OCTOBER 2026

RIJHA NEWSLETTER

Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association

The playwright who lived in Cranston

BY JAIME WALDEN

Among the playwrights who found success on the Broadway stage in the mid-20th century was Rhode Island writer Arthur P. Carter, whose work eventually made its way from the theater to Hollywood.

Carter was largely a self-taught writer. His daughter, Tina Carter, of Seattle, said in a recent interview that he was an avid reader who read all of Shakespeare's plays on his own and always wanted to be a writer. Growing up in Providence during the Great Depression, however, his parents, Barnett and Bernice Carter, could not afford to send him to college. Tina remembers how proud her father was when she went to college.



The Providence Journal

Arthur Carter, left, and actor Jack Lemmon during the filming of "Operation Mad Ball" in 1957.

Carter served in the Army during World War II, attaining the rank of master sergeant. After the war, he returned to Rhode Island, where much of his family and many of his friends lived, and began writing.

His greatest commercial success was "Operation Mad Ball," a comedy set at an American Army hospital in postwar France. The play was optioned for Broadway in 1954 and was later adapted into a 1957 Columbia Pictures film starring Jack Lemmon, Ernie Kovacs, Mickey Rooney and Kathryn Grant.

Although his career brought him into contact with the worlds of Broadway and Hollywood, Carter continued to make Cranston his home. He frequently traveled to New York for work and spent time in California, but Tina believes the importance of family and friendships kept her father connected to Rhode Island.

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Carter continued writing throughout his life. He received three residencies at the MacDowell artist's program in Peterborough, New Hampshire, during the early 1970s, giving him dedicated time to work on his craft.

Carter's writing often drew upon current events and ethical dilemmas, exploring serious issues while attempting to make them entertaining and accessible to audiences.

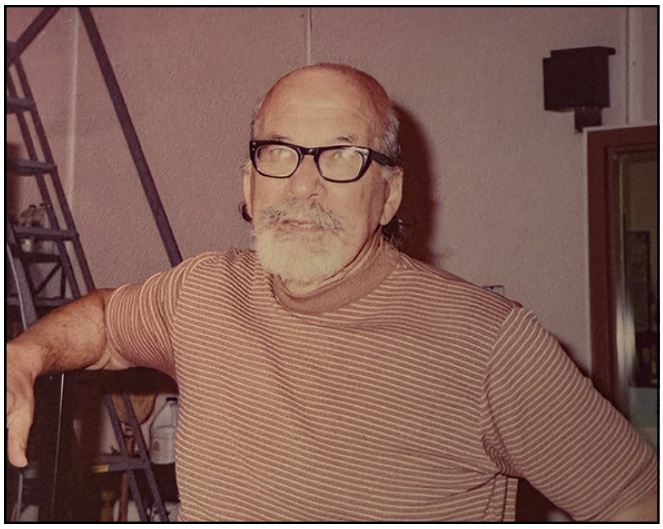
In July, Tina donated a collection of her father's materials to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. The collection includes his plays, letters, newspaper clippings and legal documents. Among the materials are works that were never published or professionally produced, offering an opportunity to explore a much broader picture of Carter's writing career.

Writing was also very much a part of the Carters' family life. Tina remembers books and copies of her father's plays throughout their home.

Carter wrote notes by hand on yellow paper or legal pads and produced his finished work on a manual typewriter. His wife, Thelma, an artist herself, read his plays and offered feedback. Tina was also encouraged to read his work and give her honest opinion.

Despite his professional accomplishments, Tina's strongest memories are of her father at home. She remembers sitting with him on the couch on Sundays reading the comics, and describes a household filled with books, art, conversation and humor. She recalls her parents as exceptionally loving and remembers her father as sociable, even-tempered and genuinely interested in other people.

Carter continued to write even when his work was not being commercially produced. Tina explained his motivation simply: "He just loved writing what he wanted to do."





Arthur P. Carter, top, and Carter with his daughter, Tina, in 1957.

While "Operation Mad Ball" remains Carter's most recognizable work, Tina hopes her father, who died in 2004, will also be remembered for the person he was. She describes him as kind, gentle, loving, wise and caring, a man whose approach to others could perhaps best be summed up by the Golden Rule.

To learn more about Arthur P. Carter, his life and his work, look for an in-depth article in the upcoming edition of RIJHA's The Notes early next year.



Letter from the president

Dear members,

As I continue my first year as president of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, I find myself often thinking about both where we have been and where we can go.

Over the years, I have seen this organization grow in breadth and capabilities. What began for me with discovering a copy of The Notes on my parents' bookshelf when I was 10 years old has become a much deeper appreciation for the remarkable work that RIJHA does to preserve and share the history of Rhode Island's Jewish community.

Today, I believe we have an exciting opportunity to bring that story to an even larger audience.

