

RHODE ISLAND
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NOTES





Rabbi Manasseh ben Israel; etching by Rembrandt, 1636
(See Stiefel article)

Rhode Island Jewish Historical

Notes



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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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EDITOR'S COMMENTS

Seldom knowing which authors will submit articles or what their topics will be, I regard each new issue of our journal as a bundle of surprises. Once an article has been accepted for publication, it is a surprise to determine which photographs, maps or drawings can be used as illustrations. It will be another surprise to see how the articles will be ordered and which illustrations will adorn outside and inside covers.

For better and for worse, I never know the extent to which readers are surprised by an issue's contents. Occasionally, somebody will express his amazement upon seeing a photo of a childhood friend or a departed relative or feel challenged by a new angle on a familiar topic. Yes, some readers are happy to point out errors, but I am more than surprised when a casual reader proclaims, "Oh, that article wasn't about Rhode Island."

The more I study Rhode Island Jewry, the more I think that it is related to everything else. It is not that Rhode Island history must be seen through a Jewish lens or that American Jewish history must employ a Rhode Island perspective. Rather, our history, like our lives, belongs to something larger and grander.

Too often I wonder why more members of our community do not take pride in and support our endeavors. Are some of our relatives, friends, and neighbors unaware of the Association? More perplexing is the thought that many Jews may no longer love learning. While some among us may feel burdened by their memories, do others believe that we are principally products of the present? Or that somebody in another place or time will write our history for us?

I urge our community to rededicate itself to remembering, understanding, and celebrating our past. While the results may often be surprising, they can also be thrilling and joyful.

Once again, I would like to thank so many people who make my work enjoyable and rewarding. They include Stan Abrams and the inquisitive members of the publications committee; Anne Sherman, our steady and loyal office manager; Bobbie Friedman, our talented and upbeat graphic designer; and the professionals of Signature Printing. Our journal could not flourish without you, our imaginative authors and curious readers.

George M. Goodwin

baseball star Ted Williams, an avid fisherman, with M. Charles Bakst in fishing department, Jordan Marsh, Miami



Ted Williams

2/21/57



THE LOPEZ FAMILY OF NEWPORT AND CHARLESTON AND ITS HEIRLOOM

BARRY L. STIEFEL

In his third consecutive article for *The Notes*, Dr. Stiefel builds on his considerable understanding of synagogue architecture. He also displays his deep understanding of Jewish books, which includes their places and means of publication as well as the significance of their ownership. Dr. Stiefel is presently preparing his own Jewish book, based on his impressive dissertation about historic synagogues, for publication by the University of South Carolina Press.

In addition to teaching historic preservation at the College of Charleston, I assist in the library's Special Collections department, cataloguing historic Judaica. Some of this Judaica, dating to the seventeenth century, is rather impressive.¹ One day I was asked to help identify a book recently donated by Charleston's oldest Jewish congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim (KKBE), founded in 1749.

The book looked (and smelled) old, with fragile yellow pages and a cracked leather binding. I carefully used white cloth gloves to open the cover in order to discern the contents of this newly donated treasure. The title page, in Hebrew and Latin, shows that the volume is *Nevi'im* or the Book of Prophets.²

Edited by Rabbi Joseph Athias, it was published in Amsterdam in 1705 by Sumptibus & Mandatis Societatis. On top of the title page is a handwritten inscription:

Ex Libris Alexander McDowell A.D. 1751
 Aaron Lopez [?]un Book
 Wilbraham Jun 20th 1783
 Moses Lopez's Book given him by Uncle
 Mr. A. Lopez

Inside cover page with the names of Moses and Aaron Lopez



Title page of the Book of Prophets

Having recently defended my doctoral dissertation, *The History and Preservation of the Synagogues of the Atlantic World, 1636-1822*, which included extensive research on the Jewish communities of Newport, Charleston, and Amsterdam, Moses Lopez's book struck me as a relic of great significance to American Jewish history and thus a story worth investigating. According to the Worldcat.org database, this copy of this edition of *Prophets* is the only one in a public library on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean.³ So it is indeed rare!

RABBI JOSEPH ATHIAS

The story of this book begins with its editor, Rabbi Joseph Athias, who was born in Spain ca. 1635. By 1648 he and part of his family escaped the Inquisition to Dutch-controlled Recife in Pernambuco, Brazil.⁴ While in Brazil, Athias became reacquainted with Sephardic Judaism. (In 1665 Athias's father, who had remained in Spain, was executed in an auto-da-fé for "Judaizing" or secretly practicing Judaism.)

In 1654 the Portuguese reconquered northeastern Brazil from the Dutch and expelled its Jews.⁵ Most returned to Amsterdam, but others made their way elsewhere. For example, in 1658, following a sojourn in Barbados, approximately 15 families settled in Newport. Considering that a group of Jews from Recife had settled in New Amsterdam in 1654, the Newport community became the first in British North America. It is possible that Joseph Athias was acquainted with Newport's early Jewish colonists, but this community did not survive. A second group of Jews from Curaçao arrived in Newport during the 1670s.

In 1658, already a rabbi in Amsterdam, Joseph Athias established his press, which specialized in Hebrew books for gentile readers. This explains why the book now belonging to the College of Charleston is in Hebrew and Latin. In the wake of the Reformation, the millenarian movement had spread among the Protestants of the Netherlands, the British Isles, and elsewhere in northern Europe. From this movement grew an element of philo-Semitism, which encouraged an understanding of Hebrew.⁶ The English were major customers of Dutch publishing firms, and many English expatriates lived in the Netherlands. Business concerns were probably more significant to Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, but philo-Semitism also enabled the Sephardic Dutch rabbi, Manasseh ben Israel, to convince him in 1655 to readmit Jews to England.

In 1627 Rabbi ben Israel had established Amsterdam's first and most important Jewish press. (Other local publishers of Jewish books included Uri Phoebus and Jacob Proops.) By 1661, however, Athias's printing business was

so well accepted that he was the first Jew admitted to the city's guild of printers. Unfortunately, Athias's press was financially unsuccessful, and he died in debt in 1700.⁷

AARON LOPEZ

Like Rabbi Joseph Athias, Aaron Lopez was originally from Iberia. Born as Duarte Lopez in 1731 in Lisbon, he and his first wife Abigail and their infant daughter fled Portugal in 1750 for Newport, determined to make a full return to Judaism and to join his already established older half-brother, Moses Lopez (1706-1767). (This Moses Lopez was the uncle of the man mentioned in the book.)

Once in Newport, Duarte Lopez was circumcised and took the name Aaron. His papers, including many in the archives of the Newport Historical Society and the American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History in New York, document his involvement in Atlantic trade. Operating within the British, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese empires, Lopez's ships sailed to the British Isles, the Netherlands, the Iberian peninsula, along the eastern seaboard of North America, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and the western coast of Africa. Although they were far-reaching, Lopez's mercantile connections were not unusual within the Sephardic network of the Atlantic world.

Lopez frequently sent ships and cargo to Charleston, South Carolina, where Isaac Da Costa, a business partner, was well established. Da Costa was KKBE's first *hazzan* and in 1753 purchased the land that became the congregation's cemetery. Listed on the cemetery deed are several Jews from Charleston and beyond, including Moses and Aaron Lopez of Newport.⁸

Among the goods that Lopez exported to Charleston were: spermaceti candles (made from sperm whales), furniture, axes, flour, and salted fish. The Newporter also brought slaves from western Africa. For example, in 1763 he imported 134 slaves from the "Guinea coast." Five years later, he brought another 63 slaves to Charleston.⁹

OWNERSHIP OF THE BOOK

It has not been determined when Aaron Lopez came into possession of the book of *Prophets* edited by Rabbi Athias, but the inscription, *Ex Libris* Alexander McDowell A.D. 1751, might be a clue. *Ex Libris*, a Latin term, means *from books*, as in from someone's personal collection or library. Lopez may have purchased the book from McDowell around 1751, which would have been shortly after his

ב"ה

כתובים
Hagiographa.

תהלים משלי איוב שיר השיר'
רות איכה קהלת אסתר דניאל
עזרא נחמיה דברי הימים'
PSALMI, PROVERBIA, JOB, CANTICA
CANTICORUM, RUTH, THRENI,
ECCLESIASTES, ESTHER, DANIEL,
EZRA, NEHEMIA, CHRONICORUM.

חוגה בעין נמרץ
באמשטרדם
נרם בתרומה וכפזות די שותפות יצ"ו
AMSTELODAMI.
Sumpubus & mandatis Societatis.

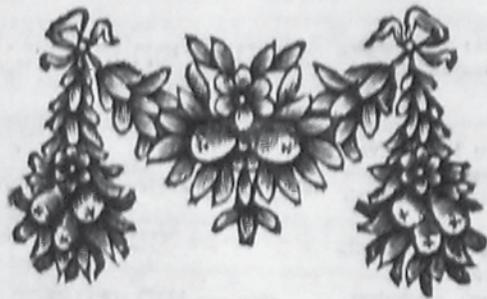
הולך לבית המדרש וינושה חסיד
לא הולך ולא עשה רשע

סכום פסוקי תרי עשר

1 סכום הפסוקים של כל שנים עשר נביאים אלה וחמשים **כי שרית עם אלהים**
 סכום 11 וחצי לכן בגללכם ציון שרה חתומה 111 וסדריו עשרים וחתי' ולכבוד
 אהיה בתוכה סכום

Summa
versuum
omnium
duodecim
Propheta-
rum est 1050. 111. Et symbolum hujus numeri exstat, Gen. 32: 29. Quia de principatu com-
 tendisti eum (כי שרית עם) Deo.
 II Medius versu duodecim Prophetarum versus est, Micha 3: 12. Ideo vestra causa Tlijom.
 quasi error arabum.
 III Et capita ejus Masorethica sunt 21 כ"א. Cujus numeri symbolum occurrat, Zach. 2: 9.
 Et gloria eius (היתה) in medio ejus.

NB. Judaeos XII Prophetas minores unico volumine comprehendere, supputatio haec, pro-
 cipue postrema, manifestum facit.



arrival in Rhode Island. Lopez was a bibliophile, but there are no extant records showing that he donated books to Newport's newly established Redwood Library. Aaron's older half-brother, Moses, had been one of the library's 47 founding "proprietors" in 1747. But McDowell was not a founding proprietor, and his identity remains a mystery.¹⁰

It is enticing to think that the book of Prophets in Aaron Lopez's collection may have at one time, though only briefly, "rubbed jackets" with other books that had comprised the Redwood Library collection. One possible shelf-mate is William Stevenson's *The Sacred History: Containing the History of the Old Testament...* (printed in 1717 and 1731).¹¹ This book of Prophets may also have been a tool in Aaron Lopez's studies with Chaim Isaac Carigal, a visiting rabbi from Palestine, or with Ezra Stiles, Newport's renowned Congregational minister who became president of Yale College, his alma mater.¹²

Most likely Aaron Lopez's book of Prophets was used within Newport's synagogue, which was constructed between 1759 and 1763 and later became known as Touro. One of the building's most generous donors, Lopez was given the honor of laying a cornerstone at the groundbreaking. There are also artifacts still belonging to Touro that are attributed to his patronage.¹³ Peter Harrison, the synagogue's architect and a major bibliophile, had previously designed the Red-



Interior view of Touro Synagogue

wood Library.

During much of the Revolutionary War, Lopez and his extended family lived in Leicester, Massachusetts. On May 27, 1782, while traveling from Leicester to Newport, Lopez drowned in a tragic accident while watering his horse at Scott's Pond, near Smithfield, Rhode Island. Abraham Mendes, Joseph Lopez, and Aaron's nephew Moses Lopez (1744-1830) were named as the administrators of his estate. The will was executed in 1783 following processing in Probate Court.¹⁴ It was probably at this time that the book came into Moses Lopez's possession, which would explain the inscription opposite the title page. Aaron's older brother had died in 1767.

Wilbraham, also inscribed on the book's inside cover, is a town in Massachusetts. It is located close to Springfield, not between Leicester and Newport, so its importance to the book's ownership cannot be determined.

NEW YORK AND CHARLESTON

Shortly after the Revolution, Newport's economy fell into decline and many members once again began to relocate elsewhere. With booming economies, New York and Charleston became primary destinations for Newport's departing



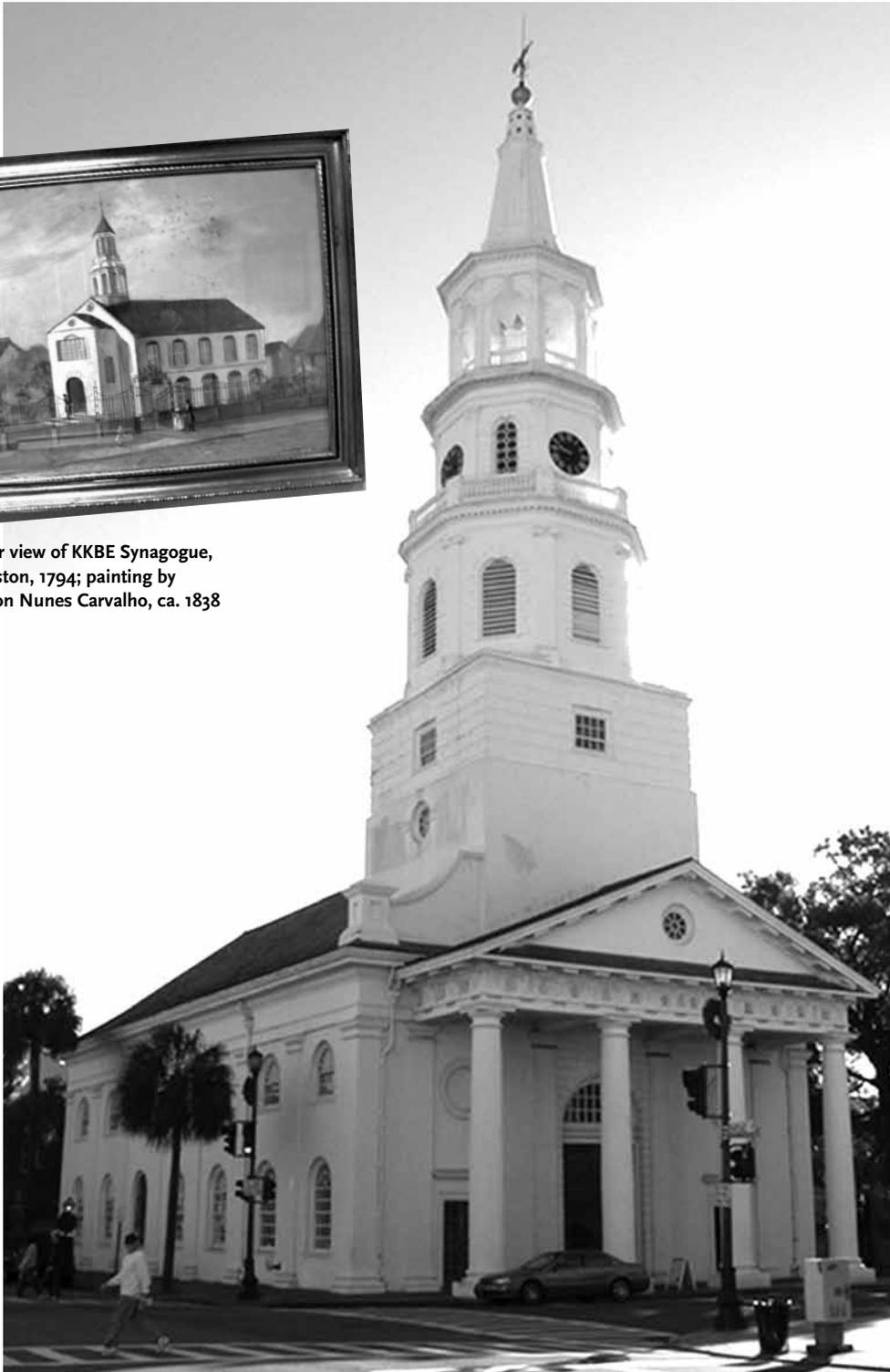
Exterior view of Redwood Library



Exterior view of Touro Synagogue



Exterior view of KKBE Synagogue, Charleston, 1794; painting by Solomon Nunes Carvalho, ca. 1838



Exterior view of St. Michael's Church, Charleston

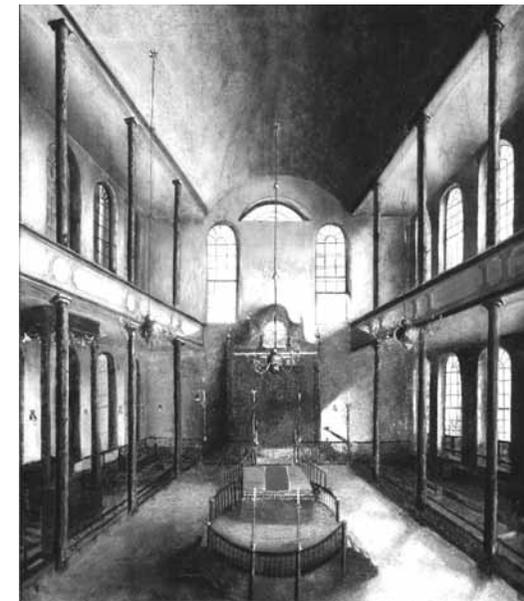
Jews. The doors of Newport's synagogue were finally closed in 1822 when, following the death of his brother Jacob, Moses Lopez departed for New York. The last member of Newport's colonial Jewish community remained there until his death in 1830.¹⁵

Documentary evidence cannot be found, but around 1830 the book may well have made its way from New York to Charleston. By the end of the eighteenth century, Aaron Lopez's nephew, David Lopez, Sr. (1750-1811), and his family were already living there. In 1790 there were 200 Jews living in Charleston, only 42 fewer than in New York. By 1820, however, Charleston's Jewish community, consisting of 700 individuals, was America's largest.¹⁶

KKBE completed its first synagogue in 1794. It was designed by the firm of Steedman & Horlbeck, but it is not known which brothers, James and Charles Steedman or Peter and John Adam Horlbeck, were involved in the project.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Steedman & Horlbeck was influenced by the design of St. Michael's Anglican Church, which, since its completion in 1753, was Charleston's preeminent church. Coincidentally, Samuel Cardy, who is credited with the design and construction of St. Michael's, had his plans reviewed by Peter Harrison, the Newport architect, who also frequented Charleston on business. Thus, there is an indirect link between Touro synagogue and the first KKBE.¹⁸

Five years after the completion of its first synagogue, KKBE was still using an ark that had been made for rented quarters. In 1799, however, David Lopez, Sr. spearheaded efforts to raise funds for the construction of a more extravagant ark. He was given the honor of laying one of its cornerstones, an honor his uncle Aaron had received at Touro's groundbreaking.¹⁹

A member of the Lopez clan probably brought Aaron Lopez's book of Prophets to the first KKBE synagogue during the 1830s, but this building was destroyed in 1838 by a fire that decimated a large swath of the city. The second KKBE, designed by the firm of Tappan & Noble, was built on the same site in 1841.²⁰ It was the first example of an American synagogue designed in the



Interior view of KKBE: painting by Carvalho, ca 1838



Exterior view of KKBE, rebuilt 1841

Greek Revival style. KKBE was even more remarkable as the birthplace of American Reform Judaism. Three decades later Rabbi Isaac M. Wise established the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Hebrew Union College, both in Cincinnati.

The Lopez family was involved with the construction of KKBE's second synagogue. David Lopez, Jr. (1809-1884), a pillar of the Jewish community during the antebellum period, was also a prominent builder in Charleston. In addition to numerous houses, he erected such public and commercial buildings as Zion A.M.E. Church, the Farmer's Exchange Bank, and Institute Hall, where the Confederacy's Ordinance of Secession was signed in 1860. David Lopez, Jr. also built torpedo boats for the Confederacy's navy and served as South Carolina's superintendent of works during the Civil War.²¹ Two sons, John H. Lopez and Moses E. Lopez, served in the Confederate army; the latter participated in the bombardment of Fort Sumter in 1861.²²

It should be noted, however, that David Lopez, Jr. and his immediate family did not at first subscribe to KKBE's liberalism. In 1841, after the congregation voted to install a pipe organ in the sanctuary, he joined Shearith Israel, an Orthodox splinter congregation. After the Civil War, the two congregations merged, so the Lopez family rejoined KKBE. In 1868, however, David Lopez, Jr.

again resigned.²³

The Lopez family's contributions to American Judaism are noteworthy in still another respect. Sally Lopez, a sister of David Lopez, Jr., founded America's second Jewish Sunday school at KKBE in 1844. (The first had been founded by Rachel Gratz in Philadelphia in 1838.) KKBE's first confirmation exercises took place in 1855, when five boys and one girl graduated.²⁴

The Lopez family's book of Prophets may well have been studied during Charleston's congregational schism and later by Sunday school teachers and students. During the Civil War many of KKBE's books and liturgical objects were sent to Columbia, South Carolina for safekeeping. They were destroyed, however, when General William T. Sherman set fire to that city. Thus, the book of Prophets was particularly precious during Reconstruction.

It is not known when or which member of the Lopez family donated the book to KKBE. Between 1872 and 1890, four Lopez men were married in Jewish ceremonies in South Carolina, so, presumably, many relatives continued



Interior view of KKBE

to live in Charleston. The book of Prophets was not presented to the College of Charleston until 2008. By this time the college's Special Collections department had already become the archive of the congregation's oldest records.²⁵

Considering that the Lopez family of Newport and Charleston did not produce a dynasty of rabbis, elected leaders or financiers, it had a remarkable and lasting impact on American Judaism. Within the realm of architecture, Touro is the oldest extant synagogue in the United States, and the second KKBE is the second oldest synagogue on the mainland as well as the oldest extant Reform synagogue in the world.²⁶ Beyond architecture, the Lopez family clearly valued words and books as well as the endearing and enduring bonds they represented.

ENDNOTES

1| The Rosenthal Collection, assembled by William A. Rosenthal, a former rabbi of Charleston's oldest Jewish congregation, was bequeathed to the college in 2006. It includes: many rare books from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries; manuscripts; albums of medals, medallions, and stamps; clippings on every subject, with pamphlets, broadsides, and newspapers; etchings, chromolithographs, watercolors, and cartoons; thousands of vintage postcards and other ephemera; printed games; and one-of-a-kind objects. Harlan Greene, "The Rabbi William A. Rosenthal Collection," *College of Charleston Yashik: Arnold Jewish Studies Program Newsletter* (Spring 2008), 10-11.

2| The missing major Prophets, for no clear reason, are: *Judges*, I and II *Samuel*, I and II *Kings*, and *Isaiah*.

3| Found on Worldcat.org, the world's largest database of library contents and services, on 29 December 2008. All other copies of this book (from the same edition) are only accessible in Dutch public libraries.

4| For more information about Recife's Jewish community, see: Barry Stiefel and George M. Goodwin, "Three New World Synagogues: Symbols of Toleration, Pride, and Continuity," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, XV (2007), 39-69.

5| Joods Historisch Museum, *Joseph Athias*, Joods Historisch Museum (2008), <<http://www.jhm.nl/personen.aspx?naam=Athias,%20Joseph>> (29 December 2008).

6| For more information on English philo-Semitism, see: Margaret Kim, "Benjamin of Tudela in Providence," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, XV (2008), 212-13.

7| Joods Historisch Museum, as above; and Machon Mekorot Institute, "Landmarks in Hebrew Publishing" in *The Judaica Archival Project*, (2000) <<http://www.jerusalembooks.com/jap/bookb1.htm>> (28 June 28, 2009).

8| Barnett A. Elzas, *The Old Jewish Cemeteries at Charleston, S.C.: A Transcript of the Inscriptions on Their Tombstones, 1762-1903* (Charleston: Daggett Print Company, 1903), 3-4.

9| Virginia Bever Platt, "And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage: The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXII (October, 1975), 601-18; and Holly Snyder, *Guide to the Papers of Aaron Lopez (1731-1782)*, 1752-94, 1846, 1852, 1953, Collection P-11, American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History Archives, New York. For the extent of Aaron Lopez's and his Jewish contemporaries' involvement in the slave trade, see, Eli Faber, *Jews, Slaves, and the*

Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

10| An Alexander McDowell was a lieutenant in Colonel Welles's Connecticut regiment of the American army. Court-martialed for desertion on March 7, 1781, McDowell was executed in Hartford two weeks later. J. Hammond Turnbull, ed., *Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884*, Vol. I (Boston: Edward L. Osgood, 1886), 305.

11| Redwood Library & Athenæum, "Original Collection," Redwood Library & Athenæum, (2008) <http://www.redwoodlibrary.org/special_collections/original_collection.html#folio> (29 June 2009).

12| William Pencak, *Jews & Gentiles in Early America, 1654-1800* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 97-9.

13| "Items Relating to the Newport Synagogue," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XXVII (1920), 405-7.

14| Harold Korn, "Documents Relative to the Estate of Aaron Lopez," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, XXXV (1939), 139-143. Moses Lopez was the son of Aaron's brother, Abraham Lopez (1711-1775).

15| Joseph L. Blau and Salo W. Baron, *The Jews of the United States, 1790-1840: A Documentary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 272.

16| Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820*, Vol. I of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. by Henry L. Feingold (5 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 111.

17| Daniel K. Ackermann, "The 1794 Synagogue of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim of Charleston: Reconstructed and Reconsidered," *American Jewish History*, LXXXIII (June 2005), 159-74.

18| Leland M. Roth, *American Architecture: A History* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2001), 95.

19| Daniel K. Ackermann, *Holy Congregation, House of God: KKBE's 1794 Synagogue Reconstructed* (unpublished manuscript, 2004).

20| Gene Waddell, "An Architectural History of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, Charleston," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, LXXXVIII (January 1997), 24-5.

21| Jonathan H. Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 56, 111, 409, 450, 473; and Robert N. Rosen, *Confederate Charleston: An Illustrated History of the City and the People During the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 94.

22| Rosen, 88.

23| Solomon Breibart and others, *Explorations in Charleston's Jewish History* (Charleston: The History Press, 2005), 51-4. Even though David Lopez, Jr. attended the Orthodox congregation, it is difficult to assess his personal convictions. His first wife, Catherine Dobyn Hinton (1814-1843), was not born Jewish and never converted. However, his second wife, Rebecca Moise (1814-1858), was Jewish. Both wives bore him children.

24| Breibart, 95.

25| Barnett A. Elzas, *Jewish Marriage Notices from the Newspaper Press, Charleston, South Carolina (1775-1906)* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1917).

26| The second oldest synagogue in the United States belongs to Congregation Beracha Veshalom Vegmiluth Hasidim in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. It was built in 1833 but under the Danish flag.

“SUCH SCANDALOUS FELLOWS”: AARON LOPEZ AND THE TREVETT AFFAIR OF 1773-74

JAMES ROBERTS

This article is a sequel to the author’s study of Aaron Lopez’s son-in-law and factor, Abraham Pereira Mendes, which appeared in our previous issue. By examining a rich variety of primary source materials, including petitions to Rhode Island’s General Assembly and contemporaneous articles in the *Newport Mercury*, *New York Gazette*, and *Providence Gazette*, Mr. Roberts continues to demonstrate both the complexity and fragility of maritime trade during Newport’s late colonial era.

Nevertheless, Lopez’s accomplishments, disappointments, and frustrations represent only a portion of Mr. Robert’s dissertation about eighteenth-century trade, which he is completing at Johns Hopkins University. When seeking a safe haven from his research and writing, he has been able to help teach courses at Hopkins about colonial America and the American Revolution. He received a Dean’s Teaching Fellowship for his own undergraduate course, “Sailors Ashore, Afloat, and Across the Line to Piracy: Perspectives in Eighteenth-Century Maritime History.” Pirates, however, were most likely not found among the author’s British ancestors. James speculates that had he been living during Aaron Lopez’s era, he would have enjoyed the fate of an indentured laborer or, if fortunate, a shipyard carpenter. If extremely fortunate, he would have avoided the fate of an imprisoned Newport debtor, as described below.

Aaron Lopez’s ascent into the upper ranks of Newport’s merchant elite during the late 1760s and early 1770s was remarkable. From an early career as a retailer and a small-time wholesaler, he amassed the social, material, and financial resources necessary for a successful mercantile career. The house of Lopez only operated well, however, when far-flung nodes in the necessary web of contacts and transactions worked effectively together.

Lopez had learned how hard it could be to find the ideal Caribbean factor when he had unsuccessfully employed his new son-in-law, Abraham Pereira Mendes, for three years. In 1772, after recalling Mendes to his wife in Newport, Lopez centered his Jamaican business on two better candidates: Newport ship

captain Benjamin Wright and Kingston merchant Thomas Dolbeare. Wright had proven his business acumen as the agent who disentangled Lopez’s affairs from Mendes’ misadventures. Unsurprisingly, Lopez sought his services on a regular, residential basis in Jamaica. The captain’s insistence that he periodically return to Newport to see his wife and children meant that Lopez needed more than one competent agent in Jamaica, however.

MAHOGANY BOUND FOR NEWPORT

Dolbeare stepped into this opening in Lopez’s network to serve as factor between July and November, when Wright endeavored to be home.¹ Whether or not he was recommended by Wright, Dolbeare earned Lopez’s trust for several years.

Nevertheless, an episode involving Dolbeare unfortunately strained this trust and tested his connection with Lopez soon after its formation. In early May 1773, Dolbeare met with a friend and a Kingston wharf owner, Philip Cox. Cox sought assistance with a cargo of mahogany bound for Newport aboard the sloop *Hero*. About a year earlier, in March 1772, two mariner-merchants, the Newport brothers Constant Church Trevett and John Trevett, had left a load of mahogany and logwood in Cox’s hands to sell on commission. The prospects must have looked good, for Cox advanced them just over 480 pounds in Jamaican currency. In the course of a year, however, Cox was unable to sell all the mahogany and sought to settle the account in April 1773 with another Trevett brother, Eleazer Jr. The settlement left the Trevetts in debt to Cox for about 235 pounds.

Cox appealed to Dolbeare in the hope that he would secure the assistance of his employer, Aaron Lopez, for the quick completion of his arrangement with Trevett Jr. to sell the mahogany in New England and remit the balance in the form of northern goods. Within about a year of Cox’s meeting with Dolbeare, however, Lopez’s good faith was abused, and he was temporarily out over five hundred pounds.

Existing documents do not reveal what role Dolbeare had played in the genesis of the Cox-Trevett arrangement, but it is clear he was instrumental to Lopez’s involvement in and perhaps his response to the ensuing affair. During the first week of July 1773, soon after entering the sloop *Hero* at Newport, a Captain Parkinson called on Lopez and handed him a bundle of papers introducing the mahogany cargo.² “The Bearer of this [letter,]...,” Dolbeare wrote,

I beg leave to recommend to your best advice and assistance, as he belongs to a Friend of mine here, Mr. Philip Cox...Per the Instrument of agreement accompanying this you’ll perceive that the Mahogany is consigned to Mr. Eleazer

Trevett [Jr.], upon his giving you full and sufficient security for the Amount of the Money due Mr. Cox, for the goodness of which he [Cox] entirely depends on your judgement...[having] nothing here to secure himself with respect to the performance of the agreement...³

Such a letter of introduction requesting assistance was common practice among merchants and ship captains before the age of international shipping corporations.

In this case, Lopez was to ensure that Trevett Jr. produced goods or bills of credit as security so that Cox received the value of the outstanding debt, come what may of Trevett's efforts to sell the wood in Rhode Island. Lopez was also to see that Trevett Jr. dispatched Cox's return cargo within five weeks—the sloop *Hero* may have been rented by the week or month—and “get him to come as near [to Cox's list of desired goods] as possible.”

Furthermore, if Trevett Jr. should come up short with the security, Cox and Dolbeare desired that Lopez sell the mahogany himself within the five-week window, sending white pine boards “and other Articles as you may be able to advance upon the esteemed Value of the Mohogany.”⁴ Although we do not know what Lopez thought about his sudden responsibility in the Cox-Trevett Jr. agreement, we do know that he extended his services.

The merchant-factor relationship underlying Lopez's acceptance of Dolbeare's request involved a mix of benefits and dependence that influenced how the Trevett affair initially unfolded. By a healthy connection to Dolbeare, Lopez gained the benefits of local knowledge and expeditious action in Jamaica. Dolbeare gained through Lopez resources capable of augmenting his own business influence in Kingston. By assisting Cox, Dolbeare extended a degree of patronage that could enhance his standing with local businessmen while helping a friend. For such a maneuver, however, he was dependent upon social capital banked with Lopez, and the latter's receptivity to its merits.

Displaying his sensitivity to this dynamic, Dolbeare flavored his request with deferential gestures to Lopez's generous judgment. “Your particular attention to the Mohogany,” Dolbeare wrote, “will very sensibly oblige me and any favours shewn Captain Parkinson or my Friend will be esteemed as conferred on Your most Obedient Servant.”⁵

Lopez's decision to assist Dolbeare demonstrated his own sensitivity to the value of well managed relations with distant factors. The esteem of Dolbeare's reputation in Kingston was a benefit to Lopez's ventures. Agreeing to add his services to a chain of favors was a business investment of a sort that indicated

Lopez's firm grasp of the personal politics of trade.⁶ By accepting the request, Lopez demonstrated to Dolbeare and Cox why he was so well respected among New England's merchants for his generosity and fair treatment of correspondents and friends.

FAILED ARRANGEMENT

Lopez fulfilled his unexpected obligation and ensured that Cox's New England cargo sailed on time. However, when the sloop *Hero* arrived in Kingston harbor on September 21, after 38 days at sea, Dolbeare and Cox were distressed to learn the arrangement had in fact failed. Neither Eleazer Trevett Jr. nor his brothers had produced the expected security; Eleazer effectively abandoned both the agreement and the wood. The full burden of the plan, hatched without Lopez's consultation, had nevertheless fallen on him. Thus, Lopez advanced 527 pounds to procure the *Hero's* cargo in time to sail.

The Kingston merchants felt their share of the responsibility. “Mr. Cox... appears amazed at the Trevetts [sic] atrocious conduct,” Dolbeare assured, “indeed I have often lamented my troubling you with so trifling an affair, and as it turned out, with such scandalous Fellows.” “The prodigious trouble you have had really pains me.” “[I] never could have thought there was such Villains upon Earth as those have turned out,” Cox himself wrote to Lopez, adding:

Could I have Harboured the least thought they would have behaved in this Manner [I] would have given the whole up at once And been much better pleased than [I] now am. [F]or when [I] Reflect on the trouble it has produced to my Friend [Dolbeare] and my Friend's Friend [Lopez], it makes me unhappy[,] but all [I] can now say on the Subject is, if ever put in my Power[,] [I] will Cheerfully Retaliate for it[.]⁸

Though Trevett Jr. was the culprit in the faltered arrangement, Dolbeare and Cox were at pains to control its fallout.

At stake were reputations. Several hundred pounds could, with a little effort, be made up. Indeed, within five months of the *Hero's* return to Kingston, Dolbeare and Cox had sent the sum owed Lopez directly to London to offset his debt with creditors there, a series of transactions matter-of-factly reported in their letters.⁹ More ink was spilt to avoid lingering damage to personal characters. “I hope ever to retain a lively sense of what a deal of trouble you have had in this matter,” Dolbeare assured Lopez. “I *think* I may say, you will never have any more from my quarter.”¹⁰ “To make amends in some degree,” he added in a subsequent letter, “I must desire, that in whatever commands you may lay me

under in future, you'll never think you are troubling me."¹¹

Dolbeare recognized that Lopez had acted only on his recommendation and that he had miscalculated. We cannot know, however, why Dolbeare misjudged the Trevetts. Perhaps his eagerness to assist his friend Cox had clouded his judgment. "I did something suspect them [the Trevetts]," Dolbeare confessed, "but [I] could not think they were so egregiously wicked."¹²

Once the troubled affair came to light, Cox, for his part, sought a speedy resolution, even at a financial loss to himself. "[I] much wish an end...put to [this dispute]...Which once done I shall be well Satisfied be it as it will," he explained to Lopez, "[I] have not the least Hopes [of] getting a Farthing from those Wretches." "[I] most Heartily wish," he urged, "you [will] put an end to this troublesome Matter at any rate."¹³ Cox sought to avoid such an outcome as would cast him as disputatious and worth avoiding.¹⁴

If Dolbeare had had the luxury of rapid communication with Rhode Island colleagues, he could have learned the Trevetts had in fact been involved in several vexatious disputes with merchants and captains in previous years. These disputes were paraded in petitions before the Rhode Island General Assembly and publicly aired in newspapers.¹⁵ Very likely, Dolbeare would have thought twice about drawing Lopez into a troublesome affair.

We can only surmise what Lopez's opinions were at that moment. Many colonial Newport merchants at one time or another were involved in disputes and compelled to publicly air grievances or petition the Assembly. Perhaps to be fair, therefore, Lopez did not allow possible negative associations from the Trevetts' earlier episodes to preclude his acceptance of the agreement. Whatever his thinking, Lopez accepted the obligation.

TREVETT JR.'S IMPRISONMENT

Whether or not the Trevetts were "villains" in character or practice, it is clear that Eleazer Trevett Jr. was in a poor position to fulfill his agreement with Cox, Dolbeare, and Lopez. Shortly after abandoning the wood and his responsibility to Lopez, the tenuousness of Trevett Jr.'s finances came to light. Delinquent in his debts with more than a dozen people in town, Trevett Jr. was imprisoned in Newport's jail. In all likelihood, however, he was less a deliberate villain than a careless and unlucky merchant with a weak grasp of the niceties of dealing with correspondents and associates.

In April 1774, about nine months after he left Lopez in a lurch, an advertisement in the *Newport Mercury* made it "publicly...known unto all the credi-

tors of Eleazer Trevett [Jr.] (an insolvent debtor) that they may appear before the justices of the superior court...and there exhibit and prove their several demands..."¹⁶ A subsequent advertisement in May included an inventory of "losses, and unavoidable misfortunes" on eight voyages between 1769 and 1773 which, along with 500 pounds in vague and undated "sundry bad debts," amounted to 4,760 pounds in Rhode Island Old Tenor, or 1,071 pounds sterling.¹⁷

By fumbling from one poor venture to another, Eleazer Trevett Jr. built insurmountable debt. Perhaps he had counted on the assistance of his brothers or friends in order to meet the security demand for Lopez. If he was more a victim than a villain in the transaction, however, he did a poor job of eliciting sympathy from Dolbeare, Cox, and the ordinarily congenial Lopez.

INSOLVENCY

Beginning in the 1750s, Rhode Island's General Assembly had accepted pleas for insolvency on a limited, targeted basis. During the following decade, merchants' continued recourse to insolvency petitions extended these provisions into general practice. By the early 1770s, Trevett Jr.'s imprisonment and public advertisement were standard for individuals seeking a reprieve from their debts and creditors.

While sensible individuals aimed to avoid insolvency, merchants and politicians plainly saw its relationship to the largely unavoidable commercial risks involved in maritime trade. If trade should be encouraged, then measures to address the ill-effects of risk made sense. To this end, an insolvent debtor such as Trevett Jr. stayed in jail until he organized his creditors and finances behind a petition for the Assembly. If successful, a petition would result in the appointment of commissioners to assign assets to creditors and issue a discharge certificate permitting a fresh start.

Between 1763 and 1770, an average of sixteen petitions passed before the Assembly annually; only one-third were refused. Being more vulnerable than most to the risk and uncertainty of maritime trade, such small-scale merchants as the Trevetts were most likely to enter insolvency pleas. In fact, Trevett Jr. and three other merchants were living in Newport's small jail during the summer of 1774, the year with the highest number of insolvency petitions for that decade.¹⁸

TREVETT JR.'S RELEASE

Though upsetting, incarceration for debt was largely procedural. But Eleazer's experience proved troublesome, and Lopez was the cause. Debtors were not strictly

confined to cells or limited in their activities within Rhode Island's jails. They could work in and around a jail to support families or chip away at debts, and, for a fee, live in rooms with their families in cases in which homes were lost.¹⁹ Once a deserving debtor's petition was wending through Assembly sessions, he or she was discharged from jail pending judgment. By the time Eleazer published his losses in the May 30 issue of the *Newport Mercury*, he had been in jail nine months (since his abuse of Lopez and the agreement with Cox). His family lived in jail with him. Unlike a cabinetmaker or cobbler, however, a mariner-merchant could not readily work while in prison. His ability to invest in voyages or a cargo depended on his actively sailing as a captain or in joint ventures with merchants.

Thus, Eleazer's only chance to escape his predicament was a petition supported by his creditors. By July 21, 1774, he could write that "of Sixteen Creditors, thirteen have signed my Petition & two more are very willing to give me a time to pay them." But Lopez was uncooperative. "You are the Only Person thatt is the means of my being Confin'd in Prison," he wrote in the same letter. "If my being in prison was any Service to You or Mr. Cox the affair would be Different, butt itt is Other ways," he reasoned. "I will do my utmost to pay according to my proposals if I am Releas'd, & If I am to be Confin'd for Life I certainly must be maintain'd, tho itt is in a Miserable way."²⁰

Trevett's proposal to remit just over 351 pounds over six years failed to elicit a response from Lopez. Nor did pointing out the impediments to repaying any sum "as Long as [he was] under Confinement and Suffering in Prison with a family for want of the Necessarys [sic] of Life..." move Lopez to assist him more than a month after the majority of Trevett Jr.'s creditors had signed their support of his petition.²¹ Lopez had accepted the Cox-Trevett Jr. agreement based on the request and recommendations of Dolbeare, his trusted Kingston factor. Trevett Jr.'s poor handling of the affair strained that trust, inconvenienced all parties, and evidently struck a nerve. Thus, Lopez was in no hurry to relieve him of the inconveniences of jail.

Almost a year after Trevett Jr.'s imprisonment for debt, Lopez finally came around. The General Assembly began consideration of Trevett Jr.'s petition in late August 1774 and granted it in October. Lopez left no explanation of what changed his mind. Perhaps the effectiveness of Eleazer's appeals gradually improved. He invoked a sense of common vulnerability to a predicament such as his that may have softened Lopez. "[I] must putt you in mind," he suggested, "thatt you have Children, who may, tho' you are now in verry Affluent Circumstances, be in my Situation..." It is more likely, however, that Trevett Jr.'s proposal

in early August to endorse to Lopez the proceeds of an earlier Antiguan venture elevated his pleas, complaints, and rather vague plans to remit three notes over six years to the concrete level of cautious business toward which Lopez was better disposed.²²

LOPEZ'S MOTIVATIONS

Contemporaries and historians seem to agree that Lopez was renowned for his compassion and generosity among Atlantic merchants.²³ What, then, might explain his apparently hard dealing with Trevett Jr. once a jailed debtor? Why did Lopez delay accepting the discharge of a man who implored him "to Consider thatt nott only my Self, Butt my family are Suffering"?²⁴

Very few letters written by Lopez exist to illuminate his opinions of the people and events around him. Contextual evidence does offer a partial explanation of his attitude toward his debtor, however, and suggests that Trevett Jr. crossed Lopez at a sensitive time, despite characterizations of the early 1770s as Lopez's "golden years."

