Joseph M. Finkle dies at 87; R.I. adman, civil rights activist

PALOS VERDES, Calif — Joseph M. Finkle, 87, a Rhode Island native, advertising executive, longtime civil rights activist and a founder of the Rhode Island Jewish Herald, died yesterday. He was the husband of Esther (Bass) Finkle.

Mr. Finkle was born in Providence, a son of Russian immigrant parents, and moved to California five years ago.

He grew up in the Armory District, where his father owned a grocery store.

"I learned how to get along with different kinds of kids," he said in a 1955 interview with the Sunday Journal. "I used to experience the effects of discrimination the same as a member of any other minority group. It was indelibly impressed on me as a kid that education would change it."

He graduated from Bryant & Stratton Business College, now Bryant College, as an accountant, but went to work in the advertising department of the old Providence Tribune, remaining for several years. He was one of the founders of the Jewish Herald, a weekly newspaper now called the Rhode Island Herald.

In 1935, he formed an advertising agency with his brother, Archie Finkle. They called it the Joseph Maxfield Co., using the first name of one and the middle name of the other.

About the same time, he became active in B'nai B'rith, a Jewish fraternal organization, and was one of the founders of the Roger Williams B'nai B'rith. Much of his work was with the organization's Anti-Defamation League, where he rose to chairmanship of that organization's New England Regional Board.

As chairman of the ADL's New England Regional Board, Mr. Finkle worked for the establishment of the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which became effective in 1948, and was a member for 14 years.

In 1955, he was installed as president of B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge 1, which encompassed New England, New York and eastern Canada. He was the first Rhode Islander to hold that office.

In 1959, he was named a member of the National Citizenship and Civic Affiars Commission of B'nai B'rith.

Mr. Finkle served on the Providence Human Relations Commission for 17 years, from 1966 to 1983, and was the first person given emeritus status by the organization. He was a member of the Rhode Island Commission Against Discrimination.

He was a member of the board of trustees of Miriam Hospital and a board member of the Temple Beth El, Providence.

Mr. Finkle was honored by the General Assembly in 1964 for his work in civil rights. He also was honored by numerous civic organizations, including the New England regional ADL board, which in 1980 cited him for "his leadership and support of the ADL to translate democratic ideals into a way of life for all Americans."

Mr. Finkle retired from advertising in 1975, but kept in shape walking miles around the city every day. He also remained active in a variety of social, civic and religious enterprises, local and national.

In an interview in 1981, Mr. Finkle said the relentless fight against racial and religious bigotry was far from finished.

"Hatred and anti-social activity seem to thrive on tough times," he said. "A lot depends on the economy of the country. When some people are economically frustrated, they will listen to whoever promises them something. When such people look for scapegoats, they usually turn on Jews and blacks."

Besides his wife he leaves a daughter, Karen Marcus of Palos Verdes, and two brothers, Archie Finkle of Palm Beach, Fla., and Dr. Phillip Finkle of Providence.

Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

FINKLE, JOSEPH M.