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Our Wonderful Years on the East Side, 1983-1994
A week before Thanksgiving, Betsey and I were proud to attend a Shabbat service at Hartford’s Trinity College, where our daughter Molly had graduated a decade ago. Not only had she been president of Hillel during her senior year, but she was also recognized for helping launch “Pink Shabbat” during her sophomore year. This observance at the once all-male, Episcopal college creates awareness of breast cancer and raises research funds.

Before the Friday night service, I thought about visiting Zion Hill Cemetery, which is nearly adjacent to Trinity’s picture-perfect campus. Almost three decades ago, when conducting genealogical research, I discovered that two of my great-great-grandparents, Samuel and Miriam Feingold, had been buried there. And, after examining thousands of graves, I eventually found their resting places. When recently back at Trinity, the weather was threatening and I wasn’t feeling chipper, so I reluctantly skipped visiting Zion Hill.

Thus, I was totally surprised and gratified when Molly referred to one of her Feingold ancestors in her Shabbat speech. She

*grave of my great-grandfather, Los Angeles, 2019*
explained to the assembled students, professors, and administrators—Jews and gentiles alike—that one of our distant relatives, Samuel and Miriam’s youngest child, Gustave, another Russian immigrant, had been one of Trinity’s first Jewish graduates in 1911. He achieved further distinction by earning a Ph.D. at Harvard and then becoming Hartford’s first Jewish high school principal.

One of my last responsibilities when completing an issue of The Notes is writing obituaries. Because I have never met many of our deceased members or may know few details about them, most of these tributes are based on previously published sources.

Yet, whether an individual has lived a fairly humble life or has achieved considerable acclaim, I am almost always impressed by the dignity, freedom, and opportunity that America has typically provided him or her. In turn, so many of our deceased members have strengthened our nation—Israel too—by living honorable and rewarding Jewish lives.

Sometimes I wonder whether some of our deceased members’ survivors ever see our journal’s short obituaries. This is particularly true after a widow or a widower’s passing or if children or grandchildren live far from Rhode Island. Quite possibly, many survivors are unaware of our splendid organization and its journal.

But I am not terribly worried. Some day, perhaps as a result of a casual conversation or an intense genealogical search, forgotten relatives will be rediscovered. I feel much the same way when, at a Beth-El minyan service, I read a list of yahrzeits. I feel pleased and honored to bear witness to my predecessors’ lives and all our mutual blessings.
Lawrence Cane [first row, sixth from left]
Camp Claiborne, LA, September, 1943
The author’s father, Lawrence Cane, was an extraordinary American, Jew, and human being. Although David is modest about referring to him as a hero, this is precisely what he was.

A few readers of our journal may remember my article in the 2001 issue, which focused on Lester Jacobs, who, I believe, was the only Jewish Rhode Islander who fought in the Spanish Civil War. He had lived at 55 Warren Street in South Providence and in June 1937 sailed to Spain, where he sacrificed his life for Spanish democracy and freedom. Hoping to identify all of his fellow Rhode Island combatants in Spain, I found eight more men. At least two of these volunteers, Henry McSoley and John Mapralian, also gave the balance of their young lives.

On many occasions while in Spain, Lawrence Cane faced mortal danger. He was again threatened only a few years later, when he gallantly served in the American military during World War II. It is now difficult to believe that our military spurned the service of many American veterans of the Spanish inferno. Yet, our government’s treatment of these courageous citizens following their World War II service may form an even darker chapter in American history.

While it is true that Lawrence Cane never lived in Rhode Island, this journal has recognized other extraordinary individuals whose children or other relatives eventually made their homes here. In
another quirk of fate, Lawrence too gained firsthand knowledge of the Holocaust.

David Cane has been our friend, neighbor, and a Beth-El congregant since joining the Brown faculty in 1973. A world-renowned scientist, he served as the Vernon K. Krieble Professor of Chemistry and Professor of Molecular Biology, Cell Biology, and Biochemistry until his quite recent retirement. Late this year, David and his wife, Suzanne, left their East Side home to live close to their daughter and her family, who recently relocated to Baltimore.

We will learn much more about David’s parents, Lawrence and Grace, in next year’s issue of our journal, when we will be privileged to sample many of his stirring letters to her.

My father, Lawrence Cane, was born in New York City in 1912. His parents, Abraham and Faye Cohen, were working-class, Russian-Jewish immigrants. Abraham was a dressmaker and an organizer with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

My father and his two younger sisters, Irene and Celia, grew up in East Harlem, which in the early 20th century housed one of the world’s largest Jewish communities. Both of his parents were secular Jews, and he did not have an explicitly religious upbringing. As a youth he excelled in school as well as in athletics, winning competitions in track and field. He was also a strong swimmer, and

![Lawrence, 1935](image-url)
as a young man once swam across the Hudson from New York to New Jersey at the site where the George Washington Bridge now stands. He attended the downtown campus of City College of New York (CCNY), now known as Baruch College, where he competed in boxing and wrestling and was sports editor and then editor-in-chief of The Ticker, the school newspaper, as well as a member of the student council.

This was during the depths of the Great Depression, a time of great economic and social unrest, not only in the United States, but also around the world. Much of Europe, North Africa, and Asia had fallen under the harsh yoke of fascism. Hitler and Mussolini had come to power in Germany and in Italy, and both countries had begun to threaten their neighbors. In Asia, Japanese militarism was also on the march.

Not surprisingly, at that time, CCNY was a hotbed of social and political activism. As editor of The Ticker, my father took an active part in the wide range of political and economic issues that roiled the campus. These included strident student protests over the visit of a group of students from fascist Italy that resulted in the expulsion of more than two-dozen CCNY students. He also took the lead at CCNY in a statewide campaign that contributed to the defeat of a loyalty oath for students. Following his graduation, my father held a variety of jobs, including work as a journalist, covering news and writing columns for The Daily Worker.

Spanish Civil War

In 1937, the Spanish Civil War broke out when the Spanish military, led by the fascist General Francisco Franco, revolted against the democratically elected government of Spain. The insurrection by what were known as the Nationalist forces against the Spanish Republic was supported actively by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, which sent air force and infantry units to fight on the side of Franco’s forces, in defiance of a League of Nations embargo against the provision of arms or other aid to either side in the conflict.

In response for a call for volunteers to defend the Spanish Republic, the International Brigades were formed, eventually
attracting at least 30,000 volunteers from as many as 60 countries, including Canada, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Poland, and Yugoslavia as well as German and Italian anti-fascists. The precise number will never be known, but there may have been 2,600 American combatants as well as a few hundred American doctors, nurses, and drivers. As many as a third of American volunteers were Jews.

In the summer of 1937, my father volunteered to go to Spain as a member of the 15th International Brigade, which became popularly known as the “Abraham Lincoln” Brigade, after its best-known American unit, the Abraham Lincoln Battalion. He was assigned to a newly organized unit of Americans and Canadians that was named the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion, known as the “Mac-Paps,” in honor of two heroes of Canadian independence.

From October 1937 to December 1938, my father served at the front in some of most important battles of the Spanish Civil War. During his first month of action, while fighting in the disastrous battle of Fuentes del Ebro, he came down with typhoid fever and was wounded while on his way to a medical station. After several weeks of recuperation, he deserted from the hospital to rejoin his unit, just in time to take part in the desperate fighting at Teruel, in which the Mac-Paps fought stubbornly to defend a key portion of the line during one of the coldest winters in 20th century Span-
ish history. In the spring of 1938, the Nationalist forces unleashed a massive offensive in Aragon, breaking through the Republican lines and driving them back over the Ebro River.

During what became known as the “Retreats,” my father and some of his men were briefly captured. Although most members of the International Brigades were usually executed on the spot if captured, he and his men managed to overpower their guards and escape. They spent two weeks behind the Fascist lines, hiding by day and traveling only at night, before being able to swim across the Ebro. They pushed a raft with one companion who could not swim before finally rejoining the decimated units of the International Brigade.

After two to three months of regrouping and resupply, the Mac-Paps participated in the assault crossing of Ebro. In spite of initial success, their advance was halted after bitter fighting outside of Gandesa. Over the next several months, the Mac-Paps participated in some of the most difficult battles of the Spanish Civil War, before finally being withdrawn from the lines by the Spanish Republican Government. In the fall of 1938, in a futile gesture of conciliation, they were sent back home. By the end of his time in Spain, my father had risen to the rank of lieutenant and commissar in command of the Mac-Paps’ 1st Machine Gun Company.