The specter of financial failure was not an abstract or paranoid consideration among Newport's merchants. Just a few years earlier, in 1772, some of Lopez's friends and associates within the Jewish community (with whom he had shared the occasional venture, petition, and commercial edge) saw their financial efforts unravel. Moses Michael Hays, Myer Pollock, Isaac Elizer, and Naphtali and Isaac Hart submitted insolvency petitions.²⁵ Everyone knew somebody who had faltered, sometimes extraordinarily so. For example, Mathew Cozzens' petition to the Assembly inventoried sixteen failed voyages between 1760 and 1772, amounting to a loss of 257,985 pounds Old Tenor.²⁶

Lopez was not in a precarious position with respect to the money he advanced on account of Trevett Jr.'s neglect. At the time, however, he was acutely aware of his own balancing act. While in debt to the London firm of Hayley & Hopkins for 12,000 pounds, he continued to distribute capital and material assets across numerous, often uncertain ventures.²⁷ Only a year before the Trevett affair, Lopez had set aside his usual private manner of business to publicly air a dispute in newspapers when he discovered that Samuel Allen II endeavored to defraud him.²⁸ Quite possibly, Trevett Jr. crossed Lopez when he had grown weary of unscrupulous traders.

It does not appear that Lopez personally had Eleazer Trevett Jr. thrown in jail on account of the faltered agreement. Once he was there, however, it seems to have suited Lopez's mood just fine to let a protracted stint in jail impress upon

Trevett Jr., and any observers of the affair, that he insisted on fair and sound practices to keep business on as even a keel as possible.

The Trevett-Cox affair began for Lopez when Thomas Dolbeare, the Jamaican factor on whom he depended for accuracy and clear judgment in distant affairs, misread a situation. A seemingly minor transaction evolved into a 13-month-long entanglement. Lopez's fortune was in no way jeopardized by his outlay, and his good name in London and in Kingston was left unsullied. The episode is more interesting for its exposure of the social capital and webs of dependence underlying maritime mercantile affairs.

The Trevett affair reminds us, then, of the stresses hidden from view behind Aaron Lopez's impressive legacy as one of the great merchants of Newport's golden age. It also exposes the sometimes fallible, if not misguided, human machinations behind economic success and failure, a point as salient today as ever.

ENDNOTES

1| Virginia Bever Platt, "'And Don't Forget the Guinea Voyage': The Slave Trade of Aaron Lopez of Newport," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, XXXII (4), (October 1975), 611-2.

2| The date of the vessel's arrival is taken from *Newport Mercury*, 5 July 1773, 3.

3| Thomas Dolbeare to Aaron Lopez, Kingston, 15 May 1773, Commerce of Rhode Island, 1726-1800 [Hereafter CRI], (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1914), Vol. 1, 438-9.

4| *Ibid.*, 438-9.

5| *Ibid.*, 438-9.

6| Peter Mathias, "Risk, Credit, & Kinship in Early Modern Enterprise," in John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, eds., *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 16-17, 28-31; Sherylyne Haggerty, "A Link in the Chain: Trade and the Transshipment of Knowledge in the Late Eighteenth Century," *International Journal of Maritime History*, XIV (1) (2002), 169-72.

7| Dolbeare to Lopez, Kingston, 9 December 1773, in *CRI*, 468-9.

8| Philip Cox to Lopez, Kingston, 26 February 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, Connecticut [Hereafter Mystic].

9| Dolbeare to Lopez, Kingston, 9 December 1773, in *CRI*, 468-9.

10| Italics in the original: Dolbeare to Lopez, Kingston, 2 October 1773, in *CRI*, Vol. 1, 454-5.

11| Dolbeare to Lopez, Kingston, 9 December 1773, in *CRI*, 468-9.

12| Dolbeare to Lopez, Kingston, 2 October 1773, in *CRI*, Vol. 1, 454-5.

13| Cox to Lopez, Kingston, 26 February 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, White Library, Mystic.

14| For the greater problem of lost reputation over money, anxiety over errors affecting friends or associates, and the gendered resonances of a merchant's fallen credibility and reputation, see Toby

L. Ditz, "Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled: Mercantile Representations of Failure and the Gendered Self in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Journal of American History*, LXXXI (June 1994), 67-9.

15| See Constant Church Trevett et al vs. Richard Bissell in *Newport Mercury*, 1 January 1770, and *New York Gazette; and Weekly Mercury*, Jan 8 1770; See Eleazer Trevett Jr., *Petition to the Rhode Island General Assembly*, 11 September 1769, Petitions to the General Assembly, 14:160, Rhode Island State Archives.

16| *Newport Mercury*, 11 April 1774.

17| *Newport Mercury*, 30 May 1774.

18| Eleazer Trevett Jr., *Petition to the Rhode Island General Assembly*, 29 October 1774, *Petitions to the General Assembly*, 15:87, Rhode Island State Archives; Peter J. Coleman, "The Insolvent Debtor in Rhode Island, 1745-1828," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, XXII (3), (July 1965), 413-15, 421; For the association of bankruptcy protection with commerce and risk-taking merchants before and after the American Revolution, see Bruce H. Mann, *Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of American Independence*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 79-85, 208. Insolvency legislation and an acceptance of a culture of commercial risk did not wholly or rapidly displace assessments of the shortcomings of individual character or morality in merchants' correspondence when ascribing causes for mercantile failures. See Ditz, "Shipwrecked: or, Masculinity Imperiled," 58.

19| *Ibid.*, 85. For the daily activities and small projects undertaken to earn money while a debtor in Newport Jail, see Virginia Steele Wood, ed., "A Rhode Island Patriot in Newport Jail: The Diary of Benjamin Underwood of Jamestown, 10 February-5 March 1783," *Newport History*, LXXI (2000), 1-22.

20| Trevett Jr. to Lopez, [Newport Jail], 21 July 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, White Library, Mystic.

21| Trevett Jr. to Lopez, Newport Prison, 5 July 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, White Library, Mystic; Eleazer Trevett Jr. *Petition to the Rhode Island General Assembly* 29 October 1774, Petitions to the General Assembly, 15:87, Rhode Island State Archives.

22| Quote in Eleazer Trevett Jr. to Aaron Lopez, Newport, 21 July 1774. For Antigua cargo arrangement, see Eleazer Trevett Jr. to Aaron Lopez, Newport, 2 August 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, White Library, Mystic.

23| Stanley F. Chyet, "Aaron Lopez: A Study in *Buenafama*," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, LIII (1963), 302-3, *passim*.

24| Trevett Jr. to Lopez, [Newport Jail], 21 July 1774, VFM 734 MC 49.792 MC 59.1, White Library, Mystic.

25| Marylin Kaplan, "The Jewish Merchants of Newport, 1749-1790," in George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith, eds., *The Jews of Rhode Island* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 2004), 20-1; Stanley F. Chyet, *Lopez of Newport: Colonial American Merchant Prince* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 35, 49, 75, 118.

26| Petitions and inventories of Mathew Cozzens, May 1774, in *Petitions to the General Assembly*, Vol. 15: 1772-1775, film C000137, No. 80, Rhode Island State Archives.

27| For discussion of the various circumstances contributing to individuals' insolvency, see Coleman, "Insolvent Debtor in Rhode Island," 423-6. For Lopez's English debts, see Chyet, *Lopez of Newport*, 122-3.

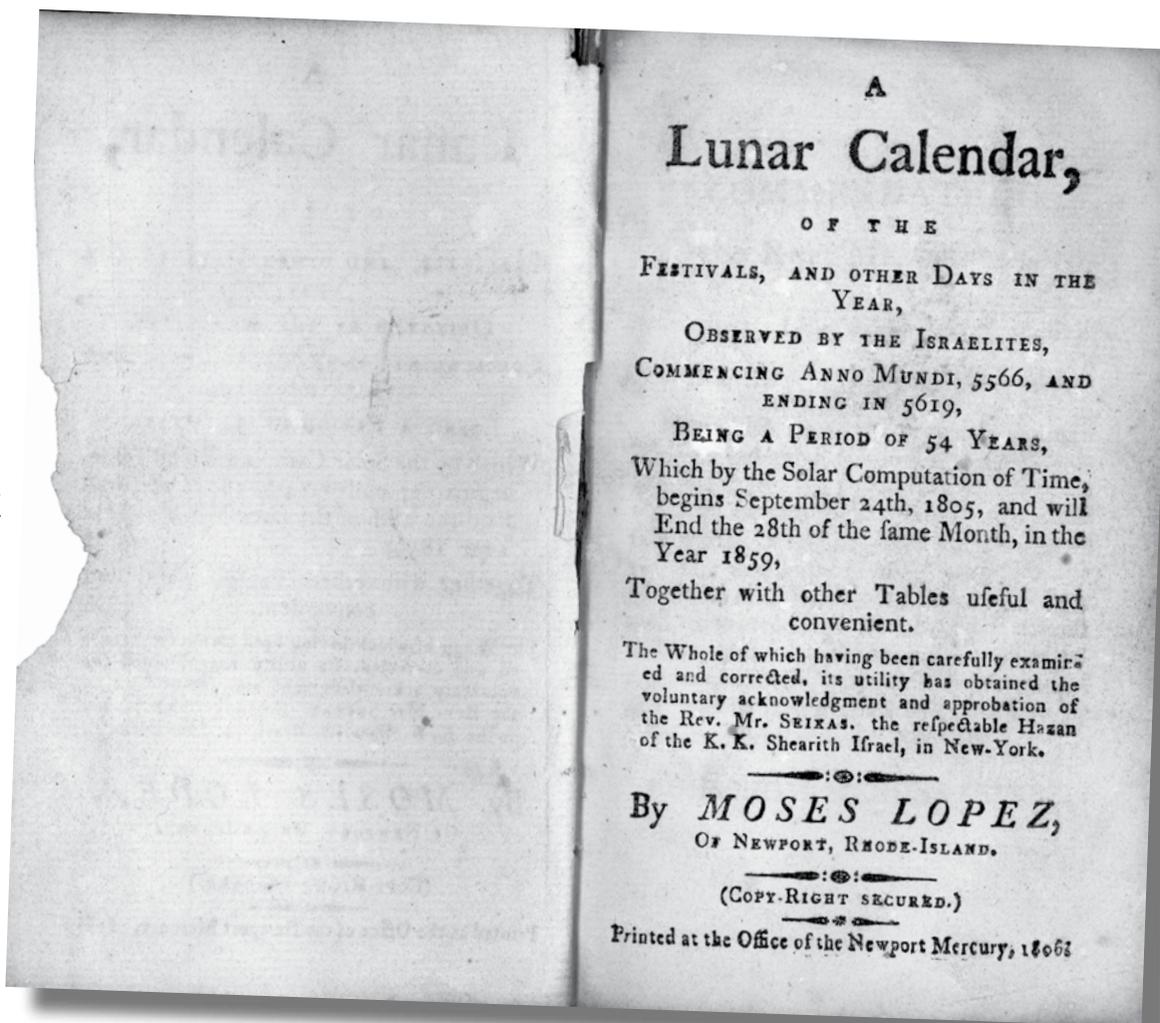
28| *Providence Gazette*, 8 February 1772.

TWO COPIES OF A PRINTED EARLY AMERICAN JEWISH CALENDAR IN PROVIDENCE

MICHAEL SATLOW

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If this article is his first foray into American Jewish history, it should lead to many others. Dr. Satlow's article suggests, moreover, that many treasures of Rhode Island Jewish history remain buried in local archives and libraries.



RIHS copy

The first book-length version of the Jewish calendar published in America was printed in Newport¹ in 1806. Authored by Moses Lopez, it is entitled: *A Lunar Calendar, of the Festivals, and Other Days in the Year, Observed by the Israelites, Commencing Anno Mundi, 5566, and Ending in 5619, being a Period of 54 Years, Which by the Solar Computation of Times, Begins September 24th 1805, and will End the 28th of the Same Month, in the Year 1859*. Several copies of the book, consisting of about 130 unnumbered pages, are extant in libraries and private collections.² The volume, well noted (although not fully treated) by scholars, is freely accessible in microform and the digitization of that microform copy.³

I am presently preparing a full scholarly treatment of this calendar, its circulation, and use. Although the first part of this article will very briefly discuss

the book itself and its authorship, the second part is devoted to the handwritten marginalia on two extant copies. Two copies are located within blocks of each other: one at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, the other in the library of the Rhode Island Historical Society. These copies open a small window onto the lives of several prominent Jewish families in nineteenth-century America.

First, a few words about the book and its author are in order. Several men named Moses Lopez lived in and around Newport during this time. Our author is not the more famous Moses Lopez, Aaron's stepbrother, who arrived in Newport in the early 1740s and held a patent on potash.⁴ It was, rather, their nephew, who was born as Edward in 1744 to Portuguese Jews who had emigrated

to America. He and his two brothers were circumcised in Tiverton in 1767.⁵

Not much is known of this Moses Lopez. From his later correspondence with Stephen Gould, he appears to have been a small merchant with perhaps some additional income from renting an apartment or two. He did not appear to marry, instead living with one of his brothers until the latter's death. At that point, suffering from rheumatism, he moved to New York in 1822, and was said to have been "the last [Jew] who quited [sic] the town."⁶ He died in New York and was interred in Newport.⁷ In 1805, when he authored the calendar, he was thus 61 years old and one of the very few Jews left in Newport. He does not say anything in his preface about why he wrote it.

The calendar, which he apparently published at his own expense using the presses of *The Newport Mercury*, contains nine tables, and is prefaced with a recommendation from Gershom Mendes Seixas, then the *hazzan* (spiritual leader) of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York. The first two tables, facing each other on each folio, comprise the bulk of the book. Table I contains the dates of Jewish holidays and other days of liturgical import (e.g., Rosh Hodesh, or the New Moon, which requires some minor liturgical adjustments). Table II details which Torah readings (*parshiyot*) correspond to each Sabbath. This set of tables covers the years 1805/6 to 1858/9. The later tables give the Hebrew dates for each Jewish holiday; provide the key to the lectionary readings indicated in Table II as well as the readings for Jewish holidays; and give the hour to commence the Sabbath in the City of New York, adjusted for the time of year.⁸ There is also a brief chart of the "dominical letters," (a method used for finding the day of the week of a given calendar date) which Lopez states he found helpful for calculating the calendar.

The calendar thus appears geared primarily for synagogue use, aiding determination of the proper liturgy and readings. Secondly it would have been helpful for individuals who wanted to know when the holidays fell and other liturgical modifications were required. Whether or not this is actually how the calendar was used, we shall shortly see that it was also used to address other needs.

JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY'S COPY

This copy of Lopez's calendar has an inscription on the inside front cover: "This calendar must be kept as a memento on account of its rarity and usefulness in ascertaining [sic] back-dates in Lunar calculations. Jacob Ezekiel Cinti 2/22 '97 (see page 1812-5572)." On the page for 1812/5572, on the first table, there is a

star between June 11-28, referencing "Jacob Ezekiel" written on the bottom; the same appears, crossed out, on the next page— apparently a mistake. Ezekiel is mentioned once more in the book. At the top of Seixas's recommendation page is an inscription that reads: "By S. Morais to his old and dear friend Jacob Ezekiel June 5th/'88."

Although Morais and then Ezekiel owned this book at the end of the nineteenth century, Levy Phillips of Philadelphia was the original owner of this copy. His name is all over the book. One of the blank pages at the beginning is inscribed with his name and the date "Jan. 7th 1808." He also inscribed his name on the book's back page and on the side on the page with the table for 1809. His Hebrew name, in block script, appears on the side of the table for the previous year, 1808: Levi ben k'h [for kohen?] Yohanan z'l.

Levy Phillips was born (probably in Philadelphia) in 1754. His parents were Jonas (or Yohanan), an immigrant from Bohemia who died in 1794, and Fanny Brandley Phillips. Levy, a merchant in Philadelphia, was a member of Congregation Mikve Israel; he in fact served as the *parnass* from 1818 to 1821.⁹ He married Leah Simon on October 19, 1785 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania,¹⁰ and died on January 16, 1832 in Philadelphia.

The calendar is in good condition and does not contain any annotations; it is unclear how often and for what purpose he might have used it. At some point it appears to have passed into the hands of S. Morais, most likely Sabato Morais. Sabato was the Italian-born rabbi of congregation Mikveh Israel (from 1851 until his death in 1897) and later a founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.¹¹ He was also the father of Henry Samuel Morais, author of *The Jews of Philadelphia*. In that book, Henry provides a long and warm biography of Jacob Ezekiel, who is indeed noted as having been born on June 28, 1812 in Philadelphia, and was residing in Cincinnati in 1894 (at the time of the publication of *The Jews of Philadelphia*).¹² He died on May 16, 1899.¹³

According to Morais, Ezekiel was the second of four children. He was reared primarily by his uncle, who arranged two apprenticeships for him: one with a dyer and chemist, the other with a bookbinder. After these apprenticeships, when he was 20, he moved to Baltimore and then Richmond, Virginia, where he lived from 1834 to 1869, running a dry goods business with his brother-in-law. He served in the Confederate army. Ezekiel was active in the Jewish community and as an advocate for Jewish causes; in 1849 he helped rescind a law that prohibited work on Sunday, which penalized Sabbath-observant Jews. He moved to Cincinnati in 1869, and was soon elected to the board of governors

of Hebrew Union College. He might be best remembered, though, as the father of his more famous son, the sculptor Moses Jacob Ezekiel.¹⁴

It is likely that Ezekiel was familiar with Lopez's calendar well before he received his copy from Morais in 1888, which was in turn well after it ceased to be of any practical use. Ezekiel is credited in the first volume of Isaac Leiser's *Occident and American Jewish Advocate* in 1843 with contributing the column that details the commencement times for the Sabbath, which are identical to those found in Lopez's calendar.¹⁵

Ezekiel's involvement with Hebrew Union College might explain the last stage of the book's journey to the collections of the John Carter Brown Library. Ezekiel may have given or sold his copy to the young Englander, who was a 22-year-old student in Cincinnati at the time of Ezekiel's death. It also may have ended up in Englander's hands via some other association with Hebrew Union College.

Englander (1877-1951), the son of a Hebrew teacher, received his bachelor's degree at the University of Cincinnati and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1901.¹⁶ While serving congregations in Ligonier and South Bend, Indiana, he took graduate studies in Bible and Semitics at the University of Chicago. Between 1905 and 1910, however, he resided in Providence, where he was rabbi of Congregation Sons of Israel and David (later known as Temple Beth-El). While studying for his Ph.D. at Brown University, which was conferred in 1909, he was a lecturer in biblical history and literature. Rabbi Englander resigned from Beth-El to join the faculty of his alma mater, Hebrew Union College, and to return to the city of his childhood. In 1933 Rabbi Englander, a professor of medieval Jewish exegesis, donated his copy of the calendar to the John Carter Brown Library, perhaps in part because the library at Hebrew Union College already owned a copy of Lopez's book.¹⁷

Had Professor Englander kept his copy of the calendar until his death, it may also have ended up in Providence. In 1951 Rabbi William G. Braude of Temple Beth-El arranged to purchase remnants of Professor Englander's library for the Temple's library. Indeed, Professor Englander had recommended his protégé, Rabbi Braude, to his former congregation in Providence. Perhaps in October 1932, when Professor Englander installed Rabbi Braude at Beth-El, the idea of a gift to the John Carter Brown Library occurred to him.

RHODE ISLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S COPY

This copy of Lopez's calendar is far more heavily annotated and of more historical

interest. The inside cover is inscribed, "Presented to Mr. Jacob I. Cohen by Naphtali Phillips New York 11th be'Adar 5570." This corresponded to March 17, 1810.¹⁸

Naphtali Phillips (1773-1870) is well known. He was the proprietor of the *National Advocate*, a New York newspaper, and he served as president of Congregation Shearith Israel for 14 terms. Having deep historical interests, he wrote a history of Jews in New York.¹⁹ In 1797 in Newport, he had married Rachel Hannah Seixas, the daughter of Moses Mendez Seixas and the sister of Gershom Mendez Seixas. Phillips may have briefly lived in Newport before taking up permanent residence in New York in 1801.²⁰ Rachel died in 1822, and Phillips soon married Esther Seixas, Rachel's cousin, who was also from Newport.

Although the precise circumstances of Phillips's acquisition of a spare copy of Lopez's calendar must remain obscure, it is probable that Phillips did not purchase it himself. He almost certainly knew Lopez personally through his connection to Newport. Even if Lopez did not himself give Phillips the calendar, Gershom Seixas (his wife's uncle) or Shearith Israel might have had spare copies. It is somewhat curious that Naphtali Phillips, at least between 1843 and 1844, possessed a handwritten Jewish calendar.²¹

Jacob I. Cohen (1744-1823), an immigrant in 1773 from Oberdorf, Bavaria, was a successful merchant in Charleston, Richmond, and Philadelphia.²² After spending most of his career in Richmond, he moved to Philadelphia in 1806 and became the *parnas* of Congregation Mikve Israel in 1810.²³ Perhaps it was in connection to this office that Naphtali Phillips presented him with this calendar. I have been unable to find other evidence of an association between Cohen and Phillips. Cohen, on the other hand, clearly knew Levy Phillips in Philadelphia, the owner of the copy of Lopez's calendar discussed above. Cohen not only made bequests to him and his wife in his will, but also appointed him as an executor of his estate.²⁴

Curiously, it appears that an extant, handwritten Hebrew calendar, produced in Philadelphia for the year 1778-9, was inscribed by Jacob Cohen's second wife, Rachel Jacobs (Polack). It was inscribed no earlier than 1807, when they were married.²⁵ It is unclear if this handwritten calendar was in her or her family's possession prior to 1807, or if it somehow belonged to Cohen.

There are some markings in the Historical Society's copy of the book that appear to have been made prior to 1810. Table II (which indicates the lectionary readings for 1807 and 1809) contains clarifying notations. It appears that Phillips, or whoever might have owned the calendar at that time, used it within a synagogue context.

1813. TABLE I. Year 5574.

(1)	(2)	(3)
Sept. 25, 26	Tifri Roffanna	Satur. Sun.
27	Fast of Gedaliah	Mond.
Oct. 4	Kipur	Mond.
9 10	Sucot	Satur. Sun.
15	Hoffanna Raba	Frid.
24 25	Roshodes Hefvan	Sun. Mon.
Nov. 23 24	Roshodes Kisleu	Tuef. Wed.
Dec. 18	Hanuca	Satur.
23 24	Roshodes Tebet	Thurf. Frid.
1814. Jan. 2	Fast of Tebet	Sund.
22	Roshodes Sebat	Satur.
Feb. 20 21	Roshodes Adar	Sun. Mon.
Mar. 3	Fast of Esther	Thurf.*
6 7	Purim	Sun. Mon.
22	Roshodes Niffan	Tuef.
Apr. 5 6	Peffah	Tuef. Wed.
20 21	Roshodes Yiar	Wed. Thur.
May 4	Peffah Seni	Wed.
8	33 of Homer	Sund.
20	Roshodes Sivan	Frid.
25 26	Sebuot	Wed. Thur.
Jun. 18 19	Roshodes Tamus	Satur. Sun.
July 5	Fast of Tamus	Tuef.
18	Roshodes Ab	Mond.
26	Tifhabeab	Tuef.
Aug. 16 17	Roshodes Elul	Tuef. Wed.

Complete Common Year,
containing 355 days.

2 יא 17 טלגנוואר ב' 70 יאר
2 יא 17 טלגנוואר ב' 70 יאר

1813. TABLE II. Year 5574.

(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Oct. 23	1 H. Berefit		May 7	31	
30	2			14 32 33	
Nov. 6	3			21 34	
13	4			28 35	
20	5	Paraffas.	Jun. 4	36	
27	6			11 37	
Dec. 4	7			18 38	
11	8			25 39	
18	9	S. Hanuca	July 2	40	
1814. 25	10	S. ditto.		9 41	
Jan. 1	11			16 42 43	
8	12			23 44	
15	13			30 45	Com'ts
22	14		Aug. 6	46	
29	15			13 47	
Feb. 5	16			20 48	
12	17	Com'ts.		27 49	
19	18	P. Secalim	Sept. 3	50	
26	19			10 51	
Mar. 5	20	P. Zachor		17 52	5575.
12	21	P. Para		24 0	S. Kipur
19	22 23	Ahodes	Oct. 1	53	
26	24			7 54	H. Tora
Apr. 2	25	S. Agadol			Frid. S
9	0	S. Peffah			
16	26				
23	27 28				
30	29 30				

ב' 70 יאר טלגנוואר ב' 70 יאר
1744 טלגנוואר ב' 70 יאר

Following common practice (as we saw in Levy Phillip's copy), Cohen inscribed his name in the book several additional times. On the page containing Table I for 1825, he wrote in the margin, "Jacob I. Cohen" and then his name in Hebrew script, "Yaakov ben Yehusha kohen," followed by a Yiddish word. In the middle of the page containing the dominical letters (Table IX), he wrote "Jacob I. Cohen's Book," and then in Hebrew script, "Yaakov kohen."

While we might assume that Cohen made these inscriptions around the time he received the book, his other annotations seem to begin in 1813. At the bottom of the pages containing Tables I and II for 1813/14, Cohen scrawled a Yiddish notation. It mentions the year 1744 and that he is 70 years old, and ends with his Hebrew name.

In 1817, on Table II by the date corresponding to Adar 27, Cohen notes a death. On the next page, on the bottom, he makes a Yiddish notation in thick ink, mentioning the number 27. In Table II, Cohen carefully marked the secular date for Adar 27 for each year through 1858.²⁶ Cohen prepared to use the book to mark a *Yahrzeit*, an anniversary of a death.

Another life-cycle event appears to be noted on the inside of the second blank page at the beginning of the book, in a very light hand: "5 Hesvan 5582 at 30 minutes past 12 o'clock at Night. Nov 1 1821." It marks the death of Cohen's second wife, Rachel.²⁷ It is unclear if the writing, which is lighter than Cohen's other notations, is his.

In the left-hand margin of Table I, between the years 1830 and 1843, seven names, with their Hebrew and English dates, are written around their appropriate place in the table. The inscriptions (and years in which the tables begin) are: Mendes, 4 May/21 Yiar (1830); Katharine, 3 Oct./19 Tishri (1833); Miriam, 5 Sept./11 Elul (1834); Margaret, 20 Feb./15 Adar (1836); Bertha, 12 Apr./17 Nisan (1837); Jacob, 6 Novemb./21 Hesvan (1841); Rebecca, 25 Sep./1 Rosh (1843).

These inscriptions are the birthdates of Jacob Cohen's grandnephews and grandnieces, the children of his nephew, David I. Cohen. David Cohen was the son of Jacob's brother Israel; the family settled in Baltimore in 1808.²⁸ In his will, Jacob Cohen bequeathed to his nephew David a property in Richmond; David was also to share with his many siblings in any remaining property and personal effects not specifically assigned in the will.²⁹ Although Jacob Cohen assigned his "Hebrew and English Books" to his wife and to David's older brother (also named Jacob I. Cohen), this calendar clearly ended up in David's possession.

David I. Cohen lived from 1800 to 1847, primarily in Baltimore. He married Harriett (Rahmah) Cohen, with whom he had seven children before his

premature death.³⁰ His best-known son was probably his eldest, Mendes, who became a civil engineer and took a keen interest in history; he was involved in several historical societies, including the founding of the American Jewish Historical Society.³¹ Given Mendes's historical interests, it would seem likely that this copy of the calendar ended up in his hands. Because the accession records of the Rhode Island Historical Society are still being processed, it remains unclear at present how this copy came into the Society's possession.

AN IMPORTANT MEMENTO

These two copies of Lopez's calendar in Providence are of course interesting for their connections with many notable, nineteenth-century Jews. At the same time, they begin to tell a story in their own right. Lopez appears to have designed a calendar primarily for liturgical use, whether public or private. If Naphtali Phillips acquired a copy shortly after its publication and used it for the liturgical functions that it best served, Cohen and his family turned it into a record of life-cycle events. A little book of tables, meant primarily to be useful for determining the correct order of prayers and readings on a given day, was turned into a family heirloom or, as in Ezekiel's copy, a historical memento.

It is not too surprising that, given the need to reconcile Hebrew dates of death to the secular calendar, Lopez's calendar was used to properly observe *Yahrzeits*. More interesting is the marking of birthdates, which at that time more typically might be found in family Bibles, both Christian and Jewish. In fact, several of the other extant copies of the calendar were used precisely in this way. Jonathan Sarna has suggested to me that this might have been due in part to the relative scarcity of Jewish Bibles in the United States at that time coupled with a Jewish reluctance to use a Christian Bible.³² For Jews like David Cohen and Jacob Ezekiel, the calendar was less useful as a tool than as an important memento, a marker of an authentic religious past.

I would like to thank Dr. George M. Goodwin for bringing this calendar to my attention and encouraging me to work on it. Phoebe Simpson Bean, printed collection librarian at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Holly Snyder at the Brown University Libraries, and Kevin Proffitt at the American Jewish Archives all provided invaluable assistance. I am also grateful to Professor Jonathan D. Sarna for his many valuable suggestions and references.

ENDNOTES

1] Printed versions of the Jewish calendar did exist in the Americas prior to this work, but they usually consisted of a page or two in a more general annual almanac. For an example, see *The South-Carolina & Georgia Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1800... Also, a French and a Hebrew Calendar*, Charleston [S.C.]: Printed by Freneau & Paine, no. 47, Bay., [1799]. This work is noted as the first such calendar to be printed in the United States in Robert Singerman, *Judaica Americana: A Bibliography of Publications*

to 1900, Vol. I (New York: Greenwood, 1990), 36, no. 0134. Just a few years earlier a similar calendar appeared in Jamaica: *The New Jamaica Almanack and Register, Calculated to the Meridian of the Island for the Year of our Lord 1796, printed by David Dickson for Thom S. Stevenson, Kingston*. This almanac is said to contain a “Kalendar of Months, Sabbaths, and Holidays, which the Hebrews or Jews observe and keep, For the Years 5556 and 5557 of the Creation.” The existence and brief description of this calendar is mentioned by Sotheby’s, which sold a copy at an auction, but I have been unable to locate a copy in libraries. Handwritten Jewish calendars did circulate in America. See: Jonathan D. Sarna, “An Eighteenth Century Hebrew *Lu’ah* from Pennsylvania,” *American Jewish Archives Journal* 57 (2005), 25-7.

2| A copy of Lopez’s calendar was recently sold for \$8,125 by Sotheby’s at an auction of “Important Judaica” on December 17, 2008 in New York City. Sale No8504, lot 23.

3| The book is noted by Singerman, *Judaica Americana*, Vol. I, 42, no. 0163, and Sarna, “Hebrew *Lu’ah*,” 25. It is available in microform and in digital form as part of *Early American Imprints, Second Series* (also known as Shaw & Shoemaker), nos. 10746 and 50565. (Both are of the same copy in the American Antiquarian Society.)

4| Morris A. Gutstein, *The Story of the Jews of Newport: Two and a Half Centuries of Judaism, 1658-1908* (New York: Bloch, 1936), 55.

5| “Miscellaneous Items Relating to Jews in New York,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27 (1920), 153.

6| This letter is labeled no. 14 among the cache of letters sent to Gould, and is now located in the American Jewish Archives (SC-13432). It is titled in penciled notation, “Important. Letter to Town Council by Touro family re: Synagogue.”

7| Gutstein, 68, 185, 225, 309.

8| Lopez claims to have obtained his table for the commencement of the Sabbath from one prepared by Reverend Joseph Jessuran Pinto in New York in 1759. It rounds off the times to the nearest 30 minutes based on the time of year. More discussion of this table can be found at <http://agmk.blogspot.com/2008/02/how-18th-c-jewish-women-knew-when-to.html>

9| Henry S. Morais, *The Jews of Philadelphia: their history from the earliest settlements to the present time; a record of events and institutions, and of leading members of the Jewish community in every sphere of activity* (Philadelphia: The Levy Type Co., 1894), 45.

10| Lancaster, located about 70 miles west of Philadelphia, was the commercial center for western Pennsylvania, Maryland, and part of Virginia. It had also been the largest inland settlement in British North America. Joseph Simon established Lancaster’s Jewish community in the early 1740s but it disappeared after his death in 1804. Eli Faber, *A Time for Planting*, Vol. I of *The Jewish People in America*, ed. by Henry L. Feingold (5 vols.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 40.

11| See: Arthur Kiron, “‘Dust and Ashes’: The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais,” *American Jewish History* 84:3 (1996), 155-88.

12| Morais, 259-62.

13| One obituary is published in *The Menorah: A Monthly Magazine* 26 (January to June, 1899), 397-9.

14| *Ibid.*, Samson D. Oppenheim, “Moses Jacob Ezekiel,” *American Jewish Year Book* 19 (1917-1918), 227-32.

15| *Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, “Jewish Calendar for 5604,” vol. 1, no. 6, September 1843. Ezekiel was credited with the times for the commencement of the Sabbath, which are identical to the

ones found in Lopez’s calendar.

16| The following biographical information about Rabbi Henry Englander is derived from: Seebert J. Goldowsky, *A Century and a Quarter of Spiritual Leadership: The Story of the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David (Temple Beth-El), Providence, Rhode Island* (Providence: the Congregation, 1989), 184, 187-8, 200, 290, 358.

17| The gift is recorded, with no further information, in the accession catalogue of the John Carter Brown Library. Dr. David Gilner, director of libraries at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, has informed me (private correspondence, June 23, 2009) that the library had already acquired a copy of Lopez’s book at least two decades earlier.

18| Adar II is almost certainly meant here. The year 5570 was a leap year.

19| Naphtali Phillips, “Sketch of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation Shearith Israel Written about 1855,” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 21 (1913), 174-228.

20| Phillips, 173.

21| Found in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society, Phillips Family Papers (P-17), Box 1.

22| For biographies, see: Jonathan D. Sarna, “Jacob I. Cohen (1744-1823),” *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Vol. III (Richmond: Library of Virginia, 2006), 345-7; Herbert T. Ezekiel and Gaston Lichtenstein, *The History of the Jews of Richmond from 1769 to 1917* (Richmond: Herbert T. Ezekiel, 1917), 17-20; Aaron Baroway, “The Cohens of Maryland,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 18 (1923): 357-76, especially 359-62.

23| Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, 19.

24| Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, 332-3. In a codicil to the will, dated to 1819, Cohen appoints his nephews, now of proper age, as sole executors of his estate.

25| Sarna, “Hebrew *Lu’ah*.”

26| Cohen was aware of the printing error in this copy. After 1827-8 (5588), Table I is as expected (1828/5589), but is facing Table II for 1826 (5587), which is identical to the earlier Table II appearing for this year. Then on the next page, Tables I and II for 1827 (5588) repeat again. Thenceforward the tables align as they should.

27| Baroway, 359.

28| Baroway, “The Cohens of Maryland II,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 19 (1924): 54-77, especially 57.

29| Ezekiel and Lichtenstein, 331 (item 6), 333 (item 32).

30| Baroway, “Cohens II,” 57. David Landman, “Cohen,” in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. by Isaac Landman (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 1939-43), III, 233-6.

31| Richard H. Spencer, ed., *Genealogical and Memorial Encyclopedia of the State of Maryland* (New York: American Historical Society, 1919), s.v., “Mendes Cohen,” 675-8. Sketches of David’s other children can be found in Baroway, “Cohens II,” 74-5.

32| These other copies will be examined in more detail in my longer study of this calendar. The suggestion from Jonathan Sarna was made to me in an e-mail of June 22, 2009. On the printing of Jewish Bibles in the United States, see: Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 81-2.



August Belmont: sculpture by John Q. A. Ward, 1910, Pell House, Newport

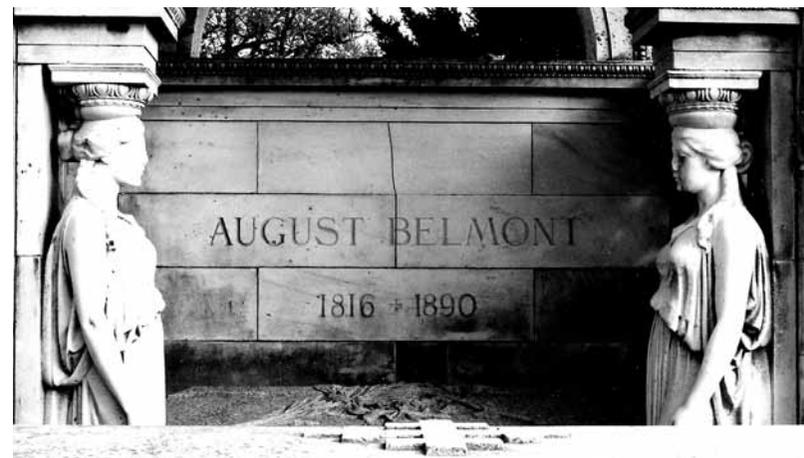
AUGUST 1890: NEWPORT, BLACKMAIL, AND SHERLOCK HOLMES

GEORGE M. GOODWIN

As Prof. Albert Silverstein lucidly explained in our 2004 issue, Sherlock Holmes visited Providence in the spring of 1918.¹ With the help of a local colleague, Bernard Goldowsky, Holmes unmasked a nest of German-American spies in the jewelry industry. Of course the detectives' courage and resourcefulness could not have been revealed during their lifetimes, and they left behind so few clues that their exploits were only recently deciphered.

But Holmes may already have been a visitor to Rhode Island, and now may be the proper time to reveal the convoluted circumstances that may have led to his first visit to the Ocean State. It occurred almost 30 years earlier, when Baker Street's most observant resident was burnishing his international reputation.

The last descendant of Newport's colonial



Belmont tombs,
Island Cemetery,
Newport: designed
by Richard M. Hunt



Commodore Matthew Perry:
sculpture by John Q. A. Ward,
1868, Touro Park, Newport



Jewish community had departed for New York City in 1822, and a new, year-round Jewish community was not established until the 1880s. Beginning in 1850, however, several Jews became summer visitors. Ironically, many stayed in grand hotels near Bellevue Avenue, which was known originally as Jews' Street and then as South Touro. As Benjamin Brown pointed out in the 2001 issue of our journal, these vacationers were primarily New Yorkers but included others from Charleston, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Savannah, and Germany.² Not only did they participate in services at Touro Synagogue; they imported a rabbi, Morris Jacob Raphall of New York City's second oldest Jewish congregation, B'nai Jeshurun, who also presented a series of public lectures on Wednesday and Saturday evenings.

BELMONT

It is highly unlikely, however, that one of Newport's most prominent couples ever entered Touro Synagogue or placed pebbles atop the graves found in the nearby Jewish cemetery. Indeed,

though they had recited their vows on November 7, 1849, in Manhattan's Church of the Ascension, it was seldom mentioned in public that Caroline Slidell Mackenzie Perry, a daughter of Commodore Matthew Perry and a niece of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, had in fact married August Belmont, a Jew.³ Yet, it was probably inevitable that Belmont, a diplomat, politician, sportsman, and one of America's wealthiest men, would become a blackmailer's target.⁴

As early as 1860, Belmont built his Newport estate, By-the-Sea, to participate in the town's glamorous social season and to allow his wife to nourish friendships dating to her childhood on Aquidneck Island. Indeed, symbols of the Perry family's patrimony were never far away. In 1868 a bronze statue of Commodore Matthew Perry was erected in Touro Park; seven years later a bronze statue of Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry was placed in Washington Square.

The house at 29 Touro Street, on Washington Square, which had belonged to Commodore Matthew Perry and his widow from 1818 until 1865, still stands. Indeed, it was recently restored. Built by Peter Buliod in about 1755, it



Buliod-Perry House, ca. 1755

Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry: sculpture by William Turner, 1875,
Washington Square, Newport; Buliod-Perry House at far right



was sold to Moses Levy only five years later. In 1792 the house was sold to Moses Seixas, who in 1795 opened the Rhode Island Bank, Newport's first, on the ground floor. Presently, the structure is known as the Buliod-Perry House.⁵

August Belmont was born in Alzey, 40 miles southwest of Frankfurt, in 1813. (Fannie Baum Rosenthal, my own maternal great-great-grandmother, who settled in Cincinnati in 1859, grew up in this small town.) Belmont was the grandson of Isaac ben Simon, who took a French-sounding surname following Napoleon's decree of 1808, which required all Jews living under French authority, including those in German territories, to more fully identify themselves. It is possible, however, that the Belmonts descended from a Sephardi family in Belmonte, Portugal. As New Christians, they would have hid their Jewish ancestry.⁶ August Belmont's "Christian" name, as shown in Alzey's civil records, was Aaron.

At nine years of age, the boy was sent to live with his maternal grandmother in Frankfurt, where he attended the *Philanthropin*, a liberal Jewish school open to gentiles. By 14 years of age, however, his professional fate was sealed. Amschel Rothschild, his grandmother's relative through a second marriage, hired him as an office boy in his banking house. Aaron was steadily promoted and in 1833 became Rothschild's private secretary. This position led to assignments in Naples, Rome, and Paris.

In 1837, when he was 24 years of age, Belmont was dispatched to Havana, but stopped temporarily in New York City. When the Rothschilds' local agents suddenly declared bankruptcy during a financial panic, Belmont decided to stay and establish his own banking house, August Belmont & Company, to represent the Rothschilds' interests. Within three years, having amassed a fortune of \$100,000, he became one of the three most important private bankers in America.⁷

There is no evidence showing Belmont's involvement in New York's Jewish community, however. He never joined Shearith Israel (North America's oldest Jewish congregation) nor any of its five sister congregations. Indeed, experiencing little religious or social prejudice, Belmont was invited to join the Union Club, one of the city's most exclusive. There he met John Sidell, a Democratic politician and a former envoy to Mexico, whose sister, Jane, had married Commodore Perry. Belmont was soon introduced to the Perrys' daughter, Caroline (nicknamed "Tiny"), and he visited the Perry family when it summered in Saratoga Springs, New York. (This resort welcomed wealthy Jews until 1877, when Joseph Seligman, a frequent guest, was expelled from the Grand Union Hotel.)

Commodore and Mrs. Perry may have objected to Caroline's romance, but they did not interfere with it. For example, Belmont was not told to become an Episcopalian, and he never renounced any vestigial connection to Judaism.⁸ But two months before her Episcopalian wedding, Caroline was confirmed at Christ Church, near the Perry home in Tarrytown, New York. Subsequently, Belmont asked his father, Simon, to have his birth certificate changed to August, but authorities in Alzey refused the request.



overgrown Belmont Memorial Chapel

In 1850, August and Caroline's first child, Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont, was baptized as an Episcopalian. The five younger Belmont children were also baptized. When the third child, Jane, died in 1875, her funeral was held at the Church of the Ascension. She was laid to rest in Newport's Island (or Warner Street) Cemetery, adjacent to the Common Burying Ground. In 1886, following the death of Raymond, their youngest child, Caroline and August erected the Belmont Memorial Chapel in the same cemetery.

Belmont achieved every measure of material success on his way to amassing a fortune of up to \$50 million.⁹ He also served as Austria's honorary consul general in New York City from 1844 to 1850. Through John Sidell, he became active in Democratic politics. As a reward for his support, President Pierce appointed him the American

chargé d'affaires in The Hague and then minister to The Netherlands from 1853 to 1856. Between 1860 and 1872, Belmont chaired the Democratic Party. He was never elected to public office, but his eldest son, Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont, served four terms in Congress (1880 to 1888) before his conversion at 90 years of age to Catholicism.¹⁰

LAZARUS

Although there is no documentary or photographic record showing that Emma Lazarus was ever entertained at By-the-Sea, she was surely aware of August Belmont's presence in Newport and, possibly, he of hers. The fourth of Moses and Esther Lazarus' seven children, Emma was born in New York City in 1849.¹¹ Even among American Sephardim, the family had a distinguished history. In 1766 Emma's great-great-uncle, Gershon Mendes Seixas, had become a leader of Shearith Israel. In 1790, Seixas' brother, Moses, already a leader of Jeshuat Israel (later known as Touro Synagogue), wrote a salutatory message to President Washington and later welcomed him to Newport.

From a very early age, Emma, who was educated by tutors, displayed considerable gifts. Her father printed her lengthy first book, *Poems and Translations*, when she was 17.

