OBITUARY

8/4/60

Henry Hassenfeld Dies; 'Wanted to Help People'

Henry J. Hassenfeld, 71-year-old industrialist and philanthropist who came here from Austria at the age of 14 with $10 in his pockets and became the world's largest pencil manufacturer, died early today in Miriam Hospital after a heart attack.

The death of the man who for years was a leading figure in the state's Jewish community came less than two months after that of his wife, the former Marion Frank. One of his two daughters, Mrs. Muriel E. Mann, died on May 16.

When Mr. Hassenfeld was presented the 1959 B'nai B'rith Public Service Award, he was termed "Mr. Community" by Rabbi Morris Schussheim of Temple Beth Israel. He had been president of the General Jewish Committee of Providence for years.

A warm and friendly man, Mr. Hassenfeld was known among his intimates for his frequent Biblical quotations and his often expressed desire to lead a life in conformity with the Torah, ancient Jewish law.

He was chairman of the board of Hassenfeld Bros., Inc., toy and pencil manufacturers, at 1033 Broad St., Central Falls. His interest in the business went beyond the money-making process, Mr. Hassenfeld frequently said.

"Making money, being successful—that's not enough," he remarked in an interview four years ago. "You have to believe in something. You have to have something to live and work for. I've always wanted to help people."

Friends recalled today a poem he himself wrote and dedicated to his wife, which he read when he was presented the B'nai B'rith award. Her death, they said, was a blow from which he did not seem to recover fully.

Mr. Hassenfeld's career was pure Horatio Alger. When he arrived in New York City to join his brother, Hillel, in 1903 he could speak but a few words of English.

He married in 1914. Mr. Hassenfeld met his wife, a Phenix girl, while traveling through New England as a buyer of cotton goods remnants from manufacturers. These he sold to stores. The couple moved here after Mr. Hassenfeld became convinced his blond, vivacious wife did not like living in New York but was pining for Rhode Island.



Mr. Hassenfeld continued in the textile business for years. Some cloth useful for binding books which he had on his hands, led him into the pencil manufacturing business.

Most of the pencil boxes of that period came from Germany. Mr. Hassenfeld considered them clumsy, even dangerous to children. "I figured we could make school boxes out of this cloth cheaper and safer and easier to carry," he once related. "That's how I got started in the school supply business."

His first plant at 217 North Main Street employed six persons. In 1927 he moved to Dorrance Street. Three years later Hassenfeld Bros. had expanded to 861 Broad St., Providence.

A logical step, Mr. Hassenfeld thought, was expansion into the manufacture of toys.

In time Mr. Hassenfeld was forced to move again into still larger quarters, in Central Falls. His plants—there are branches at Shelbyville, Tenn., and Mallard, Ky. — handle 28 per cent of the pencil production in this country. In all, 2,000,000 pencils are turned out daily.

Mr. Hassenfeld, who made his home at 767 Elmgrove Ave., was one of the founders of the General Jewish Committee of Providence. The committee conducts annual campaigns for Jewish enterprises in this country, Israel, and other parts of the world. He was its honorary president at the time of his death.

Mr. Hassenfeld was on the boards of the Jewish Home for the Aged, Miriam Hospital, the Jewish Community Center, the National Friends of Hillel Foundation, and a trustee of Temple Emanu El. He was active in forming the local Bureau of Jewish Education and was a national board member of the American Association for Jewish Education. He was on the executive committee of the National Council of the Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds.

Mr. Hassenfeld was a founder of the Providence YMHA, which became the Jewish Community Center. He was a fellow of Brandeis University.

He was a son of Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Hassenfeld and leaves two sons, Harold of Nashville, Tenn., and Merrill L. of Providence, as well as a daughter, Mrs. Leonard Engle of Pawtucket, and 11 grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at noon tomorrow at Temple Emanu El. Rabbi Schussheim and Rabbi Eli A. Bohnen of the temple will officiate.

The board of directors of the General Jewish Committee of Providence and trustees of Temple Emanu El will be honorary pall bearers. Burial will be in Lincoln Park Cemetery. Memorial week will be observed at Mr. Hassenfeld's home.

HASSENFELD, HENRY

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