It has been estimated that as many as one-quarter to one-third of the young American volunteers who went to Spain to fight on the side of the Republic were killed in action or subsequently died of their wounds. In the February 14, 1938 issue of the Communist newspaper New Masses, Ernest Hemingway, a fervent supporter of the International Brigades, wrote of the American dead: “… No men ever entered earth more honorably than those who died in Spain, [they] already have achieved immortality.”

**Marriage**

My father returned to the U.S. aboard the *RMS Ausonia* along with a group of about 50 other American veterans of the Lincoln Brigade, arriving in New York on December 20, 1938. Among the supporters who had assembled to welcome them home were my
father’s cousin and her 18-year-old friend, Grace Singer. She was a student at New York University and, as it would turn out, my future mother. During the confusion and celebration while being greeted by his family, my father backed into my mother, who had been standing somewhat shyly aside. He turned to her and said, “Why Gracie, you haven’t changed a bit!” Although they had actually met some four years earlier at a dance sponsored by the Young Communist League, they had not seen each other since then. Shortly thereafter he began to court her. They soon fell deeply in love and were married in June 1940 in my grandmother Esther Singer’s apartment off Central Park West and 92nd Street.

My mother, who had been born in 1920, was eight years younger than my father. She also came from a very different socioeconomic and religious background. Her father, David Singer, who had died in 1935 when Grace was only 15, was a successful lawyer whose parents had emigrated from Hungary. Her mother, Esther Kobre Singer, was the daughter of Max Kobre, a banker, and Sarah Herschman, who were prosperous immigrants from Germany. Through her mother, Esther was a direct descendant of the family of the Vilna Gaon, the renowned 18th-century Talmudic scholar and polymath.

Esther, who became known to all her grandchildren as

Grace, Civilian Defense Volunteer Office, 1942

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“Mimi,” was a devout Jew who kept a kosher home when my mother was growing up. One of my earliest childhood memories of her was teaching me to recite the Sh’ma each night before I went to sleep. Throughout her life she was active in volunteer and charitable work. For example, as a lifelong volunteer with the Jewish Braille Institute of America, she transcribed texts written not only in English, but also in German, French, and Hebrew, into Braille. In later life she was a leader in the Sisterhood of Temple Beth El, a Reform congregation in Great Neck, New York, where my mother’s older sister, Marjorie, was also active.

My mother’s younger brother, Marcus Singer, served state-side in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He had a long and distinguished career as a professor of philosophy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

World War II

In August 1942, two years after his wedding and following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, my father enlisted in the U.S. Army. For him, the Second World War was not an isolated historical event. Rather, it was part of the world war that he and other members of the International Brigades had hoped to prevent when they went to Spain to fight against fascism.

In 1942, the U.S. Army had conflicting attitudes toward men who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. It is worth remembering that in 1940, a year after the war’s outbreak in Europe, the U.S. Army, which would grow to over eight million men by 1945, had fewer than 300,000 soldiers, the vast majority of whom, except for a handful of senior officers and noncommissioned officers, had never experienced combat of any kind. Veterans of the Spanish Civil War, by contrast, were not only highly motivated, but they had fought against Spanish, German, and Italian forces that had been equipped with tanks and both tactical and strategic aircraft. As for modern artillery, the deadly German 88 mm Flak 37 anti-aircraft gun was first used in Spain. The U.S. Army therefore had a great need for committed fighters experienced in the use of modern battlefield weapons and tactics.

Running contrary to this clear need, many at the upper
levels of the American military regarded veterans of the Spanish Civil War as of suspect loyalty. Men like my father, often dismissed as “premature anti-fascists,” were thus frequently prevented from advancement in rank, entrance to Officer Candidate School (O.C.S.), or meaningful command assignments, if indeed they had somehow managed to become commissioned officers.

My father was more fortunate at first, being made an acting sergeant within two weeks of his enlistment and then, shortly thereafter, being sent to the Army Engineer O.C.S. at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. In February 1943, he received his commission as a second lieutenant. In spite of his superior performance at O.C.S. and his prior military experience, his continuing requests to be given a front-line combat assignment in which his experience and commitment could be put to best use were repeatedly denied.

Indeed, after further training at a military intelligence school at Camp Richie, Maryland, he was sent to Camp Claiborne in Alexandria, Louisiana, where he was one of four white officers in command of the 582nd Engineer Dump Truck Company. This was a unit of 102 black truck drivers in the then-segregated American Army. (The journalist and historian David Maraniss, in his recently published memoir of his father and uncle, A Good American Family: The Red Scare and My Father, notes that white officers with leftist sympathies were frequently assigned to command black troops. The
theory was that these officers would not only have a greater affinity with black troops, but they were less worthy of commanding white troops.

During the six months that my father was stationed in Louisiana, my mother lived with him in Alexandria. When his unit was sent to England in February 1944, she returned to New York City, where I was born in September 1944.

While training with his unit in England for the invasion of Europe, my father, who had been continuously agitating for assignment to a frontline combat unit since the first day of his enlistment, was given the opportunity to volunteer for special hazardous duty. On the early morning of D-Day, June 6, 1944, he finally achieved his wish to fight at the front. He landed on Normandy’s Utah Beach within the first 15 minutes of the invasion as part of the first assault wave of Combat Engineers. They were assigned to clear obstacles and blast a way for the 4th Infantry Division through the defensive seawall and then secure the causeway exits inland from the beach.

A month later, in early July 1944, my father received his long-sought permanent transfer to a combat command, as a first lieutenant in the 238th Engineer Combat Battalion. Thereafter, he took part in most of the major fighting in Western Europe, including the hedgerow battles and breakout from the Normandy beachhead, the invasion of Germany, the capture of Aachen, the Battle of the Bulge, the crossing of the Rhine, and then the linkup with the Russians and the final German surrender. In November 1944 he became Deputy Battalion Intelligence Officer (Asst. S-2) and then Acting S-2. In the process, he won the Silver Star for gallantry in action, a Distin-
guished Unit Citation, and the French *Croix de Guerre*.

In April 1945, as the war in Europe was drawing to a close, my father participated in the discovery and liberation of the horrific Nordhausen sub-camp within the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp. He returned home in November 1945, six months after Germany’s surrender, with the rank of captain.

**Civilian Life**

I was 14 months old when I met my Dad. After the war, my parents, like tens of millions of other American families, resumed their lives. They lived in New York City before moving in 1947 to West Hartford, Connecticut. My sister Lisa was born there in 1949. Six years later, our family moved to nearby Windsor, where my parents bought their first home. My brother Josh was born in 1956.

Around 1950, my family had joined Temple Beth Israel, a Reform synagogue in West Hartford. For many years, my mother was fond of telling the story of why we joined the temple at that time. I was about five or six years old and at Christmastime my sister and I were riding with our parents in our family’s car. When I announced from the back seat that I wanted a little baby Jesus of my own, my father ran a red light, pulled over, and said, “If he’s going to learn that sort of *mishegas*, then he can at least learn my kind of *mishegas*!”

I became a bar mitzvah in 1957. When I was growing up, my family celebrated major Jewish holidays. My mother frequently lit *Shabbat* candles and blessed my sister, brother, and me. My father, however, was not particularly religious or interested in the tenets of organized religion. Nonetheless, he was very proud of his Jewish identity and was, at his core, a deeply spiritual man. Perhaps needless to say, he possessed a strong social conscience, clear personal values, and a deep reverence for human life, which included the dignity of all people.

The Second World War was of course remembered in our home, but not as a central part of our lives. Nevertheless, June 6, the anniversary of D-Day, was always especially noted. When I was
Cane

younger, on Memorial Day my father would occasionally wear his officer’s uniform, which included his many medals. He also kept various war trophies, including an SS helmet, which my grandmother, Mimi, had suggested that I use as a potty seat. From a very young age I had also seen the horrific photos that my father had brought back showing the aftermath of the discovery of the Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp.

Throughout the remainder of his life, my father maintained close friendships with many fellow veterans of the Lincoln Brigade. He retained his political and social ideals, continuing his efforts to bring about a better and more just world. He supported the civil rights movement and strongly opposed the Vietnam War.