The young poet signed the visitors' book at Touro on July 25, 1867.¹² That summer, when only 17, she wrote one of her most memorable poems, "In the Jewish Cemetery in Newport," which was a direct and hopeful reply to Longfellow's melancholy poem, "The Jewish Cemetery in Newport," which had been published in 1854. Lazarus' poem was published in 1871 in her anthology, *Admetus and Other Poems*, which was dedicated to her mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson. By this time, her mother's first cousin, Benjamin Franklin Peixotto, a grand master of B'nai B'rith, was already serving as President Grant's consul general in Romania, where he was stationed for six years. He then served as President Garfield's consul in Lyons from 1876 to 1885 before returning to New York.¹³

"The Beeches," Lazarus House, ca. 1870



Having previously summured in East Haven, Connecticut, the Lazarus family began building their Newport home, The Beeches, at 647 Bellevue Avenue, in the fall of 1870. The architect was George Champlin Mason Sr., who later designed the Belmont Memorial Chapel in Island Cemetery.¹⁴ They summured there for about seven years.¹⁵ The former Lazarus home still stands, only a few hundred yards from the site of By-the-Sea and only a few hundred feet from Belcourt Castle, the cottage built by Oliver Hazard Perry Belmont at 659 Bellevue Avenue in 1894.¹⁶

Perhaps August Belmont became aware of Emma Lazarus through her only novel, *Alide*, which was based on the life of Goethe. In 1881 her translation of Heinrich Heine's poems and ballads was published. Heine had been born a Jew but was baptized and educated as a Catholic.

During the early 1880s, Lazarus' poems and essays were published in leading magazines. For example, three of her essays in *Century* dealt with anti-Semitism. The solution, she proposed, was the establishment of a Jewish state. But it was her poem "New Colossus," written in 1883 to raise funds for the construction of the base of Liberty Enlightening the World (the Statue of Liberty), which conveyed an altogether different message.¹⁷ Ironically, this poem—her most famous—was not well known until 1903, when a bronze plaque with its words was attached to the statue's base.¹⁸

Alarmed by pogroms following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, Lazarus became passionately involved in fundraising for New York City's Russian-Jewish immigrants. In 1882, for example, she was a founder of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (which evolved into HIAS). The following year, having helped organize the Society for the Colonisation and Improvement of Eastern European Jews, she traveled to England and France to meet Jewish leaders. It is quite possible that while in London she met the Jewish scholar Solomon Schechter and Rabbi Abraham Pereira Mendes, a reader at London's Shearith Israel who was about to become Touro Synagogue's first full-time spiritual leader.

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1825, Rabbi Mendes had numerous contacts among British and Sephardi Jewry.¹⁹ After ordination in London, he served congregations in Kingston and Montego Bay. In 1851 he returned to England to lead the Birmingham congregation and then taught in one of London's Talmud-Torahs.

After her father's death in 1885, Emma Lazarus traveled in Europe for 15 months. Once again she met Jewish leaders as well as prominent writers and artists. Within two months of her return to New York City in 1887, however, she

died of cancer.

Nobody will ever know either the extent to which or even the means by which Emma Lazarus appealed to her former Bellevue Avenue neighbor, August Belmont, to aid Europe's bloodied and endangered Jewish communities and Jewish refugees already living in New York. Perhaps Rabbi Mendes helped relay an urgent message to him through a summer congregant in Newport or through another business contact in New York City. Both of Rabbi Mendes' sons were rabbis there. Indeed, as early as 1882, Lazarus was acquainted with Rabbi Henry Pereira Mendes of Shearith Israel. Together they visited destitute Jewish immigrants on Ward's Island in the East River.²⁰ He would officiate at her private funeral and at her burial at Cypress Hills, the congregational cemetery in Brooklyn.

Of course Belmont continued to represent the Rothschilds, so perhaps one of their agents also appealed to Belmont in Newport, New York City or Europe. Somebody must have been able to melt the financier's icy heart or stir his earthbound soul.

HOLMES

Whether through business, politics or horseracing, Belmont must have received numerous threats. In the tempestuous financial environment of the 1880s, moreover, blackmail was not an unknown weapon against one's enemies. Although Belmont never publicly expressed his solidarity with Jews or loyalty to Judaism, anti-Semites hounded him. Indeed, one far-flung rumor was that his true name was Schonberg.²¹

Of course Belmont's blackmailer could easily have been a disgruntled employee, who knew about some unusual deposits (legal or illegal) in European accounts. Such an employee could easily have been an anti-Semite.

To avoid even a whiff of scandal, however, Belmont could not have turned to authorities in New York or Newport. When considering English-speaking detectives, there were many possibilities. One residing in London held particular promise, however. Since beginning his private consulting practice in 1878, Sherlock Holmes had solved almost countless mysteries—several of the most famous involving blackmail schemes. Furthermore, he was a detective who not only avoided publicity but also was a master of disguise.

Indeed, it is quite possible that numerous Anglo-Jewish philanthropists were aware of Sherlock Holmes. Several Rothschild cousins resided in Belgravia; Goldsmids and Montefiores lived nearby. Yet, as Prof. Silverstein explained in



his 2004 article, Holmes and Dr. John Watson had only the slightest interest in Jews, mentioning them on only five occasions. Although primarily attracted by a case's difficulty, Holmes was not indifferent to money. Prof. Silverstein pointed out that, in the case known as "A Study in Scarlet," Holmes enjoyed taking advantage of a Jewish pawnbroker on Tottenham Court Road. He was able to purchase a Stradivarius worth

500 guineas for only 55 shillings.

Seven years later, in 1888, Holmes made at least two remarks alluding to Jews or Jewish cases. In the case known as "A Scandal in Bohemia," which began on March 20, Holmes mentioned that from early January until late March he had traveled to Odessa to investigate the Trepoff murder. With a population of more than 50,000 Jews, Odessa was one of the world's six largest Jewish communities.²² (Warsaw was the largest, but London was not among them.) The first modern Russian pogrom had occurred in Odessa in 1871, and violence intensified during the early 1880s.

Perhaps because he was recently remarried and therefore living away from Baker Street, Dr. Watson was not fully aware of the Trepoff murder. But Solomon Trepoff, as portrayed in the Ukrainian and Yiddish press, was both a successful industrialist and vice president of Odessa's Jewish community council. He was found strangled in his office late on a Friday afternoon.²³

Another Jewish remark made in "A Scandal in Bohemia" was about a "Hebrew Rabbi" (are there other kinds?) whose surname began with the letter "A." This was probably Isaac Abravanel, the distinguished keeper of Aramaic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Hebrew, and Syriac manuscripts at the British Museum. When beginning to investigate the alleged case of blackmail involving Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, the Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein and the hereditary King of Bohemia, Holmes turned to his biographical files for information about the key suspect, Irene Adler. Her file was "sandwiched" between the rabbi's and that of "a staff commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes."



Irene Adler: illustrations by Sidney Paget, ca. 1903

ADLERS

Neither Holmes nor Watson ever mentioned whether Ms. Adler was a Jewess. Perhaps it was unnecessary to do so. Nevertheless, she occupied a singularly prominent place throughout the balance of the detective's astonishing career.

Not usually attracted to women, except for their criminal proclivities, Holmes was immediately taken by Miss Adler, who was exceptionally beautiful and possessed "a soul of steel." Although only 30 years of age (and four years younger than Holmes), she was already referred to as a retired diva. Five years earlier, the boyish king of Bohemia had had an affair with her, probably in Warsaw, where she had performed with the Imperial Opera. The affair resulted not only in some "compromising letters" but a photograph of the lovers. Indeed, Holmes was determined to gain possession of those letters and the photo in order to foil any attempted blackmail scheme.

Precisely because he was unsuccessful in these efforts, the brilliant detective was attracted to Miss Adler's cunning intellect. While Holmes was speedily gathering information about her, she fled from her home in St. John's Wood, married her probable accomplice, the attorney Godfrey Norton, at the Church of St. Monica, and disappeared from England. Having told Holmes that she would no longer threaten King Wilhelm, she left him with another photograph, one portraying only herself, and a gold sovereign.

Outwitted by Miss Adler, Holmes was so devastated that he could subsequently refer to her only as "the woman." Dr. Watson, who often noticed a shapely figure and fluttering eyelashes, knew exactly to whom he was referring.

Thus, in the early summer of 1890, when contacted by Belmont or through an intermediary regarding another blackmail case, Holmes became both deeply intrigued and highly agitated. It occurred to him that there were several reasons why Miss Adler could once again be his nemesis. Newport offered extraordinarily wealthy prey, and opera singers frequently performed at summer balls and soirées held in the cottages as well as in the theatres. Most importantly, having been born in New Jersey, she was an American.

There was perhaps another, less persuasive clue regarding Miss Adler's possible presence in Newport. The staff-commander and ichthyologist whose biography Holmes had filed was none other than Capt. Simon Adler. Holmes read in *The Daily Telegraph* that this American officer, who had frequently been a visiting scientist at London's Museum of Natural History, was now conducting research at Prof. Alexander Agassiz's world-renowned marine zoology laboratory on Narragansett Bay.²⁵ (This was the Newport property known as Castle

Hill.²⁶) Holmes wondered whether the two Adlers were sister and brother, former spouses or merely soul mates in crime.

Generally speaking, however, Holmes thought highly of Americans. He met many during his eight-month visit from December 1879 until August 1880.²⁷ In the case known as "A Study in Scarlet," Holmes mentioned his interest in Edgar Allan Poe. In the case known as "The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor," which occurred five years later, in 1886, Holmes remarked to Mr. Moulton, "It's always a joy to meet an American." During the same case, the detective praised Henry David Thoreau's understanding of circumstantial evidence. But there is no record from his 1879-80 trip that Holmes had set foot in New England.

THE DENOUEMENT

Having arrived either by train from Boston or steamer from New York City, Holmes would have likely spent much of August 1890 on Aquidneck Island. Guest quarters were readily available at By-the-Sea, a not-too-imposing residence that employed three chefs, four valets, a dozen maids, and a score of grooms, coachmen, chauffeurs, and groundskeepers.²⁸ The Belmont residence, which stood until 1946, was conveniently located on Bellevue Avenue at Marine Street.²⁹ Its closest neighbors, abutting the Cliff Walk, were the far grander cottages of Château-sur-Mer, Beechwood, and The Breakers.

Given that a large number of Newport's guests (as well as servants) were British subjects, Holmes' English accent was probably advantageous. Considering his attraction to sports, particularly boxing and fencing, it would not have been difficult for him to feign some fondness for billiards, badminton, and croquet. With its sprightly pace and rhythmic volleys, Holmes was also probably fascinated by lawn tennis. By-the-Sea, after all, was located only a short stroll from Bellevue Avenue to the Casino, the prototypical country club built between 1879 and 1881.³⁰

Though never a believer—except in scientific methods—there were several houses of worship in which Holmes could easily observe Newport's residents and guests. Trinity Church, belonging to the Anglican Communion, offered the most familiar perch, but he was curious about Baptists and Unitarians and felt some vague kinship with Friends because of their rejection of liturgy. (He was appalled by their disregard for music, however.)

Redwood Library and Atheneum, whose neoclassical quarters had been erected on the former Jews' Street in 1750, offered another vantage point and in a rather central location. In addition to feeling at home within its stately interiors,

Holmes was probably impressed by its 26,000 volumes, including many by British authors. (Of course his favorite was the Bard of Stratford-upon-Avon.)

Indeed, Holmes was probably surprised to discover how much he fancied Newport. The breezes were invigorating, and the scenery was magnificent. The Londoner enjoyed the taste of quahogs, and he found 13 tobacconists on Thames Street alone. (Of course Holmes chuckled at Newporters' pronunciation of that north-south thoroughfare.) At 142 Thames, he was amazed to discover that Walter Sherman sold honey, bees, and hives.

Surrounded by colorful characters, not only along the wharves, Holmes surely delighted in his anonymity. Despite his considerable height (over six feet), it is unlikely that he needed to adopt a disguise. When attending performances at the Opera House on Washington Square or the Music Hall on Bellevue Avenue, he was shrouded by darkness, but otherwise probably enjoyed the many hours of daylight.

Alas, there is no clear explanation why August Belmont's threatening letters ended. A culprit was never arrested, and no fisticuffs were reported in the *Daily News* or the *Mercury*. Quite possibly, Belmont's blackmailer was paid off, and he promptly retreated from Rhode Island in search of another victim.

Then there is the possibility that Holmes spotted Irene Adler and her accomplice before they suddenly vanished. Or perhaps "the woman" caught a glimpse of Holmes and, once again, miraculously outfoxed him.

But still another scenario may have unfolded only months before Belmont's November death. His ambivalence toward Jews and Judaism crept up on him, intensified, and nearly ripped him apart. Finally, Belmont was driven to bury or unearth the story about his Portuguese past. Indeed, he both feared and hoped that he was related to Newport's colonial Jews. Could these rich and proud immigrants, who survived the Inquisition, have been his kin? Who among them was from Belmonte?

In 1888 Belmont had learned that the Newport Historical Society, established in 1854, was moving to new quarters on Touro Street, adjacent to the Synagogue. He had also read in the *Mercury* that one of the Society's largest and most unusual collections consisted of the business records and personal papers of Aaron Lopez. Once Newport's richest citizen, he had been a Portuguese native and a synagogue leader. Indeed, here was a Jew who had chosen the name Aaron to replace his given name, Duarte. And Lopez's half-brother, Moses, another Newporter, had replaced his given name, José.³¹

Even if he could still read Hebrew and many European languages, Bel-

mont could not have risked studying any of Aaron Lopez's 147 volumes in the Historical Society's library. So the financier probably sent a learned emissary, who was recognized by the Society's poorly paid librarian. Perhaps this disheveled lover of manuscripts, bindings, and maps, who wondered what a living titan would want with a dead one, demanded a portion of the blackmail loot.

Whether or not Holmes encountered Irene Adler or foiled the blackmail scheme, there can be no lingering doubt about his visit to Newport during August 1890. In 2006, as Touro Synagogue underwent a splendid restoration, a sheaf of old papers was found hidden in a subterranean crevice. Perhaps they were once stored there but had long been forgotten. Rabbi Mordechai Eskovitz could not make heads or tails of the darkened pages, so he turned them over to the Historical Society. Its skillful librarian, Bertram Lippincott III, knowing of my interests, invited me to take a look.

No, August Belmont had never been Touro's secret benefactor nor ever expressed an interest in being buried in the nearby Jewish cemetery. His remains were laid to rest besides those of his wife, two children, and numerous Perry relatives in Island Cemetery.

Despite the faded handwriting, I gradually surmised that the newly discovered pages were Rabbi Abraham Mendes', possibly torn from a diary. Evidently, he had been an amateur violinist who patronized the Golden Lyre, near Roth's Hotel in Piccadilly, where Emma Lazarus had stayed on her second trip to London.³² In Newport, Rabbi Mendes had recognized another customer frequently in need of rosin, bowstrings, and tuning forks. A tall music lover who also smoked a pipe.



ENDNOTES

1| Albert Silverstein, "Sherlock Holmes, Jews and Rhode Island," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 14 (November, 2004), 336-52.

2| Benjamin Brown, "The Rebirth of the Jewish Community in Newport, 1850-1854," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 13 (November, 2001), 421-38.

3| A copy of the marriage certificate is found in the August Belmont papers, Harvard College, Houghton Library, container 8.

4| My major sources for August Belmont are: Joachim O. Ronall, "August Belmont," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2007 ed., 2, 301-2; Irving Katz, "August Belmont," *American National Biography*, 1999 ed., 2, 536; David Black, *The King of Fifth Avenue: The Fortunes of August Belmont* (New York: Dial Press, 1981).

5| Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully Jr., *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915* (2nd ed. rev.; New York: C. N. Potter, 1967), 8, 499, plate 116; Ronald J. Onorato, *AIA Guide to Newport* (Providence: AIAri Architectural Forum, 2007), 26.

6| Ronall, 301.

7| Black, 39.

8| Black, 67.

9| Black, 723.

10| Irving Katz, "Perry Belmont," *American National Biography*, 2, 536.

11| My major sources for Emma Lazarus are: Diane Lichtenstein, "Emma Lazarus," *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, 1st ed., 1, 806-9; Carole S. Kessner, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2007 ed., 12, 560-1; Esther H. Schor, *Emma Lazarus* (New York: Schocken, 2006); and Bette R. Young, *Emma Lazarus in Her World: Life and Letters* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1995).

12| Schor, 15.

13| Lloyd P. Gartner, "Peixotto Family," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 2007 ed., 15, 713.

14| Onorato, 67, 238.

15| Schor, 36. As reported in the *Newport Mercury*, the Lazarus home cost \$17,000.

16| For Belcourt Castle, see: Onorato, 236-8.

17| Belmont and Lazarus were definitely linked through sculpture and architecture. In 1865 Belmont commissioned the Commodore Matthew Perry monument from the sculptor John Q. A. Ward and the leading architect Richard Morris Hunt, who designed the base. The monument was intended for the Belmont tombs in Island Cemetery, but Belmont was persuaded to erect it in Touro Park. The Ward-Hunt collaboration was so successful that it led to 15 more monuments. Some Newporters believed, however, that the wrong Commodore Perry had been honored. A public subscription resulted in the Oliver Hazard Perry monument, by William Turner, placed in Washington Square.

Hunt, a New Yorker who built his own summer home in Newport, was the resort's most successful architect during the Gilded Age. In 1894 he designed Oliver Perry Hazard Belmont's Newport cottage, Belcourt Castle. In 1885 he had also designed the base of the Statue of Liberty with which Lazarus' poem was adorned.

Furthermore, Hunt, who had designed the setting for the Belmont tombs in Island Cemetery, suggested that a full-length, seated bronze portrait of August Belmont, sculpted by Ward in 1910, be placed there. Instead, it was displayed at Belcourt Castle. In 1941 the Belmont portrait was

donated to the city of Newport and displayed near the Oliver Hazard Perry monument in Washington Square. By the 1960s it was placed besides the Belmont Memorial Chapel and then lent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After the sculpture's return to Newport, it was placed on the grounds of Pell House, the headquarters of the Preservation Society of Newport County on Bellevue Avenue.

Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), 301-2; Susan R. Stein, *Richard Morris Hunt* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 7, 126; Onorato, 198, 236-8.

18| Despite the poem's fame, all of Lazarus' books were out of print by 1926. Schor, 252.

19| For Rabbi Mendes, see: Rabbi Morris A. Gutstein, *The Story of the Jews of Newport* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1936), 261-2, 267.

20| Schor, 148.

21| Ronall, 34.

22| Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 357.

23| Julian Wolf papers, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York City; series VIII: Organizations Files, 1882-1959, "Comité pour la défense des droits des Israelites en Europe centrale et orientale," folder 177b.

24| See, for example, Abravanel's "Notes on Early Inscriptions from Ur and El-'Obeid," *Funf Jahrtausende Mesopotamien*, München, III, 1881, 113-227. Several of the rabbi's scholar-colleagues, at the British Museum and elsewhere, are highlighted in: Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain: 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 121.

25| Capt. Adler was perhaps best known for "Mating Patterns of Echinoderm (including Starfishes and Sea Urchins) in the North Atlantic," *Transactions of the Zoological Society*, London, VII (1), 1884, 246-89.

26| Onorato, 263.

27| A thespian, Holmes had sailed to America with the Sasanoff Shakespearian Company. William S. Baring-Gould, *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street: A Life of the World's First Consulting Detective* (New York: Bramhall House, 1962), 296.

28| Mrs. Perry was also well known for the postilions who guided her coach, a "demi d'Aumont." Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, *Newport: Our Social Capital* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1905), 53.

29| For photos of the Belmont cottage, see: <http://www.newportmansions.com/page9632.cfm>.

30| Onorato, 182-6.

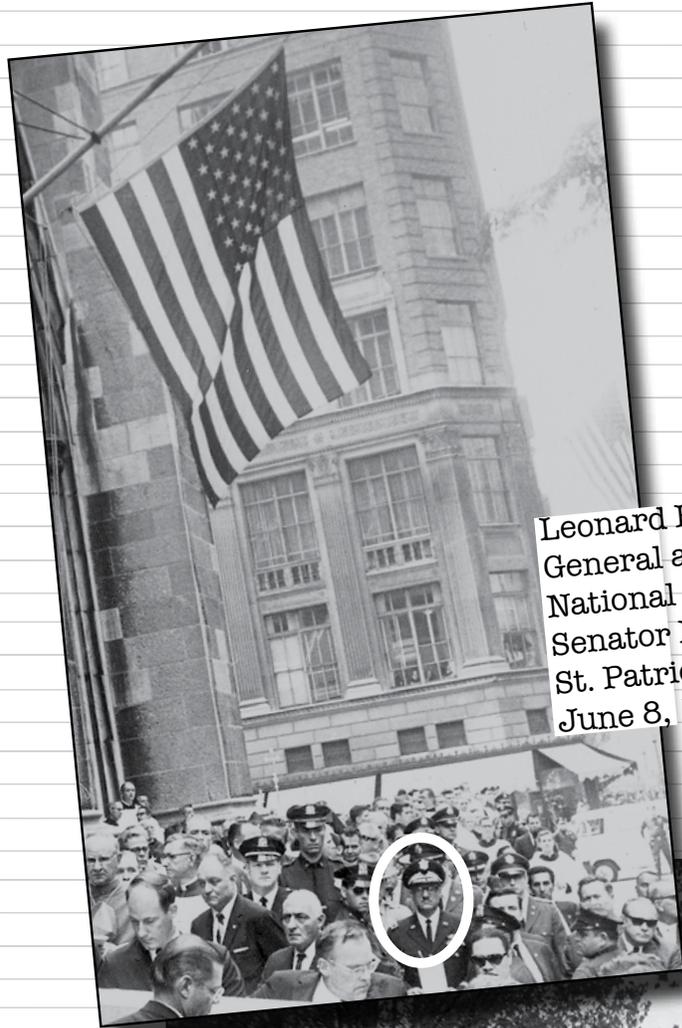
31| Rui Miguel Faisca Rodrigues Pereira, "The Iberian Ancestry of Aaron Lopez and Jacob Rodriguez Rivera of Newport," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 14 (November, 2006), 568-70.

32| Schor, 173.

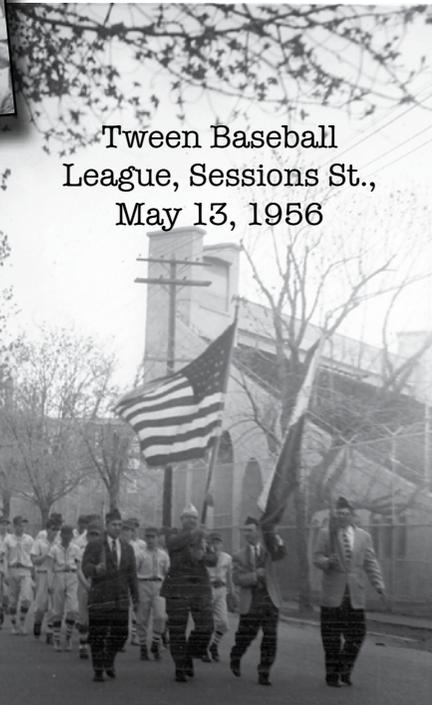


Flags,Flags, Flags:

Photos from the Association's Archives



Leonard Holland, Adjutant General and Commander of RI National Guard, at funeral of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, St. Patrick's Cathedral, NYC, June 8, 1968



Tween Baseball League, Sessions St., May 13, 1956

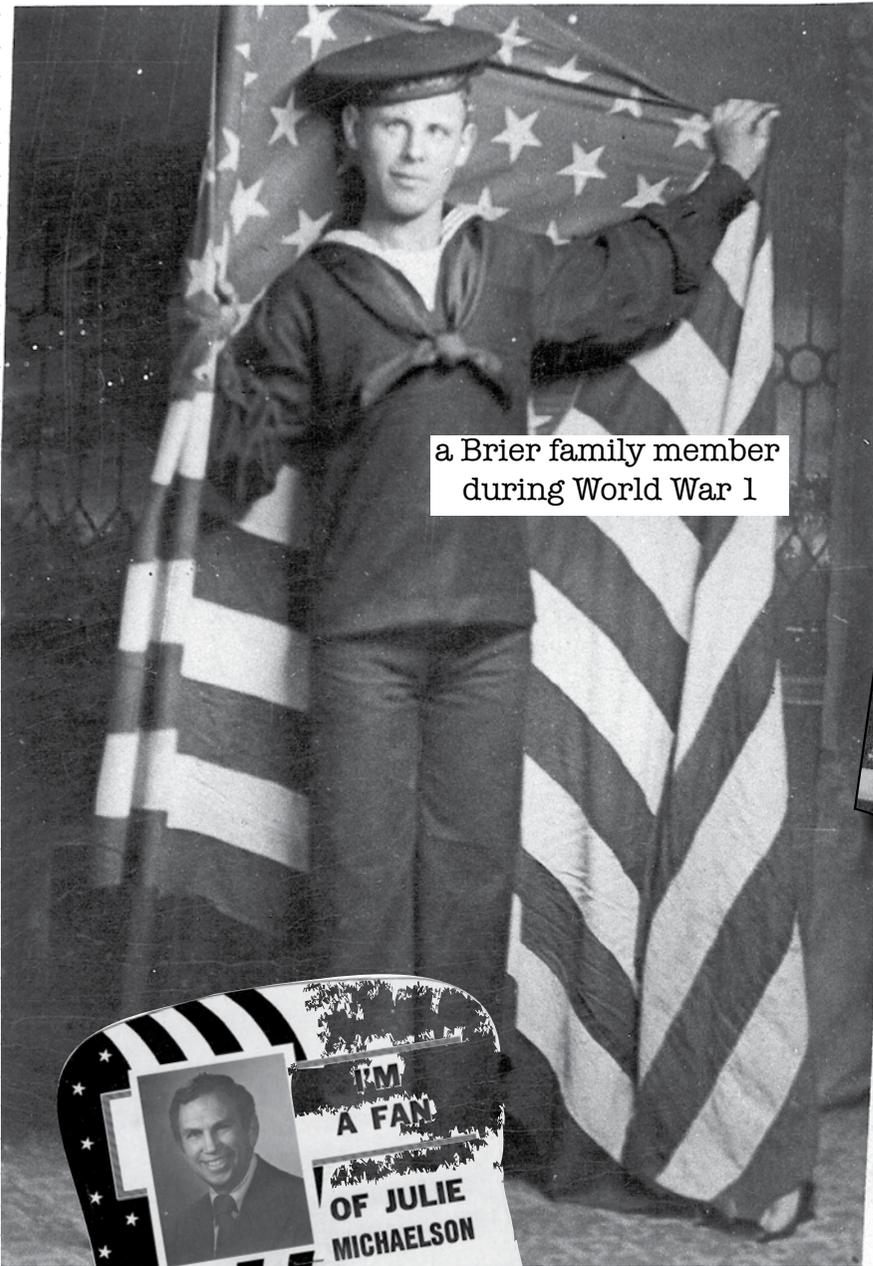


dedication of Congregation Shaare Zedek, Providence, May 22, 1955

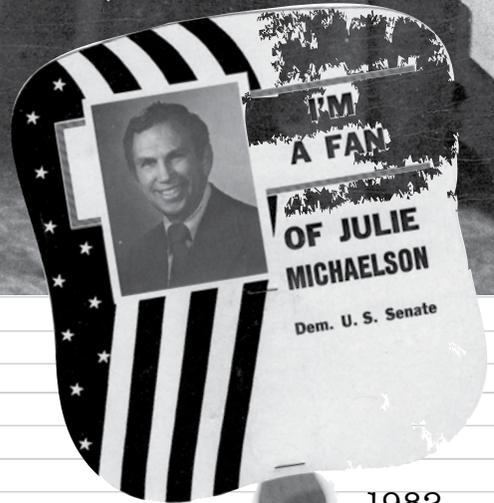


Jewish War Veterans, Post 23, Westminister St., 1945





a Brier family member during World War 1



1982

Machzeka Hadas Home for Jewish Orphans, South Providence, ca. 1908



Herman Swartz + Herman Komminskey's Restaurant, 468 Westminster St., 1907



Elizabeth Guny at home in Providence with flag used in ceremony for return of the "Independent Man" to State House, July 20, 1976



Girl Scouts at Jewish Community Center, Providence, ca. 1927



annual meeting and dedication of Honor Roll, JCC, May 12, 1943



(FRED KELMAN PHOTO)

Ida Silverman, rally for Israel, probably Veterans' Auditorum, before 1971



Judith Cohen Weiss, Brooklyn, 1945



Archibald Silverman, UJA's "Caravan of Hope" Rally, 1949



ca. 1905

Rhode Island Jewish
Tercentenary Committee,
Roger Williams Spring, 1954



cornerstone laying,
Miriam Hospital, 1950



testimonial dinner for Alter
Boyman, Narragansett Hotel,
Providence, June 13, 1937



Jewish War
Veterans,
Post 23, installation
of officers,
March 25, 1928



Camp JORI, August 1940



A SOLDIER'S PLEA

WALTER I. SUNDLUN

Born in Providence to Lithuanian immigrants, Sundlun (1890-1976) fulfilled almost all of his American dreams. An indefatigable worker, he learned during boyhood to help provide for family needs. Probably his most enjoyable job— as a teenager or later in life— was playing the organ on Narragansett Bay steamers. Walter captained the debate team at “the old” Hope High School (on the east side of Hope Street) and after graduation traveled widely as a salesman for Providence jewelry firms.

But even after opening London's, his own jewelry store on Main Street in Pawtucket, he yearned to strengthen his analytical and adversarial skills. Sundlun began his legal studies in Judge J. Jerome Hahn's Providence chambers before gaining admission, at 29 years of age, to Boston University Law School. While his wife, Jan, helped operate the jewelry store, he studied on commuter trains and late at night. Having passed the Rhode Island Bar in 1922, even before his official graduation, Sundlun served initially as an associate in the office of Albert A. Baker and William A. Spicer, a gentile firm, and, thanks to Judge Hahn, as a public defender in Superior Court. He later became Baker's partner and then established his own highly successful practice while expanding his business interests.

A board member of Temple Beth-El for 35 years, Sundlun was elected treasurer while still attending law school. (By this time, he and his family had already moved from 176 Irving Avenue to a much larger home at 195 Arlington Avenue.) He chaired the Temple's legal committee for 15 years. Sundlun remains the only president who served in two different eras: from 1938 to 1942 and from 1951 to 1955. Indeed, as a relentless fundraiser, he was instrumental in helping erect the Orchard Avenue synagogue, which was dedicated in 1954.

Providence's larger Jewish community grew to depend on Sundlun's loyalty and determination. He served on the boards of the Jewish Home, Miriam Hospital, and the Jewish Community Center and, while president of the Jewish Orphanage, helped build Camp JORI. Nevertheless, he found time for the Masons, Eagles, and Elks when not golfing at Ledgemont Country Club or skipper-



cornerstone laying,
Temple Beth-El,
September 20, 1953,
Walter Sundlun,
Rabbi William Braude



gubernatorial campaign, 1991

ing his powerboat moored at the Rhode Island or Bristol Yacht Clubs.

Had he not been a Republican (or perhaps a Jew), Sundlun may have enjoyed some success as a politician. In 1932 he was a delegate to the GOP's national convention (which nominated President Hoover), and in 1934 he was an unsuccessful candidate for the State Senate. Four years later, due to the sudden death from appendicitis of his younger son, Walter Jr., he withdrew from the race for lieutenant governor. In 1940 he actively campaigned for the Republican presidential candidate, Wendell Wilkie, and in 1948 he launched his first campaign for the U.S. Senate. Six years later he received the Republican nomination for that office, but was handily defeated by the two-term incumbent, T. F. Green.

While many Rhode Islanders grasped Sundlun's love of country, few knew about his love of verse. This poem, privately printed in Providence in 1942, was written at least a year before December 1943, when the Sundluns' older son, Bruce, the pilot of *Damn Yankee*, a B-17 Flying Fortress, was shot down over Belgium. During the five months that the 24-year-old aviator was missing in action, his father listened nightly to German propaganda broadcasts on his short-wave radio for news about captured Americans. Whenever he gained hopeful information, Walter shared it with American families.

Bruce, a former Boy Scout and a track star at Tabor Academy and Williams College, masqueraded as a stooped and crippled Frenchman while trying to reach the Pyrénées. Unable to cross into Spain, he backtracked across France to reach safety in Switzerland. Amazed by his strength, resourcefulness, and courage, American officials sent him back to France to aid the resistance and prepare for the Allied invasion. Bruce thrived on daring and danger— not introspection and prayer.

Eventually reunited with the Eighth Air Force in England, he flew missions over the Pacific, India, and China. In 1948 he delivered surplus American planes to Israel. Although retired as a colonel from the Air Force Reserves since 1980, Bruce has quite naturally retained his commanding and photogenic presence. Double-breasted blazers with shiny brass buttons became his civilian uniform.

As a Harvard-trained lawyer, he gained success within the federal government and in private practice. Seeking greater challenges, he then served as a highly successful business executive and corporate board member. Bruce became Beth-El's only second-generation president in 1988. As a Democrat, he was twice elected governor of Rhode Island (in 1990 and in 1992) and helped restore the state's financial health and ethical standards. Among numerous public

works projects, he expanded T. F. Green Airport. Its passenger terminal has been named in his honor. While residing in Jamestown, Bruce continues to lecture as governor-in-residence at the University of Rhode Island, support Democratic candidates, and participate in Temple board meetings. Like Walter, Bruce has been a powerful force for civic improvement.

*Dedicated To the Men and Women of the United States of America
making the Supreme Sacrifice for Freedom—for Dignity of Man—for our Flag.*

I

My Blessed Country,
I gave all I treasured for you—
With a willing heart that was proud and true;
On land and sea— in life— till death
I fought, protecting you with my last breath.
I knew your grandness— your true worth;
You gave me liberty— thru life, from birth.

II

My Blessed Country,
When I heard your resounding call,
“To arms!— Sons of America!— One and all!”
I dropped my anvil— I cast aside my book, my staff,
I joined the colors— I did not seek the easy path,
I flew bomber thru rain, storm, cloud and sky,
Determined to rout the enemy or die.
I sail'd o'er ocean and the sea
Searching the enemy where'er he be;
I marched over valley, mountain and hill,
And I fought in forest, swamp and jungle, till
The enemy was snared and laid low and still;
Each minute, each hour, each and every day
For victory for my country did I ever pray.

III

My Blessed Country—
 My comrades and I never watched the clock
 Nor followed the blind, the unseeing flock;
 We gave our all, we did not seek
 A limit to our labor— or a limit to our week.
 While there was a task that had to be done
 We worked— we fought on and on
 Till dawn— throughout the day— throughout the night—
 From the rising to the setting of the sun.
 I sought no favor for the duty thus done;
 I was an American! I was your son!

IV

The enemy took my life; to you I gave my soul
 And took my place midst the caravan of human toll.
 Nature's best gift is now mine;
 My journey is ended; I marched with time:
 And as I passed thru death's chamber door,
 Dressed in the uniform I proudly wore,
 I thanked Almighty God with a proud heart
 That I was privileged to do my part
 For my Country— my flag, for you
 My Blessed Country, tried and true.

V

I now rest in the land of peace and love,
 The heavenly abode of our Father above,
 I lived midst field, flowers, and sun, a peaceful life
 Far, far removed from life's noisy, struggling strife.
 And now tho far, far away— I see clear— very clear,
 The struggles of man— of life— of yesteryear;
 And as I listen,— there comes a rumbling, restless sound
 From those who still march across your surface round.
 I ask— do I hear clearly?— Can it be true
 That your children, loyal Americans
 Claim privilege, and put their demands ahead of you?

VI

Are you not with the enemy still at war?
 Will you be beaten and not even the score?
 Is there not much yet for all to do
 To protect your shores, your children and liberty too?
 My comrades and I were willing to die
 So that our flag shall continue to fly
 O'er land, in sky and on every sea,
 A symbol of freedom— of true democracy.

VII

Will my fellow Americans let our land of the free
 Suffer and bleed and cease to be
 What our forefathers made it for you and me?
 Can they not see that no victory can there be
 Unless labor, capital and all
 Answer with spirit our country's call? I know—
 Labor must be protected and capital, too,
 But this is the time for both to fight for you
 To lay aside all private gain, all inter-strife,
 And gird their all to protect your life;
 Combined, they can destroy the enemy bold
 If, in full strength, they arise to protect your stronghold.

VIII

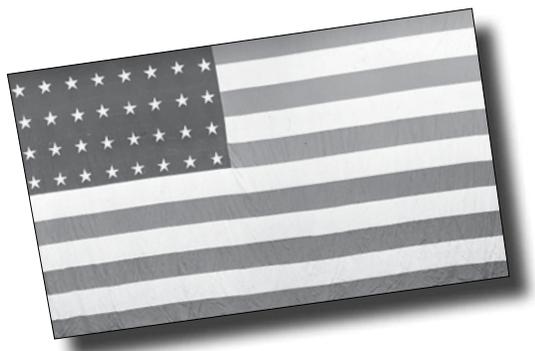
From out of the land of silence and mystery
 I call on all to steadfastly see
 That our flag shall never be hauled down
 Nor ever be replaced by an Axis crown!
 I call on all to do their part
 With a determined will never to stop
 The wheels of industry turning— the fires blazing—
 To build and build, fast and faster, with speed amazing
 To turn out guns, ships, tanks, planes and all
 So that our Star Spangled Banner shall never fall!

IX

No man, be he of book, field or brawn,
Of capital or of poor or manor born
Can now afford to claim a single right
If 'twill harm you in your present fight
For Freedom— for dignity of man— for our flag
Or cause your work to stop or even lag!
You must be saved— no matter the cost,
For if you fall,— all will be lost!

X

My Blessed Country—
When your safety is secured and victory is won
We, of the past, will rise with the morning sun
And lift our glasses to our lips and drink
From the rivers of happiness, overflowing their brink.
We shall drink to your health and strength,
The measure of our joy shall know no length.
We pray that our flag may ever wave,
A symbol of Freedom— of a people free and brave.
Men and Women of America:—
This is my plea for the blessed country I love,
This is my prayer to God above.



A DOCTOR IN WARTIME

GERALDINE S. FOSTER

Numerous articles about Jewish servicemen and women during World War II have been published in our journal. Alas, warfare is a never-ending topic. In these pages Jerry expounds on one of her favorite themes, work, but work in service to our country and humankind. Many readers well informed about D-day may be shocked by the bloody story of Operation Tiger. They will not be surprised by one physician's dedication, however. It preceded and succeeded his military service. Jerry's article is also a way to remember our beloved friend and colleague, Eleanor Horvitz, who was essential to our Association's growth and success.



Brown, Class of 1932

Abraham Horvitz knew from an early age that he wanted to become a doctor. He was perhaps four or five years old when he developed a fever and sore throat. His parents, Jacob and Fannie (Krasnow), naturally concerned, asked Dr. Harold Libby to come to their home at 331 Willard Avenue to examine the child. "All you had to do was take one look at Dr. Libby and have him talk to you to be impressed," Dr. Horvitz stated recently. "His voice and his expression were just different. He was an amazing man and I wanted to be just like him. That's when I decided to become a doctor. I didn't know what being a doctor meant, but he was so impressive, I wanted to be just like him."

Abraham, the child of immigrants, was born at home in South Providence. Previously a pharmacist in Russia, Jacob made a niche for himself in the candy business in America. He and his brother Sam were partners.

The more Abraham learned about medicine, the more fascinated he became. He attended Peace Street, Lexington Avenue, and Sackett Street Schools. By the time he entered Classical High School, his career path was set. Abraham's younger brother David and younger sister Celia (Zuckerberg) followed him to Classical, and they too went to college. David earned a doctorate in chemistry.



Abraham entered Brown University in the fall of 1928. On his first day he met another aspiring doctor, Irving Beck, who, following wartime service, would also practice in Providence. The two stood in front of Sayles Hall and talked; their close friendship ended only with Dr. Beck's death in 1998.

Abraham learned to play chess from his father and his Uncle Sam. Later he joined the Providence Chess

Club and honed his game there. At Brown, in addition to excelling at his premed studies and intramural sports, Abraham was credited with reviving the Chess Club in the fall of 1931. After 15 years of dormancy, the club once again competed successfully in the Intercollegiate Chess League (of which Brown had been a founding member 30 years before). Abraham gave up chess when he entered medical school, but he played it again while serving overseas in the military.

Abraham enrolled at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons because of his curiosity about New York City. During his second year, he decided to become a surgeon. "I liked the fact that the results of surgery made people better. The doctors teaching me were wonderful people, and that influenced my decision," he stated. The summer he spent at Harvard doing surgical training strengthened his resolve.

After graduating from Columbia in 1936, he was fortunate to become an intern in surgery at the prestigious Brooklyn Jewish Hospital. While hoping for a residency in surgery, Dr. Horvitz spent a year as a resident in pathology at Harlem Hospital. Still hoping for a residency in surgery, he chose obstetrics as an alternative.

Then came December 4, 1939, a most eventful date in Dr. Horvitz's life. He received a call that morning from a friend with whom he had roomed while at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital. His wife had just given birth, so Dr. Horvitz decided to visit her at noon. As he was leaving to return to Harlem Hospital, he passed by the office of the superintendent of Brooklyn Jewish. His door was open. When the superintendent saw Dr. Horvitz, he waved to him to come in.

"I thought he just wanted to say hello," Dr Horvitz stated. "When I came in, he asked, 'Would you like a surgical residency here?' I tell you, he could have

knocked me over with a feather. Here I was worrying about what to do with my life, and here he was handing it to me on a silver platter. My life was a fairy tale after that."

However, the position would not become available for another year. With the help of the chief of surgery, Dr. Horvitz received an appointment as a research assistant on Dr. Robert Elman's staff in St. Louis. Dr. Horvitz planned to move there after completing his term at Harlem Hospital.

That December he attended a medical convention at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. He invited Eleanor Feldman of Providence to the gala dinner dance and proposed to her. "I knew Eleanor from the day she was born," he said. Their families were friends, and due to his friendship with her older sister Frieda, he had watched her grow up. Eleanor said yes. Eight years younger, she was then a student at Pembroke College in Brown University. She finished her junior year, but without Abraham's knowledge, she withdrew from Pembroke so she could transfer to Washington University in St. Louis. In this way she was able to join him and still finish her college education. Abraham and Eleanor were married on September 9, 1940 by Rabbi Morris Schussheim of Temple Beth-Israel at the home of her sister and brother-in-law, Frieda and Jack Goodman.

At the close of 1941 the couple returned to Brooklyn. Dr. Horvitz was named coauthor of several research projects that were published. (Some copies are available in the Association's archives.)

Then world events intervened.

"I was in my second year of residence at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital," he explained, "when the U.S. Army came calling. I was inducted in October 1942 and was sent for training to Fort Dix, New Jersey, where there was a general hospital. Two months later, on December 7, 1942, I embarked for Europe on the *Queen Mary*. I spent three years overseas: a year and a half in London and a year and a half on the continent. Eleanor had returned to Rhode Island, but then went to Washington, D.C. to work as a secretary in the War Department while I was overseas. I returned to the United States at the end of September 1945.



“I was assigned to the Third Surgical Group. It consisted of three surgeons, an anesthetist, two nurses and some enlisted men. When we were on the battlefield, we had technicians because the nurses stayed behind. We were a mobile surgical unit that moved along with the advancing forces. We set up in tents or even in trucks or in buildings, if available. We became very adept at setting up the unit so that we were able to operate in the field during battles. As we moved forwards, others took care of the recuperating patients.