Our new strategic plan provides an important framework for strengthening our organization and increasing our engagement with the community. In addition to The Notes, one of our greatest resources is our archive and its collections. They have continued to grow, and our expanding online presence gives us new opportunities to make these materials accessible to people who might not be able to visit our archive or attend one of our programs.

But preserving our history is only part of our mission. We also want people to discover it, enjoy it, and see its relevance to their own lives.

I would especially like to find new ways to engage younger members of the Jewish community. There are wonderful possibilities for programs, speakers, educational events and collaborations with other Jewish and community organizations. By working together, we can introduce RIJHA to people who may not yet know about us and create opportunities for them to become interested in and connected to Rhode Island Jewish history.

I also hope we will hear from you. If you have an idea for a program, an organization with which we should partner, a story from Rhode Island's Jewish past that deserves to be told, or simply an idea about how we can better reach the community, please reach out to us at (401) 331-1360 or office@rijha.org. RIJHA has always benefited from the ideas, talents and enthusiasm of its members and friends.

Our history belongs to all of us. My hope is that, as we preserve the remarkable collections entrusted to RIJHA, we will also bring their stories to more people — and inspire a new generation to discover, appreciate and help carry forward the history of Rhode Island's Jewish community.

I look forward to taking that journey together.

David Bazar

President

Letter to the editor

The remarkable journey of Mishkon Tfiloh

This year marks the 120th anniversary of the founding of the Howell Street Synagogue, the first on the East Side of Providence. It also marks a milestone in the life of Congregation Mishkon Tfiloh, on Summit Avenue.

Since childhood, I have been aware of the inextricable bond between these two entities.

An oil painting by Max Alexander of the Howell Street Synagogue [formally Congregation Ahavath Sholom] was recently donated to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association. For me, the painting evokes the vivid memory of a childhood visit to this magnificent edifice shortly before its demolition.

Upon entering the lofty sanctuary, accentuated by an immense chandelier, the focal point was the intricately carved wooden *Aron Kodesh* [holy ark], with its faux marble finish, gold leaf details and architectural elements, undoubtedly designed and constructed by a Jewish Eastern European immigrant craftsman.

Through the intervention of my late father, Edward Spencer, the congregation received permission from the City of Providence to remove the *Aron Kodesh* and several other items from the building before the demolition. So began the remarkable journey of a congregation committed to preserving the Orthodox legacy of the Howell Street Synagogue.

When the dream of a new campus for a new Ahavath Sholom Synagogue, on the corner of Camp and Rochambeau, did not materialize (the partially completed building became the Conservative Temple Beth Sholom), many of the founding families, including my grandfather, Philip Abraams (who had dedicated the first half of the 20th century in service to Ahavath Shalom, first as treasurer and later as president), returned to



Mishkon Tfiloh's *Aron Kodesh* in the congregation's current building on Summit Avenue, Providence.

the vacant building on Howell Street. The building was renamed and rededicated as Congregation Mishkon Tfiloh on Dec. 16, 1951.

Despite adverse conditions in the neighborhood, religious services continued uninterrupted until the building was razed as part of the University Heights urban renewal.

The displaced congregation, in possession of its original *Aron Kodesh*, which had been dismantled and stored, held well-attended High Holy Day services for several years at the Jewish Community Center on Sessions Street, until their new building was dedicated and the *Aron Kodesh* reinstalled on Summit Avenue in 1962.

The remarkable history of Congregation Mishkon Tfiloh is really the story of the courageous and dedicated men and women who have kept the heart and soul of the first Orthodox synagogue on the East Side alive continuously for over 120 years.

Dr. Henry J. Spencer
Woodbridge, Connecticut

RIJHA begins photo digitization project

The Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association is delighted to announce that we have begun digitizing our photograph collection. This means that photographs from our archive and its collections will be available for viewing by anyone, anytime!

RIJHA intern Francesca Bassi, who has a master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Rhode Island, has been concentrating on the photo digitization project by carefully organizing, rehousing and archiving the physical photographs.

The digitizing project aims to preserve our archive, garner interest from the community and make our photos more accessible, and is part of RIJHA's long-term goal to make more and more of our collections available to everyone.

The digitizing process involves scanning photographs on our archival scanner and uploading the file to a Google Drive, which can be accessed with a link on the home page of rijha.org. Additionally, instructions for how to use and search our photo collection are on the website and on Instagram (@rijha1951).



A digitized photo from our archive, showing the storefront of Joseph Adler Provisions, 11 Olney St., Providence.