During the late 1940s through the '50s, my father traveled extensively in New England as a manufacturer’s representative, selling housewares. My mother often worked as a legal secretary. Both of my parents read extensively. A talented artist and painter, my mother also taught painting and arts and crafts at the Hartford Jewish Community Center and its day camp, Camp Shalom, which my sister and I attended for many summers. As far as I can remember, the only time I visited Rhode Island as a child was around 1950 on a trip to Slater Park Zoo. I was very impressed by the laughing hyena. Although I had a very happy childhood, the 1950s were a persistently difficult period for both my parents. During the McCarthy era, the FBI regularly tracked their mail and their daily movements and associations. Government agents periodically showed up at my father’s place of work and informed his boss that Larry Cane’s loyalty was suspect. Never mind that he had served in the U.S. Army during WW II and had been decorated for heroism! Because he had fought with the International Brigades in Spain, he might damage a business’s reputation. The next day he would be out of work, often needing months to find a new job. My father continually went into debt while trying to support his wife and two young children, and it
was during these periods that my mother began to work outside the home to help support our family.

About 20 years ago, my sister and I were able to confirm many details of this harassment when we obtained our father’s FBI file through the Freedom of Information Act. More than 200 pages long, it established most of what my parents had known or suspected about the surveillance and political harassment that they had experienced. One perhaps unsurprising, but nonetheless highly disturbing, discovery was the finding that essentially every entry in my father’s FBI file was stamped DETCOM and/or COMSAB. As first revealed by Senator Frank Church’s Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations following the abuses first brought to light during Watergate, DETCOM (“Detain as Communist”) was a highly secret—and completely illegal—program set up under the orders of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Those on the FBI’s Security Index who were designated as DETCOM were marked to be rounded up and secretly detained, with no public notice or any information to be made available, in the event of a war with the Soviet Union or a presidentially declared emergency. Those designated COMSAB were to be arrested first, based on the notion that their access to sensitive installations as well as their expertise in methods of sabotage was thought to render them especially dangerous. Ironically, in my father’s case, he had gained his expertise in explosives and demolitions as a decorated hero in the U.S. Army.

By the early 1960s, the federal government’s surveillance and harassment of my parents during the postwar era had largely abated. The final entry in my father’s FBI file occurred in 1962, around the time of my graduation (as valedictorian) from Loomis School, in Windsor, which I had attended as a day student since 1959. In the fall of 1962 I entered Harvard College and graduated magna cum laude in chemistry and physics in 1966. I also obtained my Ph.D. in chemistry from Harvard in 1971.

Immediately after my graduation from Loomis, my parents moved to Great Neck, New York. My father had a new job as a national sales manager of a New York-based housewares company. Our family joined Temple Beth-El in Great Neck, and my sister and
brother graduated from Great Neck South High School.  
(.My sister, who lived for many years in southern Colorado and now resides in Santa Fe, New Mexico, became very interested in the history of *conversos*, Christian descendants of Sephardic Jews. My brother and his wife, who became a convert to Judaism, began practicing Orthodox Judaism about 25 years ago. Their daughter made *aliyah* and their son, who studied at a yeshiva in Jerusalem for several years, returned to America and now serves in the U.S. Marines.)

During the 1960s and into the ‘70s, my father traveled extensively throughout the United States in connection with his job. During this time he was able to take advantage of his travels to reestablish contact with many fellow veterans of the Spanish Civil War. He became active in the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, working hard to organize a speakers’ bureau whose goals were not only to teach young people about the struggle against fascism in Spain, but to speak out about ongoing U.S. government support of Franco, as well as to organize support for the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War.

In June 1972, while Spain was still under Franco’s rule, my father returned there for the first time since 1938. I flew down from Zurich, where I was studying at the time, and spent two weeks traveling with both my parents and my brother from Madrid to Barcelona. We visited many of the battlefields and sites where he had served. We saw, for example, the ruins of Belchite, the fields of Corbera, the Ebro river valley, the stark Sierra Pandols, and the cliffs outside of Teruel, where the Mac-Paps had fought a desperate winter battle. We also met with young Spanish leftists and intellectuals, and my father was interviewed by a Spanish crew making an underground film about Americans who had come to fight 35 years earlier for Spain’s freedom.

Tragically, during the early 1970s, my father’s health, which had always been robust, suddenly began to fail. When he died in 1976, during the American Bicentennial, he was only 64. It was a great loss for all of us. My mother died in 2012. Both my parents are buried in the Hungarian Union Fields Cemetery in Queens, New York, alongside my maternal grandparents, David and Esther Singer.
The Letters

In 1996, 20 years after my father’s death, I decided to give his photos of the Nordhausen sub-camp of Dora-Mittelbau concentration camp at to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which had opened three years earlier in Washington. When I asked my mother if she could help me identify sections of the camp, she said that we could check the letters that he had sent to her during World War II. To my surprise, she told me that she had saved what turned out to be an extraordinary collection of nearly 350 manuscripts. These covered the three years of his U.S. military service: from the day of his enlistment in August 1942 until his return home in November 1945. Unbeknownst to me, these letters had been sitting in a box in my parents’ attics for almost 50 years!

Although my father had spoken openly about many of his experiences in both the Spanish Civil War and in World War II, he was more focused on his experiences in Spain. He frequently shared these with his close friends among the Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. To the best of my recollection, no mention was ever made of the WW II letters he wrote to my mother. As it turned out, once I was able to read the letters, I discovered that I was already familiar with many of the stories, but others were entirely new to me. Although I had been very close to my father and knew him very well when I was both a child and an adult, his letters to my mother revealed to me his most intimate and immediate thoughts from his early thirties.

The letters are filled with firsthand descriptions of wartime England, moving narratives of the liberation of France and Belgium, and fascinating encounters with German soldiers and civilians. Although there are few accounts of actual combat, the letters are filled with his numerous perceptive and in many cases unusually prescient commentaries on the military and geopolitical significance of the unfolding drama of the war in Europe.

My father’s letters also consistently reflect the close connection that he saw between his experiences in Spain and in World War II as well as his idealism and his hopes for a better world.

All of the letters written after February 1944 bore such re-
turn addresses as: “Somewhere in England,” “Somewhere in France” or “Somewhere in Germany.” At the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, I was able to obtain the “After Action Reports” of the 238th Engineer Combat Battalion. These reports allowed me to reconstruct the movements of his battalion as it fought its way across France and Belgium and into Germany.

Unfortunately, none of my mother’s letters to my father survived. This was due to the fact that my father was always on the move and American soldiers often had to destroy personal letters that they had received at the front.

Shortly after discovering the trove of letters, I mentioned my find to Brown University’s president, Vartan Gregorian, who encouraged me to publish an appropriately annotated collection. In 2000, a mutual friend put me in touch with Prof. Judy Barrett Litoff of Bryant University, a distinguished historian and a leading authority on WW II letters who has published more than a dozen books on correspondence from World War II and other personal histories from that period. Together, we selected about 200 of the most appropriate letters for publication and annotated them to explain their historical, military, and personal context. None of the original wording was changed, and the only deletions were of extraneous or repetitive material from a small fraction of letters.

Considering that many of my father’s letters were written just before or after battle, often in a foxhole or a temporary shelter, they are remarkable for their lucidity and impact as well as for their astute analysis of the military and political events and the unfolding human drama. Adding to their value, the letters reflect my father’s deep love for my mother, his constant loneliness caused by their separation, and his desire to be reunited with her and to return home to a world no longer at war.

This collection of letters was published in February 2003 by Fordham University Press as Fighting Fascism in Europe: The World War II Letters of an American Veteran of the Spanish Civil War. A selection of these letters will be published in the second part of this article.
Friendly & Morrow,
ca. 1950-55
Fred Friendly of Providence

Tony Silvia

The author, a native of Newport, grew up in Portsmouth. He earned his bachelor’s degree in English at the University of Rhode Island and his master’s and doctoral degrees at the University of Birmingham (in England).

Dr. Silvia began teaching journalism at URI in 1988 and served as a full professor, director of the public relations studies program, and chair of his department until 2001. Five years later he departed Kingston to become a professor of journalism and digital communication at the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg.

