned furniture maker, or that Lopez had a ne'er-do-well son-in-law representing him in Jamaica? Who ever thought that Touro was the 17th synagogue built in the British Empire?

The new issue will have as many as seven articles by or about men and women whose destinies were shaped by the 1930s and '40s. Three of these Jewish Rhode Islanders served in the military; two were German Jews who found refuge in the Ocean State. But how about a Classical High graduate, a pharmacist and a songwriter who spied on fascist organizations in Boston?

Fortunately, Rhode Island Jewish history can also bring smiles. How many car dealers active before 1946 can you name? When is the last time you thought that a woman or man was half-dressed without wearing a hat in public? What is the most splendid (or ridiculous) example you can remember?

Our journal, now in its 54th year of publication, has no equal among state or local Jewish historical societies. I am so pleased by all of our imaginative writers and loyal readers. I am proud of Bobbie Friedman, our graphic designer, and proud to complete my fifth year as editor.

RI Streets with Jewish Names

By Anne Sherman

Shirley Boulevard – Cranston - From Pontiac Avenue to Auburn Street. It was named by Benjamin Rakatansky in honor of his daughter Shirley (Mrs. Sumner Halsband). In the mid 1920's he developed the area for twenty houses from a former rhubarb farm.

Jew Street – Newport - Area between Kay Street and Memorial Boulevard, near the old colonial Jewish cemetery and present location of the Hotel Viking, later renamed South Touro Street and now part of Bellevue Avenue. It was called Jew Street for the eminent men of that religion who were to do so much for Newport.

Touro Street – Newport - From Spring Street to junction of Kay Street and Bellevue Avenue, formerly called Griffin Street. It was named for Abraham Touro at a Newport Town Meeting held August 31, 1824.

Touro St. - Providence - From Branch Avenue to Silver Spring Street. It was named for Judah Touro.

Zipporah Street – North Providence - In Allendale section from Woonasquatucket Avenue to Manning Street. No information is available why the street was so

named. In the Bible, Zipporah was the wife of Moses. The name Zipporah means bird in Hebrew.

Newman Road – Pawtucket - From Alfred Stone Road to Oak Hill Avenue. It was named by developer David Newman who built eight houses there in 1988-89.

Eaton Street – Providence - From Douglas Avenue to Smith Street. Jacob A. Eaton was a prominent state legislator who represented the North End in the RI General Assembly.

Golemba Lane –Providence - From Bogman Street to Public Street. It was named for Frank Golemba, who owned a grocery store at 83 Gay Street, corner of Willard Avenue.

Richter Street – Providence - From Smith Street to Chalkstone Avenue. Max J. Richter who lived on 64 Eaton Street developed and built a number of houses there around 1930-31 during the Depression.

Solomon Lane – Providence - South from 45 Olney St. It was named for Isaac Solomon, who lived in a house on the lane from about 1900 to 1925. Solomon immigrated to the United States in 1874 and became a peddler in South County. At one point, he lived in East Greenwich, where he opened a clothing store in 1878.

SOURCE: "Rhode Island Places with Jewish Names." Volume 11, Number 1, November 1991 of the *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* by Eleanor F. Horvitz.

Rhode Island Stories

By Michael Fink

Our history contains many mysteries, and "Michele" was among them. Micheline Small survived the nazi occupation in her native France. She certainly never forgave the German nation for invading the region of Brittany, the coastal culture that had attracted artists in search of "primitive" or at least primary, visual themes. Such as the great rocks whose meanings escape obvious interpretations.

Michele was herself an artist, and she left her paintings to the International House, where she worked to recruit members and sponsor programs. She traveled to China, Morocco, Kenya, and, nearby, the Roger Williams Park Zoo, whose animals she loved and cared for. She brought pets from the Animal Rescue League to public schools to convey and encourage respect for our fellow creatures. She left her own ashes to the plants on the broad windowsills and noble mantelpieces of that stately mansion on Stimson Avenue. Michele Small was petite in person but sturdy in soul and spirit. Almost tough, rather like the French star Simone Signoret when she was of "a certain age." I used to test out my French with Michele at coffee hours in the Alliance Francaise headquarter salon on Congdon Street, in the "cave" of the

Music Mansion. If I brought my wee Italian Greyhound with me, Michele was especially cordial. I write these few words about a member of the Resistance, secretly partly Jewish, who has left some traces of her values amid the bittersweet journey that brought her to our shores.

He might have stitched up a garment for you in his tailoring shop on Elmgrove. He reweave his own life here in Providence, a displaced person who found a marvelous minyan among us. He phoned our home to ask me to join the celebration of his 92nd birthday with a brunch in his honor after morning prayers. Morris Gastfreund was an outspoken founder of Holocaust Survivors of Rhode Island. From the pulpits of several synagogues, he described his early days here in Roger Williams' refuge. "It's always difficult at first to find a place in the sun, but people just didn't want to know what had happened to us." Morris was a forceful orator, honest and eloquent. "The so-called civilized world turned its back on our generation!" I admired him greatly for his challenging letters, articles, and speeches. But at the birthday salute at Temple Emanu-El the mood was celebratory and totally cordial. With all the enormous losses in his lifetime, Morris Gastfreund has endured, thrived, and survived in spirit as well body, as a beloved member of the Jewish community of Rhode Island. I take this opportunity to wish him and all who join me in our affection and respect for him, a long life--l'chaim and til 120!

NEW MEMBERS

Judith and Arthur Bergel, Roslyn Gabrilowitz, Ruth Goldstein, Terry and George Lieberman, Jan Neitlich, Ronnee Wasserman and Herbert Sacket

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Tobey R. Olken, Esq. and Dr. Mark D. Olken

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 Cantor Norman & Sarah Gewirtz's anniversary
 Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Gourse's 40th anniversary
 David "Sonny" Hodosh's 90th birthday

Jane & Alan Jacober's son college graduation
 Sidney Kramer's special birthday
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Milton & Cynthia Levin's grandson's Bar Mitzvah

Larry & Duffy Page's anniversary
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 Philip Segal's special birthday
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