“I worked with surgeons more experienced than I, and they taught me as we went along. We learned by doing. I continued to study. I had my medical books and the army manuals. I may still have some of that stuff.

“My surgical group was attached to the First Army with Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley. In April of 1944 plans were underway for an invasion of the continent (which became D-day). On April 28, 1944, we were on an LST (Landing Ship, Troop), cruising the English Channel with several battle groups participating in a mock invasion named Operation Tiger. We were well away from any battlefield, just cruising, when on the afternoon of April 28, we reached Lime Bay near a stretch of beach called Slapton Sands. Slapton Sands, in the general vicinity of Plymouth, resembled the area of France where the invasion would take place. Operation Tiger was a preparation for the landing on Utah beach.

“We were on the LSTs. They were large ships that carried all kinds of things: tanks, trucks, troops, battlefield equipment. We were going through practice maneuvers. There were eight LSTs in all. Three were behind the ship I was on, and four were in front. It was a beautiful day. The water was calm. We were supposed to turn around during the night and return to land the following day.

“Everything was okay until some time in the early hours of April 28. I heard bells ringing and general alarm. I went up on deck to see what was happening. We were being attacked by German E-boats. We did not know where they were. There had been some kind of slip-up or miscommunication, and they got through.

“When I went up on deck, I could see that the last LST was burning. Then I saw that the one directly behind us was hit. Tracer bullets came at us from all sides, and I was sure it was the end. There were a few times during the war it was so close that I was sure it was the end. This was one. When the torpedoes skipped our LST but hit the one in front of us, I knew there was a God. I was sure the end had come when I saw one LST burning, one exploded, and the one in front of us hit. It did not explode; it was disabled and was able to limp back to port. More than 600 Americans lost their lives in that debacle.*

“I had a good number of close calls on the battlefield. There was the Utah beach invasion. During the first hours of D-day, I was on a battleship offshore. On D-day plus one, June 7, we went in to the beach on these smaller boats and had to get off into the water. The water was up to my neck. I stepped into a hole made by a shell. A fellow soldier pulled me out and brought me up on shore on Utah beach. German planes were flying all over the place and bombs were dropping, and you did not know what the hell was going to happen next. The situation was too messy to allow me to be scared. When everyone dropped to the ground, I dropped to the ground.

“When we got to our station, about 4:00 or 5:00 in the afternoon, the tents that were our field hospital were already set up. I was soaking wet. Our team was told to get right to work because there were so many wounded soldiers lying there. They were lying on stretchers on the ground waiting for us. But the first person they told us to operate on was a soldier with appendicitis. We had to operate on him first. Otherwise he would have died. The other teams were operating on the wounded. He was later sent to England to recuperate.

“And then I had the worst night of my life. It was cold that night in France on Utah beach. We worked through the night. The next morning someone brought me my stuff. I changed my underwear and dried off a bit. I was now ready to fight the war, especially since I now had my cigars.

“I was always a cigar smoker. When I packed my kit that came ashore with me, I packed my stash of cigars in a rubber thing that was supposed to keep food dry. They came through our water landing safe and dry. I included the cigars instead of some of my underwear. The cigars were more important to me. Throughout my army service I was able to get good cigars even though they were difficult to get at home. It took a bit of rewards and bribery, but I always had them.

“After my shift at the field hospital that first day, I was supposed to set up my pup tent. First you had to dig a trench before pitching the tent, but I couldn't. I was too tired. So I lay on the ground in my sleeping bag. I was so tired I could have slept on anything. I got used to living conditions that were worse than being shot.

*197 sailors and 441 soldiers lost their lives. This was a greater loss than the invasion forces suffered on D-day at Utah beach. Although not identified as “Operation Tiger,” the debacle is described in the navy's official record. A second mock invasion, known as Operation Fabius, was held successfully in the same area on May 3-8. See: Samuel E. Morison, *The Invasion of France and Germany, 1944-1945*, Vol. XI of *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (15 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown, 1957), 64-9, 638.



field hospital in Europe; Dr. Horvitz is third from left

“We continued with the First Army through Europe, from battlefield to battlefield. We set up our field hospital, did our work, then moved on to the next battlefield. The sick and wounded were left in the care of others.

“When the war was coming to an end, we were in a place called Nordhausen, about 80 miles from Berlin. It was the site of a notorious concentration camp. April 15, 1945 was the first time I knew about its horrors. You’ve seen the pictures, but nothing comes close to the actual horror I saw. The Americans liberated the camp. The horrors we found! No one could believe it. For one day or maybe one weekend we had to handle the care of the ill inhabitants. To see these people, the survivors, how they looked, the stench, the smell was indescribable. What these people went through! They were later sent to civilian hospitals, and we moved on.”

After his discharge from the service, Dr. Horvitz returned to Brooklyn Jewish Hospital to finish his surgical residence. Finding an apartment in the postwar period was almost impossible, however. Early each morning he and Eleanor climbed into his old Chevy, bought a newspaper, and dashed off to get a head start for any possible rentals. They finally secured a place when his brother and his fiancée were married. They took over her apartment, then found a better one. He spent three more years at Brooklyn Jewish Hospital as a surgical resident. The Horvitzs’ son, Leslie, was born in 1947.

In January of 1948, six months prior to finishing his residency, Abraham and Eleanor came to Providence. Within one week they purchased a home on Cold Spring Street, on the East Side, and he rented office space in a building at 111 Waterman Street owned by his friend, Dr. Nathan Kiven, who had also served

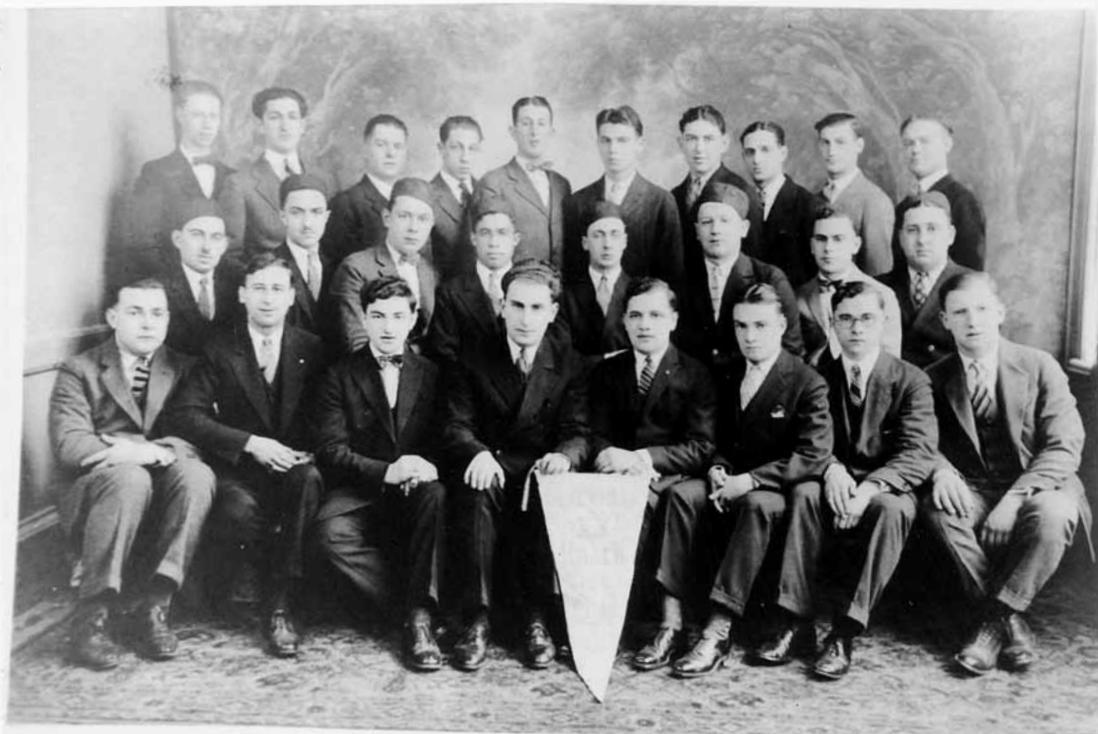
in the military. Dr. Horvitz began his practice that summer. Fortunately, he was not called up during the Korean War.

In addition to his staff affiliation with Miriam Hospital, Dr. Horvitz was chief of surgery at the Rhode Island State Hospital for Mental Diseases in Howard, a consulting surgeon at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Providence, and on the courtesy staff of the surgical service at Roger Williams Hospital in Providence. He was also a clinical instructor in surgery at Boston University and Brown University Medical Schools and was active in the Rhode Island Medical Society.

Dr. Horvitz retired in 1989 after 41 years in private practice and as a teacher to new generations of surgeons. He imparted not only his prodigious skill but, like his revered Dr. Libby, his dedication to patients.



Abe + David, ca. 1916



undated

named Doug, who only knows Zatloff as a blind man in a wheelchair, asks him what position he played. Zatloff instantly answers, “Tackle.”) In the kitchen of her Pawtuxet Village home, Sylvia (Rosenfield) Levin chuckles about being one of the many pregnant wives at an Olympic Club event in 1946.

What kind of club produces such cherished memories? What kind of club lasts 25 years, longer than all other JCC clubs, and has reunions attracting hundreds of alumni and their wives from across the country? The answer starts at 65 Benefit Street, the first location of Providence’s Jewish Community Center.

FOUNDING

As with many organizations, there are different versions of The Olympic Club’s founding. Lou Yosinoff says that Jacob I. Cohen, the JCC’s first director, approached several boys in the neighborhood with the idea of forming a club. Lou’s cousin, Erolle Haas, currently living in Florida, remembers the beginning slightly differently. When eight boys walked into Cohen’s office, Cohen responded to Erolle, “Why, do you want to be president?”

In 1938 club historian Sydney Cohen wrote the official version: “A group of kids found out that Executive Director Jacob I. Cohen wanted a club formed

in the Center. They talked it over and found that they could probably save five cents each week for dues. No sooner than this was agreed upon did little Louis Yosinoff set about getting a club organized. He succeeded, and was rewarded by being elected president.”

Everyone agrees that in May 1927 eight boys, ages eight, nine and ten, formed the club. Besides Yosinoff and Haas, they were Jack Jacobson, Joslyn Presser, Jacob Rottenberg, Nathan Schwartz, Ira Stone, and Haskell Wallick. The boys came from the immediate neighborhood— Carrington Avenue and Benefit, Jenckes, Olney, and North Main Streets. They were all sons of immigrants from Russia, Poland, Romania and Austria. Today their families would probably be called “working poor.” Their fathers were skilled tradesmen (cobbler, tailor, tin-smith, textile loom fixer), store owners (shoes, dry goods), and a fruit and vegetable vendor. Almost all their families were Orthodox Jews. Six of the families worshipped at the Howell Street shul (Ahavath Shalom), another at Orms Street (B’nai Zion). The Rottenbergs were active in the Workmen’s Circle.

None of The Olympics living today remembers why he needed or wanted his own club. Lou Yosinoff remembers that in 1927 there was already a boys’ club at the JCC, The Samsons, and that “the guys from Oakland Avenue (in the North End) had a club.” The Center sponsored Boy Scout Troop 5. Maybe the neighborhood pals wanted their own club with a wider range of activities than other clubs at the Center.

A SECOND HOME

In any case, the JCC became their second home. Because the game room was open four nights a week and the new club held weekly meetings, some of the boys were there every night except Fridays. “Our parents always knew where we were,” says Yosinoff. Schwartz adds that Center activities kept them off the streets and that they never even thought about alcohol or drugs.

But the friends were not called The Olympics yet. Their first name, The Loyals, quickly gave way in 1928 to The Young Frats, which was bestowed by J. I. Cohen.

Lou Yosinoff emphasizes that the JCC of the 1920s was in part a settlement house. We cannot know today what was in the minds of Jacob I. Cohen or The Olympics’ first “leader,” William Gates, but as elsewhere in the settlement movement, hygiene, fitness and Americanization were emphasized. JCC rules required physical exams for anyone using the gym, with screenings provided by on-site doctors and dentists. Gates kept weekly health and attendance charts. He

also trained the boys to run their weekly meetings using *Robert's Rules of Order*. Erolle Haas remembers Gates organizing mock congressional sessions, with half the boys as Democrats and half as Republicans. They introduced, debated, and voted on legislation. Gates also trained the boys in the arts of debate, declamation, and writing essays.

Before long The Olympics were entering friendly but intense rivalries in all these arenas with the Center's other clubs, including the girls' clubs, Kadima and Checkerettes. So coveted was the Jules P. Goldman Trophy for the Center's best all-around club that my otherwise honest father, Jack Jacobson, once submitted two entries in an essay contest, his own and another ghostwritten in the name of Erolle Haas. Needless to say, Erolle was quite shocked to win first place ("Who, me?"). The Olympics took the trophy by one point that year, 1932, and won it the following year as well.

Early on The Olympics, befitting their name, fielded basketball, baseball, and football teams. Lou Yosinoff led cheerleading. The cheer that Nat Schwartz recounted over the phone goes: "Chahee chahah, Jacka racka boomerack, Olympics Olympics, Rah rah rah."

The boys put on plays, stunt nights, and minstrel shows (yes, sometimes including blackface). Lou, Boris Pritcher, and others performed skits and plays, including *Money*, at the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island, which was located at the site of today's Miriam Hospital. The Olympics developed an ongoing relationship with JORI, with some of the orphans joining the club. Among them were Nathan and Saul Barber,¹ Marshall Broomfield, and Albert Miller.

Weekly dues of five cents were used for many purposes, including an end-of-year banquet. In his report about the 1938 banquet, Syd Cohen wrote with irony about the earliest banquets. "These were elaborate affairs," he noted, "consisting of soda and corned beef sandwiches, or hot dogs...held in the club room" (room 8, on the second floor of the JCC). With a chuckle Erolle Haas reminisces about the first year the boys made the big leap away from Benefit Street to Weinstein's Banquet Hall downtown, with corned beef sandwiches still the main menu item. By 1938 the affair had graduated to the Crown Hotel, complete with indoor miniature golf.

Like many of today's teachers and youth leaders, Gates used certificates to acknowledge achievement and encourage his charges. Among the mementos donated by Joslyn Presser to the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association are two certificates he received on May 27, 1930. One is for good attendance, regular dues payment, and "conducting himself as an able gentleman of THE

OLYMPIC CLUB." The other is for participation in "Junior Rally and Stunt Night, helping the Club to win first prize in each event" and participation in debates.

WILLIAM GATES

Lou Yosinoff recalls that William Gates, who left Rhode Island in 1933, poured heart and soul into his work with The Olympics, day in and day out. He even talked with them in his car after the Center closed. "You wouldn't find a leader like that today, to devote his whole life to the club," says Yosinoff. "He certainly taught us morally and ethically." Five years after Gates' departure Syd Cohen wrote, "Such an example did he set, and so well is he remembered, that even those club members who do not know him have a deep-rooted respect and admiration for him."

Soon after Gates' departure, the boys officially changed their group's name to The William Gates Cutler Olympic Club. (He had been reared by his aunt and uncle at Benefit and Bowen Streets, but he later found out that he had biological parents named Cutler.)

Other advisors followed— Jack Alprin, Max Levine, and Harold Stanzler—but between the leadership skills developed by Gates and the members' growing maturity, The Olympics needed less and less adult guidance. As teenagers, Yosinoff and Jack Jacobson had already become leaders for the Olympic Juniors. In 1936 Max Levine wrote an Olympic Club constitution, but a committee of members hammered out amendments to suit their needs. They had learned well Gates' civics lessons.

Following Gates' dynamic example, The Olympics were involved in virtually every activity available to youth at the JCC. In 1935, for example, nine Olympics, including James Hochman, the editor, were on the coed staff of fifteen that produced *The Centerite* newsletter. In a 1937 photo of the JCC's Sunday school graduation class, all the boys are Olympics: Ralph Winn, Morris Bernstein, Morris Cofman, and Sydney Greenfeld. A news clipping from that time, "Cast for Jewish Guild's Comedy," shows that Olympics Syd Cohen, Sam Kolodney, and Jos Presser were among the coed cast of the one-act comedy, "Men from Brandon."





Syd Cohen + guest, Al + Ruth Roffer, Howard + Betty Cohen,
Tedi + Sid Green, David Tanger + guest, Haskell Wallick + guest, 1946

DANCES

The year 1935 saw the beginning of The Olympics' annual formal dinner dance, always held on Memorial Day weekend. Zinn's Banquet Hall, the Hotel Warren, and the Weber Duck Inn (in Wrentham, Massachusetts) were among the classy venues where these affairs were held during the 1930s. An item in a 1935 issue of *The Centerite* reads, "You've heard of the saying, 'Hitch yourself to a star— etc.?' Well, girls, you'd better hitch yourself to an Olympic before they are all gone." "Girls all wanted to be invited to our social affairs because they were such nice affairs," says Lou Yosinoff. As an indication of the flair The Olympics brought to these affairs, everyone at the 1937 dinner dance received a 3 x 4 inch program with a small pencil attached for collecting autographs.

Two interesting aspects of Olympic culture, reflecting the spirit of brotherhood, involved dinner dances. If a girl declined an Olympic member's invitation, no other Olympic member could invite her. The other was the morning-after baseball game at Sessions Street field (the current site of the JCC). Because it started at 6 a. m. sharp, an Olympic occasionally showed up to play in his tuxedo.

Aside from the formal dances, Olympic social events included a barn dance, other casual dances, picnics, community sings, and annual Olympic Nights, with contests for hog calling, pie eating, cigar smoking, apple bobbing,

and sucking punch from a baby bottle. Lou Yosinoff recalls dances with as many as 200 people held after basketball games against JCCs or YMHAs in Brockton, Boston, and Fall River. For a dance held at the Old Plantation Auditorium (later a location of Johnson & Wales, downtown), The Olympics actually dispatched members to Fall River with posters and tickets. Many Olympics met a first date or even a future wife at dances.

Like most teens, The Olympics were focused on themselves and peers, but family and synagogue connections were also regular parts of Olympic life. Parents' Night was a big annual event in the JCC gym, and every member's mother received a Mother's Day card from the club, with a poem written by Syd Cohen. Howell Street shul's rabbi, Morris Silk, and other rabbis were often guests at Olympic events.

FRATERNITY

In some ways the club resembled a fraternity. In its early days initiations included paddling, but that did not last long. More typical was the initiation of Hy Levin, who had to sing from the steps of City Hall. The Olympics also had their own hat and pin, the latter made by Elmer Lappin's uncle at the company that later became Emblem and Badge. The club belonged to the Rhode Island Youth Federation and the Federation of New England Intermediate-Senior "Y" Clubs.

Nicknames abounded among The Olympics, enough to rival any group of inner-city youth today. Some nicknames were based on a member's appearance, his personality traits, his interests or his work. Such nicknames included: The Bat (Jimmy Hochman, who wore glasses), The Horse (Len Chernack, for his football and wrestling prowess), Bomp (Harold Aven, who could really whack a baseball), Gabby (the loquacious Sid Green), Riff (sax-playing Al Roffer), Bucky (John Kapstein, who idolized movie cowboy Buck Jones), and Apex (Ira Stone, who worked at that well-known tire store). Other nicknames were take-offs on a member's Yiddish name: Yonk (Jack Rottenberg), Heschie (Harold Golden), Revie (Irving Reuven Zatliff, Reuben Karten), Miescha (Morris Satloff) and Mutty (Max Simkofsky). Lou Yosinoff was Yarka, the name of a Colgate University football player from Rhode Island. The Cuban Kid was Charlie Shechtman, who had come to Providence from the Caribbean island. The meanings of other nicknames have been lost: Chamoose (Charlie Abrams), Knocky (Norton Rappaport), Lum (Sam Schleifer), Puddy or Puddin' Head (Norm Greenstein), Wimpy (Lew Snyder), and Zop (Leon Ackerman). Nat Schwartz remembers that Izzy Fine was called Stinky. Well, Stinky went on to become Professor Isadore Fine, a

marketing specialist at the University of Wisconsin.

The Olympics' motto was Charity, Friendship, Benevolence. "Our spirit of service started there (at the Center)," says Lou Yosinoff, who spent 33 years as a teacher and guidance counselor in Providence public schools. The Olympics' good works went beyond the aforementioned relationship with the Jewish Orphanage. As early as 1929 the boys bought a banner with the Center's name for the gym. They later bought etchings for the JCC and donated a trophy for the club with the best recruitment record in the Center's annual membership drive. In 1936, during the depths of the Great Depression, the club began the annual practice of donating to the Community Fund and contributed to the Red Cross's local flood relief efforts.

The year 1939 was notable to The Olympics for two reasons. Their basketball team, coached by Jewish Orphanage director George Katz, won the league championship of the 30-member New England Young Men's Hebrew Association. The first two Olympics marriages also took place that year; Erolle and Connie Haas were wed and then Sanford and Charlotte Lichtman. Subsequently, Nat Schwartz proposed that each married member be given a stag party and \$10, and that each child born to an Olympic would receive \$15. Not to be outdone, the club's resident jokester, Bob (also known as Pat) Novgrad, proposed that the first child born to an Olympic member would receive diapers in Olympic colors (blue and white), signed by all the members.

With their reputation fueled by great social events and athletic accomplishments, The Olympics grew to at least 65 members by 1941. (This is Lou Yosinoff's estimate; the exact figure no longer exists). The club's large membership was matched by increasingly tight bonds, strong spirit, and deep pride. Members enrolled in nearby colleges remained active. This group included, for example, Lou Yosinoff, Jos Presser, Syd Cohen, and Sam Kolodney, who were in the Class of 1940 at Rhode Island College of Education (later known as R.I.C.). Other members, including Jack Rottenberg, who attended Providence College before graduating from George Washington University, also stayed in close touch.

WORLD WAR II

But war was looming. At a 1941 banquet, Syd Cohen sang his new poem, "The Boys of Class 1-A," to the tune of "Turkey in the Straw." It included the lines: "The Olympics now are handicapped, we're losing men galore, the services are not yet through, they're taking more and more." Ruby Pollack and John Kapstein

had already joined the National Guard, and Hy Levin had joined the Navy in 1940. Draftee Lew Snyder wrote from the Louisiana mudflats, "If you can stay out of this army, do it." But as 1941 drew to a close, at least seven other Olympics, including Syd Cohen, were already in the Army.

Like many members of his generation, Nat Schwartz remembers exactly where he was when he heard the news that Pearl Harbor was bombed: at the weekly Sunday night Olympic Club meeting in room 8 of the JCC. "I didn't know what the hell Pearl Harbor was," Nat commented. "I thought of a Chinese restaurant downtown near the Outlet Company." (This may have been the Port Arthur on Weybosset Street.) Nor did most of the other Olympics know the name of the naval base just attacked by Japanese aircraft. But virtually all members of The Olympic Club would soon be in the armed services. All but a handful were in the armed services by 1943.

Olympics were represented in every branch of the service. Some stayed in the States, but most served overseas at some point during the war. Most functioned in supportive roles, as supply clerks, radio operators, and airplane mechanics, but a large number were in combat. Olympics were involved in some of the war's pivotal battles. For example, infantryman Sam Hochman and combat

Wall of Honor at JCC



engineer Irving Levine² landed on D-day. Signalman Max Simkofsky's ship, the U.S.S. *Thurston*, was part of the Iwo Jima invasion. Moe Zarchen, who volunteered for the infantry to "get a crack at those—," was at the Remagen Bridge crossing.

Several Olympics were decorated for individual heroism or were in units receiving Presidential Unit Citations. Syd Cohen, initially a lieutenant in a medical unit and later a lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve, felt that The Olympics possessed excellent leadership skills. These contributed to a disproportionate number of members attaining officer status.

Three Olympics died in the war: Gerry Clamon, on patrol in France in July 1944; Abe Smith, in a German artillery barrage in March 1945; Aaron (Harry) Kopit, after piloting a bombing mission over Japan in April 1945. He left a wife and three-month old son.

SID + TEDI GREEN

Sid Green, who had severely injured his leg at age eight, was one of the few Olympic Club members exempted from military service. Nevertheless, he worked for a company supplying the naval construction battalion (Seabees) based at Davisville, Rhode Island.

But Green's role in the war effort went way beyond his actual job. He edited *Mail Call*, the JCC's newsletter sent to its 570 members in the military, and he wrote its "Olympics in Uniform" column. Additionally, Sid helped launch and maintain a huge Wall of Honor at the JCC, which displayed nameplates of all its service members. He accepted further responsibility for maintaining a display board with enlarged photos of Olympic Club members in uniform.

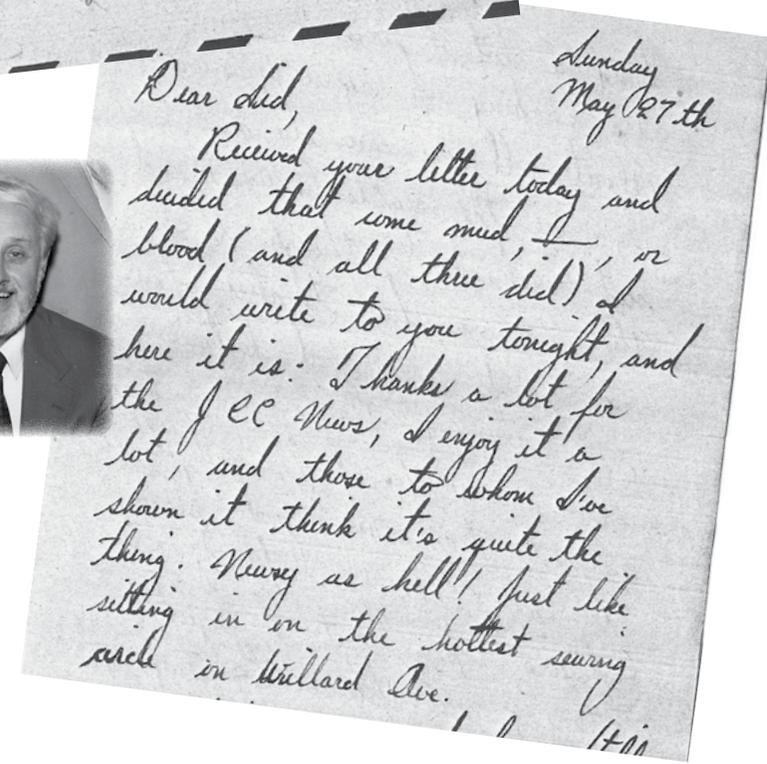
In October 1943 Sid married Tedi Cohen from Brookline. They had met at a dance after a JCC basketball game. The newlyweds settled into an apartment at 11 North Avenue, off Hope Street near the Pawtucket line. In a 1977 article marking The Olympic Club's 50th reunion, Sid told *Providence Journal* reporter Bob Chiapinelli: "My poor wife. She must have been hostess to 9,000 dinners. Every time a serviceman would come home, (he went) right to Sid Green's house." Though that number was obviously exaggerated, Tedi told me in 2007, "The neighbors wondered what was going on, with guys in all kinds of uniforms coming in and out all the time." When I commented that this must have been difficult for a newlywed, she answered, "You knew when you married an Olympic that you were marrying into the whole club." In 1945 Tedi sent out Valentine's Day cards to all Olympic servicemen.



letter from "Lum" Schleifer from Phillipines



Sid Green, 1987



Sid may have exaggerated the number of dinners his wife cooked, but between January 1944 and September 1945 he definitely received at least 282 letters and postcards from 39 Olympic Club members in the armed forces. Tedi Green gave me an accordion file full of this correspondence on Memorial Day weekend of 2007. Coincidentally, it was exactly 80 years earlier that eight East Side boys had started what was to become The Olympic Club. The World War II correspondence I had been given included 71 pieces from seven of those eight original members. They had been stationed all over the globe: France, Italy,

Germany, New Guinea, Australia, the Philippines, Dutch Guinea, and Alaska.

Olympic connections stayed strong throughout the war, especially once Sid Green circulated Olympics' military addresses. Twenty-two of his correspondents mentioned receiving mail from other Olympics. Fifteen had also been visited by their Olympic brothers. Jimmy Hochman was the most popular (or best situated). He was visited by five Olympics while stationed with the Army Signal Corps in Paris.

In his letters Sid Green floated the idea of a Buck-a-Month Club, with the thought of building up enough funds for an Olympic clubhouse after the war. Twenty-one of his correspondents addressed the pros and cons of this proposal, with many including dues. Many letters included nostalgia for The Olympics' prewar activities. Sam Hochman, serving with the Third Army in Germany, wrote the following on March 12, 1945: "It seems as though that when the

Kraut start throwing everything at you all sweet memories return, our Sunday debates, our hilarious barn dance and our "sober" Dinner-Dance."

Olympic GIs were asking Sid Green not only for more letters, but other kinds of help as well. Harry Woloff asked Sid to visit his mother. Lou Yosinoff asked how his father looked after hospitalization. Ira Stone asked Sid not to tell his mother about his hospitalization after an accident. Haskell Wallick asked Sid not to tell his mother that he was in combat. Moe Zarchen requested secrecy about his being wounded. Hy Levin requested that Sid ask Jewish Orphanage director George Katz about getting into social service work after the war. Jack Rottenberg asked Sid to reach out to his brother-in-law who was having trouble adjusting after four years in the Army. Jack Jacobson requested care packages. Seymour Sax wanted film.

In Olympic lore Revie Zatliff was legendary not only as a ping pong champ, but also for allegedly connecting all The Olympics in Europe by phone



1946

through his job as an Army switchboard operator in France. Today Revie denies this, stating that he merely called many of The Olympics himself and that all the calls were authorized. But one wonders, based on the following statement in a May 4, 1945 letter to Sid from Jimmy Hochman: "Zatliff is crazy as a bedbug, if he ever gets caught calling up it'll be his ass, but I guess he doesn't care about it as he's been calling all over France."

In November 1945, Hy Levin wrote to Sid Green from Shanghai, "No doubt real soon the Olympics will be officially operating again and I do think that somehow the war and military service will have a direct effect on our club; for the better too!"

BACK HOME

Hy was right. On January 25, 1946 the *Rhode Island Jewish Herald* reported on The Olympic Club's first meeting in four years. Sid Green was president, and



Officers, 1952; left to right front row: Irving Levine, J.I. Cohen, William Gates Cutler, Lou Yosinoff, Ruby Pollock; back row: Jos Presser, Sid Green, Al Roffer, Sam Kolodney, Jack Jacobson

Syd Cohen represented the club on the JCC board. Rabbi Morris Silk was guest speaker.

Meetings resumed twice monthly. Despite out-of-state moves, several wartime marriages, and a few births, the club regrouped with 63 members. The annual dinner dance, dedicated to fallen comrades Gerry Clamon, Abe Smith, and Aaron Kopit, was held on Memorial Day weekend back at its prewar location, the Taunton Inn. The club soon resumed its ties to the Jewish Orphanage. My mother, Rosalyn (Kaplan) Jacobson, remembered a “date” on which my father, Jack, and other Olympics helped dig the site for Camp JORI’s pool.

A cracked, glossy photo given to me by Syd Cohen’s wife, Goldie, shows the 1947 installation of tuxedo-clad officers: Syd, Irving H. Levine, Sumner Pearl,

1950



480

Hy Levin, and Syd Rakatansky. Another photo shows Jack Jacobson receiving the president’s gavel from the JCC’s second director, Simeon Kinsley. A Health and Welfare Fund (resembling a *landsmanshaft*) was set up from which members could receive \$8 per week if sick or disabled. Olympics football and basketball teams were things of the past, but a *Jewish Herald* photo from this time shows an Olympics baseball team as it is about to vie for a league championship. In another clipping, 21 Olympic bowlers smile for the *Herald* camera after winning the newspaper’s 1948 tournament against the Knights of Pythias and Providence Fraternal Association. That year the club had at least 61 members.

The Olympic Club had grown and prospered through the Great Depression and it came back strong after World War II, but even The Olympics could not compete with the joys of peace: married life, the baby boom, the G.I. Bill or the lure of settling beyond Rhode Island. After 25 years, the club officially disbanded in 1952.

REUNIONS

But the Olympic spirit of camaraderie would not die. In 1957, 62 members reunited for a 30th anniversary gathering at Lindy’s Restaurant in Cranston, where many members settled. Five years later, they assembled at The Farm in Warwick, another suburban enclave. That same year a small group of Olympics formed an investment club. Even Charlie Shechtman joined, mailing his contribution early each month from Southern California.

Eleven former Olympic leaders still living in Rhode Island organized a huge 50th reunion and dinner dance on May 29, 1977 at Crestwood Country Club in Rehoboth, Massachusetts. They were joined by three of their former leaders, Jack Alprin, William Matzner, and former coach and JORI director George Katz. As in The Olympics’ heyday, this reunion and dinner dance included special awards. Former president Jack Jacobson had retrieved some bricks from the demolition of The Olympics’ old stomping grounds, the JCC on Benefit Street. Repainted gold, these were given to the four members who had traveled the farthest to the reunion: three from California and one from Colorado.

With appetites whetted by the reunion, eight Olympics got together soon after to play poker. That game stretched into 15 years of Tuesday nights.



1987 reunion; Jack Jacobson, first row, right



founders, 1987 reunion

Despite the deaths of many members by 1987, the 60th anniversary reunion and dinner dance (back at Crestwood) drew 56 members, 48 wives, several members' widows, and Jack Alprin and George Katz. The hall was decorated with a "Welcome Home Olympics" banner, and memorabilia galore were displayed. From the ceiling hung homemade street signs from the old East Side and North End: Benefit, Carrington, Douglas, Doyle, Howell, Lippitt, Orms, and Pratt. Syd Cohen's presentation on "The Special Flavor of the Olympics" was

drenched in nostalgia, with songs, cheers, a quiz on nicknames, and quotes of the prices paid for the 1941 dinner dance: \$1.50 per dinner, \$10 for 100 programs, \$2 for the janitor, and \$35 for the band.

In 1992 the entire club was inducted into the JCC's Rhode Island Jewish

Sports Hall of Fame. True to their history, after that year's reunion, The Olympics donated \$1,800 to the JCC, with \$300 designated for junior baseball and basketball teams.

Although their numbers were vastly reduced by 2002, 24 members still came together for the club's 75th anniversary. Jason Shwartz, then attending RISD, joined his grandfather Dave Tanger's old friends.

MENSCHEN

Lou Yosinoff thinks there may not have been another club like The Olympics anywhere in the country. He mentions three reasons: the original eight boys were so young (eight to ten years old), the club's breadth of activities, and the longevity of the organization (active for 25 years, but still gathering after 75). Asked about the club's meaning for his own life, Lou says, "It taught us how to become *menschen*." Or, as Jack Jacobson told a television news reporter in 1992, "We molded character more than anything else." Nat Schwartz says, "They were all like my brothers. We would do anything for each other." To Errol Haas, "Everybody was a good guy. It was a wonderful thing for us growing up.

1987 reunion



We made lifelong friends there.”

I could go on about The Olympics’ success— in business, teaching, other professions, marriage, and family life— but instead I would like to emphasize community service (*mitzvot*). One of the many Olympic Club files at the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association is devoted entirely to clippings of communal achievements. Lou Yosinoff helps raise \$25,000 for scholarships at Rhode Island College; Ralph Winn starts a youth bowling league; Harold Homonoff receives the Shofar Award for the promotion of Jewish scouting; Sid Green is among seven JCC volunteers of the year in 1991 for involvement in its swim-athon; Hy Levin, after retirement from the Navy, pursues a career as an alcohol and drug abuse counselor.

Then there were other Olympics, not in the file, who are now deceased. Jack Jacobson helped start the Cranston YMCA; Ira Stone led Congregation Chevra Agudas Achim (now known as United Brothers) in Bristol; Irv H. Levine and Charlie Abrams were officers of the local chapter of the Jewish War Veterans; Sid Cohen served on the board of Rhode Island College’s alumni association. I cannot help but think that The Olympic Club experiences helped point these men in such directions. They may have been poor boys, but they led such rich lives.

My picture of The Olympic Club may seem rosy. Later in life one Olympic got into legal trouble. I know of three business situations in which a former Olympic treated another in a nonbrotherly manner. But we are talking about a club that involved at least 157 people.

As Lou Yosinoff told George LaTour of *What’s News’s* in 1992, “Some of us turned out pretty good.” Indeed! The former JCC director, Jacob I. Cohen, and the club’s first advisor, William Gates Cutler, would surely be proud.

In addition to all The Olympics and their wives mentioned above, I would like to thank Lloyd and Sheila Kaplan, for providing a home base; Sanford Gorodetsky of the Jewish War Veterans; Anne Sherman of RIJHA; and the following family members of Olympics: Jonathan Kapstein (nephew of John), Freda Lehrer (daughter of Ira Stone), Helene Nemtzow (sister of Jacob Rottenberg), Cynthia Shwartz (daughter of Dave Tanger), and Erroll Zatloff (son of Irving).

ENDNOTES

1| Saul Barber became a biology professor at Lehigh University. His essay, “My Life in the Jewish Orphanage of Rhode Island,” is found in: George M. Goodwin and Ellen Smith, eds., *The Jews of Rhode Island* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England, 2004), 190-204.

2| This Irving was often confused with Irving R. Levine, who became a prominent journalist. Irving H. was also known as “the short” Irving Levine.

AUNT LILLIAN

MICHAEL FINK

Readers of our journal have become acquainted with and perhaps attached to several members of the Fink Family: Grandfather Harry, Mother Blima, and Uncles Herb and Sam. Now Mike has painted another wistful but indelible portrait.

It’s not that “Mr. RISD” is drawn only toward colorful characters (or that he is such a character). Rather, Mike sees something good and satisfying almost everywhere he looks. As if he were Hercules or David, my friend and colleague never tires of rushing to somebody’s defense.

My brothers and I thought that New York was the greatest city in the world. We believed that Montréal held all the glamour of Paris. That was during the Depression and World War II, when, as small boys, we were confined to our cobblestones and curbstones.

Aunt Lillian, on the other hand, took Providence and Rhode Island quite seriously— as the safest and most normal nook upon the planet. My mother’s perhaps older, perhaps younger, sister was born in Romania in 1904 or 1906 (since none of the three sisters would declare dates) and was reared in Canada. She married there, left her husband, and moved to a small women’s hotel in Manhattan. At a lunch counter she attracted the attention of the short-order cook. She shared the rest of her life with him. This is a brief account of her sojourn.

Lillian was born with a major curvature of the spine. She had to create her own wardrobe. In her Murray Hill flat, where I so often visited her, she kept the dressmaker dummy of her form just inside the front entrance of the very tight quarters. There was a dumping chute for what we used to call “swill parcels” at the left, a staircase to the roof at the right. Beyond the kitchen-dining area with a Venetian blind to hide the appliances, a parlor overlooked Lexington Avenue. Upon a writing table stood a



ca. 1924



sisters Stella + Lillian,
Montréal, late 1920s

a framed portrait of her only child, a daughter who had died as an infant. She had been named Charna for Lillian's mother. The name on the door of the apartment and at the entrance to the building read Allen. Actually, Lillian's husband, Leonard, received mail under the name Alimena, but the sound and look of Allen struck her as more respectable. Could it pass for a Jewish name?

Let's come back to Providence. Upon the newspapers' society pages, Lillian had announced that she and Leonard had been married at 12 Creston Way— the residence of my immediate family, and the house I still live in!

Lillian lived her own legend. She asked her sister Betty (my mother) to swear in court

or upon a legal document that she had been born in Canada and had been wed in Rhode Island. Betty was extremely reluctant to put her name upon a false statement. True, Romanians had the reputation for being willing, like Gypsies, to claim whatever might be of use to their clan.

But Betty had a rather different nature. She was straight and even in some sense a bit shy. And don't forget that during the era, since Betty herself had a Romanian birth certificate and only became an American citizen at the start of the war, she would have feared any suspicion of false identity. What could be worse than deportation into the dark hole, the void?

Had Lillian ever obtained *a get* or even a Canadian divorce from her first husband?

Leonard, a gentle and composed person, was an amateur painter and violinist. He was a good-looking and mild-mannered companion, but as a child, I was fascinated by his missing finger. Similarly, as a youngster, I was both intrigued by and attracted to my aunt and uncle in downtown Gotham, who resided a few blocks from Grand Central Station.

The first time my elder but not eldest brother, Chick, and I took a train from Providence to that gorgeous and fabulous temple to travel was during the spring school break of 1947. We took an open-air bus to those rooms that would continue to serve me as a safe haven, a welcoming oasis, and a theatre of family drama somewhere between saga and Dada. I picture my brother and me in our



Lillian + Leonard, New York, 1930

matching Bar Mitzvah "leisure suits," endeavoring to stick to kosher foods at Jewish restaurants and delicatessens while not fully trusting our generous hosts' belief in kashrut. They went in more for Ethical Culture and leftist politics.

What was the keynote to Lillian's intense personality? She both admired and envied Betty's solid brick house and yard and her trio of American sons. She wrote letters criticizing her treatment of us. "Why don't you buy Michael a new coat? You should put braces on his teeth!"

For a wide range of reasons, my friendship with Lillian nevertheless withstood the test of time during my teens and college years. There was a free place to stay, with beer and coffee always provided also to my classmates. Lillian and Leonard would happily steer me to the proud museums, monuments, prospects and theatres that made those numbered and named avenues the fabled boulevards of the hemisphere— symbols of freedom and liberty, opportunity and promise.



graduation, Hunter College,
New York, ca. 1946

sisters Betty + Lillian,
Michael's graduation,
1955



And yet, each time I would take my leave and a bus or subway to Grand Central and back to college or to Providence, I would think she's too critical, too possessive, too evasive, too inquiring, too divisive regarding my relationships to my father and even my mother. But then, as I drank my coffee poured from a silver pot by a uniformed railroad server, I would review the endless kindnesses, the humorous routines, the jokes, the *kloles* (old Romanian-Jewish curses that come in handy), and the touching embraces that had bound me to her. I knew that the story of nephew and aunt would not close quickly.

During my junior year I left New Haven to study at the Sorbonne. My parents never visited, and did not telephone, although they sent money, cigarettes, and toilet paper. They respected my privacy, and they had their East Providence business to maintain. But Lillian followed me, with Leonard, and I shared the streets and alleyways of Paris with them. Lillian rented a Vespa motor scooter to explore with me the sixth arrondissement I knew so well.

During my senior year, I invited Lillian and Leonard to join the happiness of my Yale commencement in 1955. It all turned out rather sadly, however. My father was less than delighted to dine with his sister-in-law, who customarily criticized him to my mother and me. My dad never hid his displeasure, and the day ended badly.

When I spent a year in Eastchester, New York, the Allens were my first dinner guests. We had nevertheless drifted slightly apart. My studies in poetry and in translation differed from her interests in child development. My "politics," such as they were, perhaps veered in a different direction. Mine was a silent, anxious generation.

Lillian had taught public school in New York and took a summer refresher and research course at the University of Rhode Island. I was driving a Harley Davidson motorcycle that summer. A tiny, 50 cc. model unfit to compete with trucks on a major highway. And I daringly rode it down Interstate 95 to pay homage to the Allens on their South County campus—there, calmly, by the iconic statue of the mascot ram. I brought some pieces I had written for their perusal, to show off a bit of what I was doing within my vocation.

Lillian may have been somewhat disappointed in me. That I chose the path of teaching, as she did, rather than climbing "higher" in the greater world. Maybe, though, she would be happy to know that, through these words, I honor her as a guide.

During college I had brought a beautiful girl to the Allens' apartment. But Lillian believed I liked her for her aristocratic wealth, not for her person. Her comment rather hurt me.