Dr. Silvia has extensive experience as a consumer reporter and as a news anchor at many television stations and as a correspondent, based in Atlanta, for CNN. Additionally, he has produced stories for PBS affiliates as well as for the NBC-owned station, KNSD, in San Diego. He has received three Emmy Award nominations and an Associated Press Award for best documentary. In 2008 he was named a fellow of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Six years later, he was inducted into Kappa Tau Alpha, the nation’s oldest honor society for journalism and mass communication.

The author of dozens of articles in academic and industry journals, Dr. Silvia has also written seven books about broadcasting and journalism. One of his most recent, Robert Pierpoint: A Life at CBS News, was published by McFarland in 2014. His new book, also for McFarland, will be Journalists Battle Dyslexia: Decoding a Silent Disability. It will include a portrait of Fred Friendly.

Except for its winter, Tony is still quite fond of the Ocean State. In addition to his home in Dunedin, Florida, he maintains a residence in Little Compton. Surprisingly, however, this is one of his first articles about a Rhode Island broadcaster.

It was a long journey for a young man who had troubles on virtually every level: reading, spelling, writing, speaking, and, especially math. Fred Friendly (whose given name was Ferdinand Wachenheimer), though not a native Rhode Islander in the sense that Rhode
Islanders define that term (being bred, born, lived and died here), left a lasting imprint on his adopted state. His influence on the field of journalism here came second only to the seminal impact he had on the invention of what we now call broadcast news through collaboration with the man generally credited with the title “the father of broadcast news,” Edward R. Murrow.

It started at 395 Lloyd Avenue in Providence, in the downstairs living room of the home where he and his family had moved from Brooklyn when Fred was 11 years old. The year was 1926. (Fred’s father, Samuel, who had represented his family’s business in a Fifth Avenue office, relocated to Providence to join his brothers, Jacob and Harry, whose prosperous jewelry manufacturing business, Wachenheimer Brothers, was located on Garnet Street.) It was a sad time soon thereafter, when Fred’s father died of meningitis, on June 6, 1927, leaving his mother, Therese Friendly Wachenheimer (1877-1954), with a young son (her only child) to raise alone.¹

To complicate matters, in the aftermath of her husband’s death, Therese was faced with being the advocate for a son who was big, awkward, smart, loved history, but had a stutter, and in adolescence would become known more for his athletic ability than his brains.

“I came to Providence in the sixth grade,” Fred Friendly would one day recall during a 1995 speech. “It was a tough time for

¹ Notes
me. Shortly after moving to Providence, my father died suddenly and my poor mother who had faith in and hope for me, hardly knew how to deal with all my learning problems.

For the young Fred Friendly, three things in his life made a difference: a strong mother, a religious education, and the Providence Public Library. His mother Therese (who had been born in Oregon) defined what those in the dyslexic community would now refer to as a “warrior mother.” She stood up not only for her own child, but also for social issues. Therese (who, as a widow, never worked outside the home) was, again to use a contemporary term, a social activist. She stood for, and demonstrated in support of, women’s rights (then called the suffrage movement) and had the grit and determination to follow through on her convictions. No doubt the child learned from the parent. Throughout his life, Fred Friendly would stand up for the downtrodden, the oppressed, and the deserving, though forgotten, members of society.

In school he was labeled “dumb,” but he never internalized that label, nor what it stood for in a society that had no knowledge of dyslexia, a form of learning disability that variously was perceived as “lazy” or “seeing backwards” or plain troublesome. Fred was labeled all three. That didn’t make him “special” in today’s parlance; it made him troublesome, a distraction in the classroom, a “cut up,” someone whom teachers would rather avoid than engage. He was searching for his place, a niche that is hard for any young person, but especially so for someone who is dyslexic.

To add to the pain, he didn’t know he was dyslexic until, ironically, he read about the symptoms when he was in his 50’s and his wife, Ruth Mark Friendly, was a teacher. She told him about a troublesome student she had in class who she knew was smart, but couldn’t read and so, therefore, was a problem she couldn’t solve. For dyslexics, there are always problems to solve; their lives are a constant attempt to “fit in,” to solve the Rubik’s Cube that creates the fit.

He searched for his place. Reading was hard, but listening was easier. He could discern patterns in spoken speech. The words made sense when he heard them, as opposed to seeing them in static
symbols on a page. Radio was a relatively new medium in those days, the early part of the 20th century. And in Rhode Island there was one of the earliest radio stations, Providence’s WEAN.5

Originally owned by a Providence department store called Shepard’s, WEAN became one of the founding members of what was called the Yankee network. Its place in radio history is well documented and, for Fred Friendly and the history of broadcasting, it was pivotal. Fred didn’t know a lot about himself as a young man, but he did know what he was good at doing.

“One thing I could do – I could speak well – and I had a good vocabulary. I used to think and wonder about how I could ever earn a living,” he recalled. “We lived on Lloyd Avenue, right where Miles Avenue joins Lloyd. I would stand by the window in my bedroom, on the second floor of my home, thinking ‘I could be a radio announcer – I could be on radio.’”6

So, the young man who had trouble reading, who had trouble adapting, whose mother was once told he should be sent to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, found a refuge, a calling, a place, a “fit.”

“I used to listen to the radio a lot and I learned a lot listening,” he recalled in the 1995 speech given in Providence. “I would stand looking out onto the street with an imaginary microphone set on my radiator and I would report the goings on of the day – or what I saw happening outside – whatever came into my mind. I think that even gave me a feeling of confidence. I figured I could do something when I was older.”

He tried. And he tried. WEAN was a reach for a kid who had struggled through Hope High School and aimed high for college, once telling his guidance counselor and every student who would listen that Harvard was on his radar screen and in his future. That was beyond reach. What was within reach was radio. He attended Nichols Junior College of Business Administration in Dudley, Massachusetts, for two years before the era when it granted associates’ degrees, but that wasn’t where his success was born – or grew.

“Then came the time to get a job. I went to WEAN. They were too big for me – they thought.” Instead, they advised him to “go
north,” to smaller stations in places like western Massachusetts. “But I ended up coming back to them – and I finally did get a job doing an idea that I had.”

That idea was a series of five-minute biographies of famous people he called, after his aunt’s suggestion, “Footsteps on the Sands of Time.” It would eventually become a series of record albums, but, at the time, it was a foot in the door.

“Footsteps on the Sands of Time” became a large success on a station that was searching for programming. Fred was paid the sum of $25 per week, a good amount of money in the 1930s. More importantly, it put him on a journey that would bring him into the U.S. Army, what he would call his “Rhodes Scholarship,” a meeting with a man who was, at the time, a monumental figure in radio news and would one day become the patron saint of an upstart new medium, television news. It was a medium in which both would be strangers, but to which Fred Friendly would bring Edward R. Murrow, reluctantly perhaps, but a medium in which both would be formative and, as some have suggested, would “invent.”

Along the way, Fred Friendly would retain his connection to Providence. For one, his radio name “Fred Friendly” came about because the manager who hired him at WEAN said Fred Wachenheimer was never going to make it as a “radio name.” So came the moniker Fred Friendly, employing his mother, Therese’s, maiden name. It would become the name that would go down in history as one of the pioneers of television.

Fred Friendly credited radio, yes, but also a supportive and caring single mother with his success. In addition, his Jewish upbringing was a major factor in his search for meaning. Fred had attended religious school at the Reform congregation, Sons of Israel and David, which was more commonly known, after its move in 1911 to Broad Street in South Providence, as Temple Beth-El. The Wachenheimer family had probably belonged to this congregation by 1906; Harry had been a member of the committee that planned the new building’s dedication.

Fred, with 13 other young men and women, was confirmed in 1931 under Rabbi Samuel M. Gup (who served Beth-El from 1919
until 1932). This is how Fred was described in his class’s yearbook: “We can’t say much about Ferdinand, because he attends class only occasionally. But any boy who can study by himself and shows his interest so is sure to get there, so here’s best wishes.” It is not known if Fred had become a bar mitzvah, however.

Through Beth-El, Fred might (and probably should) have gained access to the world of radio, for two of the congregation’s most prominent and wealthiest members were Leon and Joseph Samuels, who owned The Outlet Company, Rhode Island’s largest department store. Their Providence store began broadcasting from its own radio station, WJAR, in September 1922, only a few months after the Shepard Company, its rival on Weybosset Street, had launched WEAN. (Although the Samuels brothers were not active members of Beth-El, they were surely acquainted with the Wachenheimer family.) Rabbi William G. Braude (who succeeded
Gup in October 1932 and remained for 42 years, a Rhode Island record for longevity) would soon closely mentor the young man, who was searching for meaning and a “place.” For Fred Friendly, Rabbi Braude became like a second father, a supporter, a confidante, and a friend.