RIJHA NEWSLETTER
VOL. 3, NO. 4

Published quarterly by:

The Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association
401 Elmgrove Ave.
Providence, RI 02906
www.rijha.org | 401-331-1360

Please email questions, comments and suggestions to:
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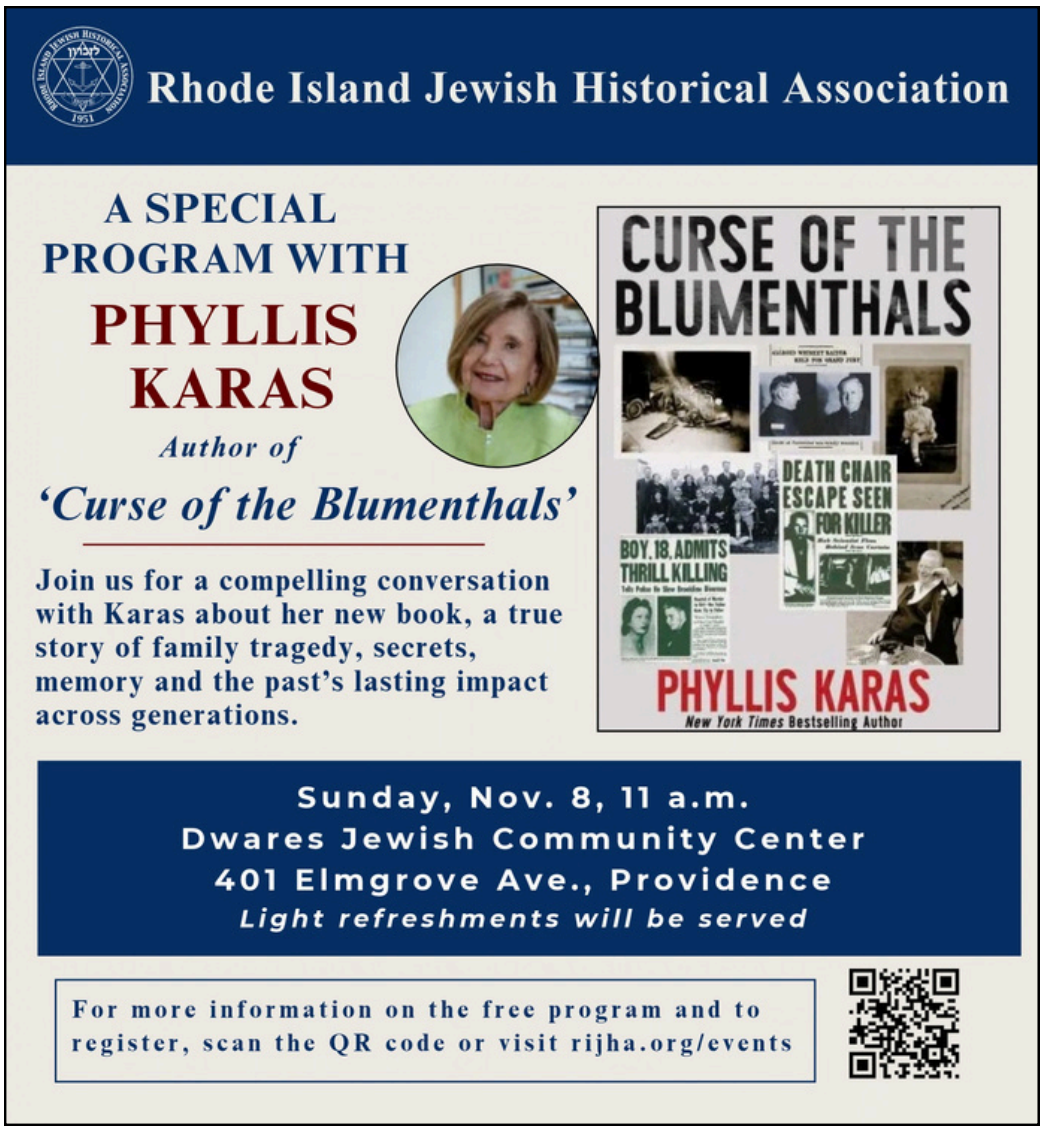
Publication team:
Executive Editor Jaime Walden
Copy Editor Cynthia Benjamin

Adviser:
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Join us at the **Evening of Jewish Renaissance** at 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7, at the Dwares Jewish Community Center, 401 Elmgrove Ave., Providence.
National Park Ranger Andy Schnetzer will be the keynote speaker, presenting RIJHA's Hahn Memorial Project and sharing the story behind this important piece of R.I. Jewish history.
Our Hahn Memorial traveling exhibit will also be on display throughout the evening.
Learn more and register here:
www.tinyurl.com/mwmjdjj5

Upcoming Event



Donations & Grants

General

Steven Baker
Larry & Susan Ginsberg
Bob & Lois Kemp
Mel Topf

In memory of

Hannah Baratz, from:
Richard H. Epstein, M.D.

Grants

The Harold A. Winstead Charitable Foundation