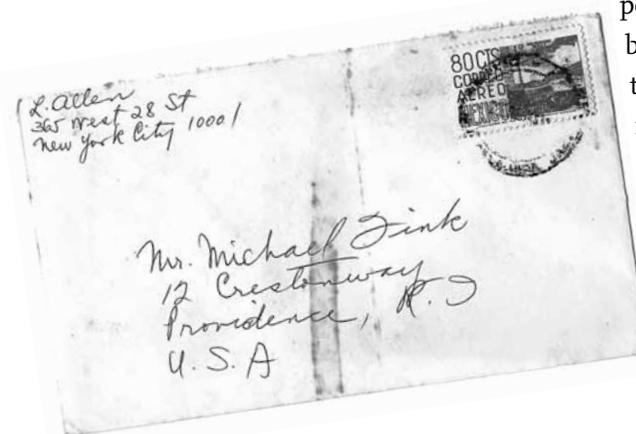
But when, years later, I brought my fiancée to Lillian's home, she entertained us as usual with every gesture of genuine hospitality. No, I wasn't an utter ingrate.

And once I was properly married and ensconced in an appropriate apartment of our own and even awaiting the arrival of our first child, I telephoned Lillian and asked her to have the Passover seder at our table. "Too late!" she declared. Lillian believed primarily in this life, nothing mystical to follow.

She was suffering from a mortal illness and put her blessing upon our lives as a couple. When we had our daughter, Leonard said that Lillian had hallucinated over the happy news. She saw herself giving birth to a baby.

After her passing in the springtime of '76, Leonard came to visit, beaming in a white summer suit and bearing gifts in pink ribbons. He told us that Lillian had requested that her body be used for science and for humane purposes such as organ transplants,

but that he could not bear the thought. Instead, he dedicated a flowering tree in the courtyard of their apartment.



from Mexico

“Why did you marry Lillian?” I made so bold as to ask, but I put the query gently and courteously to him. “She had such a beautiful face,” he answered promptly.

Well, Lenny married again (as Lillian had bid him). She was a Providence lady. We celebrated the wedding at the fateful Twin Towers in Manhattan, and after five years we met there again to toast their anniversary. They had some good years together. They even flew to Rome to visit our apartment when I was serving as director of RISD’s European Honors Program. And the couple often paid a visit when here in Providence, occasionally at our South County summer retreat, as Lillian and Leonard had done when my parents kept small places at the shore throughout July and August.

But the last time I saw Lenny, he was in a wheelchair and asked me in a troubled tone of voice, “Who do you think is calling me? A lady with the last name Cohen or Oser, with sisters named something like Minna, Rose, Stella, and Blima. Who could it be?” I did not contradict or explain. I listened deeply and replied that Lillian’s spirit was asking to be included in his thoughts.

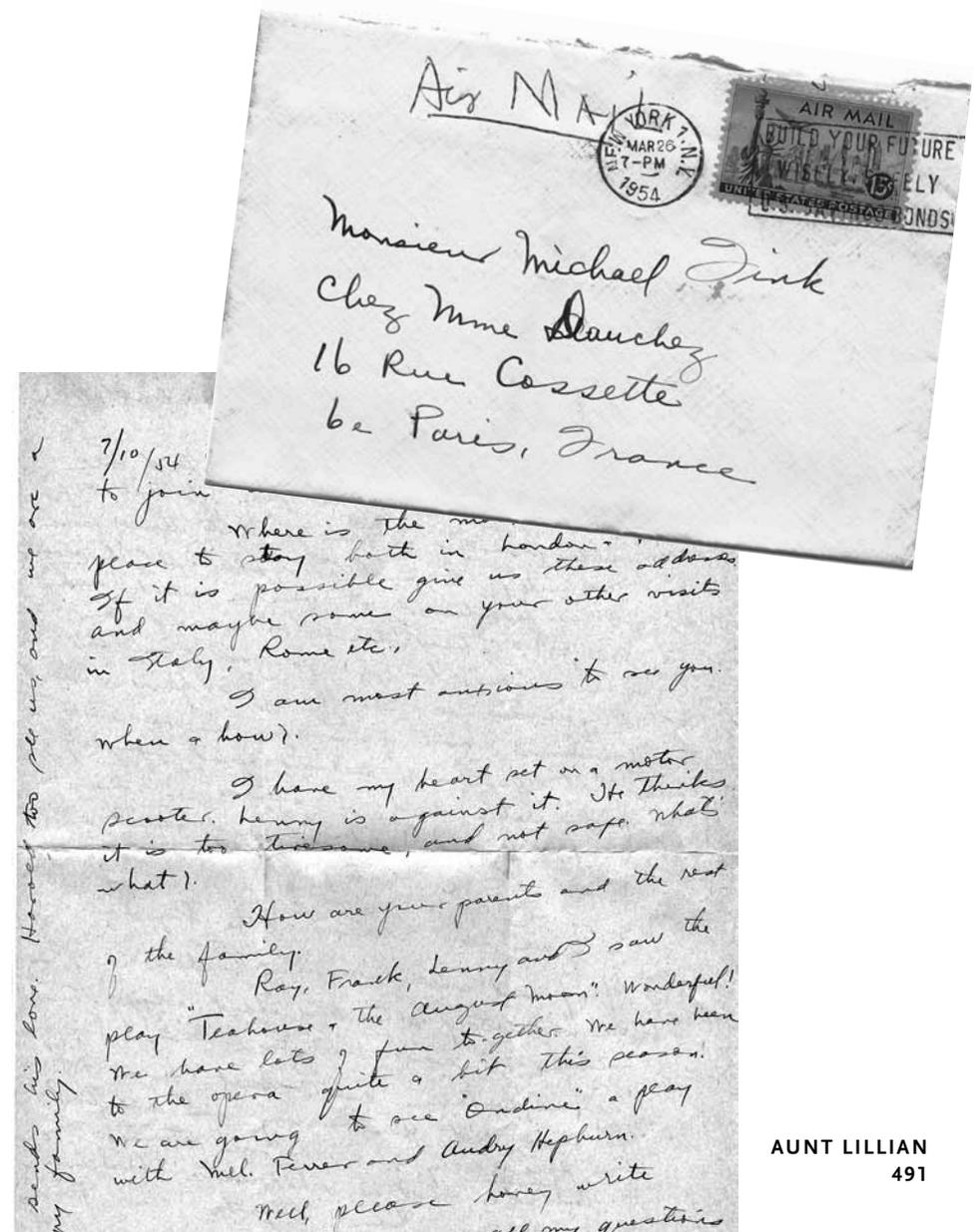
Strangely enough, Lillian’s youngest sister, my Canadian Aunt Stella, had narrated a dream to me. She had been doing a wash and Lillian had appeared, on something like roller skates, from behind the machine, beckoning her. And I realized that Lillian had wielded a powerful, psychic, haunting magic, whose source was her hunger for life and all its treasures, some of which I had held back from her.

Lillian used to wear a cameo that had been given to her by her mother. I wanted that precious heirloom for my wife as a talisman of a grandmother and a branch of the family I had not known. But the pin was never found in the safe deposit box after Lenny’s death. It had vanished into yet another void. The heirs to Lenny’s side of the family sent me instead a box of photographs, from which I select a few to share with my readers. They show the hope, the pride, and the strong will of this lady from every place and from any place.

In what sense does Aunt Lillian belong in Providence, with me? As part of a Rhode Island story? Perhaps the wondrous phrase by Roger Williams, “a refuge for those troubled in conscience,” may give a hint. She wanted Rhode Island, concise as her apartment, with its cheer and embrace. She was open to the escape-valves of river and ocean with woodland to hide in and with fine houses to visit. Rhode Island’s fancy façade was fading in those years, but it was all the more enchanting for the dreamer. “Simply marvelous” was one of her phrases of exaggeration.

I cherish Aunt Lillian’s letters and even some epistles never meant for me to see and ponder. The packet I found in the ancestral attic of my boyhood, written under the name of her first husband in Montréal. The notices of her second marriage, which never took place in my own garden.

She belonged in a world of make-believe and perhaps in the domain I make an effort to create with my metaphors. Through them I endeavor to script a creative and demanding force within my larger and wider family, receding into yesteryear. Aunt Lillian is like some elfin spirit that comes from nowhere and goes off nowhere but leaves behind a legacy of longing.



SEI GEZUNT, DOROTHY

JUDITH PRESS SALZMAN

Dr. Salzman portrayed her remarkable uncle, Maurice Goldsmith, in our previous issue. Here she portrays a no less amazing relative, whom she met less than two years ago. Like Uncle Maurice, Dorothy Brynes Weinstein spent her youth in South Providence before settling in Boston. Long before celebrating her centenary, however, she became an institution on Beacon Hill. Dr. Salzman's engaging style of writing is perfectly suited to her engaging subject. As with the extended Fink family, readers would surely feel privileged to meet more of the extended Press clan.

Two years ago I received an e-mail from a woman named Linda Winkelman. She'd tracked me down through an exhaustive genealogical search and had compiled notes on the shared parts of our family tree: the Uditsky sisters from Gorodishche, Ukraine; their Fall River relatives, the Dashoffs; and in Rhode Island, the Bryneses and the Silverman clan. Uditsky, Dashoff and Brynes were familiar names. My mother had spoken of these cousins, but I'd never met a single one of them.

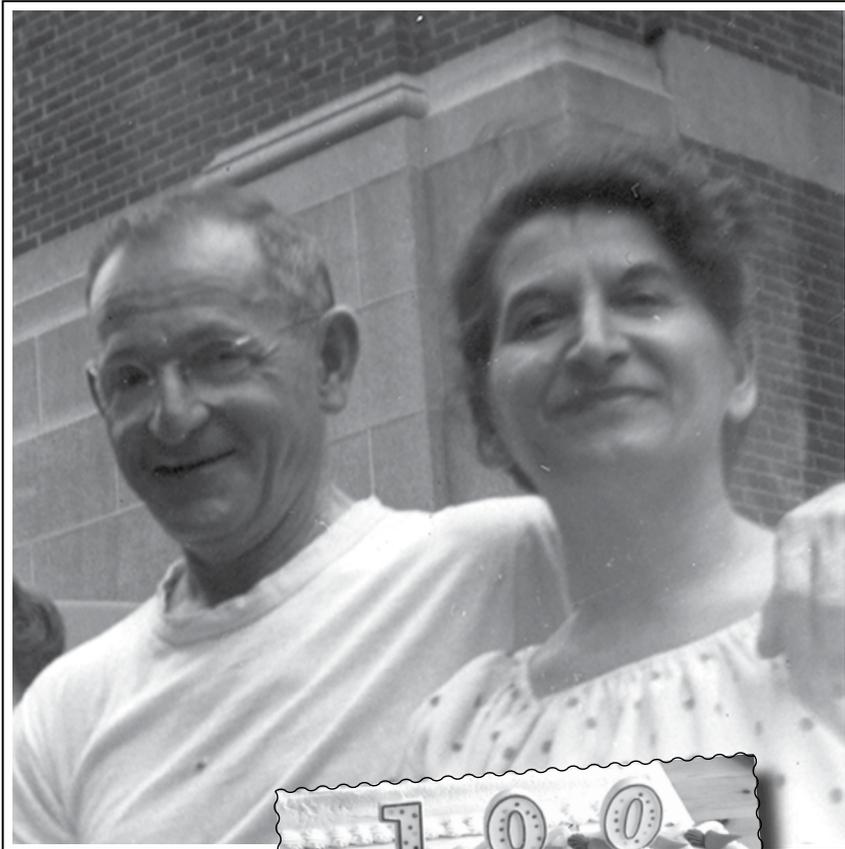
The next day Linda Winkelman called me. "You have a cousin in Boston," she said, "Dorothy Brynes Weinstein. She's a terrific character. Maybe you'd like to meet her."

I'm a writer. I have a weakness for terrific characters, so I decided to ring up this Mrs. Weinstein on Beacon Hill. I imagined a grand lady long estranged from her Jewish roots, ensconced in an elegant townhouse crammed with paintings and Oriental carpets.

"Yes?" Mrs. Weinstein inquired when I called that afternoon. "Who is this?"

I explained the call from Linda Winkelman and the possibility that we were distant cousins. "I believe my grandma, Hudel Goldsmith, and your grandmother, Sima Uditsky, were somehow related to one another."

"Oh, my dear yes, we are cousins," she agreed. "My Baba Sima and Hudel's mother were sisters. I can't remember which sister it was, though. Dvora,



Bill + Dorothy Brynes
Weinstein, ca. 1955





Dorothy's grandmother,
Sima Uditsky Brynes

or maybe Basya. Those two never came to America. I'm going to be ninety-nine years old on December 3, and my memory isn't as good as it used to be."

Would Dorothy's memory be good enough to shed light on the mystery of my grandmother's birth, or why the family never spoke of her parentage? Here was the only living relative who had actually known Huded Schlossberg Goldsmith. This in itself was sufficient reason to pay her a visit.

I told Dorothy I'd like to come talk to her. "I don't know," came the reply. "Call me on Friday, I'll see how I'm feeling." Dorothy, it seemed, dispensed with the usual formalities.

On Friday I expected a refusal. Instead, when I called Dorothy, she struck a bargain.

"All right, come on Sunday and bring me a Jew bread if you can find one. Up here on Beacon Hill they don't put *kummel* seeds in the rye bread," she explained.

"VILLARD AVENUE"

When I rang Dorothy's bell on Sunday, I was full of questions. How in the world had she migrated from South Providence to Beacon Hill? Did she mingle with the Brahmins or with the likes of Ted Kennedy and John Kerry? Did the senators stop by for coffee and a slice of Jew bread when they were in town?

"It's quite a story," she agreed, when we sat down to tea in her modest kitchen. Dorothy herself reminded me of other relatives, much beloved, now deceased: down-to-earth, with a salty tongue and no airs about her, never mind the fancy address. As it turned out, she was living on the first two floors of her five-floor town house; the rest were rented out to medical students. No Chippendale, no china. Instead of paintings there were numerous photographs of her children and grandchildren, and no exotic carpets. No carpets at all, in fact. Carpets invariably pose a hazard for a 99-year-old woman with balance problems. Dorothy had fallen in September, and now she needed a walker, which she still wasn't accustomed to. "I used to promenade all over the neighborhood," she said. "Now look

at me. I must be getting old."

Setting aside her walker, she poured tea for the two of us, then cut off a thick slice of bread and smeared it with butter. Her eyes twinkled. She knew I couldn't wait to hear her story, but like all good raconteurs, she began slowly, letting my anticipation rise.

"It's a long story," she began. "We started out on Willard Avenue in South Providence. 'Villard Avenue,' we called it. My family lived in a cottage with all the modern disappointments—running water, cold and not yet, wall to wall floors, hot and cold folding doors— but we loved it. For nine years we lived in that cottage, and when we had to move, everyone cried."

"Everybody called the neighborhood Jewtown. All the merchants were Jewish— Harry Biller the butcher, Samuel Snell the baker, Benjamin Kane the druggist. If a family was between paychecks Mr. Biller let them buy on credit, which we often did. My father was, as we used to say, too light for the heavy work and too heavy for the light work. Once in a while he painted a ceiling for someone."

How did the family survive, I asked.

"My mother Rachel, may she rest in peace, taught me to beg. She said it would be more effective if she sent me to the grocer instead of going herself. So I would go to Mr. Biller and say, 'Please sir, just a few bones for soup. My father Abe isn't working,' and Mr. Biller would fill a bag for me."

Despite this and other indignities, Dorothy and her seven siblings thoroughly enjoyed the old neighborhood. Though desperately poor, "we made our own fun," she explains. After school she and her sister Ethel would scrounge for empty boxes at the local shops, then used them to set up their own play store in an empty field next to their cottage. They gathered armfuls of the tall grass that grew in the field, stripped the rice-like kernels off their stems, and pretended they were beans and grains. Money was torn-up bits of newsprint, and an empty



Dorothy's mother, Rachel Brynes (seated),
with a cousin

cigar box served as a cash register.

Sometimes their fun was interrupted by roving gangs of hoodlums from the outskirts of Jewtown. “They’d run to our houses and pull all the wet laundry off the line. They’d call out ‘Goddam Jews’ over their shoulders as they were running away. But we were used to it. We got called goddam Jews every day of our lives. When I played jump rope in the schoolyard, if I won more points than a *goyische* girl she would call me a dirty Jew and stop playing with me. That’s just how it was.”

Another person, thinner-skinned and less resourceful, might have turned bitter in the face of these insults, but victimhood held no appeal for Dorothy. No sooner did she finish telling me about the rampant anti-Semitism on Willard Avenue than she was off and running with more examples of what a terrific place it was.

“We had Bazar’s Hall, where you could see a movie for ten cents on Saturday afternoon. I scrubbed floors for my mother, and when I’d saved up enough nickels I went to see a show ‘The Mask of Terror,’ I think it was called. I was scared of the dark for weeks afterward and never went to another movie for ages.”

“Another time, my mother gave me a nickel for doing the housecleaning. She said go wash your face and brush your hair and go buy an ice cream cone, but not on this street. Walk down ten blocks so the other children won’t see you. I don’t have enough nickels for all of them.”

Throughout grammar school Dorothy and her siblings helped support the family, which would otherwise have been on the dole. Evenings and weekends everyone sat around the kitchen table doing piecework for the Silverman Brothers jewelry factory on Public Street. The Silvermans were cousins by marriage to Dorothy’s father, and every Monday the factory would send a truck with boxes of pinbacks for the children to bend into shape. Mrs. Brynes required everyone to sit and work until “our fingers were bleeding,” but no one complained. “It was much better than having to work at the factory, with its terrible smell of bananas that filled the air and irritated the workers’ lungs. It was an odor like bananas cooking in hell. They used to dip the cheap jewelry in that



Dorothy's aunt, Annie Brynes Silverman

stinking oil to keep it from tarnishing.”

Sunday was the children’s day off. Occasionally there were enough spare nickels to ride the trolley to Roger Williams Park, but never enough to ride the carousel. More often Mrs. Brynes would take the family to visit the Silverman cousins across town, where they spent the afternoon feasting on herring and potatoes and singing all the old Yiddish songs, as well as some of the newer ones, acquired on the Silvermans’ occasional trips to music stores on New York’s Lower East Side. My own Grandma Hudel, a former opera singer, led the chorus, her clear soprano rising above the rest of the voices.

“So beautiful she was,” Dorothy recalls. “The auburn hair, her eyes, her voice. Hudel was a person unto herself. Very quiet, very private. So stately. When I walked down Willard Avenue and saw Hudel, I would say to my friends, ‘See that woman? She’s my cousin.’ I was proud to know her.” Asked if she could remember playing with Hudel’s children (including my mother) at those gatherings, Dorothy shook her head. “No, I don’t. It’s just Hudel I remember.” Then she added, “Those were the best days, the Sundays at the Silvermans. The herring with potatoes, the music, the tea with *mandelbrodt*, they all filled me with such *Yiddishkeit* that I rode home full of pity for anyone who wasn’t Jewish.”

INTO THE WORLD

For Dorothy, eighth grade was the end of childhood. She had to leave school and begin working in earnest, but she left Peace Street Grammar School in a blaze of glory. She’d decided to compete for the statewide Anthony Medal for reading and speaking, and she approached the school’s principal, Willis Fisher, with the pince-nez and disdainful manner, to ask his permission.

“Out of the question,” he replied. “You look like a ragamuffin.”

Dorothy’s dander was up. “I can do it, and I shall,” she told Mr. Fisher.

She did. Her mother sewed her a new dress, and brimming with optimism, she stood before the judges and recited the poem “A Troop of the Guard” by Hermann Hagedorn. After she’d won the medal, her mother, who always spoke “the king’s English,” took partial credit for Dorothy’s success, but it was clear that Dorothy herself had a natural aptitude for public speaking. Even today that talent is manifest in her gift for storytelling, and she has passed it along to her youngest son, Jordan, familiar to Boston residents as the sonorous morning voice of WGBH radio.

As for Mr. Fisher, of the pince-nez and crabbed disposition, he was soon asked to leave his post at Peace Street Grammar School. He’d been caught in

some hanky-panky with a group of schoolboys he'd chaperoned to a spelling bee in New York. The school's parents took matters into their own hands, and soon thereafter Mr. Fisher disappeared without a trace.

After graduation Dorothy pleaded to be allowed to stay in school. All her girlfriends were going on to high school, she argued, but her mother was adamant. No, she told Dorothy, the family needed all three of the eldest children to earn an income. Now it was Dorothy's turn to go out into the world.

"Young lady," she said, "life will be your teacher. Be an apt pupil. Learn your lessons well. Learn from life."

"And how am I to learn?" Dorothy wanted to know.

"Just keep your eyes and ears open."

With mixed feelings Dorothy entered the work force at age thirteen. Her older brother Sam, a salesman for the wholesale jewelers Spear & Susskind on Eddy Street, persuaded his employers to take her on as a clerk. The job paid between eight and ten dollars a week, and every penny went directly into the Brynes' family coffers. "My mother would have killed me if I'd spent even one dollar on myself," Dorothy explains.

After a brief stint at Spear & Susskind, Dorothy noticed a help wanted sign hanging in the window at Johnson's Cut-Rate Store near the corner of Weybosset and Dorrance Street. These were the early 1920s; the Biltmore Hotel and the Industrial Trust Building were under construction, and downtown Providence was enjoying a short but sweet commercial boom. Johnson's, a Connecticut outfit that was expanding into the rest of New England, was one of the first businesses to introduce the concept of cut-rate shopping, and the store needed extra help.

By now an experienced clerk, Dorothy parted company with the friend who'd joined her for a stroll ("He who travels alone travels best," her mother liked to say), walked into Johnson's and landed herself a new job at higher pay.

Around the same time she also began working nights and weekends for Mrs. Samuel Starr, the wife of a local doctor. Dorothy cleaned and took care of the Starrs' children, Bobby and Beverly, but that job didn't last long. Mrs. Starr turned out to be a demanding, penny-pinching sort of employer, and she and Dorothy fell out after a particularly unpleasant negotiation over the promise of overtime wages.

Dorothy had agreed to work extra hours in order to earn money to take her sister Ethel to the Kiddie Revue, an annual talent show that featured tap dancing, singing, and skits by a troupe of young performers. Mrs. Starr prom-

ised to pay Dorothy an extra fifty cents a week if she worked every night for a week until the children's bedtime. Dorothy figured she'd earn enough to take her sister to the Saturday show, but when Saturday came Mrs. Starr claimed she'd never agreed to the arrangement.

"May I have the money to treat my sister?" Dorothy asked.

"What money? You're making it up!" Mrs. Starr accused her. And that was the end of Dorothy's indentured servitude to Mrs. Starr.

Toward the end of the 1920s Dorothy started working at the Outlet Company's bargain counter. By now she knew a thing or two about surviving in the retail business. She earned the nickname "Bargain Aisle Annie" for her sharp intelligence and entrepreneurial savvy.

Both skills were put to the test the day she was almost fired. She was stopped in the aisle by Samuel Steiner, the store superintendent, a short, saucer-eyed man who looked like Eddie Cantor's old brother. Everyone knew that when Mr. Steiner collared you, the jig was up. Dorothy shivered and shook at the prospect of being sacked.

"I've been told," Mr. Steiner said, "that three members of your family now work at the Outlet Company. There's a Depression on, you know, and we're obliged to spread the work around, so I'll have to let you go."

Dorothy wasn't having it. "You mustn't fire me," she argued. "My parents are separated, and there are five children still at home. We all need to work."

Dorothy's plea persuaded Mr. Steiner. (Among other things, she would have made a terrific lawyer.) "All right then," he agreed. "Seeing as how your mother has no other source of income, I'll let you stay on." Case closed. Dorothy stayed at the Outlet until 1937, when her son Lawrence was born.

LEAVING PROVIDENCE

Dorothy and her husband, Bill Weinstein, had started courting during the time she worked at Johnson's Cut-Rate Store. Bill's brother Herman, who owned a pool room off an alley near the store, regularly purchased shaving cream and toothpaste from Dorothy and one day surprised her with a matchmaking proposal.

"You sound like a Jewish girl," he told her.

"I am."

"Well, then, I'd like to introduce you to my brother Bill. I think he'd like you."

Bill ran a second family-owned pool room up in Boston, but he made

a point of visiting Dorothy as often as possible. They hit it off immediately but postponed marriage, like many other Depression sweethearts, for financial reasons. Living together was out of the question.

“We were moral people,” Dorothy says. “None of those shenanigans for us.”

On March 22, 1936 she and Bill were married by a “sweet little *rebbele* from the toy manufacturers’ family. What was his name?”

I asked if she meant the Hassenfeld brothers, but she wasn’t sure.

The wedding itself was a modest affair: at home, with family. The big celebration had already taken place— a bridal shower at the Port Arthur, a Chinese restaurant on Weybosset Street whose owner was acquainted with Dorothy’s brother-in-law. For sixty-five cents a head, the guests feasted on chop suey and egg foo young, all you could eat, with tea and fortune cookies for dessert.

Dorothy herself must have opened the best of the fortune cookies, because the years that followed were increasingly happy for the Weinsteins. In 1941 they moved to Boston’s West End, and Bill found work at the Charlestown Naval Shipyard, which was busily repairing British warships being fitted out for battle. Now, for the first time, the Weinsteins had an apartment all to themselves— a four-room, cold-water flat with views of the Esplanade and the Charles River basin. Around the corner lived Dorothy’s cousin Label Schlossberg (Grandma Hudel’s movie-star handsome half brother) and his wife Nechama. The two women became fast friends and helped one another through major and minor family crises.

I once asked Dorothy if my Grandma Hudel ever came up to Boston to visit Label. After all, they were the only two members of their immediate family who had immigrated to the United States. Wouldn’t she have wanted to stay in touch with her own brother?

“I don’t think she did,” Dorothy said. “Maybe it’s because she and Label had different fathers. Hudel was adopted by Schlossberg.”

Who, then, was Hudel’s biological father? Dorothy had no idea. Maybe Hudel was born out of wedlock. Maybe Basya, her mother, had been divorced, a fate nearly as shameful as bearing a child out of wedlock. Hudel’s immigration papers complicated the story by listing three different maiden names for her mother: Uditsky (the correct one), Opitsky (a misspelling?) and Mogilevsky.

Mogilevsky? The only Mogilevsky I’d ever heard of was Sigmund, a boy cantor from Zlatopol, Bessarabia, who later changed his name to Zelig Mogulesko and became a comic star in Abram Goldfaden’s theater troupe before emigrating

to the United States in 1886. Could he have been Hudel’s father? The dates were right: Hudel was born in 1881, during a period when Goldfaden’s company was touring Russia, with Mogulesko starring as Shmendrik the fool, a role that made the epithet *shmendrik* a familiar insult in Jewish households. When he died in 1914, 30,000 mourners lined the streets of the Lower East Side to pay their respects to the acclaimed comedian, dead at the age of 56.

Dorothy recalls that Hudel had once remarked that she didn’t like visiting her brother because Nechama kept “such an untidy house.” It seems equally likely, Dorothy now agrees, that Hudel may have distanced herself from her brother because he was the only living relative who knew the secret of Hudel’s birth. “I’m sorry I don’t know any more about this,” she tells me. “I know you were hoping I would. In those days, people kept their secrets to themselves. Now it’s all over the TV, the newspapers. No one has any privacy.”

TEN ROOMS, FIVE FLOORS

The wartime years brought new privations for the Weinsteins. Bill was in and out of work. Once again Dorothy was forced to beg for soup bones, but the West End butcher, less generous than Mr. Biller on Willard Avenue, refused her requests. Nevertheless, like the crafty cook in the old folk tale, Dorothy was an expert at “making soup from a stone,” and she managed to feed her husband and three young sons on a very tight budget. Following their mother’s example, the older boys, Lawrence and Arthur, investigated ways to make their own fun. Early on they learned to navigate the city on their own, taking advantage of all its public pleasures— the parks and playgrounds, libraries and museums (“Children under twelve admitted free”), the outdoor concerts on the Esplanade. In those days, being a West End kid wasn’t such a bad deal, even if you weren’t rich.

One winter day in 1952 Arthur, the middle child, came down with mumps. Then the baby, Jordan, fell ill. “What shall I do? We can’t afford a doctor,” she complained to Nechama.

“You silly little mother,” Nechama scolded. “Call the district nurses. They’ll send someone for free.”

The nurse, Annie Grimes, arrived, briefly inspected the children and told Dorothy not to worry, the children were going to be fine.

“But,” she added, “the five of you shouldn’t be living here in four small rooms. I own a ten-room town house on Beacon Hill, and it’s just my sister Margaret and me living there. When I’m ready to sell, I’ll sell it to you. I want the voices of children to ring through the house after I’m gone.”



home on Beacon Hill; on right before vacant lot

At the time Dorothy's husband was out of work. When he came home from job-hunting that afternoon, Dorothy told him about the district nurse's proposal.

"Well I'll be a sonofabitch!" he said. "I'm out looking for work, and you go and buy a house."

Nothing happened for two years. The Weinstains thought the nurse had forgotten about them. But they hadn't forgotten about the house, and on Erev Yom Kippur they walked over to Beacon Hill and looked at the house on Temple Street. Dorothy's reaction was skeptical: how would she ever be able to clean a ten-room house on five floors? Maybe it was for the best that the nurse had forgotten about the Weinstains.

Soon afterward Annie Grimes rang them up. "I'm ready to sell," she said to Dorothy, who explained that they couldn't possibly buy now, they didn't have the money.

"That doesn't matter, your credit is good with me." Miss Grimes accepted a deposit of fifty dollars, and the house was theirs.

In the 1950s the backside of Beacon Hill hadn't yet been gentrified. Now the tall houses sport polished brass door knockers, repointed brick facades and stone urns full of impatiens and petunias on their doorsteps. Back then, the neighborhood descended from the golden dome of the State House down to Cambridge Street and Mass. General Hospital. The opposite slope, from Mt.

Vernon Street down to Charles Street and the Boston Common, was populated by movers and shakers: captains of industry, bankers, bluebloods and bluestockings. Not even the Kennedys were fully welcome there— not yet, at least.

On Dorothy's side of the hill the residents were a motley crew. One other Jewish family lived nearby, but they were solidly, proudly middle class and spurned Dorothy's attempts to befriend them. Still, most of the neighbors were cordial, and Dorothy gradually won them over with her inimitable blend of moxie and goodwill. The boys thrived, and Bill endeared himself to the neighbors as the local scoutmaster.

The elder sons, Lawrence and Arthur, also attended Hebrew school at the Smith Court synagogue off Joy Street, which had recently moved from North Russell Street in the West End. All three boys celebrated their *B'nei Mitzvah* at the new location, and it was through the Smith Court congregation that the family maintained its ties with the old West End neighbors.

Over the years the Weinstains also opened their doors to a series of young doctors from all over the world. They'd arrive homeless at Mass. General for a year of residency training, and the hospital would send them to Dorothy. She gave them rooms on the top two floors of the house and cooked dinner for them every night in hopes it would cure their homesickness. To this day the tradition continues, with young doctors from South America and Asia occupying the upstairs rooms. They tiptoe into the house so as not to disturb Dorothy, but if she's at the kitchen table they always check in with her. "Are you all right, Mrs. W.? Shall I put the trash out?"

After Bill passed away in 1969 (from metastatic cancer that may have resulted from chronic asbestos exposure during his twenty-four years at the shipyard), Dorothy might have found herself



Bill, Dorothy + Lawrence, ca. 1940

overwhelmed by the challenge of maintaining the house on Temple Street. Instead, she was sustained by an outpouring of affection and support from family and friends, who offered meals, household repairs, and transportation in exchange for the pleasure of her company.

To this day, a steady stream of past acquaintances comes to visit from as far away as Europe. On more than one occasion they've stayed with Dorothy, cooked for her, run errands for her, reminisced with her. Someone—a neighbor, an old tenant, a relative—is always stopping by to look in on her, pay homage to her famous sweet tooth with a plate of cookies or a freshly baked pie. Last Pesach, a gentile neighbor brought her a batch of *Hamantaschen* for the holiday. It was the wrong holiday, of course, but as Dorothy said after the neighbor left, "It's the thought that counts."

Even the security police at Suffolk University across the street keep an eye on her. "Mrs. W., what a great lady," the head security officer said to me one night last winter when I attended a play at the Suffolk Theater, directly opposite Dorothy's front door. It was an icy, treacherous evening, but a warm light shone from Dorothy's parlor window, where she was most likely sitting alone, listening to her beloved WGBH radio and leafing through the latest issue of *Newsweek*. "May she live forever," the policeman said, nodding in Dorothy's direction. "There's no one else like her around here."

Metaphorically speaking, Dorothy *will* live forever, in people's memories and in the form of the little vest-pocket park next to her house. The neighbors call it Mrs. W.'s garden, because it was Dorothy who agitated to save the property, a parking lot belonging to the church on the next street, from the hands of developers.

"They were going to put up two high-rise apartment buildings in that



Dorothy, 1955



100th birthday party with author and her daughter Rachel

space, right next to my kitchen windows, so I talked to people in the neighborhood about donating money to save the property, and one day when I made a killing on the stock market—\$7,000, would you believe it?— I put it into the *pushke* as seed money. The neighbors rallied round, and with Suffolk University as our partner, we persuaded the Boston Parks Department to buy the lot. Now the city maintains it, plants the flowers, keeps it neat. And here I sit, reading my magazine and feeding the birds. Such a pleasure..."

Pleasure must be Dorothy's middle name. She's always had a talent for finding pleasure in unlikely places, even at times when other people might yield to despair. When she reminisces about Lawrence, her eldest son, dead at age forty-nine from kidney disease, she passes quickly from grief to remembrances of what a lovely person he was, what a full life he had— two years as a kibbutznik in Israel, then social work school and a career devoted to public service. It must be this habit of mind that keeps her going forward, into her second century, despite major losses and life-threatening illnesses. It certainly isn't her diet, in which schmalz herring and rye bread slathered with butter figured prominently for many years.

In December 2008 Dorothy's extended family gathered to celebrate her one hundredth birthday. She blew out the candles in a single lusty breath, ate a generous slice of carrot cake, then entertained the guests with a Jewish version of the 1917 jazz standard "Darktown Strutters Ball." Her version is called "The Downtown Matzo Ball," and she remembered every word of it. The next day she was taken to the hospital with serious heart troubles— serious enough to have done in someone with a less vigorous spirit. Now she's back in action, entertaining visitors, cracking jokes, feeding the sparrows that wait at her feet for another spritz of bird seed. And when we say good-bye, she says, "You know, I had a terrible time last winter, but here we are in my garden, and it's a beautiful day. I hope that you and I will keep meeting like this for years to come."





MY PROVIDENCE, PART I

IRENE BACKALENICK

Although the author has not lived in Providence for nearly 65 years, her memories of growing up here are exceptionally vivid. They also reveal difficulties often hidden from our journal. Not only did Ms. Backalenick experience the Great Depression, but also her parents' joyless marriage, her grandparents' early deaths, and relative isolation from the Jewish community. Being a girl brought the additional burden of low expectations.

As demonstrated in the article's second part, however, Ms. Backalenick triumphed by earning a bachelor's degree and then a doctorate in theatre history and criticism. Her study, *East Side Story: Ten Years with the Jewish Repertory Company*, was published by University Press of America in 1988. A professional writer for decades, she gained wide renown as a theatre critic covering Broadway, Off-Broadway, and London's West End. The author has also served on the awards committees of the New York Outer Critics Circle, Drama Desk, and Actors Equity. As the first part indicates, much of her own story is highly dramatic.

Looking back to my childhood years in Providence, I realize what a long, improbable journey my life has been—encompassing not merely the few hundred miles between Rhode Island and New York City, but reaching across galaxies. How I, a child of the Depression, and a timid child at that, could have left the narrow restrictive world of my childhood and moved on remains forever a mystery. Such thoughts give me sudden moments of faith. Was someone up there, out in space, watching out for me?

Born in Providence on August 12, 1921, I was named Iti Libby Margolis. *Iti Libby*, a Yiddish name derived from my long-gone maternal great-grandfather *Yitzak Labe*, was later Anglicized into Irene. All my forebears on both sides came from Lithuania, apparently from small shtetls. Little is known of exact locations, but the family stories indicated lives lived out in one-room dwellings with dirt floors, dominated by huge stoves. My grandfather Jacob Silverman, most enterprising of the lot, managed to escape the shtetl, work his way to Warsaw, and



sisters Rose + Lydia



Max + Irene

ultimately to this country. Trading in scrap metal and then silver, he acquired the name Silverman. Though my mother Lydia and the other Silverman siblings were born in this country, my father Max Margolis arrived in this country, a boy of ten, with his family.

FARRAGUT AVENUE

Earliest memories? When I was three years old, or less, I recall reciting poems before a large audience. In those days, you made certain that your children took lessons of some sort— tap-dancing, singing, reciting of poems. (It was the Shirley Temple syndrome, although that child actress had not yet appeared in film.) Although I was given “ballet” lessons (an early photo of a chubby child in ballet attire proves it), I had no dancing or singing skills. But I did have a good memory, so “elocution” was the choice. We lived in a flat on Farragut Avenue— a pleasant, tree-lined street off Broad Street, near Roger Williams Park, where a neighbor (Ruth Spenard, I think), who had artistic aspirations, taught me to memorize and act out lengthy poems.

Soon she was booking me into various halls. I recall one such place— a home for “wayward girls,” it was called. When they showed me the large room

with many cribs, filled with babies, I puzzled over why they were there. I stood on stage in the large hall, reciting poems (complete with exaggerated voice and gestures), enjoying the attention I received. (Shyness would come later.) “How do you remember all that?” I was asked. “When I’m saying one line, I’m thinking about the next,” I explained. (Early indications of an acting career, but, somewhere along the line, that was lost.)

Two other memories from that period were negative. First, as I raced through our dining room one day, I knocked over and broke a vase (my mother’s favorite), and was soundly spanked, as my mother raged at me. She was given to sudden outbursts of temper. (To this day, I tend to avoid confrontations.) Secondly, while sitting on the front steps of our house, a ragged man approached, stopped, glared or leered at me, and moved on to the park at the end of the street. Frightened, upset, I ran into the flat (that memory would surface in nightmares years later).

My mother, Lydia, though quick to anger, was quick to forgive, and I remember a warm, devoted parent. My father, Max, a quiet, gentle man, was also devoted to me. But they were not devoted to each other. It was not a happy marriage. Apparently, my mother, deeply disappointed in her marriage, was transformed from a lively, outgoing girl to an embittered recluse. Certainly in those early years, they had no friends, and their lives consisted of compulsive house-cleaning for my mother— and working, or looking for work, for my father. They were also given to sudden shattering battles. My mother would scream and rant, while my father stood silent. (I had no idea what triggered the explosions or what the battles were about.) Finally, unable to take more of that exchange, my father would slam out of the house. I, in turn, would run into my bedroom and hide under the bed or in the closet.

When I was four years old, life changed— at least outwardly. My father was a machinist (or mechanic), but he was often out of work. My mother, who had once been a competent secretary at Dunn & Bradstreet, could have found a position, but did not consider it, any more than she considered a divorce. My mother was a product of the times, when divorce was practically unheard of, particularly in Jewish families.

CORINTH STREET

Finally, with our family close to destitution, we left Farragut Avenue and moved to 65 Corinth Street (corner of Corinth and Savings Street)— my maternal grandparents’ house in South Providence. It was a middle-class neighborhood, just off



cousins

Broad Street, where my grandfather, Jacob Silverman, owned a three-story tenement. My grandparents lived on the ground floor, the second floor was rented out, and we were given the top floor, paying very little rent to our landlord. (We had a six-room flat, with two bedrooms, living room, dining room, spare room, and, of course, one bathroom. I was fortunate to have my own bedroom with little-girl furniture and a large closet where I kept my stash of toys and games.)

We had close contact with my grandparents. As we had no radio, we would listen to my grandfather's crackling radio, once hearing a distant thin-voiced Enrico Caruso sing an aria. At holidays, we celebrated our Jewish heritage, though we paid it little mind year round. On the High Holy Days, my grandparents would spend all day in a South Providence synagogue (and my cousins, Winnie Silverman and Charlotte Lipman, and I would run in and out of the building, visiting them.) On Passover, we would gather with uncles, aunts

and cousins, converging downstairs at my grandparents' table. It was a happy, excited bustle. The dining room table would be set with fine cut glass, candles, red wine, the works, though I don't recall a ceremony—no lengthy seder service.

But what about Christmas? What was its impact on the Margolis family? Was it a Christian holiday, or a national holiday, as some Jews chose to see it? My parents ignored Chanukah and observed Christmas in their own way. We had no Christmas tree, as that would have gone too far, but they did not cheat me out of Santa Claus, who arrived without fail the night before Christmas. I would wake in the morning, thrilled to find my bed covered with brightly-wrapped packages. Somehow, they had scrounged the money to buy gifts.

Nevertheless, around age nine, I went through a difficult time—nightmares, sleepwalking. Sometimes I would wake before dawn, lying on the dining room floor. Or, wakened in bed by terrifying nightmares, or imagining a huge dark figure in the doorway, I would try to go back to sleep. As a last resort, I would go to my parents' room and crawl into bed between them. All of us were jammed together and could only attempt to sleep.



Lydia and Irene

SUMMERS

One summer, as the Great Depression got under way, my father was once more out of work. His older brother Jack and wife Celia lived in Bradley Beach, New Jersey, where they ran a small boarding house. It was a time when miniature golf courses flourished across the country, and Uncle Jack got my father a job running one such operation. We moved to Bradley Beach for the summer. Suddenly there was the beach, sand, miniature golf, swimming pools! My father tried to teach me to swim, insisting that I put my face in the water and kick my feet, but I timidly resisted. Furious, he walked away, and I never, then or later, learned to swim properly. But Bradley Beach was a happy experience. I

met my older cousins—Sylvia, Harold and Bernie (my dad's favorite)—and other second cousins—the Levines, who ran a chain of New Jersey hotels in Asbury

Park and Lakewood. I saw Jack's children as glamorous, exciting people from another world.

Other summers, back in Providence, my Aunt Rose Silverman Lipman (my mother's youngest sibling) and her daughter Charlotte would visit from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, staying with my grandparents. Charlotte and I became inseparable, playing endless games of make-believe. Thus I escaped my usual solitary indoor occupations—reading, writing in my diary, and drawing. And sometimes I saw my cousin Winnie (daughter of my mother's brother George Silverman and his wife Florence from South Providence).

We three cousins (all the same age and all only-children) were each given identities, however inappropriately. Winnie was considered the pretty one, Charlotte the talented one (she liked to sing), and I, the smart one. What did it mean to be “smart”? Nothing. I longed to be pretty—or at least talented.

Or rich. By our standards, Winnie's family was rich, and I inherited her cast-off, but very good, clothes. I was invited for a week each year to Newport, where they rented a summer beach house. We climbed rocks along the shore with Winnie's cousins, Herbert and Joanie Fields, fished for crabs, played on the beach. But I was shy and conscious of being the poor relative (although I could not have articulated that in so many words). How did Winnie's parents take on the mantle of wealth? Surely not in reality. My Uncle George managed an ice house, where they carved out huge blocks of ice for home and commercial consumption. But at least he worked steadily. Moreover, his wife's family had grandiose ideas, and saw themselves as a kind of royalty. Florence had married down, marrying a Silverman.

My father was seen as the family failure. Though he was devoted to my maternal grandfather, serving as his chauffeur and gofer, he was disdained—more servant than heir-apparent. The message of inferiority, the lack of self-esteem, was etched into him, a legacy I inherited. I had many of his traits, physically and temperamentally—the curly blonde hair, broad cheekbones, squinty eyes, and the shy, soft-spoken style. My mother often confirmed this legacy, saying, “You're just like your father!” in moments of exasperation.



grandmother Sophia Silverman

MORE GOOD MEMORIES

Whatever the problems, those early years held good memories. On Sundays, we often piled into my grandfather's Buick, my father at the wheel, and headed down to the East Greenwich Dairy. I can still taste the crunchiness of its ice cream cones filled with creamy coffee.