He told the students at Providence’s Hamilton School at Wheeler School that, in addition to his Jewish roots and upbringing, the Providence Public Library played a vital role. “I went to the Providence Public Library every day and began to read voraciously—and write. I became better and better at it just from the practice and I loved doing it.”9 It was at the library where he found the inspiration, as well as the content, for the afore-mentioned “Footsteps on the Sands of Time” radio series that would be his point of entry to a world beyond Providence.

This new world began with his stint in the U.S. Army, where his initial assignment was slicing onions for soldiers’ meals on kitchen duty but quickly progressed to a place where he was asked to give inspirational speeches to the troops, a feat at which he so excelled that the Army brass noticed and gave him the go-ahead to produce more of the “Footsteps” programs. They eventually were contracted by Jack Kapp, a record executive, and released as LP recordings.10

Enter Edward R. Murrow (1908-1965). Murrow had been the voice from the rooftops, in every American’s living room during the blitzkrieg of England during World War II. He was the most trusted and revered journalist in America. Friendly, through a series of contacts, angled to meet Murrow and the two eventually did meet. It was the start of a partnership unequalled in many industries, most of all broadcast news. Murrow agreed to be the narrator on the “Footsteps” recordings, which brought both men fame and for Friendly, fortune. One narrative is that Murrow, who didn’t lack for funds, gave Friendly the entire $25,000 fee paid by the record company.

In return, Friendly became Murrow’s voice, some would say his conscience, on important programs that he would go on and eventually produce, once out of the Army and on civilian soil. It was Friendly who brought Murrow to television, a medium of which
the latter was suspicious and which he variously dismissed as a “box filled with wires,” not unlike many radio “stars” of the day.

Together they produced the seminal radio program “Hear It Now,” incorporating the same approach as “Footsteps”: profiles of famous people and events in history. That led to Friendly’s pivotal role in “See It Now,” the television extension of the radio series on CBS.

They became collaborators, in the best sense, complementing each other’s talents. The famous “McCarthy program” of “See It Now” (aired on November 18, 1951), in which Murrow took on Senator Joseph McCarthy and his witch hunt for Communists, especially within the government but also the entertainment industry, made CBS executives nervous, so much so that Friendly and Murrow had to pay for their own advertising of the program after sponsors fled.11

In the 2005 movie adaptation, “Good Night and Good Luck,” the focus is on Murrow, and Friendly, who produced the program and assisted in writing the script, is portrayed as a sideman to Murrow, which stretches the truth.12 Friendly was instrumental in that program’s inception and its execution, harkening back to his mother Therese’s roots in standing up to bullying and, in this instance, despots.

Never known as an easy person to get along with as he rose in the ranks of CBS News, eventually becoming its president, a position from which he resigned on principle in protest, Fred Friendly had his supporters and his detractors. After CBS News, he assumed the Edward R. Murrow Professorship at Columbia University’s prestigious Graduate School of Journalism, a position in which he created a minority internship program and began to envision the start of what we now know as PBS. He was a visionary, a man of a hundred ideas a day, only four of which, he would admit later in life, were “any good.”13

The depth of Fred Friendly’s contribution to broadcast news, as in most things in one’s life, was demonstrated by the loyalty of others, beginning with Murrow. On March 17, 1957, nearly three years after his mother’s passing (and in honor of her yahrzeit), Fred Friendly organized a memorial for her at Temple Beth-El’s new

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location on Providence’s East Side. Drawing an audience of approximately 2,500 congregants and guests, it was probably the largest event yet held at the Orchard Avenue complex, which had been dedicated in 1954.

Among the dignitaries who attended: the poet Carl Sandburg, the actor and comedian Danny Kaye and, most notably, Edward R. Murrow. The latter seldom travelled or spoke in public, except at industry events. He made the trek out of respect for his professional cohort, Friendly. He had never even met Therese
Wachenheimer, but had enormous regard and respect for his professional partner, her son.

One account of Murrow’s appearance at the Temple, widely shared, is that the famous broadcaster, who was known as a chain smoker, both on and off the air, asked for special dispensation to smoke in the sanctuary during his tribute. Rabbi Braude granted it, to some criticism, but granted it nevertheless. It may have been the power of Murrow, who was the most famous man on television in his day, but it no doubt was also in deference to Fred Friendly, a congregant and a favorite son of Temple Beth-El.16

No doubt it was also in recognition, on that day in March of 1957, that the smoke present in the Temple was a metaphor for the flame that Fred Friendly had lit in his professional life, providing light and giving meaning to issues in a world where, for him, childhood had been a dark and lonely place.

(Endnotes)

1 Background on Fred Friendly’s move to Providence and his upbringing on Lloyd Avenue is found in R. Engelman, Friendly Vision: Fred Friendly and the Rise and Fall of Television Journalism (New York: 2009).


3 “In addition to joining Beth-El’s Sisterhood, Therese participated in Jewish affairs on the state and national levels. She was actively involved with Hadassah as well as the Rhode Island League of Jewish Women and the state section of the National Council of Jewish Women ...Therese was an active member of Rhode Island’s League of Women Voters, Federation of Women’s Clubs, and World Affairs Council.” Engleman, 15. In this same chapter, Engelman goes into great detail on Therese’s civic life and activism.

4 Story recounted by Ruth Mark Friendly in personal interview, June 2019. She was Friendly’s second wife. His first, from Providence, was Dorothy Greene.

5 The best source for the history of Rhode Island radio stations is found in J. Rooke, Rhode Island Radio (Charleston, SC: 2012).

6 From Hamilton speech, p. 1 of typescript. As late as 1947, Friendly continued to list his home as 395 Lloyd Avenue in Providence directories. By 1946, however, this building had also become home to a boy who would gain prominence as both a Rhode Island lawyer and a Temple Beth-El leader. This was Melvin L. Zurier, who had been born
in 1929. Following his parents’ early deaths and through his undergraduate and law school years at Harvard, he lived occasionally with his aunt and uncle, Ida Zurier Fisher and Harry Fisher, who owned the building and lived upstairs at 393 Lloyd. Melvin grew closer to his cousins, Natalie and Zelda Fisher. Eventually, the Fishers moved downstairs to 395 Lloyd, and Melvin left Providence in 1954 when he joined the Air Force’s Judge Advocate General’s Corps.

7 From Hamilton speech, p. 2 of typescript.
9 From Hamilton speech, p. 2 of typescript. Friendly was most likely referring to the downtown Public Library because the Rochambeau branch at 708 Hope Street was not built until 1930.
10 Engelman’s chapter two, “My Rhodes Scholarship,” is the best source for the narrative of Friendly’s time in the U.S. Army.
12 Morrow was played by David Stratham, Friendly by George Clooney, who also directed and co-wrote the movie. It was nominated for five Academy Awards.
13 Engelman, chapters 19 and 20, 310-45, detail Friendly’s last years, working at Columbia University and helping to found PBS.
14 Therese was buried in Beth-El’s cemetery (plot N54). The inscription on her grave proclaims: “For the end of the upright man is peace.” This is derived from Psalms (37:37): “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.”
15 Since his childhood years at Beth-El, Friendly maintained a friendship with Norman Fain, who chaired the new temple’s construction committee. Decades later, the sanctuary would be named in honor of Norman and his wife, Rosalie.
Mike has been the most frequent contributor to our journal during my editorship. He has missed only one issue, my first, in 2004. He also enjoys the distinction of being the only former editor who has found a new role within these pages.

Given the decades and topics he has covered, Mike’s articles form nearly an entire autobiography. And there has been great thematic and stylistic consistency. Yet, he’s somewhat reluctant to tell readers too much or in an explicit manner. I dare say that Mike, a strange detective, prefers presenting mysteries rather than finding solutions.

Would I want to travel with Mike to France? Yes, because of his linguistic skills and all the colorful and bizarre people I would meet. No, because he eats and drinks so little. Mike would also probably derive as much pleasure from visiting a flea market as I would from an august museum.

But both Mike and I would want to explore Jewish curiosities and try to unravel their meanings. While I would prefer immediate explanations, Mike might say, “Time will tell – or perhaps not.”

