



# RIJHA NEWSLETTER

*Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association*

## From Providence to Downton Abbey: The warehouse that inspires designers

BY JAIME WALDEN

For decades, artists, jewelers, collectors and costume-jewelry designers have spoken about Wolf E. Myrow Inc. with a mixture of awe and delight.

Tucked inside an unassuming industrial building in Providence, the warehouse has earned a near-mythic reputation. Andrew Prince, known for designing the jewelry for “Downton Abbey,” once described it as “a warehouse filled to the rafters with everything you could possibly need to make costume jewelry.”

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Prince recalled spending hours combing through boxes of stones, chains and forgotten materials from Rhode Island’s jewelry-making past.

“I could have spent \$100,000 there, there is such amazing stuff to



Store signage on the Wolf E. Myrow Inc. warehouse, at 46 Aleppo St.

buy,” he said in an article in The Providence Journal in October 2015.

Pieces from Prince’s visits later made their way into the final season of “Downton Abbey” and a Downton Abbey-inspired jewelry collection.

But the story of Wolf E. Myrow, who was the father-in-law of RIJHA board member Marilyn Myrow, begins long before movie studios and television designers came calling.

Born in Newport, Myrow’s early working life had nothing to do with jewelry. He owned and operated a fruit store, but that chapter ended abruptly when he was drafted into the U.S. Army and sold the business.

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Ultimately rejected for military service due to a past injury, Myrow was forced to reconsider his future.

According to Myrow's daughter, Carol Neimark, of Lombard, Illinois, the turning point came through her mother, Ruth. Myrow's father-in-law, Emil Ross, owned a jewelry business and offered Wolf a box of stones. Myrow sold those stones, invested the proceeds into additional inventory, and slowly began to build what would become a stones-and-findings business.

What began out of necessity soon evolved into a passion. Myrow began buying excess stock from jewelry manufacturers. Often working out of the trunk of his car, he visited factories looking for end runs, mismatches, broken assortments, canceled orders and anything else a manufacturer no longer needed. He repackaged these finds and sold them to buyers who recognized the value in these overlooked goods.

It wasn't long before Myrow became known as the "King of Jewelry Closeouts in New England."

As the business grew, he opened a location on Westminster Street, before eventually moving the operation to 46 Aleppo St. in the early 1970s. Today, the company is still known for its sprawling 80,000-square-foot warehouse at that location.

By the mid-1960s, Myrow's business had grown enough that he brought in a partner, Mike Spagnole, the father-in-law of future company owner Anthony Antonelli. For roughly 20 years, the two men ran the company together, expanding its inventory and reputation.



**Wolf E. Myrow, left.**

**The interior of the Wolf E. Myrow Inc. warehouse.**



A devoted volunteer for several Jewish organizations, Myrow belonged to Providence temples Beth Israel and Congregation Shaare-Zedek. When he died in 1980, at age 71, he left behind not only a thriving business but a unique legacy in Rhode Island's industrial history.

Today, the warehouse bearing his name remains a rare surviving link to Providence's once-dominant jewelry industry. While most of the factories that fueled the city's jewelry boom have closed, moved or been redeveloped, Wolf E. Myrow Inc. endures as a living archive, its boxes of beads, stones and findings preserving the remnants of a manufacturing era that helped define Providence for more than a century.



# Letter from the president

Dear members,

As I write this, RIJHA's new Strategic Planning Committee is hard at work. The committee's first project was creating a questionnaire for board members and former presidents of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. This is the first step in learning what we do well and where we need to improve.

Later this winter, the committee will invite board members to take part in follow-up conversations to explore the survey responses in depth. Then, committee members will reach out to the full membership for input.

The committee members are Harold Foster, RIJHA's immediate past president and chair of the planning committee; David Bazar, first vice president; Larry Ginsberg, treasurer; and Bob Kemp, board member.

This strategic planning process is important because it allows us to step back and view the bigger picture. It will help us build on what's working, address what isn't, and make thoughtful decisions about where we want to go next.

Doing this work now will help ensure that RIJHA remains strong, relevant and able to fulfill its mission for years to come.

Over the past quarter, RIJHA has stayed busy. We have continued to offer programs that share Rhode Island Jewish history with the public, such as RIJHA Recording Secretary Ruth Breindel's presentation on little-known Providence architect Harry Marshak, as well

as making progress in organizing and preserving our archive and strengthening relationships with partners who help us reach new audiences.

Much of RIJHA's work happens behind the scenes, but it is essential to maintain our collections, manage our resources carefully and keep

the organization running day to day.

Thank you all for your work, whether public-facing or behind the scenes, in keeping our 75-year-old organization vibrant and relevant going forward.