My *Bubby* Sophia kept a kosher house, and each week my father would drive her to Willard Avenue for groceries. We would stop at the butcher, where I had the privilege of seeing a chicken slaughtered ritually (running about the yard with its head cut off). This did not prevent me, however, from enjoying *Bubby's* Friday night chicken dinners. My mother followed that style of Jewish cuisine—meals with slowly-braised beef or chicken, and certainly no pork or bacon or sea food! (I would not discover lobster or steak or rare roast beef until years later, when I lived in New York.)

There were also the weekly movies at the Liberty Theatre on Broad Street. Every Saturday morning, I was given a dime, and off I would go to view a feature film, a second film (usually a cowboy movie with Tom Mix or Hoot Gibson), a cartoon, and the RKO news. I would sit through it enthralled, as did every other neighborhood kid.

That block along Broad Street also housed Sam Black's small grocery store, where my mother regularly sent me with the family grocery list. Nearby was also Levines' pharmacy. (The Levines' son Irving would grow up to become Irving R. Levine, a Brown University graduate and noted radio and television journalist.)

There was also George's even smaller grocery, at the bottom of Savings Street, used only for quick necessities. One hot summer day I begged for a soda, which my mother refused. In a rare show of defiance and stealth, I walked to George's and “charged” a bottle of grape soda, which was delicious. (My crime was later discovered and I was duly punished.)

Neighbors in the area included the Kenyatta family (who lived next door to George's)—a large brood of Middle Easterners, possibly first-generation immigrants. Mr. Kenyatta, a pharmacist, had invented a kind of tonic, a cure-all, which he packaged and sold as “Kaytonic.” I recall that it had a sickeningly sweet, disgusting taste.

FATHER'S FAMILY

We also visited my father's Worcester family—his younger sister Anna Margolis Ravelson, her husband Sam (a grocer), and their six children. They were a loud,

contentious family, and I did not look forward to our Worcester visits. Invariably, en route by car, I would throw up. I cringed at the thought of that dirty, disordered household, with children whining or screaming or hurling toys. Tantrums were the order of the day. I watched, appalled. My father's parents— my other *Bubby* and *Zaidy*— sat in a corner of the living room, two small silent shadows. I never connected with them— never even learning their names— as I did with my mother's parents. The Ravelsons' place was a sharp contrast to our silent, orderly home, where my mother kept everything immaculate, compulsively laundering curtains and vacuuming floors.

The Ravelson visits to us were even worse. My mother did not like this family, and it was my father, not she, who invited them to visit— secretly. They would arrive on our doorstep unexpectedly, tramp up the front steps, and my mother, amid grumbles, would begin to throw together a meal— tuna fish from the larder and whatever she could find. She would throw furious looks at my father, but always managed to feed the group.

Growing up on Corinth Street through the '20s and the Depression, we had very few worldly goods. No new furniture or household goods, and my mother made whatever clothes she and I had. But I was not aware of deprivation. There was always food on the table.

THE TROLLEY

When my father did work, he would turn over his weekly paycheck to my mother. She and I would take the trolley car downtown, where she would pay the utility bills (electricity and gas but no phone). We would lunch in a restaurant called Gibson's, where I ordered mashed potatoes (either with gravy or butter). It was sheer heaven. The last stop would be a Chinese restaurant, where we ordered "take-out." This consisted of chow mein or chop suey with a side order of rice— the entire meal for three costing thirty-five cents. Dinner that night would be the Chinese food supplemented by a salad and chocolate pudding with whipped cream for dessert. A feast!

The trolley lines had their limitations. On summer days I longed to go to the beach and begged my mother to take me. But the trolley reached only to the grubby, overcrowded Conimicut Beach, not the attractive, distant Narragansett Bay and ocean beaches. My mother was reluctant to take me to Conimicut, so we rarely made the trip. Always preoccupied with cleanliness and bodily functions, she would say, "The water's dirty; people use it for a bathroom."

FRIENDS, ADVENTURE, AND SECURITY

My other memories of the early Corinth Street years include my street playmates. In the warm weather we were a gang of kids, with endless street games. One girl had an abandoned backyard hen coop, which we turned into a theater. We played hopscotch, drawing the airplane shape with chalk on the sidewalk, and bounced balls against the sides of houses. Jump rope, jacks, and marbles were also popular. I had roller skates, and would whirl down the sidewalks, once breaking my left arm (which would trouble me years later). We would chase the ice truck down the street, reaching in for ice chips (leftovers from the ice blocks the iceman delivered)— our substitute for ice cream. "Don't eat that," my mother would warn. "All kinds of bad things (she meant human urine) have gone into that ice." But we were undeterred.

I also loved to climb trees, both in my large backyard, where we had something called a eucalyptus tree, and in the wooded area (not yet razed for houses and office buildings) at the foot of Corinth Street. I formed a so-called "club," pulling in my friends and labeling some trees as "baby trees," others more challenging. There was a sense of power, freedom, exhilaration, as I made the more difficult climbs. I would stay out until it began to darken, at which point my mother, from the upstairs window, would shout out "Ireenee," so that it could be heard for several blocks. It was dinnertime and I happily headed home.

Thus began my lifelong dichotomy— my longing for adventure and my need for security— the yin and yang of life (at least, of my life). In later years, I tended to make major decisions impulsively, not with advance planning. I sought out excitement, new paths, romantic adventures (no doubt fueled by those Saturday morning movies), but with attendant fears and anxieties and an unrelenting need for security. On the one hand, I longed to be exactly like my peers; on the other hand, I was driven toward different goals, always, somehow, out of sync.

My best childhood friends were Virginia ("Ginny") Spargo (one of the six little redheaded Spargos who lived diagonally across the street), Ruthie Nelson (of the blondish hair and sullen look) and Bernice Lemoine (of the too-early big breasts, heavy eyeglasses and long lashes). Ginny's mother had a flair for interior decoration, and each little Spargo had a room painted in the color of his choice. The effect was charming, quite unlike any home in the neighborhood. Both Ruth and Bernice, children of divorced parents, lived with grandparents, who regarded me skeptically, but said, on reflection, "She's a nice little girl, even though she's Jewish."

I got the message. Being Jewish meant being substandard, below par,

somehow shameful. I longed to be part of the pack, exactly like every one else. At Thanksgiving I pleaded with my mother for a turkey dinner (which I must have seen, on an unconscious level, as the entry to white Protestant America). “WHY can’t we have turkey?” I whined. “Because turkeys are too big, and we’re a small family,” my mother patiently tried to explain.

Still I was accepted, though conditionally, in this non-Jewish neighborhood. (My enterprising grandfather may have moved here deliberately, rather than choosing a Jewish neighborhood.) I was part of the street gang, and my street life was a welcome escape from a home often marked by silence, boredom, and my mother’s compulsive housecleaning.

SNOW AND ICE

In winter the short, hilly Savings Street would be covered with snow. I had a sled, as did others, and we would fling ourselves on our sleds and coast (“belly flop,” as we called it) down the hill. We longed for snow, which the Providence winters provided in abundance. But I would awake, most mornings, to a freezing house, huddled under the covers. My mother would rise first, stoke the coal in our big black kitchen stove, and finally rouse the rest of the household. I would grab my clothes and rush to the kitchen, where I dressed by the stove.

Our apartment was also heated by a coal furnace, housed in the basement. The coal truck would arrive regularly, sending the black chunks through a chute into our basement. It was my mother’s job to keep the furnace going, descending into the dim, cluttered basement. I never entered that basement, though it remained in my dreams, one more source of nightmares.

Winters and summers, Jimmy the Iceman (a tall, lively, red-faced Irishman) came to our house. He trudged up our three flights with our block of ice, hefting it into the icebox that stood in our back hall.

SCHOOL, MUSIC AND READING

Life expanded when I entered first grade at age six— a happy new experience. I walked the 12 blocks to Niagara Street Elementary School each day on my own, since no one was then concerned about safety. But I had my own fears— as I passed a large wooded area each day. What did I fear? I worried that a big, burly man would come out of the woods and attack me. Where did that idea come from?

School, whatever the limitations of the Providence school system, provided a wider world than our home. Why was there no music at 65 Corinth

Street? Because we could not afford a piano or because my mother wanted no reminders of her youth? Like all five of her siblings, my mother had been given music lessons— the piano, in her case. (There is one story about her brother Frank— known as “the Dummy.” Frank played the violin, and, at one point, hit a wrong note. My hot-tempered grandfather rushed into the room and smashed the violin over his head— breaking that instrument, but not Frank’s head.)

My mother and her siblings had lived in a big house on Benefit Street. The family, according to my mother, had had a wildly busy social life. My uncles, after dates, would come in, sit on my mother’s bed, and share their experiences. There are stories that my mother and her younger sister Rose would make their new dresses for a few cents and attend Saturday night roadhouse dances. My mother, so the story goes, was popular and outgoing as a girl, playing the piano and giving life to every party. How life changed after her marriage!

I was saved by my grandfather’s bookcase (located in the family’s downstairs hall). Two of my uncles had gone to college briefly. Uncle Paul, the elder, was enrolled at Harvard (according to family stories) but ran away after a few months, joining the circus as a musician. (He would later play the clarinet and saxophone in Paul Whiteman’s band, returning home in later years to live with his parents. The story suggested a mysterious, tragic love affair.) Uncle George survived a semester at Brown, but dropped out when he met Florence Zeller-meyer (so my mother claimed). My grandfather, a martinet, had planned for his two eldest sons to become civil engineers!

Thus their schoolbooks languished in the front hall bookcase, awaiting my perusal. My favorite book was *The Pith of Astronomy*, which led me to a new love. There was also Shakespeare, which I hardly understood, but loved all the same. Later, when I began to get around on my own, I discovered the small neighborhood public library on Prairie Avenue. I would stand gazing at the shelves, wondering with despair how I would ever manage to read every book.

My grandfather inspired me in a way that my parents did not. Since I was an earnest little pupil (there being no distractions), I brought home perfect test scores. I remember showing one marked “100%” to my grandfather. “Only one hundred percent?” he asked. “Is that the best you can do?” After relating this to my teacher, she gave me “125%” on the next test, and “200%” following that. If my grandfather had lived longer— he died when I was ten— my life might have taken a different turn.

I saw my grandparents as old people— very old (though my grandfather died in his fifties and my grandmother in her early sixties). My *Bubby* offered a

contrast to my peppery little *Zaidy*, and we had a different relationship. She was love, warmth, comfort, as she often cradled my head on her ample bosom, holding me tight. I still see her vividly, always clad in a housedress and apron, her gray hair pulled back in a bun, a smile on her broad face. She would forever be the prototype of all grandmothers.

As to school, I skipped through several early grades, getting my first report card in third grade. Handing out the cards, the teacher said, "Will the boy who got all As please stand?" A boy stood accordingly. And then: "Will the girl who got all As and a C in deportment stand?" Humiliated, I stood. I had been reprimanded several times for whispering to classmates. The classrooms of those days bore no resemblance to today's open cheery experiences. Pupils did not talk, unless queried by their teacher. Otherwise, they sat with hands folded on the desktop, while the teacher lectured or handed out work pages.

It was not until sixth grade that I had a remarkable teacher— Miss Caulfield. How she managed her daringly experimental approach in the Providence school system is one of life's mysteries! She decided to spend the entire semester on ancient Egypt, fashioning every phase of the curriculum around this theme. We learned arithmetic, reading, history, everything, by way of the Egyptian world. I became fascinated with hieroglyphics, taught myself many of the symbols, and was enraptured with Egypt. One youngster, more gifted than the rest of us, did beautiful paintings of the pyramids and the Nile.

But through the school years, I consistently had one poor grade— in physical education. As the gym class lined up, with me, the shortest one, at the end (humiliation enough), the others went off happily to display their gymnastic skills. But I was a disaster— terrified of vaulting the "horse," unable to climb the ropes, baffled by a simple cartwheel or somersault. Those non-competitive summertime street games and tree-climbing did not prepare me for "gym."

JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Providence, in those years, had introduced the junior high school system— eight such schools in the city, each named for historic figures. I went off to seventh grade at nearby Roger Williams Junior High School. It was a remarkable experience for the times, with numerous extracurricular activities. I hardly knew which to choose— the school newspaper, the drama group, art clubs. Finally, drama won out, where I joyously wrote plays, acted, and directed.

But as eighth grade ended, we had to make difficult choices for ninth grade. The best students, college-bound, chose the Latin/algebra route— and

would leave at the year's end for much-acclaimed Classical High School. Those somewhat less academic students took French/algebra and might attend one of several high schools. The dregs were consigned to a "business" program, which culminated, after ninth grade, at Central High School.

It was a difficult choice— not one in which my parents joined or showed any interest. Perhaps I did not share my dilemma with them. (And *Zaidy* was not around to exert his influence.) It was a major life decision which I, a 12-year-old, had to make. Initially, I signed up for Latin/algebra. I was a good student, and my friends were headed in that direction. But then I reasoned that I could never attend any college (that was for rich kids), so I should be practical. I changed to the "business" track. The guidance teacher questioned me, but, satisfied with my answers, waved me on. It was one of those decisions at an early age that— for better or worse— shaped my life. (I've often speculated on what I might have become, had I kept to the original decision of Latin/algebra.)

But the decision gave me one more year of junior high school and its attendant joys— all of which ended with Central High School, just a trolley car ride away for me.

Central High's only claim to the arts was one school play a year, and, upon auditioning for a role, I was told I was "too short." (I was just five feet tall.) No matter. I concentrated on "cultural French," "business English," and, most importantly, shorthand and typing. French (where we focused on French songs and ignored grammar and vocabulary) was a waste of time. But I learned to write a good business letter, and I mastered shorthand and typing (skills which, it turned out, served me remarkably well all my life). My friends were also aspiring secretaries— the nubile blonde Doris Youngberg, the perky Ruth Mansfield, and the little, fiercely-determined Bea Schwartz. (Only Bea had other aspirations, which I would discover later.) Frequently at Bea's house on Comstock Avenue, I got to know the Schwartz family— her older sister Norma, brother Abner, and baby sister Beverly. Norma was a distant figure, but I became fond of Abner and Beverly.

One summer the Schwartzes rented a house at Oakland Beach, and Bea was able to invite Doris, Ruth, and me for several days. While the others enjoyed swimming, I focused on the beach's marvelous french fries (never again to be matched). Was it the extra-special vinegar they sprinkled on each serving that made those french fries so memorable?

At Central High I also concentrated on the dark-haired,



Bea Schwartz,
Central High
yearbook, 1938



Irene,
Central High
yearbook, 1938

dark-eyed Italian boys (of Sicilian and Neapolitan origin), who abounded there. Very sexy. And they, in turn, were attracted to me. Perhaps freckled, fair-skinned girls were a novelty. There were numerous flirtations. It was a time of sexual awakening—of groping, fumbling, kisses behind the lockers. But I was a “nice” girl, and nice girls did not cross the line, not even slightly. One remained virginal until marriage.

In spite of the barren cultural landscape at Central High, certain creative activities evolved. There was the yearbook, with one English teacher, a Mr. Walter Brownsword, as its advisor. Recruiting his most promising students, he also started a little literary journal, *Crest*. Busy with my shorthand, I was not among them, but several of my friends were. Bea was an aspiring writer. Through her I began to hang out with the *Crest* crowd, and its editor— one Tony Lutrario— would become my high school sweetheart.

Tony was of different caliber, different from any boy I had known. It was Tony (the school’s brightest, most promising student, the class president, the yearbook editor) who would introduce me to the world of culture and the arts, including the RISD Art Museum, the Roger Williams Park Museum, and the main downtown library. Where did this boy get this drive, this knowledge? Certainly not from Central High, the school he had inappropriately chosen for his own.

The summer following our senior year, Mr. Brownsword wanted to take us all on a biking/hostel trip to Europe. But it was 1938, and none of us had the necessary \$125. (Again, I have wondered what turn my life might have taken, had we made that trip! Would we have been trapped in Europe? Would we have been caught up in the War? Would I have had a direct encounter with the Holocaust?)

June 1938 marked an ending— my formal education and my parting with Tony. Once out of school, I dared not continue to see him. “You will break your mother’s heart,” my father warned me sternly, but never mentioning names or specifics. This was not only a parental view, and a Jewish view, but a widespread community view. In those rigid times, one did not cross the line from one ethnic or religious group to another. Though I continued to write to Tony, occasionally to see him, the halcyon days of high school were over.

Within a few months, at age 16, I entered the working world. One chapter ended, and another chapter began.

Tony, Central High yearbook, 1938



SURVIVING THE HOLOCAUST: A MEMOIR

PETER WEGNER

This article forms a pendant to Judith Romney Wegner’s article in our 2006 issue. It also joins a small but miraculous chorus of testimonies about the Holocaust that have appeared in these pages.

Although the Wegners retain their elegant English accents and some amusing colloquialisms, they followed a familiar pattern of Jews seeking opportunities on this side of the Atlantic. Indeed, for 40 years the couple has flourished in Rhode Island. As an international pioneer in computer science, Peter joined the Brown faculty in 1969 and retired a decade ago. After practicing law, Judith also became a distinguished academician. Both Wegners are wired with a wicked sense of humor. Fortunately, they plan to write sequel articles touching on their multinational and multidimensional experiences in New England.

This memoir describes my experiences as a child in Europe, my early life in England during and after World War II, and how I was able to lead a productive life as a Holocaust survivor.

RUSSIA

As a child, I fell victim to both Nazi and Soviet anti-Semitism. My parents, Leo Weiden and Hermine Wegner, met in Vienna in 1930 as members of a left-wing political group that included Bruno Kreisky (destined to become chancellor of Austria in the 1970s). They emigrated to Russia in 1931, in part because of Austria’s growing anti-Semitism; and that’s how I came to be born in Leningrad on August 20, 1932. My father, a journalist by profession, was initially assigned to a manual laboring job in the Putilov steelworks; and my parents named me *Putilo* in honor of the plant’s revolutionary associations. My nickname was *Putti* until my name was changed to Peter after my mother and I returned to Vienna in 1938.

In the fall of 1937, during the notorious Stalinist purges in Leningrad, my father, who by that time had become senior librarian at the National Library



Peter at six years when sent to London

Свидетельство о рождении № 3292

Выдано в том, что Вейден (фамилия) Мирим (имя) Гершков (отчество) августа (месяц) 1938 (год) 19 (число) в (предлог) Ленинград (местность)

Число в книге записей актов гражданского состояния О РОЖДЕНИИ 422 18 (номер) Ленинград (местность)

От	Родители:	отец:	<u>Вейден</u>	мать:	<u>Венгер</u>
Оплаты			<u>Мирим</u>		<u>Гершков</u>
Гос.			<u>Ленинград</u>		<u>Ленинград</u>
Почт.					
Особ.					

Как документ

Заведующий Клизов Целепроездное № Оцен

Russian birth certificate

of Science, was arrested by the Russian secret police (NKVD). I remember two men coming to our apartment one evening and taking him away. I never saw my father again.

It was not until half a century later, when KGB archives became accessible after the demise of the Soviet Union in 1989, that I discovered what had actually happened to him. The chairman of the St. Petersburg Jewish Federation kindly offered to check the former KGB files, which revealed that my father had been executed by a firing squad, after a summary trial on spurious charges of “counter-revolutionary activity” – for which there was absolutely no basis. Having learned the date of his death, November 24, 1937 (20th Kislev 5698), I can now recite



Leo Weiden

kaddish for him on the correct Hebrew date.



Hermine Wegner

ANSCHLUSS AND KRISTALLNACHT

In January 1938, two months after my father’s death, my mother returned with me to Vienna, where we moved in with my maternal grandmother, Jetti (Ethel) Wegner. We arrived just two months before Hitler’s annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938 (the *Anschluss*); and my mother had to flee immediately, since she was on the Nazi blacklist for two reasons, being both a Jew and a left-winger. I was too young at the time to learn the details of my mother’s escape to England, where she had accepted an offer of employment as a live-in maid; but I learned recently from one of her cousins (now living in St. Albans, England) that she had skied with a group of colleagues across the Alps into Switzerland, leaving me with my grandmother.

The day after the *Anschluss*, watching from our apartment window (which overlooked the *Praterstrasse*, one of Vienna’s main streets), I saw a huge parade of German soldiers, including an open car in which a man was standing and waving to the crowd, which was enthusiastically chanting *Heil Hitler!* Although I did not understand what was going on, I recall my grandmother telling me, “That is Hitler – a very bad man!” Soon after the *Anschluss*, several of my male relatives were arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. When they returned six months later, they had lost weight and I heard

them tell my grandmother how badly they had been treated.

The anti-Semitic victimization of children included my being chased in the park by other children who wanted to beat me up because they had discovered I was Jewish. The Nazi authorities forced me to switch from my state school to a Jewish school run by the local synagogue, since Jews were no longer considered Austrian citizens and their children were barred from attending state schools. (My family would never have chosen to send me to a Jewish school, as we were secular and non-observant.) The local synagogue, including my school, was burned down on *Kristallnacht* (the night of November 9-10, 1938); and I remember going for a walk the next day with one of my uncles and seeing Jewish women being molested by Nazi soldiers and Austrian police.

Kristallnacht shocked the world. But the only country to offer concrete assistance was the United Kingdom; the British Parliament reacted quickly with a resolution offering political asylum to 10,000 Jewish children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to escape Nazi persecution by letting their parents send them to England on special *Kindertransport* trains, provided their financial support was guaranteed. My mother, already in England, found a financial sponsor for me (it was Marks & Spencer, the famed Anglo-Jewish retail chain).

On April 25, 1939 my grandmother took me to Vienna's *Westbahnhof*, where, along with about 300 other boys and girls aged between three and seventeen years, I boarded a train bound for London, organized by Quakers and the International Red Cross. We were chaperoned by young Jewish adults, who were required to return after delivering their cargo, or no further transports would be permitted. Our train left Vienna at 5:00 pm, passed through Munich around midnight, and reached the Dutch border at nine o'clock the next morning. The train was sealed during the ride through Germany, but once we crossed the Dutch border the doors were finally opened. I remember being allowed to get out and walk on the platform and receiving a welcome drink of hot cocoa dispensed by kind Dutch ladies showing their concern for Jewish children who had been persecuted by the Nazis.

We continued our journey to the Hook of Holland, crossed the English Channel to Harwich during the night, and arrived at Liverpool Street station in London in the afternoon of April 27, two days after leaving Vienna. In 2006, a realistic bronze sculpture by Frank Meisler, a former *Kind*, depicting five *Kinder* arriving with their suitcases, was erected by the Association for Jewish Refugees outside the station entrance as a memorial. I was luckier than most of the children, as my mother met me at the station and brought me to a house in the



memorial in Liverpool Street station

London suburb of Willesden, where she was caring for children of the family that had hired her as a domestic servant. They allowed me to stay there for two months, during which I attended a local primary school and learned some English; but after that I was sent away to boarding school, as my mother could not keep me indefinitely in that house.

BUNCE COURT SCHOOL

The Jewish Refugee Committee in London paid my tuition, room and board at a primarily Jewish coeducational boarding school in Kent, about 50 miles from London; many of its one hundred pupils in 1939 were *Kindertransport* children. The headmistress, Anna Essinger, had transferred her school from Herrlingen (near Ulm in Germany) to England in 1933, knowing that a school with mainly Jewish students could not survive in Hitler's Germany. As an ethnic rather than an observant Jew, she had adopted Quaker principles during World War I, while a graduate student in German at the University of Wisconsin (in Madison). Once her school was set up in England, she was able to accept *Kinder* and other refugee children who had reached England earlier, and also to hire some excellent teachers who had fled from Germany to England after Hitler came to power. The headmistress insisted that all classes be taught in English, and encouraged the children to speak English among themselves; however, they occasionally relapsed into German!



Bunce Court School

I joined Bunce Court School (named for the old manor house it occupied) in September 1939, one week after the outbreak of World War II. A few months later, the British Government evacuated the school, because the Kent coast was considered the likeliest landing point for a German invasion; and we spent the rest of the war in Wem, Shropshire, about eight miles from the Welsh border. (We were given only three days to evacuate the school, and some of us were sent temporarily to an alternative boarding school called Stootley Rough near Haslemere, Surrey.)

At school, students were expected to help in the kitchen with chores such as peeling potatoes, and to work in the garden growing vegetables as our contribution to the war effort. This was done primarily because the school could not afford to hire workers, but justified by the claim that doing such chores would teach us to be self-sufficient. I recall taking long walks with teachers and other students along the banks of Lake Ellesmere and in other parts of the beautiful countryside. My mother managed to visit me at school occasionally, and former schoolmates often tell me how well they remember her, because she was the only mother who came to Bunce Court; their own parents were trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe.

When my mother left the housekeeping job and rented her own apartment, she first worked for an Austrian refugee organization, and later opened a

The Bunce Court school bell rang its clarion calls daily from 1933 to 1940, and again after the school's return from the wartime evacuation, from 1946 to 1948.

It served as an essential aspect of life, awakening the students in the early morning hours, giving notice for meal times as well as when school classes began and when afternoon work periods beckoned.

Bunce Court - or New Herrlingen as it was also known, was established by Anna Essinger who decided at the beginning of the Nazi era that her school in southern Germany was no longer a viable place to educate children. Thus Bunce Court became the seat for her progressive educational endeavour.

second-hand clothing store. Used clothing was in great demand, as new clothes were strictly rationed during the war. I sometimes joined her in London during vacations; and I remember on one occasion having to spend the night sleeping on the platform of a London tube station that doubled as an air-raid shelter. But I stayed during most vacations at school with the other children, who had nowhere else to go. We spent summers by hiking in the countryside and reading books from the school library.

As a long-term student at Bunce Court (where, all told, I spent nine years), I came to be considered someone the teachers could reliably consult about the likely reactions of the student body to administrative decisions they were planning to take. However, I was not always a model student. I instigated several nefarious activities, including going on long bike rides with my schoolmates in the middle of the night! On one occasion we cycled past a police station in Faversham, and when the police informed the school about this, our nocturnal bike-rides came to an abrupt end, but as this was a progressive school we received no actual punishment.

Another controversy arose when I pulled up a young Christmas tree from a nearby forest and placed it in the school's entrance hall as a seasonal decoration. The school observed no religious traditions, Jewish or Christian, and the staff discussed the propriety of displaying a Christmas tree in a predominantly

ethnic Jewish school, as well as the pros and cons of removing it; the tree was eventually taken away. I believe they would equally have removed a Hanukkah menorah had someone sought to place that on display. In general, the school avoided any involvement in organized religion.

When the war ended in 1945, the school moved back to Kent, and I continued to study for my School Certificate, normally taken at age 16— the official school-leaving age at the time. I earned my certificate at age 15 in 1947, but remained at the school for one more year.

I have continued to interact with schoolmates and teachers, maintaining contact with some of them to this day. Many still live in England, but some emigrated to the USA or Israel. Most of the children had lost their parents and siblings in the Holocaust, so we naturally thought of ourselves as an extended family, with Bunce Court as our home. The headmistress asked us to address her as *Tante Anna* (“Aunt Anna”) and her sister Paula Essinger, who was the school nurse, as *Tante Paula*.

Several Old Bunce Courtians later made substantial contributions to the arts or sciences. These included: Dr. Leslie Brent (born Lothar Baruch), a noted immunologist who was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society (the honor society for British scientists); Frank Auerbach, a leading artist and member of the Royal Academy, whose paintings hang in the Tate Gallery; television and film director Peter Morley; and playwright Frank Marcus. Another school friend was Anna John, granddaughter of artist Augustus John; she was one of several non-Jewish students who attended the school because their parents favored progressive education. Still another non-Jewish student, Harold Jackson, became a prominent journalist with the *Manchester Guardian*; he recently wrote an amusing piece about the advantages and drawbacks of Bunce Court School, which he read aloud at a reunion in the summer of 2003 attended by about one hundred former students and teachers.

My own educational experience at Bunce Court inspired me to continue on to University, become a professor, and publish several books on computer science. In retrospect, the nine years I spent at Bunce Court were among the happiest of my life, providing a sound basis for family relationships and successful social interaction.

Anna Essinger was renowned as a progressive educator, whose teaching methodology paralleled that of A.S. Neill at Summerhill School in Suffolk. (Founded near Dresden in 1921



Anna Essinger

and located briefly in Austria, Summerhill was moved to England in 1923 and still exists.) A few years ago, Germany posthumously rehabilitated Anna Essinger by naming a *gymnasium* (a high school) in Ulm in her honor. (Ulm was also the birthplace of Albert Einstein, born in 1879, the same year as *Tante Anna*; she outlived him by five years, passing away in 1960.) The original Essinger school building at Herrlingen became Field Marshal Rommel’s headquarters during the war, and he committed suicide there on Hitler’s orders following his alleged complicity in the abortive assassination attempt on the Fuehrer in 1944.

Bunce Court was closed in 1948, as there was no more need for a school for Jewish refugee children. Instead, the manor house was converted to flats (rental apartments). *Tante Anna* continued to live nearby until her death; I visited her often, and recall reading to her, as she had gone blind in her old age. I also stayed in touch with other Bunce Courtians, including our former cook *Heidtsche* (Gretl Heidt), whose apartment in Soho, London, was a popular venue for many of us.

I recently visited the school’s former gardener, Maria Dehn (now in her nineties and living near Philadelphia), who had inspired me to want to be a gardener before I decided to become a professor! Maria’s father, Max Dehn, was a prominent German mathematician who had originally helped Anna Essinger find a home for her school in England. Professor Dehn, like other Jewish academics, was dismissed by the Nazis in 1935 from his post at the University of Goettingen; he emigrated to the USA, and later became a professor at the University of Texas in Austin.

MOTHER'S DEATH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

After completing high school in 1948, I lived with my mother, who had managed to save the down payment to purchase a modest house in Ascot, about 25 miles from London. To prepare myself for university entrance, I enrolled at the Regent Street Polytechnic, near Oxford Circus, commuting daily by train. But in August 1949, my mother was suddenly hospitalized with a brain tumor. As bad luck would have it, I was abroad on a hitchhiking tour of Europe at the time and had climbed Mont Blanc before traveling on to Vienna (then still under Russian control) to visit relatives who had somehow survived the Holocaust. Only upon arrival in Vienna did I learn that my mother was dangerously ill. Returning immediately by train to London, I arrived just in time to see my mother lying unconscious at the Middlesex Hospital, a few hours before she died. I was devastated when the hospital called me the next morning to inform me that she

had passed away during the night. Her untimely death at age 39 was a traumatic experience for me, a 17-year-old who had lost almost all of my family members in the Holocaust— except for my mother’s elder brother, Max Wegner, who had emigrated to the United States before the war and was then living in Los Angeles. (He died not long ago, in his nineties; I remain in constant touch with his daughter, Marjorie, my only first cousin, now living in San Diego.)

with Uncle Max Wegner in London, ca. 1944

Finding myself an orphan with no means of support, I applied for financial aid from the Government. This was quickly awarded— even though I was not a British citizen— and took the form of an outright grant, not a loan to be repaid later. I have always been very grateful to England both for saving my life through the *Kindertransport* and because the authorities were willing to pay the entire cost of my university education after my mother’s untimely death, including my board and lodging.

During my second year at the Regent Street Polytechnic, I decided to study mathematics at London University. So in the spring of 1950, I took the exam for admission to Imperial College, which I entered in the fall of that year. While there, I decided to study computing. I also studied philosophy, and during 1952-53 attended Professor A.J. Ayer’s seminar at University College on his book, *Language, Truth and Logic*, in which I gave a couple of talks about the impact of philosophy on mathematics and computing.

My extracurricular activities included chairing London University’s Philosophical Study Group, in which capacity I organized lectures by well-known philosophers like Professors C.E.M. Joad, J.B.S. Haldane, and Karl Popper. These evening meetings were preceded by suppers at which I was able to meet the speakers personally and have technical discussions with them. My interest in philosophy has continued throughout my life; I am currently rereading Bertrand Russell’s *History of Western Philosophy* and am especially interested in John Locke (1632-1704), whose empiricist ideas contributed to the growth of the British Parliament and influenced the separation of church and state in the U.S. Constitution. My publications on computer science have often included philosophical

analysis as a supplement to technical discussion.

In my final year at Imperial College, I attended a lecture on computer research by Professor Douglas Hartree, who invited me to work at the Cambridge computer lab after graduation. I moved there in the summer of 1953 to work on the EDSAC computer (Electronic Delayed Storage Automatic Calculator), recently constructed by Professor Maurice Wilkes as the first British computer. It was becoming clear to me that computer science would contribute greatly to knowledge-acquisition and problem-solving.

In 1953-54, I took the Cambridge postgraduate diploma course in Numerical Analysis and Automatic Computing, which enabled me to gain expertise in computer science at the very inception of the discipline (no master’s or doctoral programs in the subject existed at the time). During this period I worked closely with Maurice Wilkes, writing historical articles on scientists like Leibniz and Babbage. My thesis, *Programming for the EDSAC*, presented my computational research in mathematics as well as a philosophical analysis of early models of computation. I have stayed in touch with Professor Wilkes, and visited him in Cambridge as recently as 2007, a few years after the Queen knighted him for his groundbreaking contributions to computer science. His knighthood should have been granted much earlier, but was delayed because the Government did not consider computer science a significant discipline until recently! He smiled ironically when I addressed him as “Sir Maurice” during my recent visit.

In June 1954, I took my final exam during the week that the noted cryptographer Alan Turing, who had cracked the German submarine Enigma code during the war, committed suicide while undergoing prosecution for homosexuality— then still a criminal offense in Britain as in the United States. This tragedy shocked Wilkes and others who knew Turing personally. Today, Turing is venerated as a founder of computer science; and the Turing Award (the “Nobel Prize” for computing) is bestowed annually in his memory.

During my year at Cambridge, I managed to find time for social interaction. My college was Fitzwilliam House (to which most graduate students were assigned), but I did not actually live there; I rented a room in a local vicarage, and occasionally discussed religion with the vicar. On Friday nights I often dined at the University Jewish Society, where I interacted with many of the students, including my future wife, Judith, who was called “Second-verse Romney” because she knew all the verses of the Friday-night *zemirot* (Sabbath table hymns) by heart. More about our relationship will follow.

EARLY CAREER

After receiving my Cambridge diploma, I worked briefly in the Computer Science Laboratory at Manchester University. Lodging with a Jewish couple, I occasionally attended lectures at the Manchester Institute of Jewish Studies. Then I decided to visit Israel, where I was invited to join the Weizmann Institute in 1955 to work on the WEIZAC computer. I also worked with my boss, Professor Chaim Pekeris, on a mathematical model for evaluating the likelihood of finding oil in Israel through underground exploration. (Alas, none was ever found!) I returned to England in the summer of 1955, but have since visited Israel frequently to lecture at the Hebrew University, the Haifa Technion, and other institutions.

On my return to England, the Prudential Insurance Company hired me to develop computer software for actuarial purposes. Soon afterwards, by pure serendipity (or was it Divine Providence?), I ran into Judith, who had just graduated from Cambridge, where we had originally met. We bumped into each other—literally!—on the London tube during the rush hour, while commuting downtown on the Bakerloo line— I to my job at the “Pru” and she to a Bar final preparation course. We dated a few times, after which we became engaged.

Soon after our marriage in London’s Hammersmith Synagogue (an Orthodox congregation) in July 1956, we decided to spend some time in the USA,



wedding on July 22, 1956 at Hammersmith Synagogue, London;
Judith’s parents on left and Peter’s great aunt and great uncle on right

where I had been offered a job as a research assistant at Pennsylvania State University, in the “exchange visitor” program sponsored by the U.S. government. We left England just days after Judith was called to the Bar (back then, it was still taken for granted that a husband’s career took precedence over that of the wife). My Cambridge computer degree proved invaluable, both in Israel and in the USA, at a time when the fledgling computer field was expanding and becoming increasingly important both in academia and in industry.

Judith and I had planned to return to England after two years at Penn State, but we decided to stay longer when MIT offered me a research position, where I worked for one year with Fernando Corbato (who later won a Turing Award for his work on the newly-developed computing system Multics). I then transferred to Harvard, where I worked for a year in the statistics laboratory on statistical models of economics.

During these two years we rented one floor of a triple-decker belonging to an Orthodox family in Brookline, and attended Shabbat services at Young Israel, an Orthodox congregation. Judith, who was at home caring for the first of our four sons, also taught Hebrew school at Kehillat Israel, a Conservative congregation near Coolidge Corner.

Finally, in 1961, we returned to London, where I had been offered a lectureship at the London School of Economics (LSE). There I taught computing to economists and continued my research on economic computation; I published three books on computing, and wrote several well-received evaluations of British Computer Society conferences. My colleagues at LSE included high-level economists who advised government officials on economic policy, as well as Karl Popper, with whom I often debated philosophical issues. In retrospect, LSE was one of the most stimulating institutions with which I have been associated. However, after three years there, we decided that my career would be better served by returning to the USA, so we applied for and received a “green card” (a permanent residence visa for ourselves and our two London-born sons, Simon and Mark.

TOLERANCE

Let me conclude by returning to the topic of my Holocaust-related activities. For many years, Holocaust survivors spoke little of their experiences, because they felt that no one wanted to hear about their personal tragedies. But in the last twenty years, books and films about the Holocaust have proliferated, especially as the survivors will not be with us much longer, and it is now considered important to speak out against recent atrocities in places like Rwanda, Darfur, Congo,

and other troubled regions. I joined the Reunion of *Kinder*, founded in England in 1989, and the *Kindertransport* Association, founded in the USA in 1990. We meet every two years to reminisce about our *Kindertransport* experiences and discuss how to make the world a better place.

One *Kindertransport* film, *Into the Arms of Strangers*, won the Oscar for best documentary in 2000. I recommend this film to anyone who wants to learn more about the experiences of *Kindertransport* survivors; it brings home to viewers the horror of children forcibly separated from parents who had no choice but to send them away in order to save their lives.

Judith and I recently inquired into the fate of my Viennese grandmothers after I had left for England on the *Kindertransport*. The Austrian state archives informed us that my mother's mother had been deported in 1942 by train to Minsk, where she was immediately shot on arrival and buried with many others in a trench that had been prepared ahead of time. I also learned that my father's mother, along with her two daughters (my aunts) and their children aged 9 and 10 (my cousins) had been deported in 1941 to Kovno, Lithuania, where they were machine-gunned and buried in a trench at a notorious killing field known as *Fort Nine*. Today a memorial to the Holocaust stands there (which I actually visited while attending a computer conference in Lithuania in 1990, long before I discovered that my father's family members had perished there). There can be no doubt that I would likewise have ended up deported, shot and buried in a trench had I not escaped on a



Grandmother Jett Wegner, ca. 1935

Kindertransport. My Bunce Court schoolmates tell similar stories about their parents and siblings; deportation and mass execution were standard Nazi methods of killing Jews in the war's early years, before the extermination camps with gas chambers and crematoria were put in place.

Both of my grandfathers, Juda Wegner and Isak Weiden, had died earlier, one in 1926, the other in 1940—thereby avoiding the horrors of the Holocaust. I have located and visited their graves in Vienna's *Zentralfriedhof* (municipal cemetery); one is in the old Jewish section and one in the new. Fortunately, Jewish graves in the Vienna cemetery escaped desecration by the Nazis, though many cemeteries throughout Nazi Europe were destroyed to obliterate the fact

that Jews had ever lived there.

In 1993, the Austrian government for the first time admitted the State's complicity in the destruction of Austrian Jews (which they had previously blamed entirely on the Germans) and distributed unsolicited reparations of a few thousand dollars to survivors like myself. It also recognized expatriate Austrian Jews who had achieved success in life despite being victims of Nazism. In 1999, the Austrian government offered to induct me into the Austrian Academy of Science



Peter at Grandfather Isak Weiden's grave in Jewish section of Vienna's *Zentralfriedhof* Cemetery

and Art for my services to Austrian computer science. (I had worked with Austrian colleagues to organize an important computer conference.) However, I could not go to Vienna to accept the award when it was offered, and it was not until 2007 that I was again invited there to receive the *Oesterreichisches Ehrenkreuz fuer Wissenschaft und Kunst* (Austrian Medal of Honor for Sciences and Arts) along with a public apology from the Minister of Education for Austria's persecution of the Jews during World War II.

Some of my friends had urged me to decline the award because of what happened to my family, but I have in fact interacted many times with German and Austrian colleagues in recent years, and I decided that accepting this honor was an appropriate way to heal the wounds inflicted by the Holocaust on both Jews and gentiles. Though the actions of German and Austrian Nazis were unforgivable, I have never hated Germans or Austrians as an ethnic group, and have always tried to be fair to those whom I have encountered over the years.

In Providence, as a member of our local Holocaust Education and Resource Center, I speak regularly to high school students about the Holocaust, my *Kindertransport* experience, and what happened to my family. I also discuss these events with my children at our Passover seders. I have told my story at Rhode Island's annual *Yom Ha-Shoah* commemoration; on *Yom Ha-Shoah* 2009, I was invited to speak to the Jewish community in nearby Plymouth, Massachusetts. And now I have told my story to you.

When I talk to high schoolers, I urge my teenage audiences to attend college and prepare themselves for jobs that will let them contribute to society and make the world a better place. Though Holocaust survivors like myself strive to improve society, we are all aware of terrorist organizations that currently promote suicide bombing and other atrocities. Our emphasis on tolerance still has to contend with persistent anti-Semitism and other forms of hatred. We hope the world will allow tolerance to triumph in the end.



(August 1933) 12
Peter in Leningrad, aged one year

FALL RIVER: A JEWISH REMINISCENCE

M. CHARLES BAKST

Only a Rip van Winkle would have been oblivious to the author's byline in *The Providence Journal* (and former *Bulletin*). But Rip slumbered for 20 years; Charlie banged out copy and commentary for more than 40 years. He began his tenure with the papers while still a Brown undergraduate (Class of 1966) and retired this past fall as the dean of Rhode Island's political reporters and columnists. While never afraid to identify himself as a Jew or proclaim his support for Israel, Charlie's sense of Judaism was pervasive in his understanding of the state's perpetual dilemmas: honesty vs. hypocrisy, justice vs. injustice, taking care of people vs. taking advantage.

Though proud of his interviews with presidents, governors, and celebrities, he was also inspired by his conversations with ordinary and invisible Rhode Islanders. In this sense he made a profession out of schmoozing: hanging out at Fred's barbershop on Wayland Square or Davis' and Seven Stars on Hope Street. I do not know if he enjoyed racetracks, but a thoroughbred was named in his honor.

Charlie told me a couple of times that he could not write an article for *The Notes* until he retired. It is too bad for Rhode Islanders that his retirement occurred somewhat early, but our readers will probably agree that their wait has been rewarded. Our Association is delighted to extend a hand to Fall River's Jewish community, which lacks its own historical organization and publication.



5th birthday party at
Mrs. Hutchinson's
Nursery School, 1949



An e-mail parted the mists of time...

In my Barrington home a year or so ago, I came upon a box of three, 45-rpm records. On its cover were the hand-printed words, "The Saga of my Bar Mitzvah," and pasted on was a photo of a 13-year-old me in yarmulke and tallis. Over the decades, I'd glanced the box a couple of times in my parents' home in Fall River and then in mine, but I doubt anyone had listened to the records in more than half a century. And now, of course, I didn't have the equipment to play them. But, in a serendipitous 2009 encounter, I happened to have the 45s with me when I ran into Newport record and movie producer Larry Kraman. He said he'd take them home, play them, and e-mail me the results.