I mailed my application to join the Sweet Briar Junior Year in France program, which was supported by Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and their women’s college collaborators, at the very last minute – maybe even a day beyond its deadline. I needed to work up the courage to overcome my father’s resistance to the idea. My mother encouraged the freedom to explore my horizons, the geography of my soul. My father preferred to keep his eye on what I might do, or become, beyond the boundaries of his reach.

My own concept of what France represented during the early post-war era was like that of most Americans, a vague impression that the arts of pleasure and leisure took precedence over “capitalist” considerations. No longer the Golden Age or the Impressionist/ Dada epoch, but the Existential era under a gray sky. I suppose that, on some level, French was still somehow a mother’s voice while the English language was a paternal admonition, more practical and prosaic.
My Hope High classmates had sometimes spelled Fink as “Phynque,” so maybe this was a prelude to my pilgrimage. But that’s probably a stretch. Yet there was a hint of the Québec chapter in my family’s migratory pathway toward all that Providence became to us.

I could search for a few snapshots of the June day of my departure from New York harbor on the Mauretania, but they have probably been nibbled by mice or damaged by mold and moisture among the boxes and trunks in my garage-studio. My Aunt Lillian and Uncle Leonard, who lived in New York, waved like a scene from an early film when travel was always by boat.

We students arrived at Le Havre and from there and thence went to the Touraine – to imprint the proper French accent upon our still absorbent adolescent minds. After six weeks among the chateaux along the Loire and in the caves of the Vouvray vineyards, we relocated to Paris.

Yes, I had my Jewish concerns, always, but my American youth contained the assimilationist concept deeply rooted in the idea that religion is profoundly private. Put aside the American personality and the English language, as well as your specific spiritual identity. If I visited a place of worship, I pretty much kept it a secret; it was only after my first to Israel, in 1961, that the personal turned openly political for me. Even at Yale, I avoided Hillel, and although I spurned any form of pork, I simply went along mostly with whatever the dining-room fare presented. I believe that administrators of the Sweet Briar program did indeed forewarn program personnel about the food habits of American students, who were labeled as Israelien, a kind of euphemism for the somewhat pejorative or cruder Juif.

They assigned me to the apartment of M. et Mme. Dauchez.

My chamber at 16, Rue Cassette, near the St. Sulpice metro stop, had a deep, sunken étage (floor) beneath the ground floor, and I had to go down, down, down to fetch some coals to furnish the kindling for the parlor stove in my third-floor room with a garden view. It was a pretty little room-warmer of ceramic and with lovely details to admire and to sketch. I would shovel the coals, light the fire, and survive the chilly night.

Nevertheless, I finally did indeed succumb to a feverish
chill and had to send for a doctor. His diagnosis? “You have a fragile throat, put this little cotton scarf on, and you will revive and recover.” “Vous avez la gorge fragile,” was the way he delivered this charming definition of my condition. My choice of écharpe was a simple but rather elegant gray cotton kerchief, and it worked!

I took the scarf home to Yale and wore it like a flag throughout my senior year! Plus, I drew that parlor stove on my letters and postcards with the lovely stamps proclaiming that the industries of France were fashion, wine, and perfume. “A meal without wine is a day without a sunbeam.” (“Repas sans vin, journée sans soleil.”) I could revisit the haute couture by looking over the mail I had sent across the ocean bearing the image of a lovely lady in a graceful gown. We at home had only khaki mail boxes in those days, and all our postage stamps bore the somewhat grim image of serious, if heroic, George Washington.

My breakfast consisted of yesterday’s stale bread dipped in fresh coffee in a chipped, large bowl. Then I would make my way to the Sorbonne classrooms, on either bank of the Seine, passing a nostalgic and smaller-scale model of our Statue of Liberty. I would share lecture hall spaces with French citizens still living with their parents.

I had plenty of free time to explore the flea market at any hour of afternoon or evening and to exchange my much valued Camel cigarettes (from the cartons put into that old Wickenden Street trunk that had been stuffed with sweaters and coats from Fink uncles, cousins, and brothers) for token toys to bring home. These included a ceramic ashtray that featured a student with a waving scarf about to enter an urinoir (a public place established by Napoleon to relieve oneself)! The souvenir ashtray ended up on a table in my brother, Chick’s, Newport home.

Although the art museums and galleries were totally welcoming to us Americans, especially with our student identity cards, I remember Paris – perhaps all of France – from an underground viewpoint, like a vole or a mole. There were theatres in cellars, basements with bats, and caves with gypsies living secretly like forgotten species. American jazz musicians used these caves (pronounced in the French style) to toot their horns. The very word “underground”
had political implications, *bien sûr*, as a form of subversion of acceptable “bourgeois” values and traditions.

My earliest gesture at the start of my sojourn occurred when we were taken to visit the vineyards and I saw legions of bats hanging upside down above the barrels of exotic vintages. For some eccentric reason, I took a single flying mouse and placed it under my beret – an affectation of assimilation – and then, in the first class lecture, a *dictation*, which meant you had to write down quite correctly in graceful calligraphy the words being dictated, I released my captive companion. And of course pandemonium broke loose until the professor opened all the French windows and let the poor beast fly freely to recover its bearing. Why did I do this idiotic thing? I can’t say – it was all so long ago – but it had something to do with my sense that France was about letting everything go where it was destined to go to seek its personal liberty, fraternity, and equality.

As for other flying creatures, I of all people haunted the bird markets (*marchés aux oiseaux*). I even bought and then brought these creatures as gifts for dinner parties! I believe that I have a snapshot somewhere of the smiles of welcome when I carried a bird in a pretty cage to a Thanksgiving reception at a chateau.

Mostly, my evenings were cinematic, celebrations of the experiments of Jean Cocteau or of Max Ophuls. I saw such films in small student cinemas as “Les Enfants Terribles” with Nicole Stéphane and “The Earrings of Mme. De…” Both had Jewish overtones, and I explored them later, within my career at RISD, when I sought to combine Paris and Providence. *Stéphane* was actually a Rothschild and a Résistante, and I interviewed her in connection with a Cocteau film conference I sponsored at Hofstra University in 2004. Max Ophuls was the father of Marcel Ophuls, who visited my RISD class to discuss the complexity of issues about resistance and collaboration.

On a train I met an ailing American veteran of World War
II, who gave me the address of a Parisian lad he had befriended on Liberation Day, 1944. Would I contact that young man with news of his GI comrade?

So I made my way to the Jewish quarter near the Rue des Rosier, to number 33, Rue du Renard, and found one Jean Couture. This person dwelt with his mother and his grandfather and also had a pet hamster! This was a small apartment with which I would become quite familiar. The Couture family invited me every Sunday for dinner and an educational stroll around the most historical neighborhoods in the Left Bank of the renowned “City of Light.” My accent and fluency impressed them, and they continued this new, fresh “tradition” they invented through the pneumatique, a system of instant communication rather resembling the chutes department stores used, to put receipts and change in a tube that connected layers and levels of downtown buildings. I would stop by the post office on the Rue de Rennes and find an invitation from the famille Couture to take a break from the student routine.

Then one day I saw Jim Brachman, a student from Princeton in the Sweet Briar group, and I waved amicably at him and said a brief, “Hiya.” Well, Jean Couture was not pleased. “I dislike to hear you in English. That fellow looks like a Jewish person. My dog barks at the neighborhood Jews!” Oh dear, now, what was I to do with such a comment?

You see, Jean had assumed I was somehow Canadian, perhaps even a descendant of the old Québec cultures during the realms of imperial France. I had to come out of a closet and tell all about my roots, or keep still, play a role, and hide my identity from my host.

Upon my return to Rhode Island, I remained in touch with Jean. He sent me photographs and news of the welfare of the plants I had brought as household gifts, and I wrote about my life on the New Haven campus. Until one day I
confessed the account of my family. My mother had indeed grown up and attended schools in the province of Québec, in the cities of Trois-Rivières and Montréal, but, like the Couture dwelling near the metro stop Chatelet, she was surrounded by Jewish families. Needless to say, I never again heard from Jean. End of a friendship. My fault! My fault?