**Doing this work  
now will help  
ensure that  
RIJHA remains  
strong, relevant  
and able to fulfill  
its mission for  
years to come.**

**Linda Lotridge Levin**

**President**



# Program puts spotlight on 20th-century local architect

BY RUTH BREINDEL

Harry Marshak, a little-known architect who built distinctive houses in the East Side of Providence in the 1920s and '30s, was the topic of a talk and slideshow at the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association's annual Fall Meeting, held on Oct. 26.

An audience of 75 people filled the boardroom at the Dwares Jewish Community Center, in Providence, to hear RIJHA Recording Secretary Ruth Breindel's presentation on the self-taught architect and his unique style.

In Providence, Marshak designed or renovated three synagogues: Sons of Jacob, 24 Douglas Ave.; Shaare Zedek's Talmud Torah building, also known as the Broad Street Synagogue, 688 Broad St.; and Temple Beth Israel, at 155 Niagara St.

In addition, he designed at least 11 houses in the city, as well as the Primavera Apartments, built in 1928-'29 at 490 Angell St. A 1989 publication by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission described the apartment building as "a large complex built on the open-quadrangle plan with Spanish Colonial detail, [that] evokes the feel of a Mediterranean village square."

Breindel showed each of these structures to the audience and said there might be more Marshak houses in Providence that have not been identified, and there is at least one in Fall River. She said her favorite Marshak house is at 232 Slater Ave., on the corner of Mount Avenue, for the way it sits on its plot, its angled front door, large front window and circular balcony.



Two houses designed by Harry Marshak: Top, 30 Elmway St.; bottom, 232 Slater Ave.

Among those in the audience were several people who own Marshak houses, and they shared architectural details of their homes. For example, one owner's daughter, upon hearing about the intricate detail in the houses, told her parents to take up the newer floor as there was a mosaic floor underneath.

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Owners Sheila and Rick Dvorin graciously allowed pictures to be taken of the inside of their house for the presentation. They are only the third owners, and have kept everything in the proper time period (mid-1930s).

Also present was Harry Marshak's stepdaughter, Rona Nachbar, of North Providence.

Breindel said Marshak homes were usually small and featured intricate brick work. Later, using this "small house concept," Marshak designed plan books of small houses, which were sold to lumberyards and other stores.

The R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission's publication, "Historical and Architectural Resources of the East Side, Providence," offered this description of Marshak's style: he "designed a number of new residences and dwelling renovations on the East Side during the 1920s and 1930s which are characterized by highly idiosyncratic assemblages of historic architectural forms."

*If you missed the presentation, you can watch it at: [rijha.org/about-us/pastprograms](http://rijha.org/about-us/pastprograms).*



A Providence Preservation Society plaque on a house Harry Marshak designed at 200 Taber Ave.

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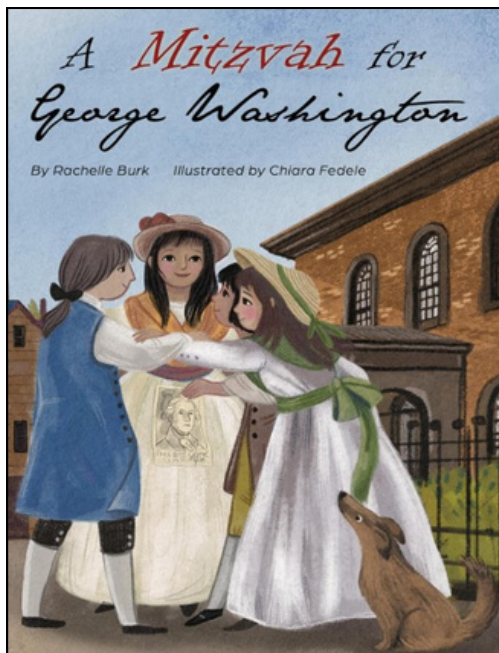
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# Bringing Jewish R.I. history to fourth-graders



Using grant funding, the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association has hired Tiverton educator Christina Costa to create a Grade 4 curriculum that pairs with “A Mitzvah for George Washington,” a children’s book by Rachelle Burk that was published in 2024. The book, set during George Washington’s 1790 visit to Newport, offers an accessible, engaging introduction to Rhode Island’s founding principle of religious freedom through the lens of Newport’s Jewish community. Costa’s curriculum will build on the story with primary sources, discussions and hands-on activities to help students understand the lasting impact of Roger Williams’ “Lively Experiment.” Together, the book and curriculum connect Rhode Island history to national history, showing students how the state’s early commitment to religious freedom shaped both the colony and the new nation.

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