I heard back from him the next day. His e-mail came with an attachment. I pressed the button, and suddenly it was 1957. "My name is Merrill Charles Bakst. I was born in the City of Fall River, Massachusetts, on February 22, 1944. My parents are Ann and Lester Bakst. My brother is Arthur Martin Bakst. We reside at 27 Bigelow Street in Fall River."

If this sounds like a deposition, it's because my father was a lawyer and he wrote it.



Ann, ca. 1933

My voice comes across as young and thin. But the southern New England accent, with the dropped Rs, is strong.

"I celebrated my Bar Mitzvah at Temple Emanu-El, Miami Beach, Florida, Saturday, February 23, 1957. Rabbi Irving Lehrman of that Temple delivered a beautiful charge which I shall always remember and bestowed his blessing upon me." Needless to say, I have no recollection today of what Rabbi Lehrman said. But I do remember the March 17, 1957 recording session in a studio in a home in New Bedford.

My father brought me there to chant the Hebrew blessings and haftarah I sang at the service— note that I pronounced "s" as "s," not, as the current fashion would have it, as "t"— and to repeat the prayer he had penned for that occasion. ("Endow me with the understanding to fulfill the precepts and commandments of thy Torah...")

Even with my narrative comments thrown in, this material still took up only 15 minutes; the recording technician said we had another three minutes available. My father had me fill it by reading telegrams.

Irony marked my Bar Mitzvah. The occasion represented the dramatic religious high point of my growing up in Fall River's then-bustling Jewish community, where life centered around Temple Beth El, not far from downtown, across from what was then Durfee High School, which my brother, four years older, attended. My father had been president of the Conservative congregation in 1955, and my mother, from the legendarily large Horvitz family, was active in Hadassah, Sisterhood and other organizations. For the Bar Mitzvah, I trained for months with Cantor Marcus Gerlich. But the actual ceremony was in Miami Beach, where my mother's father, Morris Horvitz Sr., a widower in his 80s, spent the winters. The reception was in the Crown Hotel.

On March 2, back in Fall River, Rabbi Samuel Ruderman called me to the pulpit and, in recognition of my Temple Beth El religious school training, awarded me a second Bar Mitzvah certificate. Fall River's Temple Beth El building has much the same feel as Providence's Temple Emanu-El. Both opened in the late 1920s. And the next Saturday night, my friends joined me at a party at the Mellen Hotel.

Today, Beth El, with a small, aging membership, is a shadow of the congregation it once was. But in the 1950s it was strained to capacity on the High Holy Days. There would be services in both the main sanctuary and the auditorium in the adjoining building that was put up in 1954 to house the religious school and provide facilities for basketball and other activities.

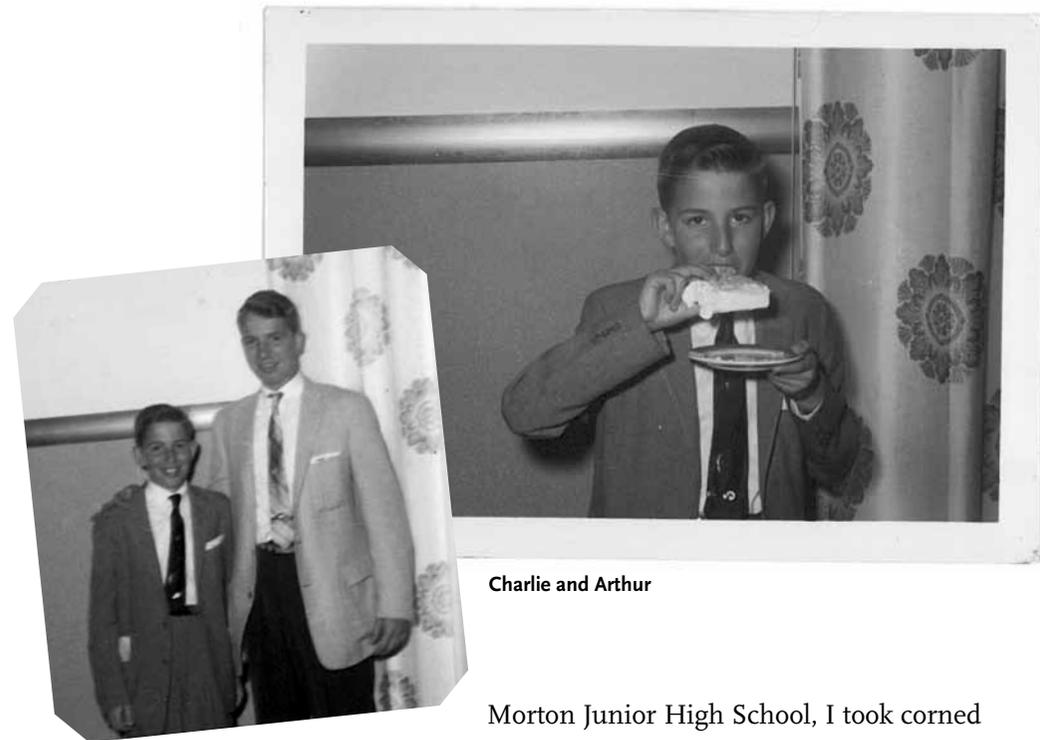


Bar Mitzvah party, Crown Hotel, Miami Beach, February 23, 1957 with: friend Bonnie Mintz, grandfather Morris Horvitz Sr., and father Lester

The city in general, once a world textile leader, was by no means thriving, but some prominent factories, including well-known clothing manufacturers, continued to hum away. The Jewish community, with a good complement of lawyers, doctors, store owners, and industrial executives, was a firm presence and a study in achievement.

I glance at a roster of signatures of the kids who went to my Mellen party, folks like Kenneth Silk, Mark Goldman, David Horowitz, Barbara Goltz, Eileen Shaw, Billy Granovsky, Judy Leibowitz, Jimmy Packer, Ricky Reder, Carol Simon, Myron Magnet, Fred Friedman, and Bonnie Mintz. Their families reflected this socioeconomic world. We were, that evening, 30 Jewish seventh graders. In today's Fall River, it would be hard to imagine such a gathering, and, as for my friends, I don't know of more than a couple who remained in the city as adults. My father and mother, who stayed until their deaths in 1978 and 1983, lived near the Union Hospital (now Charlton Memorial) at the edge of the Highlands; the farther north you went, amid the blocks surrounding Robeson Street and Highland Avenue, the more Jewish the neighborhood became.

Fall River had a Jewish bakery, butchers, and delicatessens. When I was at



Charlie and Arthur

Morton Junior High School, I took corned beef, rolled beef, salami or baloney sandwiches for lunch almost every day. My parents also ranged to food emporia elsewhere, including Miller's and Davis'. Sometimes my father would unwrap a glistening order of sliced corned beef and tell me, triumphantly, "Eat this, it's from Providence."

Providence was familiar, yet exotic, a kind of promised land— more sophistication, more culture, more Jews, more shopping. My parents often spoke of moving to the East Side, but it might have been just a pipe dream and I don't remember their ever taking a concrete step to do so. I do recall my mother schlepping me to an orthodontist, Eugene Nelson, in Providence. In my later years, some of the guys and I thought it a Big Deal to go to the big city— say, for the canteen dances at the old Jewish Community Center— and meet girls and go on dates to the movies or a Thayer Street coffeehouse that featured folksinging. My father had a keen interest in politics and baseball, my mother in theater and music, and they loved to travel; by no means were they recluses.

But they certainly viewed the world through a Jewish prism. Whenever a newspaper carried a list of people— a board roster, say— they would scan it to pick out Jewish names. When I was in boarding school at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts, illness forced Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter to disappoint the school community and cancel an appearance there. This troubled



senior year at Phillips Academy, Andover, 1962

my father, who told me, “It makes all Jews look bad.”

In 2004, I spoke at a Temple Beth El service honoring the congregation’s early members, who included relatives on both sides of my family. I noted it was the first time I’d spoken in this setting since 1960, when I was 16 and read a prayer at the Confirmation service at the end of tenth grade. Although my parents sent me away to school in the ninth grade, my mother insisted I also finish Sunday School and be confirmed, so for two years I did a correspondence course— writing book reports, doing self-testing exercises, and mailing them in— and on the rare occasions I was in Fall River on Sundays I would have to go to class.

A Horvitz cousin was already at Andover when I arrived; another followed in my wake. During each of my first two years, the tuition, including room and board, was \$1,600; during each of the next two years it was \$1,800. Many of the students were on scholarship. That I was not was a testament to my father’s law practice and to the fact that my parents placed a high premium on education.

As I recall, Jews made up about 10 percent of the student body; Catholics a little more. Basically, it was a Protestant school— all boys but now coed— and everyone had to go to daily chapel, with its traditional Protestant hymns. During my senior year, Jewish students were excused from Sunday chapel if they went to Jewish services instead, and that’s what most of us did, except for one week when everyone wanted to go to the Protestant service to hear the fiery Rev. William Sloane Coffin Jr., an Andover alum who was the Yale chaplain.

Future President George W. Bush and I overlapped at the school, but I didn’t know him. For that matter, future Rhode Island Governor Don Carcieri and I overlapped at Brown University, but I didn’t know him either. My mother, who, in her later years, did some teaching in Fall River public schools, was a Brown alum; I wouldn’t underestimate the role that that played in my admission.

In the summer of 1960, between the tenth and eleventh grades, I went on a Young Judaea trip to Israel. My grandfather, who had a wholesale business, Fall River Paper & Supply, paid for it; he thought the excursion would improve my Hebrew. To me, at the time, it was a vacation, a pleasure trip, but I came to realize in later years how much I absorbed from it in terms of Israel’s history, geography, security, and the role the country plays in the Middle East and Jewish life.

My grasp of what it means to be Jewish also was shaped by five summers (1952-56) at Camp Tel Noar in Hampstead, New Hampshire. Its director, Frieda Baxt Hohenemser, was a distant cousin. Her husband, Jacob Hohenemser, was the cantor at Providence’s Temple Emanu-El and led the camp Hebrew and English sing-alongs.

Still, my story is grounded in Fall River’s Temple Beth El.

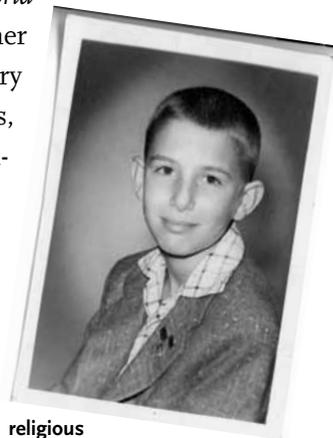
I said in the 2004 speech that I was struck at how often I used to find myself at the temple, including Sunday School— 400 kids were enrolled— and Hebrew classes on either Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday; there were so many students that two sections were needed in each grade. On Saturday mornings we’d be back for Bar Mitzvahs. Every now and then there would be a Bat Mitzvah— in those days, of course, it was pronounced “BAS” Mitzvah— and they were very different. While a boy got a whole service to himself, four or even six girls were Bat Mitzvahed at a time. There was also Junior Congregation, and we had weekend sports and dances. During vacations there would be outings to places like the Portsmouth roller rink.

More recently, I came upon some artifacts. On yellow, lined paper, written in pencil, here is a Sunday School exercise from February 5, 1956, when I was in sixth grade. We had to list the Ten Commandments. I received a mark of 100, which was generous, because my presentation of the material was not perfect. For example, I wrote, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.” In red pencil, the teacher, after the words “the Lord,” inserted the missing “thy God.” She also noted that my spelling— “adulatory,” “wittness,” and “neigbor”— was flawed.

Here is a copy of the March 30, 1956 issue of *World Over*, the Jewish kids’ magazine we were given every other week. This issue included stories on the 13th anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Jewish life in Des Moines, Iowa, and English Jewry’s 300th anniversary, not to mention numerous puzzles and games.

The religious education and extracurricular activities built Jewish identity. To some extent, of course, this separated us from Fall River’s non-Jewish community. On the other hand, it also was a broadening force, putting us in contact and keeping us in touch with Jewish kids from public schools besides our own.

To be sure, there were other, but smaller, Jewish



religious school awards worn on lapel, ca. 1955

enclaves in Fall River: Orthodox *shuls*. My mother's parents and several other relatives belonged to the Quarry Street synagogue in the Flint, the neighborhood around Bedford Street and Pleasant Street. I remember the synagogue as musty, with old men *davening*, swaying and strolling about, and women were in the balcony. The services were entirely in Hebrew, except when someone would call out, say, "Page 36." Then there'd be more chanting and murmuring and then someone would shout, "Page 55."

When a High Holy Day wore on, my brother and I would hike to Quarry Street to visit my grandfather at services. The *shul* is long gone now.

When I think of my grandfather and his wife, Dora, I often conjure tastes of the cuisine at their house. Items like cabbage soup. Boiled chicken. Whitefish with sliced tomato and cucumber and rye bread with whipped butter. On Sundays, Horvitz relatives, including folks from out of town, would gather for Jewish pastries and tea; some of the oldtimers, in Russian fashion, sipped tea from a glass.

Back to Temple Beth El. Sunday School students were supposed to go to Saturday services at least twice a month. I wasn't exactly crazy about this, but it was a convenient place to meet up with friends. After services, we routinely would head downtown and go to the old China Royal and get a chow mein sandwich for a quarter. Then, for another quarter, we would take in a movie double feature.

During one Saturday service, Rabbi Ruderman asked my friend Mark Goldman and me to stand up. We had nice suits and ties on, and he held us up as examples of how to dress for the occasion. Suppose, he said, you were about to meet the President of the United States. Well, he said, meeting God is even more important. The odd thing is that during my career as a journalist, I would often have the honor of meeting presidents and vice presidents. Every time I thought of Rabbi Ruderman and his views on attire.

I have many small memories, such as arriving early for Hebrew School and stopping at the vending machines to down a Coke and Baby Ruth...the beauty of the *sukkah* in the vestry... my father telling someone to make sure the High Holy services included a prayer for America because President Eisenhower had just had a heart attack...the herring and hard-boiled eggs I'd devour at the men's club breakfasts.

And larger memories. The temple reinforced the lessons of justice, charity and pride my parents instilled at home.

When I spoke at Beth El in 2004, I said: "There were the teachers and

the students and the lessons and the sermons, and everything in ways I never thought about then and sort of added up. There was the *Keren Ami*, the nickels and dimes we brought in on Sunday mornings. There was the afternoon a poor gentile kid came looking for help, and the rabbi helped him. There was a time a bunch of us acted like jerks on the public bus on the way to Hebrew classes, and someone called the rabbi, and he chewed us out, and rightly so, because we had embarrassed the temple.

"We learned about support for Israel, a sense of bonding, and I remember the pictures of the old, isolated Hebrew University on our notebook covers, and there were organizations like Young Judaea and USY and AZA."

When my father was temple president, he would often be called to get over there to fill out a minyan, and that gave me a sense of what it means to take on an obligation. And when my mother would be invited to present a Bible at a Bar Mitzvah, she would polish her remarks and polish them again, and that pursuit of perfection made an impression on me.

The Bible stories, the customs, the struggle to master Hebrew, the lectures about morality and the dietary laws, represented a standard by which to measure ourselves. We could never be religious enough, or good enough, but we could try, we had to try.

Listen again to the recording of the prayer I recited in 1957. "You have enabled me to reach this important day in my life in health and in strength. Continue to be with me in the years to come so that I may be a loving and devoted son, an upright and honorable man, ever true to our religion and to our people." My father wrote it, but I came to subscribe to it, and Temple Beth El shapes me still.

William Faulkner had a line: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." And he was right.



Michelle Obama at Biltmore Hotel, Providence, 2008

WARWICK JEWISH COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

The next meeting of the Warwick Jewish Community Association will be held at 8 P.M., Monday, OCTOBER 25, 1954, Hangar #1, State Airport, Hillsgrove.
ELECTION OF OFFICERS.

ONCE IN A LIFETIME - FOR A LIFETIME - FOR YOURSELF

TEMPLE  BETH AM
WARWICK JEWISH COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
BUILDING FUND CAMPAIGN

895 POST ROAD - WARWICK, RHODE ISLAND - PHONE NO. 7-9877

ACK MOSSBERG, PRESIDENT
HASKELL WALLICK, CHAIRMAN, BUILDING FUND CHAIRMAN

October 10, 1958

Dear Fellow Member:

We are happy to announce a milestone in the history of our Temple. We have watched our community grow so rapidly that it has terribly outdistanced our ability to provide adequate facilities---for worship---for the education of our children---and for our own social activities.

We need our own building. We need our own Synagogue, classrooms, a place for learning and relaxation. We need a Temple not only for today, but for tomorrow---and our children's tomorrows! We must look to the future as we build today.

But we are only 170 families. We have discussed and planned and planned again. Our task is not an easy one. We need the sum of \$150,000 to build a Temple that will make us proud and that will make our children proud of us.

We are, therefore, embarking on a 6 week building fund campaign to raise \$150,000. In these 6 weeks we must achieve what will last a lifetime! We must dream and think big. We call on you to think of the future---in terms of work and giving even beyond your present capabilities.

15+ MAILING THURSDAY OCT. 9, 1958

FIFTY YEARS OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM IN WARWICK: THE HISTORY OF TEMPLE AM DAVID

ALICE + SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN

The authors' distinguished careers as sociologists, demographers, and educators were portrayed in the 2007 issue of our journal. While Sid and Alice are highly regarded for leadership roles in numerous Jewish communal organizations, including our own Association, their longtime involvement in Am David is less widely known. Yet, when invited to reflect on the history of their congregation, they were reluctant to say anything about themselves. Fortunately, Sid and Alice were persuaded to add a few personal notes to their narrative. But not enough! Thus, putting aside the strengths and limitations of social scientific analysis, I can proclaim that at *shul*, as elsewhere, the Goldsteins are beloved.

After World War II, tens of thousands of GIs returned home and began to establish their own families. The demand for housing grew intense. A ready solution was the development of homes in areas lying outside core cities-- in the suburbs. The quintessential such development was Levittown, begun on Long Island in 1947.

Areas outside Providence did not lag far behind, as the inner city lost population to the older suburbs of Cranston, Warwick, and Barrington. Jews, of course, participated fully in this changing population distribution, spurred on not only by the desire for new housing, but also by the changing nature of the old neighborhoods. Cranston and Warwick, and to a lesser extent Barrington, soon had significant Jewish populations.¹

As the number of Jews in Warwick grew and as they began to raise families, several of these new residents felt a need for formal Jewish organizations within their own city. Many still had strong ties to institutions in the areas they had left behind, particularly to the Orthodox communities in South Providence. But, being Rhode Islanders, they wanted their institutions closer at hand. Thus, Israel Moses, a lawyer, sent a letter to several of the Jewish families he knew to

be living in Warwick, asking them to attend a meeting to organize a formal Jewish community in the city.

OFF TO A FLYING START

The meeting took place on April 29, 1954, when a handful of men and women met in Hangar 1 at Hillsgrove, the state airport.² The 16 participants in that meeting determined to form a Jewish community organization, and within a year, the formalities had been completed and the Warwick Jewish Community Association came into existence. Officers were elected, with Israel Moses as the first president; he also served as the new organization's legal counsel. A Sunday school program began holding classes at the John Brown Francis School. Even a Sisterhood was formed, which elected Lillian Wiatrak president.

In the year following its inception, the WJCA grew substantially, both in membership and in programming. Erev Shabbat (Friday evening) services were held on a regular basis in a variety of available spaces, including a fire hall in the Lakewood section of Warwick and in the Legion Hall. High Holy Day services were organized and held in the Hoxsie Community Hall, with a cantor imported from New York for the occasion. The school expanded its offerings, becoming a three-day-a-week Hebrew school, meeting still at the Francis School after-hours on weekdays and on Sunday mornings. Hebrew classes for adults were offered as well. Instruction was generally provided by lay volunteers.

Consonant with its growth and activities, the organization adopted a Jewish name— Temple Beth Am (House of the People)— and under that name received a charter from the State. Sixty-seven people were signers of the document requesting the charter. Although most of its members came from Orthodox families, Temple Beth Am followed a general trend among suburban Jewish congregations in the United States and adopted the family seating and order of service of the Conservative movement. Nonetheless, services tended to be traditional, with little use of English.

By 1956, just two years after its founding, the congregation was firmly established as a presence in the Warwick area. High Holy Day services were again held, but this time with a local cantor— Irving Schmuger, a pharmacist whose family, including daughter Selma Stanzler, was deeply involved in the state's Jewish community. The families of Haskell Wallick and Melvin Blazer presented Temple Beth Am with its first Torah scrolls. They were kept in a portable ark in the home of one of the congregants, and set up for Shabbat and holiday services as needed.

Registration in the religious school doubled within the first two years of the congregation's existence, attesting to the spurt of growth in Warwick of young Jewish families. Social programs proliferated as well, with dances, picnics, and the Sisterhood's first annual Donor Dinner. The Sisterhood also sponsored a series of educational evenings, featuring a combination of timely lectures presented by local rabbis and experts (including "What Is a Normal Child?" and "Mental Health"). There were also evenings devoted to programs more directly related to women's interests ("Beauty and Culture Demonstration" and "Fashion Show").

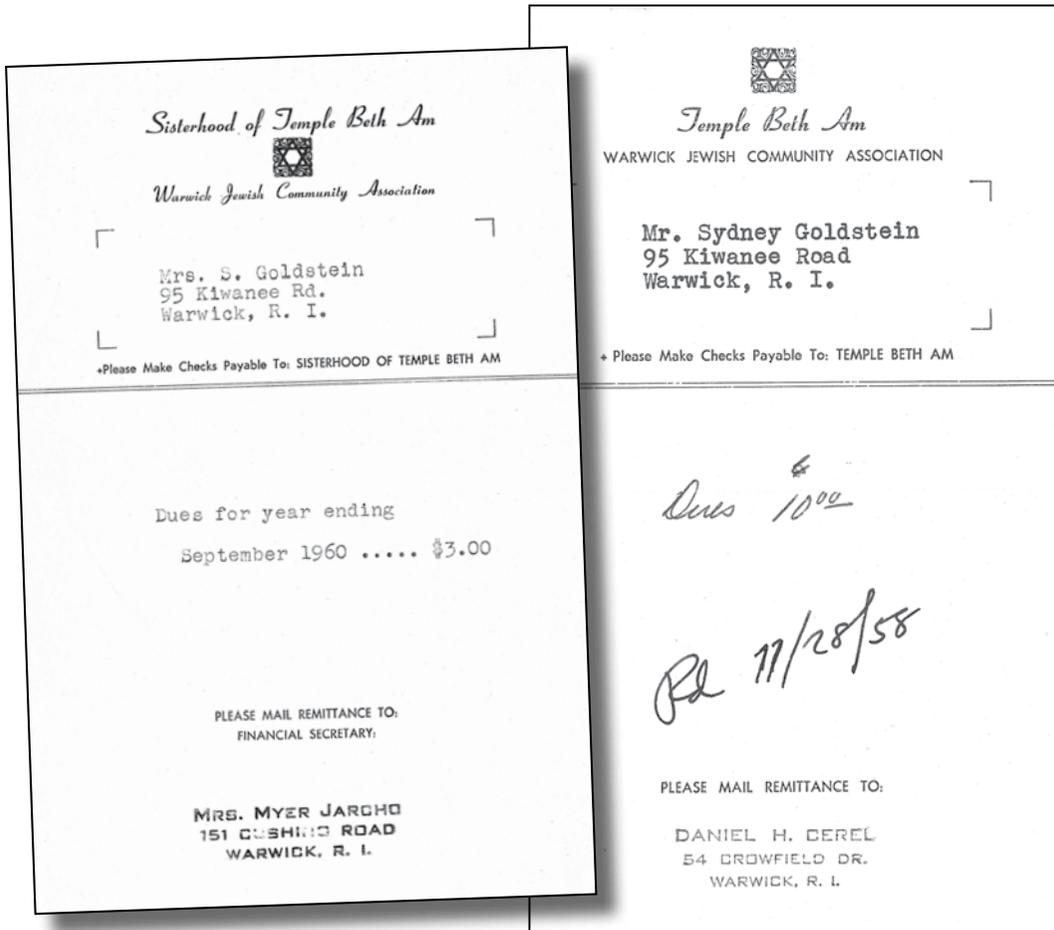
A firm indication that the congregation had "come of age" was its formal affiliation with the Conservative movement's United Synagogue of America (now known as United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism). Following Temples Beth Israel in Providence, Emanuel in Providence, B'nai Israel in Woonsocket, and Torat Yisrael in Cranston, Beth Am became the fifth Conservative congregation in Rhode Island.

BEGINNING OUR INVOLVEMENT

Our involvement with Temple Beth Am began just five years after its founding. We had moved to Providence in 1955, when Sid was offered a position as an assistant professor of sociology at Brown University. We initially rented an apartment on Adelaide Avenue in South Providence and joined Temple Beth Israel. Both of us had been reared as Orthodox Jews: Sid in an Eastern European congregation in New London, Connecticut, and Alice in a modern Orthodox synagogue in Germany. Both of us had changed to Conservative Judaism: Sid through his involvement with Hillel during his college years, and Alice as a member of a Conservative congregation in New London. Thus, joining a Conservative congregation on our move to Rhode Island was natural enough.

In 1957, following the suburban trend, we moved to the Pilgrim Park area of Warwick. Our decision to locate there was informed by a number of considerations, not the least of which was the existence of a Conservative Jewish community. We could have continued our affiliation with Temple Beth Israel, but believed it important to support local institutions and wanted our children eventually to attend a religious school near their home and friends. We therefore became members of Temple Beth Am, paying our annual membership dues of \$10 for the first time in 1958.³ Within a short time, we were fully involved in the congregation's activities.

At the same time, because of our orientation to Providence's East Side



through Sid's position at Brown, we participated often in Jewish community events in Providence, including adult education programs sponsored by the Bureau of Jewish Education, and occasional services in Providence synagogues. We also relied on the kosher butchers and bakeries in Providence to meet our food needs, since such kosher services were not available in Warwick. All these activities helped to supplement the offerings available in Warwick and made us feel like members of Rhode Island's larger Jewish community.

BUILDING A SYNAGOGUE

Given the growth of the congregation, its members quickly realized that they would need a permanent home of their own in order to realize their potential as a thriving suburban institution. Under the leadership of the congregation's second president, Jack Mossberg, a Building and Site Committee, chaired by

Bernard Wiatrak, an engineer employed at Quonset by the federal government, and a Building Fund Committee, headed by Haskell Wallick, were appointed. Jack Mossberg's leadership was especially crucial at this point. A Rhode Island native who had served on PT boats in the Pacific during World War II, Jack used his professional expertise as a salesman as well as his wide knowledge of Judaism to unify the community in support of building a synagogue.

Though built on a far larger scale, Temple Beth-El's daring new synagogue on the East Side, completed in 1954, must have provided some inspiration. Because the Reform congregation had relocated from South Providence, it too reflected Providence's changing neighborhoods. But earlier that year, Congregation Beth David moved from its old synagogue on Chalkstone Avenue to a new one on Oakland Avenue, thus remaining in the North End.

In 1957, Beth Am's Building and Site Committee purchased a parcel of land on Gardiner Street, in the Spring Green neighborhood, which was a central location for many of the congregation's residents. The success of the six-week fund drive for \$150,000, under Building Fund chair Haskell Wallick, enabled the congregation to hire a young architect, Ira Rakatansky, who was a champion of modernism. Though he had not yet built a synagogue, he had many useful thoughts on the subject based on his thesis at Harvard's Graduate School of Design. Rakatansky presented the congregation with a sensitively designed plan that provided not only for current needs but future growth and expansion. Nils Johnson, Inc. was awarded the construction contract.

Both President Jack Mossberg and Bernard Wiatrak, Chair of the Building Committee, closely supervised the progress of the construction and recognized the dedication and integrity of the contractor. Guests at the groundbreaking for the new synagogue and its attached school building, held in May 1959, included a representative of Mayor Raymond Stone and clergy of two neighboring churches. The cornerstone for the new building was laid that September, with Sidney Goldstein as Chair of the event.

Even before a building was completed, the congregation sought a rabbi to provide religious guidance on a part-time basis. Rabbi Pesach Sobel (z"l), while still a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, came to Warwick once a month to conduct Friday night services and organize Junior Congregation; he also presided over holiday services. While in Rhode Island, Rabbi Sobel stayed at our home; we kept kosher and our home was within a reasonable walking distance of the congregation's temporary location in the Lakewood section of Warwick. Sid particularly remembers their long walks on Erev Shabbat past a

lake, when the wintry winds blew with a vengeance, and one Sukkoth, when the two of them walked to and from services in very heavy rainstorms.

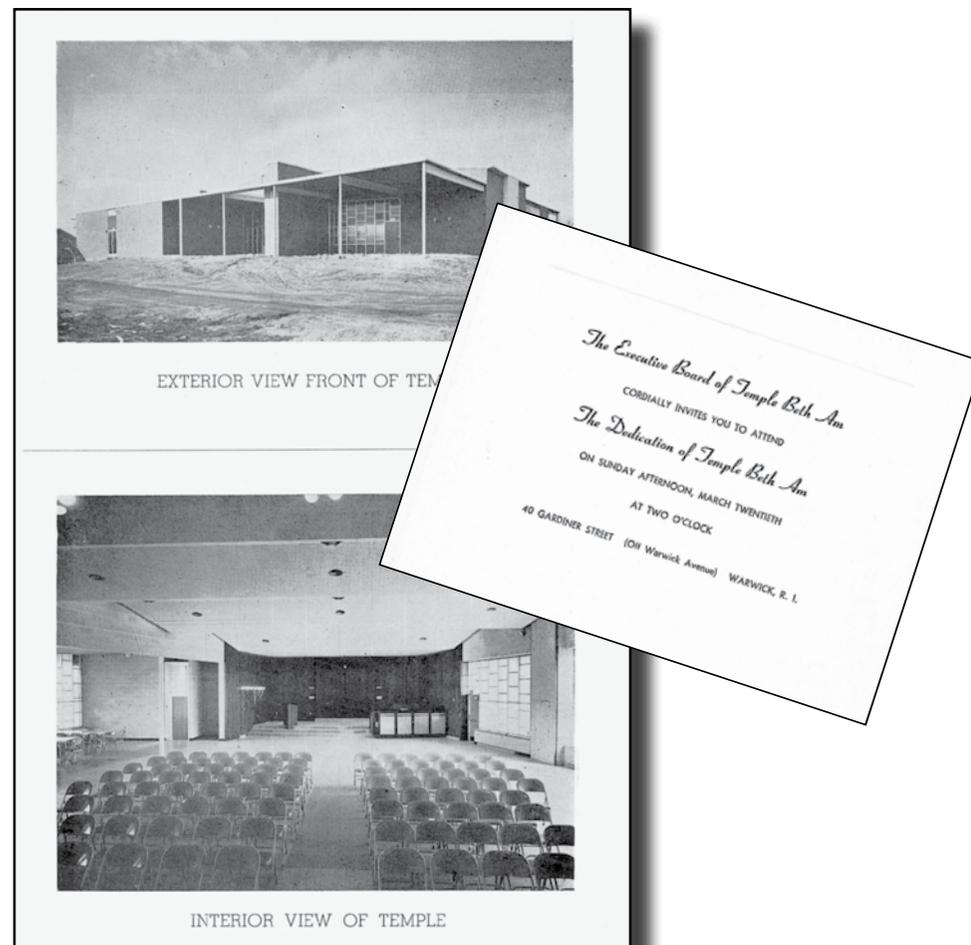
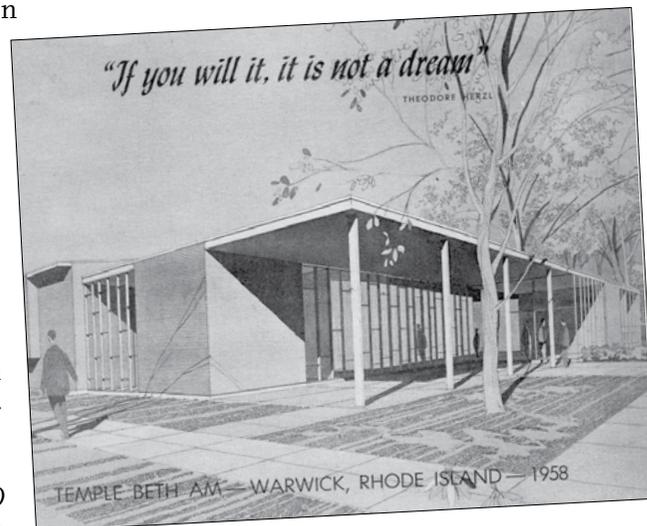
The congregation timed special events to coincide with Rabbi Sobel's presence in Warwick. Thus, Marsha Charifson celebrated her Bat Mitzvah on a Friday evening in February 1960. When Rabbi Sobel was not in town, Sid led Junior Congregation services, a role he continued for several years even after the synagogue had its own building and full-time rabbi. Former students still remember the leading role he played in their Jewish education. Other services were often led by Jack Mossberg with the assistance of Cantor Schmuger and later Cantor Samuel Berditch

High Holy Day services for 1959 were held in our new sanctuary, although the building was not yet complete. It was encased in builders' plastic sheeting, providing an appropriate sense of impermanence to services that highlight the passing of time. The building was designed with a sanctuary and adjacent social hall that could be used as space for larger attendance and special events.

This temporary construction inspired Sid and Alice to build a sukkah using a similar design: a sturdy framework covered in builders' plastic. It was easy to find cornstalks and gourds with which to decorate the sukkah in the many farms that lined Plainfield Pike and Scituate Avenue in Cranston. Ours was the first sukkah to be built in Warwick, and for many years it was a destination for religious school children.

DEDICATION

Within half a year, the building was completed, and a gala dedication took place on March 20, 1960. (The new synagogue of B'nai Israel, a sister Conservative congregation in Woonsocket, was dedicated in September 1962.) Sid was Chair of the occasion. In attendance at the dedication were almost all of the State's other rabbis, clergy of other faiths, and local and federal officials, including Congressman John Fogarty. Particularly moving was Rabbi Eli Bohnen's (ז"ל) remark that in all his career as a rabbi, this was the first time he had witnessed the lighting of an Eternal Light.



Read at the ceremony was a telegram of congratulations from President Dwight D. Eisenhower, which was reminiscent of the famous letter sent in 1790 to Touro Synagogue by President Washington. (In 1958 President Eisenhower had actually read the Washington letter in ceremonies at Touro.)

The sanctuary was enhanced by the artistic Eternal Light, lettering on the ark, and Torah adornments created by congregation member Joseph Schwartz. Joe was a Holocaust survivor from Hungary, who had been trained in a yeshivah but also learned metal working as a trade. He moved to Rhode Island to take a job as a jewelry designer, and lent his knowledge of Judaica and his talents and expertise to beautifying our synagogue.



officers' of Beth Am, June 1959; Sidney Goldstein is in top row, second from right

A YEAR OF FIRSTS

1959-60 was a year of firsts for the congregation. A USY (United Synagogue Youth) chapter had been formed the previous year; it held its first Purim carnival in the new building. Social activities, including a dinner dance and a Sisterhood donor dinner, were organized. Our daughter, Brenda Ruth Goldstein, was the first baby named in the synagogue, just a week after the first High Holy Day services were held there.⁴ As her parents, we presented the Temple with its first shofar in honor of the occasion. The first Bar Mitzvah in our own building, of Richard Aron, occurred later in the year.

Early in the spring of 1960, Temple Beth Am officially installed Rabbi Sobel to the post of congregational rabbi, ushering in a decade of constant growth and development. The school greatly expanded as the baby boom generation began to reach school age. Adult education flourished as well. An evening series featured professional experts from the community and Temple lay leaders. An afternoon book club and a Sunday evening music series filled out the program.

The Sisterhood was particularly active during this time. It took responsi-

bility for furnishing the kosher kitchen in the new building and was responsible for organizing many of the congregation's social events. The Sisterhood's newsletter, edited by Alice Goldstein, was the forerunner of the more general newsletter eventually published by the Temple.

CONTINUING GROWTH

During the next several years, as Temple Beth Am grew, the congregation hired not only a full-time rabbi, but a cantor/educator as well. Rabbi Sobel left to devote himself fully to Jewish education. He was succeeded by Rabbi Noah Valley. Irving Poll, as the first full-time cantor, worked closely with B'nei Mitzvah youth and introduced the congregation to what were becoming the standard melodies of the Conservative movement. He was aided by Cantor Norman Gewirtz of Temple Beth-El, who, in his role as the Bureau of Jewish Education's music teacher in the area's religious schools, taught children and adults the melodies for the *Hallel* service. When Cantor Poll left Beth Am to make *aliyah* (as would Cantor Gewirtz), he was succeeded by Natan Subar, who came to us from Israel, via Canada. Both cantors worked closely first with Rabbi Joseph Langner, and then with Rabbi Bernard Rotman, in enhancing the religious experience of children and adults alike.

Friday evening services ushering in Shabbat became a highlight of the week, drawing large numbers of congregants and providing them a religious and social focus. The chance to socialize over the weekly *Kiddush* helped to forge bonds of community that became a Temple hallmark.

Space became a problem as the congregation grew. The original patio was enclosed to provide space for a chapel and additional classrooms. In the mid-1970s, this space was refurbished into the "Past Presidents' Room" to serve as an all-purpose meeting room and a small social hall.

To meet the Temple's growing financial needs, dues were increased regularly, but they were never adequate

TEMPLE BETH AM	
ESTIMATED BUDGET FOR 1959-1960 (12 months elapsed time)	
UTILITIES	
Heating	\$ 750.00
Light	500.00
Water	75.00
Telephone	200.00
SERVICES	
Labor Janitorial	1200.00
Janitorial Supplies	300.00
Building Maintenance	200.00
GENERAL & ADMINISTRATION	
Total office	450.00
RABBI <i>home's office</i>	2800.00
YOUTH ACTIVITIES	400.00
UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF AMERICA DUES	300.00
INTEREST (Amortization of principal to be paid from pledge receipts)	6800.00
INSURANCE	200.00
HIGH HOLY DAY SERVICES	700.00
DONATIONS	100.00
MISCELLANEOUS EXPENSES <i>+ Anthony</i>	125.00
TOTAL	16,225.00
	<i>15,000</i>
	<i>1,225</i>
	<i>15,000</i>
	<i>1,225</i>
	<i>15,000</i>
	<i>1,225</i>

to fully cover the expanding budget. As a major fundraiser, congregants then organized as the Friends of Temple Beth Am to run bingo games, the profits of which were used to help balance the budget. The Friends' Bingo game became one of the most successful in the State and, over the course of several years, accumulated a solid endowment for the synagogue.

MERGER

The changing Providence neighborhoods that had been so instrumental in the foundation of Temple Beth Am continued to create change during the 1960s and 1970s within the greater Providence Jewish community.⁵ Both the North End and South Providence underwent drastic population turnover, resulting not only in the loss of Jews but their vital institutions. As a result, a number of synagogues in these areas were closed, and others merged with more viable institutions in other parts of the city.

In July 1980, Temple Beth Am merged with Temple Beth David of the North End, creating a new entity— Temple Beth Am-Beth David. Five years later, reflecting the successful merger, the congregation became known officially as Temple Am David (People of David).

Established in 1914, Beth David had represented a merger of Agudath Hakollel (the *Russische Shul*), founded in 1892, and Ahavath Achim, founded in 1903. A modest wooden synagogue erected in 1914 was in poor condition 30 years later, as was the surrounding neighborhood. Groundbreaking for a new synagogue occurred in 1946, but construction, which required three successive fundraising committees, was not completed until 1954. In 1962, Anshe Kovno, founded in 1890, merged with Beth David.⁶

With funds made available through the merger with Temple Beth David, the former Beth Am was able to pay off its original mortgage and begin plans for expansion. Planning for a new sanctuary had begun as early as 1979, under the leadership of Harry Katzman.

Rubin Zeidman was especially active in this undertaking. In fact, “Ruby” came to personify the Temple. Although he had his own business, a record store, to look after, he spent countless hours at the Temple, not only supervising staff, but also making sure that bills were paid (often from his own pocket). Most important, his participation guaranteed the viability of the twice-daily minyan. Temple Beth Am-Beth David was truly his home away from home.



Temple Beth David, November 1968

FURTHER EXPANSION

A significant expansion of the Temple was designed by Oliver C. Johnson of McCleish & Johnson of East Greenwich. Groundbreaking occurred in April 1981, and a ceremonial dedication was held on September 12, 1982. The expansion provided the congregation not only with a new sanctuary, but also with a separate, large social hall (whose flexibility allows for an enlarged sanctuary for special events). A sense of continuity with the former sanctuary was maintained because the *bimah* (raised area containing readers' desks and ark) was moved intact from the original structure. A small chapel for daily services was also built, bringing the cost of the entire expansion project to \$400,000.



The expansion of the building was paralleled by the expansion of services to the Temple's youth. With the growth of the religious school to over 125 students, a satellite school, cosponsored with Temple Torat Yisrael, was established for families living in the East Greenwich area. Additionally, in 1981 Rubin Zeidman founded the Eunice Zeidman Preschool for 4, 5, and 6-year-old children in memory and in honor of his late wife. This preschool, open to the entire West

Bay Jewish community, is designed to instill a sense of Jewish identity in children at a young age; it includes a monthly Shabbat program. As a bridge to the fully-accredited Religious School, Temple Am David also developed a *Mechina* program for 7-year-olds.

Following *B'nei Mitzvah*, students were served by the congregation's Confirmation and high school program until 1983, when three of the State's Conservative congregations (Temples Emanu-el, Torat Yisrael, and Am David) joined together to form the Harry Elkin *Midrasha*. The *Midrasha* continues to be considered an integral part of our youths' Jewish education, and our young people have consistently had the proportionally highest attendance of any congregation. Some of our youngsters have also attended the Alperin Schechter Day School (now known as the Jewish Community Day School of Rhode Island).

For several years during this period of growth and change, the Temple was without rabbinic continuity. Congregants rallied to fill some of the leadership gaps, and Cantor Natan Subar provided spiritual guidance. His unexpected death in 1981 proved a temporary setback. Our new cantor, Steven Dress, was added to the Temple family in 1982; he had a new sense of energy and enthusiasm that fit well with the optimism engendered by the enlarged building. With



Confirmation class, 1973, with Rabbi Bernard Rotman and Cantor Natan Subar

the appointment of Rabbi Richard Leibovitz in 1984, our synagogue again had a full complement of professional leadership.

FULLER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

By the mid-1980s, the Conservative movement was encouraging the fuller participation of women in the religious life of synagogues. Several of us at Temple Am David felt that we should also move in this direction, although, as in many other congregations, a sizeable number of congregants were opposed to any change in the status quo. Some feared that such a move would cause considerable attrition in membership. We decided, therefore, to take a gradual approach. Under Rabbi Leibovitz's direction, we began an adult study group to review relevant texts and to hear various viewpoints of faculty from the Jewish Theological Seminary (where the first woman rabbi was ordained in 1985). The group continued its work for several years, eventually under the guidance of Rabbi Scott White.

In 1988, the congregation voted to offer women "equal ritual status," which included the right to be counted in a minyan, to be called to the Torah, to chant a haftarah, and to lead the congregation in prayer. Although a few members objected to the change, and even fewer dropped their membership, most congregants were amenable to the new order.

As an immediate result of this change, it became easier to constitute daily *minyanim* (quorums of ten needed for prayer), which strengthened the Temple's dedication to offering morning, afternoon, and evening services daily.



children's fashion show, March 1958

Girls were also quickly affected by the new ruling, since they were now able to have their *B'not Mitzvah* on Saturday mornings, just like boys, and now were expected to be called to the Torah and chant a haftorah.