The poetry and philosophy of the mid-fifties in Paris — before the whitewashing of the buildings to release the “City of Light” from the dark shadows of war — was labeled “Existentialism.” Which meant to me, the concept of Resistance with its essential paradox, with its artistic ambivalence and ambiguity. Was the collaborator secretly helping Jews by spying on the Gestapo or the police? Was the Resistant clandestinely betraying the trust of his cohorts or simply compromising his commitment in order to protect his imprisoned relative? Everything depends upon your own responsibility and daring, your choice to defend the hope of “freedom” in the face of despair. There were no rewards for the heroes and heroines of the partisans and underground rescuers. No glamorous uniforms or aristocratic authority figures, and no expectation of reward. This was a philosophy of both despair and courage.

In my version, every Jew is one of the 36 Just, the Chabadnik or Hassid who, like an elfin Atlas, holds up and redeems the world altogether and alone, saving the past, present, and future. Although the Resistance was not a mainstream motif in occupied France, it consisted of an uneasy alliance of de Gaulle military aristocrats, Stalinist communists, veterans of the Spanish Civil War, idealist refugees and, mainly and mostly, Jews!

Sartre and de Beauvoir proposed that all Art was about the defiant quest for Freedom and Liberty. Judaism, they reasoned, was the invention of anti-Semitism! This was not good enough until Elie Wiesel and then Claude Lanzmann defied the Existentialism of Sartre/de Beauvoir.

Nevertheless, a giant poster showed our new president, Dwight Eisenhower, liberator of Europe and ally of Russia, Britain, and the Free French, with his huge grin of gained victories on the battlefield and at the polls. Instead of teeth, his smile was a denture
of electric chairs! Because Julius and Ethel Rosenberg had been executed a month before our arrival, and the irony of it all was not lost along St. Michel and St. Germain, the boulevards of the student Left Bank.

My parents had no plans to visit, nor did I expect them to, but two of my aunts from Canada did in fact visit me during the harsh winter of ’53-’54. Minnie, the eldest, came with her ailing husband, Izzy. They took me to the Moulin Rouge. Lillian, who had moved to New York and remarried, often played hostess for me during and throughout my undergraduate years. She and Uncle Leonard rented a motor scooter and met my neighborhood acquaintances, among whom was a street-girl. (hmmm!).

A familiar figure among and along my pathways, I was greeted amiably by one and all. My visiting aunts were most impressed by my friendly chats with the servers in the cafes as well as the homeless clochards at street corners.

This was actually the coldest winter on record, known as the winter of Abbé Pierre, because he collected sweaters and scarves like mine, from students, to share with the needy. There was also a Kermesse aux Étoiles, in which the movie celebrities – both French and the Hollywood exiles from the HUAC repressions – would offer kisses for woolen stockings. It was a festival set up on the grounds of the Louvre. I could claim that I had kissed Ingrid Bergman by swapping my cousins’ collections of woven hats and jackets in the flea markets for fancy wines and token gifts, such as silken kerchiefs or top-drawer potions and perfumes form the Right Bank.

I was, after all, my father’s son as well as my mother’s and had learned thrift, not spendthrift extravagance, as a student. “Tout coute trop cher,” dictated Mme. Dauchez, but I already knew that before stepping foot on the Mauretania.

My last evening in Paris I spent alone in Les Halles (the wholesale market), among the truck drivers unloading their fabulous vegetables and enjoying mugs of onion soup and rather large glasses of red wine ordinaire. This is also where I met my companion of that evening, who conducted me back to my student quarters on his motor scooter. (He later sent me a postcard as a somehow symbolic
souvenir of a fleeting friendship.) All good things must come to an end, and I had to make my way from my tiny chamber on 16, Rue Cassette to the gates of the walled city at the Gare du Nord (railway station). A limousine stopped to fetch me with my hitchhiker’s thumb summoning a rescue. The chauffeur in full blue regalia opened the rear door where, in upholstered comfort, sat a fine elderly gentleman in a “morning suit” of formal attire. He put his arm through mine and handed me his card. “Prince Achille Murat, Comte de Paris,” it read. I was told on the Dutch ship Maasdam, as I was homeward bound, that he was indeed the King of Paris – and forbidden from entering the city proper by post-Revolutionary law. And therefore doomed to circle around the gates, nervously awaiting the invitation to resume the throne, un jour. I do not know what I have done, or what fate has done, with that magic card. Perhaps it is hiding among the endless piles of papers in my possession. This is a true tale! Metaphorically, it seems in retrospect to indicate that I had spent a momentously influential sojourn in la belle France, but now I must make my way toward tomorrow, out of yesteryear.

I did not abandon anything. I have taken RISD students during winter sessions back to “my” Paris, but of course “my” Paris was ’53–’54. That Paris is gone. Those cafes no longer exist, except in my memoirs or among the pages of books of nostalgic/historic photographs from long ago. It turns out that Abbé Pierre wasn’t such a kind fellow after all, for he was accused of collaboration during the Occupation, thus dethroned and dishonored, at least from a Jewish viewpoint.

Aboard the Maasdam, which sailed from Rotterdam, I dined with a couple of refugees, who were probably Jews. I snapped a few

voyage home
shots of them and visited them in Philadelphia during my senior year at Yale, but they moved shortly thereafter in search and quest of the elusive, midcentury American Dream.

I kept the menu of the last dinner before landing in New York, with its autographs of fellow travelers, containing some kind compliments. I don’t know who among them wrote: “À un faux français qui parle français mieux que les français!” (“To a fake Frenchman who speaks French better than the French do!”).

How did I feel upon my return to Providence and thence to New Haven after my “existential” experience as a boulevardier? At first, it was a letdown. Just speaking English struck me as a loss. I recall offering to shake hands in the Parisian style, but then I pulled back my hand, embarrassed! Sometimes I dreamed in French! I pondered and wondered if I should cling to my identity as an expatriate.

Looking back from the present, I can recall that I had made my decision. I was not what I had been, and I understood that I must resume my “true” identity, despite my dilemma. So I greeted my Yale classmates with some degree of anxiety, but made use of my accomplishments – socially at least. I could show off my fancy French at parties, especially at women’s college mixers.

“A un faux français qui parle français mieux que les français!”

“To a fake Frenchman who speaks French better than the French do!”

HOLLAND-AMERICA LINE
S.S. “MAASSAM”

DINNER
Upon entering my final semester in New Haven, I, an English major, nevertheless won the prestigious Montaigne Prize for excellence in written and spoken French. I had written a memoir of my routine during that phenomenal year in midcentury, postwar Paris. For example, I quoted the insults and assaults of Mme. Dauchez, my landlady in Saint Sulpice. She had instructed me how to keep both hands on the table, sip my wine only with my right hand, even how not to fill a glass to the top and why. These were the rules of propriety and politesse.

Monsieur Dauchez would forgive any shortcoming if only I offered a Camel cigarette for him to smoke while he might stroll around the block and explain to me its historical secrets. “The bread isn’t as good as prewar,” he might say while thoroughly enjoying each puff. He would even take a tiny pair of scissors and cut the butt in two to save the other half for later.

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YALE UNIVERSITY
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT

HENRI M. PEYRE
DEPARTMENT OF FRENCH
515 WILLIAM L. HARKNESS HALL

April 28, 1955

Mr. Michael Fink
1895 Yale Station
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Fink:

I am very happy to be able to congratulate you on behalf of our Department on your victory in the Montaigne Prize contest.

I understand that you distinguished yourself by your elegant and intelligent command of French, which seems to have made a great impression on all the examiners. I understand that this year’s candidates were unusually able and the competition was formidable, and you may take just pride in your achievement.

With our good wishes, I am

Very sincerely yours,

Henri Peyre
I had lunched and dined with the Dauchez family throughout the long, icy winter, but in mid-spring I took my suppers at student restaurants, where you paid your bill after the garçon (waiter) counted the number of slices of baguette you had eaten. Thrift ruled!

My Montaigne essay summed up the culture I would now swap for the wasteful, somehow gross, values of the booming economic promises of postwar America.

Fortunately, the Montaigne Prize came with a cash bonus. I spent the money at J. Press, that paragon of Ivy League fashion founded by Jacobi Press, a Latvian-born Jewish tailor, and then owned and managed by his sons. I acquired a brown/black tweed suit, a pumpkin fedora, an “ancient madder” silk necktie, a pair of cordovan shoes with taps – actually a total wardrobe of fashionable items that took me through graduate school in high style – before denims and turtlenecks lowered the standards of propriety.