Other changes were instituted gradually, as women became proficient in synagogue skills. The first adult *B'nei Mitzvah* class was organized under the guidance of Rabbi Nehama Goldberg. Two years of intensive study of Jewish rituals and texts culminated in 1997 with *B'nei Mitzvah* of five women (Fanny Bojar, Alice Goldstein, Toby Horowitz, Jane Levenson, and Bayla Sklaroff) and one man (Robert Hodosh). Since then, Adult *B'nei Mitzvah* classes have been offered regularly and have provided an important avenue for adults to engage in a meaningful rededication to Judaism.

PROPOSED MERGER AND ITS AFTERMATH

During the 1990s, reflecting changes in the national Jewish community toward greater efficiencies in the use of communal funds and in the provision of services, Temple Am David and Temple Torat Yisrael in Cranston explored the possibilities of a merger. The goal was to establish a single Conservative Jewish entity serving the entire West Bay. Rabbi Scott White's decision to leave Temple Am David to return to his home in Kansas City and the announcement by Cantor Steven Dress that he was accepting a post with a congregation in Sharon, Massachusetts, suggested that the time was appropriate for some cooperative arrangement with Temple Torat Yisrael.

After a lengthy series of discussions, it became clear, however, that strong personal attachments and strong congregational identities would make the combination of the two groups problematic. Consequently, Temple Am David voted to remain independent and called on its members to help fill the void left by Rabbi White and Cantor Dress in its professional leadership. In this, the cochairs of the Ritual Committee played key roles. Mark Goldman volunteered to provide the necessary leadership to maintain the daily *minyanim*, a longtime hallmark of the congregation, and Sidney Goldstein took responsibility for Shabbat services. School programs continued uninterrupted during the period under the able guidance of the religious school staff.

A NEW ERA

At the end of 2000, after the tenure of Rabbi Nehama Goldberg and sequential short-term leadership by Rabbi Leo Abrami and Cantor Stanley Rosenfeld, Temple Am David appointed Cantor Richard Perlman as its Cantor and spiritual leader.



B'nei Mitzvah class, 2005; Alice Goldstein is front center; with Edward Fink and Cantor Richard Perlman

Well known in the community, both because of his own activities and because his father, Ivan Perlman, served for many years as Cantor at Temple Emanu-El, Cantor "Rick" has brought with him new energy and purpose as we move into the 21st century. His encouragement of youth programs and the involvement of all Temple members in *tzedaka* projects have been especially noteworthy.

In 2002, Sharon Sock inspired a group of parents with very young children (toddlers to age 3) to stimulate their children's love of Judaism through songs, activities, and stories in weekly classes. The program, Shalom Friends,TM has received not only statewide, but also national recognition.

Children in our religious school have been actively involved in *tzedaka* projects, including visits to seniors at Tamarisk Assisted Living, as an integral part of their Bar/Bat Mitzvah preparation. The entire religious school participates in Max's Lunch Bunch, preparing peanut butter sandwiches for Travelers Aid. This project was initiated by Max Dwares, the son of Barbara and Kevin Dwares, who died of leukemia in 2004 and in whose memory the activity is continued. Even the congregation's trips to Israel have had a focus on *tzedaka*, providing a rich dimension to the Israel experience for participants.

Temple Am David, like people and institutions everywhere, is a conglomerate of contradictory trends and feelings. The congregation has always prided itself on being a particularly warm and welcoming place. This attitude has kept the loyalty of many of its members, including us, even after our children moved away from Warwick and we no longer had their religious education as a compelling reason to stay. At the same time, like many institutions, the Temple has tended to be very slow in bringing younger people into meaningful leadership roles.

Committed to enriching Jewish life in the West Bay, we welcome the presence of other congregations, most recently Chabad. We have also participated in collaborative programs with Temples Sinai and Torat Yisrael in Cranston and Temple Beth David in Narragansett. Nonetheless, Temple Am David has also felt isolated from and ignored by the larger Rhode Island Jewish community, seeing itself as being too distant from the East Side to warrant attention.

OUR SIXTH DECADE

Am David enters its sixth decade with renewed dedication to strengthening Jewish life in the West Bay. Over the years, the Temple has developed a particularly strong sense of community, viewing members as an extended family, where all are welcomed. This includes especially younger couples, some of whom are intermarried and many of whom have not had a strong religious upbringing. The mix of congregants, from elderly, longtime members with an Orthodox background to these much younger, less Jewishly educated families, poses a particular challenge for integration and identity. Broad education initiatives, especially for children and families, and many social and informal events have deepened our bonds to one another.

Our congregation will also be blessed by continuous professional leadership. In 2007, our spiritual leader, Cantor Perlman, was granted lifelong tenure. Like sister congregations and many institutions nationwide, however, Temple

Am David is feeling the effects of the current economic recession. This has been particularly acute because, over the years, the synagogue has relied on its endowment rather than dues increases to balance its budget. (Bingo ceased being a source of revenue some years ago.) With a shrinking endowment and rising costs, especially for energy and other services, such a strategy is no longer possible. While a number of cost-saving programs have been implemented, dues increases and greater volunteer involvement in the daily needs of the synagogue have also been required. Fortunately, members' responses have been very encouraging. As People of David, we face the future with the knowledge that a great deal of hard work lies ahead— but also with optimism.

ENDNOTES

1| For an overview of the growth of suburban synagogues in the West and East Bay, see: Geraldine Foster and Eleanor Horvitz, "We Settled in the Suburbs: Founding Four Synagogues," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes*, XIII (November 2000), 297-317. Congregation Ahavath Shalom, chartered in the mill town of West Warwick in 1919, preceded suburbanization. It never employed a rabbi and was dissolved ca. 1995.

2| Many photos, clippings, and documents are reproduced in the celebratory booklet, *Temple Am David 50th Commemoration*, which was published in 2008 and won an award from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism in 2009. The authors of this article are grateful for the information gathered in the booklet.

3| For the fiscal year 1957-58, dues totaled \$1,690, or approximately 44% of the budget.

4| Beth had been born in 1955, David in 1957.

5| (Editor's Note) Significant demographic studies, which help document changing Jewish communities both locally and nationally, include: Sidney Goldstein, *The Greater Jewish Community: A Population Study* (General Jewish Committee of Greater Providence, 1964); Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider, *Jewish Americans: Three Generations in a Jewish Community* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968); Calvin Goldscheider, *American Jewish Fertility: Trends and Differentials in the Providence Metropolitan Area* (Brown University, 1986); Calvin Goldscheider and Sidney Goldstein, *The Jewish Community of Rhode Island: A Social and Demographic Study, 1987* (Jewish Federation of Rhode Island, 1988); and Sidney and Alice Goldstein, *Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity* (New York: State University Press of New York, 1996). Additional studies by Sidney and Alice Goldstein have appeared in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* (1964, 1971, 1979, 1987, 1996).

6| Some of this information is derived from the souvenir brochure prepared for the dedication of Beth David's new synagogue on January 10, 1954.

REFUGE IN PARADISE

MAXIM D. SHRAYER

Jews from Russia and the former Soviet Union have been portrayed in more than a dozen articles in these pages. Covering several generations of New Americans, these articles include scenes of shtetl life (in both Ukraine and in Providence) as well as heroes of World War II. This is the first article by a former refusenik who is both an artist and a professor. Strangely, however, in its celebration of an island paradise, it relates to a recent article by an American GI.

Maxim D. Shrayer (www.shrayer.com) is a professor of Russian and English at Boston College, where he cofounded the Jewish Studies program. A native of Moscow, he emigrated from the former USSR in June 1987 with his parents, Emilia and David Shrayer, and came to live in Rhode Island. Maxim entered Brown University as a transfer student and graduated in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in comparative literature and literary translation. For almost twenty years, his parents made their home on the East Side before moving to Brookline, Massachusetts, in the summer of 2007. The Shrayers have numerous ties with Rhode Island and visit frequently, especially in the summer.

A bilingual author, critic, and translator, Professor Shrayer has authored and edited more than ten books, among them *Waiting for America: A Story of Emigration* (2007) and the recent collection, *Yom Kippur in Amsterdam: Stories* (2009). He received a 2007 National Jewish Book Award for *An Anthology of Jewish-Russian Literature*. Shrayer lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, with his wife, Dr. Karen E. Lasser, a physician and medical researcher who grew up in Pawtucket and attended Wheeler School. They have two daughters, Mira Isabella and Tatiana Rebecca.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are about 750,000 Jews from the former Soviet Union living in North America, and another million in Israel. It's impossible to imagine the fabric of our Jewish communities without ex-Soviet Jews. And yet, our story is only now entering the cultural mainstream. This essay, a selection from *Waiting for America* (Syracuse University Press), explores the experience of Soviet Jews waiting, in transit, to become Americans.

In June 1987 a young Jewish man left Moscow for good with his parents. Years later I would describe the experience of leaving Russia and coming to the West. Former refuseniks, we celebrated our freedom in opulent Vienna then spent two months waiting for American refugee visas outside Rome, in the coastal resort of Ladispoli.

Waiting for America is simultaneously three things. It's a literary memoir of discovering the pleasures and limitations of Western democracies after living in the Soviet Union as a Jew. It's a Jewish emigration story and a history in the making. Finally, it's a love story, in which a young Jewish refugee is torn between Jewish-Russian and Western women.

Waiting for America is about the baggage that Jewish exiles bring along, from the inescapable family traps to the sweet cargo of memory. Throughout the book, as its main characters think of their new lives in America, the state of Rhode Island makes a cameo appearance in their dreams and reveries. I'm grateful to *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* for giving me this opportunity to tell you about a young Soviet Jew "waiting" for Rhode Island. M.D.S.

WE ARRIVED IN AMERICA AT THE END OF AUGUST 1987, on board the now-extinct Trans-World Airlines. It was a plane full of immigrants— from the Soviet Union, from India, from Pakistan, from Egypt— and we all applauded when the plane touched down on a runway at Kennedy Airport. Ahead lay our new lives in the New World. When I turned forty in the summer of 2007, I had been living in America for half of my life— no small feat for the Jewish boy from Moscow that I once was.

The summer I spent in Austria and Italy in 1987 had paved the way for the detachment of the Russian "I" from the American "me." Like a time buffer, the three months described in these pages divided my life, separating my Russian (and Soviet) past from my American present. However, this story of emigration would not be complete without one more adventure, which occurred almost at the tail end of our stay in Italy. It was the first and only time in my life, not even

in all the twenty years of living in the Soviet Union, that I felt desperately poor.

Now picture the second week of August in Sorrento. The day's sweaty palms were beginning to ease their grip on our throats. My mother and I were taking a three-day tour of the south of Italy and had our money and papers stolen in Pompeii. My father had stayed behind in Ladispoli, since he had seen Pompeii and Sorrento with Uncle Pinya a week earlier.

In Naples, after a tour of Castel Nuovo, where cobblestones smelled not of the fine dust of ancient Europe but of cheap red wine and sardines, the tour guide had insisted that we visit a church with the relics of St. Januarius. The name of this patron saint of Naples made me think of snow. Standing in the cool vault, enveloped by stale, aromatic air, I was transported to a nostalgic recollection. I saw a wintry landscape from my native country: snowdrifts, a frozen river, hoarfrost on power lines. In my daydream, I was kissing a girl whose face I couldn't recognize; the lips, however, tasted warm and familiar. My vision came crushing down against the stone slabs of the church floor when an elderly guard pulled me by the sleeve:

"Take off your hat, mister. Take your hat off. You're in a sanctuary!" The guard pointed his black finger at my boater with a blue ribbon. He was enraged by my obliviousness.

In my street-spun Italian— still heavily indebted to botanical Latin, although now buttressed by near-native gesticulation— I proceeded to explain to the guard that Jews didn't uncover their heads in the presence of the Almighty, but rather kept them covered at all times, especially inside a temple. I don't know what had come over me.

The guard apparently discerned just one word from my lengthy explanation—"synagogue"— and his face turned purple.

"Synagogue! But this is a Christian church! Take your hat off, you..." and here the guard fell short of words. "You're standing near the relics of St. Januarius. Take your hat off or leave the sanctuary!"

I should have taken my hat off. I shouldn't have laughed at the old zealot. But I was thinking of snow and of kissing girls in my native country.

The next stop on our excursion had been Pompeii. My knowledge of the place came from a Russian classical painting by Karl Bryullov, *The Last Day of Pompeii*, depicting the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 C.E. I remembered the panic-stricken Roman women and men in crimson togas running out of their homes and being swept off their feet by swirling lava. There was nothing tragic or solemn in what I actually saw. Fancy a twenty-year-old who examines, in the

company of his own mother, frescoes of men copulating with women, other men, and animals. Picture dwarves with hooves and enormous members. Imagine the dry heat of an early afternoon in August in Pompeii. Try to visualize us: two refugees from Russia standing on petrified lava under the dome of an azure sky amid what used to be the walls of the Temple of Venus.

I had a backpack in those days, the only backpack I've ever owned. It was a present from an American girl I had courted in Moscow the winter before leaving Russia for good. The blue backpack, now dangling behind my back, contained my wallet, a folded anorak, and an address book with the names and addresses of everyone I knew in the whole world. The old wallet was made of yellow pigskin; it was bulky and didn't fit in any of my pockets. In it were seventy U.S. dollars— our spending money for the trip— and two refugee travel documents, my mother's and my own. To be precise, they weren't even proper refugee documents. We'd been stripped of our Soviet citizenship and had to surrender our passports before leaving Moscow, and our Soviet-issued exit visas had served as our identity papers when we traveled to Vienna and Rome. And now these transit papers of sorts had disappeared along with most of my links to the past stored inside my blue American backpack.

I'll never find out what actually happened. A group of us was heading back to the tour bus. I told my mother I would go look for a drinking fountain. Modern Pompeii is a grid of petrified memories— narrow streets lined with roofless houses. I turned into a nearby lane and, sure enough, it brought me to a fountain. The rest was like a mirage: I remember putting my backpack down on a bench a few feet away from the source, then drinking my fill and letting tepid water pour over my head and shoulders. Then I turned to the wide bench of pink granite where my backpack had been just a few moments before, but there was nothing there. I stood alone amid what used to be a Roman city of pleasure. I searched in vain for signs of the bright blue that would have been clearly visible against the backdrop of Pompeii's pale stones. Only the late afternoon sky of southern Italy was a deep blue over my head, a deep blue of omniscience.

What was I to do? Which side street to take in that labyrinth of crumbling walls? I began to doubt my own sanity. Might I have left the backpack in the Amphitheater? The House of the Tragic Poet or the House of the Faun? The Forum? The Temple of Jupiter? I dashed back and forth, trying to orient myself. I struggled to recall a point of reference, a fresco, a phallic relief, a garbage can, anything. Now all Pompeian houses looked the same to me, all men on the frescoes alike, ugly goat-men with dirty manes of curly hair. In my panic, I could still

remember that I was late, that a whole bus was waiting for me at the parking lot. I ran for all I was worth. My poor mother took the news stoically. But our fellow refugees on the bus showed no signs of compassion. It was almost as though they'd left their goodness behind the turnstile of the Soviet passport control.

"Enough is enough," a piano tuner from Minsk yelled right in my face. "We'll be late to Sorrento" (as if one could ever be late to Sorrento!).

"You will never find your little backpack," grumbled a dentist from Pinsk. "You'll get yourself a new one in America."

"Will your mama spank you?" asked a little girl from Dvinsk, traveling with a mother and a deaf grandmother.

I begged Anatoly Shteynfeld, whom rogue Nitochkin had placed in charge of the trip, to give me a little extra time. "Ten minutes," he squeezed out through his rotten teeth. And Shteynfeld looked triumphantly toward my mother, who sat in the back of the bus, hands pressing her temples. Like a jackal after a firebird, Shteynfeld still lusted after my mother, but after the trip to the north of Italy he was hesitant to show it. He now channeled his lust after another man's wife into open hostility toward me, her son.

I ran to the museum office, hoping they would have a "lost and found" room. There were three men in the office, the Italian park rangers as it turned out, dressed in half uniform, half fiction, and speaking less English than I Italian. They asked to see my identification.

"I don't have any. It was in the backpack."

"But we need to see your papers before we can initiate a search in the national park," said one of the three officers. "How do we know that you're not attempting to collect someone else's possessions?"

"Please understand, my papers are in my wallet. The wallet is, or was, in the blue backpack, and the backpack is missing."

"We're sorry, mister, but there is nothing we can do under the circumstances. You can try calling here to see if something turns up. But if I were you," and the second officer gave me a mortician's smile, "I would go to the *carabinieri*. They deal with foreigners." The third officer didn't utter a single word.

On the bus leaving Pompeii, mother and I both felt completely alone among the other Russian refugees. Now without transit papers to America, we were reduced to being mere figures of the past. Our predicament was especially absurd because we had two more days of sightseeing that were paid for, and we couldn't just disembark and head back to Rome where new transit documents would be issued less than two weeks before our departure for America.

Printed on the letterhead of JIAS, the replacement documents showed our black-and-white photographs, seared in the upper right and lower left corners with a JIAS stamp. The newly minted documents attested to the fact that the pictures were indeed of my mother and me, and also listed our birth dates and the names of our respective parents. The replacement documents were even less official than the original Soviet-issued exit visas that had been stolen in Pompeii. On these makeshift papers, beneath the text in Italian attesting to our identities, a stone-faced immigration and naturalization officer would later stamp, "ADMITTED AS A REFUGEE PURSUANT TO SEC. 207 OF THE I & N ACT. IF YOU DEPART THE U.S., YOU WILL NEED PRIOR PERMISSION FROM INS TO RETURN. EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZED," and scribbled below "JFK 8/26/87" and also his badge number. The immigration officer stamped our travel documents, took our U.S. visas, and also gave us each a white index card with some numbers and letters in red.

"Going to Rhode Island," the immigration officer said as he let us into the country. "Nice place. Great beaches."

In a daze we proceeded to a restaurant, where our old Moscow friends now living in New Jersey fed us sandwiches and then walked us over to a different terminal, where we boarded a tiny plane. It was one of those propeller planes that, I believe, no longer service passengers in national commercial airlines, and on its wobbly wings we flew from JFK to the pocket-size capital of the country's smallest state. From the tiny plane I looked down onto the city where I would spend my first two American years and where, by a fatidic coincidence, my wife grew up. I looked down on my first American home and thought: My God, how can Providence be so small?

But all of that wouldn't happen for two more weeks after our near-disastrous trip to the south of Italy, and as the tour bus carried us away from Pompeii and the site of the stolen blue backpack, the prospects of coming to America seemed bleak. Between the two of us, mother and I had about twenty dollars in our pockets, and no one would help us. Now, as we approached Sorrento, Anatoly Shteynfeld informed the group that on a clear day one can see Capri off the tip of the Sorrento peninsula. The island of Capri was the final destination.

How can I describe that evening in Sorrento? A scratched print of a Technicolor film that I both shot and acted in. Faded colors and blunted sensations. And one acute feeling: longing. The Sirens lured and tempted Odysseus from this harbor. Sorrento was an eternal tune I'd known since my Russian childhood, yet I was a stranger in its squares and thoroughfares. Growing up

behind the Iron Curtain, I had yearned to see Sorrento. I had been drawn to this place and its lore. I knew that many great writers had trod these streets and sat in these *trattorias*. I used to picture them in my head as I gazed at February-gray snowdrifts from my bedroom window in Moscow. What were they thinking about as they smoked their *papirosy* and sipped Chianti? Did they miss their native lands? Gorky's Volga, flooding far and wide in the spring; Ibsen's foggy and mysterious Christiania. I didn't miss Russia. I mean, of course I missed it, but I knew that there was no going back. What I longed for in Sorrento was some stability; my future was so uncertain, and now it seemed even more unsettled without papers and money.

On the main promenade, store windows loomed with silver and turquoise. Young glamorous couples devoured each other's mouths right in the middle of human traffic. Bands played *Come Back to Sorrento*, and my mother and I were doing our best not to think of the meaning of the song's words.

A smug Anatoly Shteynfeld, in a new hat and sunglasses, sauntered past us. Then he turned back and caught up with mother and me.

"I don't suppose you'd be interested in sharing a romantic supper with me?" he said to my mother.

"Listen, Shteynfeld." My mother replied so quickly and so crisply, that a son's pride rushed to my cheeks and ears. "Second of all, can't you see that I already have a date," she said, resting her hand on my arm. "And first of all, didn't my husband tell you in Bologna to stay away from us? Well, guess what? He'll be meeting us at the piazza when the bus returns to Ladispoli. And he never warns twice." And mother turned on her heels and pulled me into the stream of Sorrento's richly emblazoned crowd. How I loved her in her strength and bluntness!

Eventually we bought ourselves two slices of the cheapest pizza we could find and wandered from one outdoor café to another, listening to bands playing, but too shy to grab a table. Finally, we found a café that did not intimidate us as much as the others did and occupied a corner table away from where the band played and other tourists sat over large plates of salad and pasta. When the waiter finally spotted us, we asked to see the menu as though we had the intention of ordering a meal. When the waiter came back, I asked to see the dessert menu. "We changed our minds. Not hungry," I explained. We ordered two scoops of gelato, a pistachio and a watermelon, and requested some tap water with it. The waiter measured us with his eye the way a patrician looks at a beggar. He brought a dish with two tiny scoops and one spoon, and didn't bother with the water. No ice cream ever tasted as good as the one mother and I shared in Sorrento at sunset.

There was a time when paradise was accessible by land. One could leave behind Sorrento with its worldly hustle and bustle, the vanity of its fancy crowds, the overpriced restaurants and haunting gelato stands. One could simply abandon this domain of pickpockets and jewelers and walk across a narrow isthmus to the most perfect place on the face of the earth. And then one day a natural catastrophe sank the rocky link with the mainland, making Capri into an island, now reachable only by water. But all the same, one can still get there somehow!

In the morning, after a meager breakfast, we boarded a ferry run by *Navigazione Libera del Golfo*. The ferry was identical to the one that used to circulate between the left and right banks of the Moscow River during my childhood. An old invalid of a ferry: peeling paint, squeaky doors, retirement-age crew. As the ferry slowly approached the island, mother and I sat on the upper deck, recounting the misfortunes of the previous day. The closer we got to Capri, the lighter we felt, the easier it was to let go.

We had eight hours to explore Capri, a little over ten dollars between the two of us, and half a roll of film in an old camera my father's father had brought from East Prussia among other trophies of 1945. Our eyes did most of the shooting, and those photographs are still fresh in my memory. Mother and I walked everywhere that day. First, a turbulent tourist crowd carried us to Piazza Umberto I, with its busy cafés and shops, with German and English humming in our ears. We read daily menus—scribbled down on black slates—as if they were concert programs. An overture: *insalata caprese* (mozzarella, tomatoes, and basil). Enter first violin: rabbit cooked with vinegar and rosemary. Sweet lemon pastries, *limoncelli*, like trills of piccolo.

The island of Capri, as we soon learned from a public map, consists of two towns, Capri and Anacapri, and a few smaller communities. We decided to ascend as high as our feet would take us; we knew we wouldn't have the money to pay for a chairlift from Anacapri to Monte Solaro. We strolled through a public garden with almond bushes and a few couples of blonde, well-groomed men. My mother noticed a counter with hundreds of dark green bottles: perfumes made with local ingredients.

"What scents do you have?" I asked a rangy salesgirl, clad in soft yellow.

"We have everything," and her fingers lifted one of the bottles, opened it, and let my mother, and then me, sniff it.

It smelled like blossoming almonds. The salesgirl then picked up another vial and let us smell its contents. The coolness of an ocean breeze wafted

through the air. The Italian girl now held almond blossoms in her right hand, ocean breeze in her left, and smiled at us.

“We can mix those scents in your favorite proportion,” she said.

I thought of asking whether they could recreate scents from a description— a fresh haystack, a woman’s hair after a long-drawn bath— but I didn’t have the words to explain this either in English or in Italian.

There are places every Russian longs to visit. Paris is one of them, Rio de Janeiro another, Capri the third. Once you’ve visited those places, you can die a happy person. Mother and I found an open café on a mountain terrace with a view of the entire Bay of Naples. We ordered one tea and one piece of lemon pastry; the tea came in a little pot of stainless steel, with a choice of lemon or milk. We weren’t sorry to part with seven more dollars.

“Do you remember Heyman?” mother asked, matter-of-factly, as she took a sip of tea.

“Yes, I do, very well. Why?”

“It was always his dream to come here one day. He knew every detail about this island. From reading.”

Heyman taught music theory at the Moscow Conservatory. He was of Jewish-Polish stock, and he never spoke of his past. We knew he had grown up in Kraków in the German-speaking family of a psychiatrist, and we also surmised that his parents were killed by the Nazis. Music and poetry were the only countries Heyman hadn’t disavowed. He was married to his former graduate student, a gentle Slavic blonde with cat eyes and ever blushing cheeks. Their son, Keshka, had been my best friend in middle school. As a kid, he had the kindest, sincerest smile I’ve ever encountered. In high school, after we had already drifted apart, Keshka became a boxer and won several major tournaments. He was drafted into the military out of university and returned a different, damaged person. After a semester he dropped out and got mixed up in shady affairs. He would surface, every so often, asking mutual Moscow friends for an infusion of cash to support a “business venture” or to help pay off debts— the ones his father hadn’t paid off. Then he disappeared altogether.

As far back as I can remember, Heyman was always working on the same book, an interpretation of Stravinsky’s career. He would come home after a day of teaching music, drop his weathered briefcase in the hallway, and proceed to the piano in his winter coat and rabbit fur hat. He would play for an hour, usually from Stravinsky’s fugues, sometimes pausing in the middle of a phrase. On a late afternoon in March, over a year before we left Russia, Heyman’s wife found

him dead at the piano.

“I’m sorry he never got to see Capri,” mother said after a long silence. “I mean in his lifetime. I wonder what he would have thought.”

There we were, mother and I, sharing a cup of tea almost at the peak of this mountain-island. It seemed that the whole world lay at our feet. We were penniless, without any proof of our identity. Moreover, we were between countries. Our lives were in flux, but we felt remarkably tranquil, as though destiny held its weightless hands on our shoulders.

At the table next to ours, an American couple sat down to lunch. He had a great belly and wore a red baseball hat. She had a triple chin and modeled Gypsylike silver earrings with turquoise stones, probably purchased from a local vendor. The waiter brought them two plates with club sandwiches, two bottles of Coca-Cola, and two long, narrow glasses. The sandwiches were gargantuan and emitted the fine smells of smoked meats and honey mustard. Silent and content, the Americans were biting into their sandwiches and gulping Coca-Cola.

They were so blissfully comfortable in their own skin, so untouched by fears and inhibitions, so unworried about their future. They were so incredibly American, as though they carried around them invisible bubbles filled with the air of their native Ohio or Pennsylvania. The Americans were calling each other “hun” and “luv.” They were exchanging weighty comments about the quality of Italian foods: “their” sandwich bread, “their” cheese, “their” turkey. It was getting harder and harder for us to dwell on incorporeal subjects.

“What do you think America is like?” mother asked me. Of course we were speaking Russian, and the couple with sandwiches couldn’t understand us. “I mean, what do you think it’s really like?”

“I think it’s grand. It’s like a game where no one knows the rules and everyone plays by them. I think it’s an easy place to be. Lots of room. How about you, mama? What do you think it’s like?”

“I’m not sure. I hope it’s a place where you don’t have to take part in anything if you don’t want to. Beautiful beaches. I don’t know. I think I’ve been waiting for America too long. I’m ready to go there.”

“I think American girls are very sexy.”

Down below we could see a sandbar girding the island of Capri. A narrow sandbar swarming with life and color and sun rays.

“Mama, let’s make a promise, a compact. Let’s come back here one day— you, papa, who knows? Maybe I’ll fall in love and get married. And the four of us will sit in this café and look at Sorrento across the bay, and order club sandwiches,

many club sandwiches, and of course champagne. And we'll talk about our new life in America and remember our old life in Russia. What do you think?"

"I think it would be wonderful. And especially your American wife. I can almost picture her."

A light cloud flitted by over our heads. A seagull screamed. A gust of wind blew a napkin off the table.

Mother looked at her wristwatch. "We should go. They won't wait for us this time. And we don't have any money to pay for new ferry tickets."

"Well, mama, perhaps we could just stay here. What do you think about moving to paradise for good?"

"I don't think I'm ready. And, besides, your father won't like it here."

As we were getting up, I turned to take one last look at the happy American couple now consuming powdered doughnuts and coffee.

After almost twenty years in America, when I sometimes feel low, I recall the end of that day on Capri, how mother and I walked back to the ferry down a serpentine road. All of a sudden it started to rain. We passed an old woman with a pink donkey, then a couple of men holding hands, then a boy with a fishing rod. Mother and I only exchanged glances. No words could describe our paradisaal poverty.

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION 55TH ANNUAL MEETING

Mel Blake, nattily attired, chaired the meeting at the Jewish Community Center, which was attended by more 120 members and guests. Having completed his fourth year as president, Stephen Brown reviewed many highlights of his tenure, including the success of the annual Florida meetings. Past president Stanley Abrams presented him with a token of the Association's appreciation. George Levine and his daughters were thanked for a gift of a high-speed printer.

Several brief reports followed. Treasurer Jack Fradin reported that expenditures were slightly less than budgeted. The Association's endowment has fallen, but Jack believes that it will rebound. Stanley Abrams, chair of the publications committee, noted the high quality of our journal.

Past president Eugene Weinberg, reporting for the nominating committee, introduced the new slate of officers and board members. Mel Zurier, never failing to add some levity, performed his customary duty of installing the new leaders. He recognized the significant communal service rendered by the Leach family, and extended his best wishes to David, the Association's 16th president. David's brother, Bruce, has joined the board as a presidential appointee.

Past president George Goodwin introduced the afternoon's speaker, Bernard P. Fishman, the executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Society, who delivered the 39th David C. Adelman Lecture. His topic was: "From Egypt to Rhode Island: What 30 Years in History Museums Tell Me about the Future of the Past." The past has a promising future, if history museums honor their traditional functions of collecting, preserving, exhibiting, and educating and devote substantial funds to infrastructure.

Sandra Abrams, Susan Brown, Lillian Schwartz, and Anne Sherman coordinated a most enjoyable collation.

Respectfully submitted,
Maxine Goldin
SECRETARY

AARON COHEN: 1923-2009

A son of Ukrainian immigrants, Aaron was born in Pennsylvania and grew up within the Jewish neighborhood of West Philadelphia. As a 1940 graduate of Overbrook High School, he drew praise for both his “superior scholastic standing” and his “amiable personality.” Indeed, a yearbook writer proclaimed that Aaron’s sharp intellect enhanced his “pleasing, warm, and comfortable” manner.

After a year and a half at Temple University, he enlisted in the Army Air Corps. In 1943, due to his considerable math and science skills, he was sent to an intensive, pre-meteorology program at Brown. Through a blind date, he was introduced to Judith Weiss, a Providence native and a brilliant Pembroke student. After graduating from meteorological training at M.I.T., Aaron was commissioned a second lieutenant. He served as a weather officer in England and France, but was able to put his knowledge of Yiddish to good use in Germany, where he communicated with prisoners of war. He also found time to win a European table tennis championship. As a sergeant in the Women’s Army Corps, Judy furthered her lifelong interest in journalism.

After their wedding in Providence in 1946, both Aaron and Judy benefited from the G.I. Bill and returned to Brown. They graduated in 1948: he with a bachelor’s degree in psychology (magna cum laude and Sigma Xi); she with a master’s in political science. They were fortunate to rent an apartment in Browntown, the University’s dormitories for married students (and their children), which had previously served as naval barracks in Newport. Aaron wrote vividly about that experience in the 2008 issue of *The Notes*.

Though encouraged to pursue a career as a psychologist, Aaron chose business. Initially employed by his father-in-law at Vogue Textiles in Pawtucket, he spent more than 40 years as an executive and plant manager at Cadillac Textiles in Valley Falls.

Again thanks to the G.I. Bill, Aaron and Judy purchased a home in Pawtucket, where they reared Jeremy, Stephen, and Deborah. It was not surprising that both sons became professional musicians, for Aaron’s father had been an Orthodox cantor and choir director and Aaron, like most Jewish boys, had played

violin. As an adult he built a huge collection of classical recordings (78s and then CDs). Both he and Judy attended concerts of the Rhode Island Philharmonic and for over half a century were season subscribers to the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Ever fearful of uniforms, Aaron’s parents had prevented him from becoming a Boy Scout. Even if his own boys were indifferent to scouting, Aaron enjoyed serving as a troop leader.

Aaron and Judy were uncertain as to which synagogue they would join. Largely because of their attraction to Rabbi William Braude’s soaring intellect, they selected Beth-El. Always a bibliophile, Aaron chaired its library committee.

And of course the Cohens’ own intellectual gifts, strong convictions, and dedication brought them to leadership positions in our Association. Judy served as editor of *The Notes* for ten years before her passing in 1997, and Aaron served as president between 1994 and 1998. He championed Heritage Harbor Museum and served faithfully on its board. Another keen enthusiasm was Brown Learning Community, where almost every course appealed to him.

Aaron loved sports. He played tennis since high school, even after recovering from a major illness a decade ago. He delighted taking his kids to Brown football and basketball games and encouraged all three to become competitive swimmers. He cheered as if a Celtics or a Red Sox victory depended on him.

After finding Ruth Rosen, a companion who shared many of his interests, Aaron was too busy to think about golden years. Which were these? Ever an optimist, he knew that almost all brought happiness.

Aaron died in Providence on November 8 at the age of 86.



1980

IN MEMORIA

OCTOBER 16, 2008 – NOVEMBER 11, 2009

ALPERT, ARLINE G., born in Providence, was a 1950 graduate of Pembroke College and served as a class agent.

Mrs. Alpert was a leader of Fall River's Jewish community. She was a trustee of Temple Beth El, a president of its Sisterhood, and chaired the Ruderman Memorial Lectures for 20 years. She also served on the boards of the Jewish Home and Corrigan Mental Health Center. A founder of the local chapter of Brandeis University Women's Committee, Mrs. Alpert was an active supporter of its library for nearly 50 years. She was also a life member of Hadassah.

Mrs. Alpert is survived by her husband Sumner, son Bernard, and daughters Sherry, Miriam Woodman, and Sandra Pankiw.

Died in Fall River on January 8, 2009 at the age of 80.

BESHUNSKY, DORIS DANNENHIRSCH, born in Providence, was a daughter of Abraham and Marion Kelman. She began her amazing swimming career at the Olneyville Boys' Club by winning several junior and senior New England championships. In 1935, sponsored by Rhode Island's Jewish League of Women's Organizations, she was part of the American team at the second Maccabiah Games in Palestine. She then performed widely with the "Formation Swimmers," a pioneering team of synchronized swimmers.

In 1943, while a student at the University of Pennsylvania, Mrs. Beshunsky formed "The Pennguinettes," one of the nation's first synchronized swimming clubs. After earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in physical education in 1947 and 1948, she coached swimming and golf teams for six years at Penn. She remained the director of "The Pennguinettes" until her retirement in 1977. Having also produced numerous water shows, she was a member of the Academy of Aquatic Art and a judge and referee at swimming and diving competitions.

In 1982 Mrs. Beshunsky was inducted into the Rhode Island Aquatic Hall of Fame. Two years later she was inducted into the Pennsylvania Swimming Hall of Fame. In 1985 she became the first woman inductee of the Rhode Island Jewish Athletic Hall of Fame. Additional honors included her induction into the Philadelphia Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and the Penn Athletic Hall of Fame.

Mrs. Beshunsky was a member of Congregation Adath Jeshurun, the Women's Division of Philadelphia's Jewish Federation, and a board member of the Philadelphia Jewish Archives and the Hebrew Benevolent Ladies Asso-

ciation. She donated numerous aquatic-related mementos to the International Swimming Hall of Fame in Fort Lauderdale and to the archives of our Association.

Mrs. Beshunsky was predeceased by her first husband, Morton Dannenhirsch. She is survived by her husband Sidney and sons Stan and David.

Died in Philadelphia in March at the age of 92.

BLISTEIN, SOPHIA, born in Pawtucket, was the daughter of the late David and Dora (Feldman) Schaffer. She was the wife of the late Prof. Elmer Blistein of Brown.

A 1941 graduate of Pembroke College, Mrs. Blistein served as a president of the Pembroke Alumnae Association and of Women of Brown University. She was a Brown University trustee and a membership chair of the Friends of the Library. She was also a trustee of the Providence Athenaeum, the Pawtucket League of Women Voters, and the Pawtucket YMCA. She was a member of Temple Beth-El.

A social worker for 40 years, Mrs. Blistein worked for the Red Cross, Travelers Aid Society, Planned Parenthood, and Children's Service.

She is survived by her sons Adam and David.

Died in Providence on June 8, 2009 at the age of 90.

KAPSTEIN, SHERWIN J., a son of Max and Rose Kapstein, was the youngest of 12 children. He was the husband of the late Gladys (Chernack) Kapstein. A star athlete at Hope High School, he graduated from Brown University in 1939. During World War II, he served as a Navy lieutenant.

Mr. Kapstein was an educational leader. After having taught and coached at the high school level, he served on the Providence School Committee from 1953 to 1966. He was also a president of the Rhode Island Association of School Committees and an executive director of the Rhode Island Education Association. While serving in the Rhode Island House of Representatives, he championed public education.

Mr. Kapstein was a member of Temple Emanu-El and a life member of our Association. Both he and his wife were vigorous supporters of Brown Hillel. In 1987 he was inducted into the Rhode Island Jewish Athletic Hall of Fame.

Mr. Kapstein is survived by his sons Jeremy and Daniel and daughter Deborah Bronitsky.

Died in Providence on March 24, 2009 at age of 92.

KRAMER, SIDNEY, born in Providence, was a son of the late Philip and Fannie (Elman) Kramer. He was a graduate of Brown University. During World War II, he served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific theatre. A member of the Jewish War Veterans, Post 533, he also served as state commander. He was instrumental in building and maintaining the Jewish War Veterans' Memorial at Lincoln Park Cemetery.

A graduate of Cornell University Law School, Mr. Kramer was an attorney specializing in real estate and redevelopment.

He was a member of Temple Torat Yisrael, Chased Shel Ames Association, and South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association. He was also active in Heritage Harbor Museum and the Rhode Island Rose Society.

Mr. Kramer is survived by his wife Dorothy.

Died in Warwick on October 19, 2009 at the age of 91.

LEAVITT, HAROLD, born in Providence, was a son of the late Samuel and Annie (Emers) Leavitt. He was a graduate of Providence College and belonged to its President's Council. During World War II he served as an Army captain in the European and North African theatres.

Mr. Leavitt was the founder and president of the Leavitt-Colson Company, an electrical distributorship.

He was a president of the Jewish Home for the Aged and of Ledgemont Country Club and was a member of Temple Beth-El. He was also a 32nd Degree Mason and a Shriner.

Mr. Leavitt is survived by his wife Erma and son Robert. He was predeceased by his son Laurence.

Died in Boca Raton on February 3, 2009 at the age of 95.

MEISTER, MELBA K., born in Fall River, was a daughter of the late Irving and Anna (Sacknoff) Kuperschmid. After working as a dental hygienist for 20 years, she became a jewelry designer for Vogue Creations.

Mrs. Meister was a member of Temple Beth-El in Providence, where she served as a trustee and as a president of Sisterhood. She was also a member of Temple Beth El in Fall River and Touro Synagogue. Mrs. Meister was an officer of the Women's Division of Jewish Federation and a life member of Hadassah. Additionally, she was a docent for the Preservation Society of Newport County and a volunteer at Newport Hospital.

Mrs. Meister is survived by her husband Herbert, daughters Beth Salzman and Elyse Thaler, and son Andrew.

Died in Newport on May 16, 2009 at the age of 70.

PEARLMAN, MIRIAM, born in the Bronx, was a daughter of the late Charles and Pauline (Hacker) Vogel.

Active in Providence Hebrew Day School, Mrs. Pearlman was an *aishes chayil*. She was a life member of our Association.

She is survived by her husband Thomas, daughter Rebecca, and son Roger. She was predeceased by her son Joshua and daughter Ann.

Died in Providence on October 31, 2009 at the age of 75.

PRIEST, PHYLLIS, born in Boston, was the daughter of the late Hyman Kesselman and Mae (Cohen) Drazin. She was a graduate of Boston University.

Mrs. Priest was a member of Temple Emanu-El, the Miriam Hospital Women's Association, and the Holocaust Education and Resource Center of Rhode Island.

She is survived by her husband Burton, daughter Mara Scoliard, and son Jeffrey.

Died in Providence on August 6, 2009 at the age of 72.

SAKLAD, Dr. SARAH, born in Providence, was a daughter of the late Max and Eva (Resnick) Mazick. She was the wife of the late Dr. Elihu Saklad.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Pembroke College, she received her medical degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1932. Dr. Saklad had a private psychiatric practice and consulted with area hospitals. She was devoted to Crawford Allen, the residential program for chronically ill children at Rhode Island Hospital. She also wrote a history of psychiatry in Rhode Island.

She is survived by her daughter Brina and sons Mark and James.

Died in Providence on August 26, 2009 at the age of 101.

SAVAGE, JULIAN B., born in New Bedford, was a son of the late Morris and Eva Sevitch. He graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. During World War II, he was an Army captain in the Pacific and European theatres.

Mr. Savage was the owner of Myron Herman Company/Herman's Furniture Galleries.

He was a member of Temple Beth-El, Cranston Rotary, and the University Club.

He is survived by his wife Selma and sons Jonathan and Robert.

Died in Cranston on August 11, 2009 at the age of 89.

SCRIBNER, HERBERT, born in Providence, was a son of the late Jacob and Dora (Bachman) Scribner. He was the husband of the late Helen (Garey) Scribner.

Mr. Scribner attended Northeastern University and Boston University. During World War II, he served in the Army Air Corps in the Pacific theatre.

He was a merchandise manager for Arlan's Discount Department Store.

Mr. Scribner was a member of the American Civil Liberties Union and volunteered for Meals on Wheels.

He is survived by his son Kenneth and daughter Frances.

Died in Cranston on August 27, 2009 at the age of 90.

STEPAK, SAMUEL J., born in Providence, was a son of the late Lewis and Bessie (Cohen) Stepak. As a member of the National Guard, he helped provide emergency assistance during the Great Hurricane of 1938. He attended Brown University and the University of Rhode Island.

During World War II, Mr. Stepak served in the Navy aboard the U.S.S. *Philadelphia*. For decades he proudly wore a cap with the ship's name, which symbolized his deep love of humanity.

Mr. Stepak worked for Leeson Corporation and the Postal Service and taught in Providence schools. He served as executive director of Temple Beth-El from 1970 to 1984 and rendered heroic service during the Great Blizzard of 1978. A beloved teacher in the Temple's religious school for 25 years, he was also a Hebrew tutor and a stalwart of the evening minyan. He also assisted with the Chabad House minyan.

Always eager to lend a helping hand, Mr. Stepak was a board member of Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence, a cameraman for the "Senior Journal" television show, and a member of Touro Fraternal Association. A life member of our Association, he often served as a photographer at meetings.

He is survived by his wife Lynn, son Steve, and daughter Jane.

Died in Providence on August 30, 2009 at the age of 90.

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CORRECTIONS

The last issue of *The Notes* was Volume 15, Number 2.

MEMORIES OF THE EAST SIDE AND RIVERSIDE: The author's maternal grandfather was

Harris Huttler. Her paternal grandmother was Bela Wattman.



Peter Wegner with Uncle Max Wegner in London, ca. 1944