But beyond the exterior, the very name “Montaigne” merits a commentary. The majestic mayor of Bordeaux translated the Jewish “shrug” into the phrase “Que sais-je?” (“What do I know?”) as the succinct summary of a style of essay that became its own genre of literature. I would later visit the statue of Montaigne that dominates the central garden of Bordeaux, and discover and uncover the fact that he was in fact a descendant of Jewish refugees from the Spanish Inquisition, who brought into royalist France the democracy of the personal journal with its Chassidic modesty, wit, and sense of scale. Not grandeur but humility and good will, and the humorous approach that may even have influenced Shakespeare!

What did I bring back from Paris – other than a few souvenirs and personal gifts – here to Providence? Well, for one thing, I discovered that my own nearly lifelong dwelling on Creston Way had been part of a French encampment during our War of Independence. Even the allée of sycamore trees along Summit Avenue recalled for me the Bois de Boulogne along the Champs-Élysées or at least the Boulevard Heurteloup. The plaque where Memorial Road, Creston Way, and Summit Avenue meet (funded by the Sons of the American Revolution) keeps the memory of Count/General Ro-
chambeau alive for me. Tourists visit that monument and neighbors keep its garden site neat and orderly. Visitors may also stroll down to “Camp” Street (named for the French encampment) to summon up the spirits of the alliance of France and the new America.

The year after my graduation from Yale, I emphasized a French approach to pedagogy – through “pictures” – when I earned a master’s at Harvard’s Graduate School of Education. And over my six decades of teaching literature and film history at RISD, I have chosen to combine my linguistic talents, such as they were, by teaching American, British, French and, yes, various Jewish traditions. Of course, once a Francophile, always, to some extent.

As for friendships with my fellow Sweet Briar, ex-pat students, yes, one in particular remained a lifelong friend, and I keep in touch via the magazine published by the program. Another fellow graduate became an ambassador, first to Romania and then to Malta, and I visited him and would reminisce with him at Yale reunions. Jim Rentschler, who had a gift for languages, became a French major. I have some photographs of our dinners in fact as well as in my memory.

I had known Paris as softly grey but also pastel and subtly promising. For quite a while, my friends and family associated me with the era and its emblems. But when airports took over from ports of call and recall, Providence, of course, caught up with Paris in the globalization of all commodities.

Do I have any regrets in my heart about what I may have left behind from my early intellectual and artistic opportunities in Paris? Really not. I spend a lot of time – hours wasted perhaps – wondering about the meanings of everything under the sun and moon and come up with no answers but only further doubts. I can lecture about the history I have lived through, the challenges of my generation, the escapes from the enormity of the world’s problems then, now, and facing us. Or I can huddle in my RISD office surrounded by souvenirs. I can dive down in a desk drawer to find a photo or a postcard and relive a few moments of yesteryear. I am, somehow, still that figure with a scarf and a hat making his way half in actuality and half in dreamland.
Yes, there had been a magical tone to every day of that year abroad in 1953-54, for Gaul had become my Oz!
“The Rock”
Memories of Androscoggin:
Summers Spent on and off “The Rock”
Jeffrey A. Brown

Jeff’s article is the fourth in an ongoing series about summer camps. For many youngsters, these institutions provided mountains of fun as well as some of life’s most challenging and rewarding experiences.

Jeff, who grew up in Providence, is a fourth-generation member of Temple Beth-El. A former Brotherhood president, he currently chairs the board’s investment committee.

Many of the author’s friends and recent acquaintances may believe that the orange and black necktie he often wears represents his alma mater. Well, in a sense it does. More literally, however, it refers to two alma maters: the university in New Jersey where he graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa as well as Maine’s Androscoggin. Jeff majored in sociology and, based on research in Israel, wrote his senior thesis on the social stratification of kibbutzim.

After earning both a law degree and a master’s of law in taxation at Boston University, Jeff has worked in pension consulting and administration for 40 years. He is president of his own firm, Compensation Planning, Inc., in Warwick, where his son, Grant, serves as vice-president. For four decades, Jeff has also been an adjunct faculty member in Bryant University’s Graduate Tax Program.

Additionally, this proud summer camp alumnus has helped lead Jewish Family Service and currently chairs the investment committee of Jewish Collaborative Services. For 15 years he has coached soccer in East Greenwich’s recreational league. Jeff and his wife, Barbara, enjoy travel, especially to Francophone countries. By the way, he often wears an animal-shaped lapel pin that refers to her nickname! And it’s not “Tiger.”

Initially, when George Goodwin approached me to write about my summer camp experiences, I demurred. I was not sure that I wrote well enough, and I was uncertain that anyone would want to read

Brown
about them. However, as I thought about the possibility of an article, I began reminiscing about all the experiences I had at camp. Doing so became a wonderful trip down memory lane. I visited places I had not thought of in well over 50 years.

I attended Camp Androscoggin from about 1956 to 1964. To be more precise, I should say I attended the Androscoggin Camps. In fact there were two distinct camps, Camp Androscoggin and Camp Androscoggin Junior, both located in Wayne, Maine, about 20 miles west of Augusta, the state capital. The camps were named after Lake Androscoggin.

Androscoggin, originally one camp, was founded by Edward Healy in 1907. When I attended Senior Camp, his son, Edward Healy, Jr., whom we called “Chief,” owned it. He was a slightly built man, with round glasses, who bore a strong resemblance to the cartoon character “Mr. Magoo.” In one of the camp cheers, he would be referred to as “Feich” Magoo, which was “Chief” backwards.

My memories of Junior Camp, which had been established in 1937, are not as vivid as those of Senior Camp. Nor do I have the same emotional ties to Junior Camp as I do to Senior Camp.

Although neither Androscoggin was a Jewish camp in terms of teaching or celebrating Judaism, both were definitely Jewish in another sense. I would estimate that over 80% of the campers were Jews, and most came from greater New York City. There were no religious services, but a small group would leave camp each Sunday to go to Catholic mass. They could all fit in one car.

There is another way in which Androscoggin was in some sense Jewish or even anti-Jewish. As if to counteract the stereotype that Jewish boys were mostly nerdy, weak, and bookish, Androscoggin, especially its Senior Camp, could be quite demanding and rugged. There were activities, especially during one’s final year, which may have resembled boot camp. No sissies allowed here! We definitely were not pampered.

I am aware of only three campers from Rhode Island, but all were Jews. During my first year at Junior Camp, I had two friends from Providence, John Bloom and Alan Hassenfeld. Born in 1948, we were going to be classmates at Moses Brown School, but due to
how my birthday fell, I ended up in an older peer group at camp. This certainly made for more challenging athletics, as I was not particularly well coordinated back then.

Both John and Alan also continued to attend both Androscoggin. I see Alan occasionally in Rhode Island, but I met up with John only a few times because he moved to San Francisco.

I am aware that Jeff Brier, another Jewish kid from Providence and a Moses Brown student, also attended Androscoggin. Given that he was more than five years my junior, our paths never crossed at camp. His folks, Milton and Zita, had been friendly with my mine, Howard and Bette, which is how he found out about Androscoggin.

Before I went to overnight camp, I had attended Juniper Trails, a day camp in Bristol. I am not quite sure how my parents learned about Androscoggin, but I do remember that its director visited our home in Providence. Everything sounded fine to me. I was not concerned, at age eight or nine, that a summer season lasted eight weeks. I later learned that my maternal grandparents had sent my uncle, Al Lipkin, off to overnight camp when he was only four.

**Junior Camp**

Junior Camp, geared for boys eight to 11, was owned by Pat Wack, whom we would sometimes refer to as “Paddy Whack.” There were maybe 100 campers per season.

During my first summer, I was in one of the cabins closest to the mess hall. The older campers would have to walk a bit farther. We had only five to seven campers in a cabin along with a counselor. Although the cabins were electrified and each had a bathroom, they were not luxurious by any stretch of the imagination. But they were not too Spartan, either – at least compared to Senior Camp’s cabins.

We wore camp uniforms, which consisted of grey T-shirts and shorts adorned with orange and black stripes and of course the camp name. Most of our gear was stored in trunks, but we also had small cubbyholes for uniforms.

One of my strong reminiscences of Junior Camp involves a production of *The Wizard of Oz*. A former camper had come back
for a part of the summer to help campers prepare the show in the camp rec hall. Who was he? Tom Lehrer, the satirical songwriter and performer. He quickly became my childhood idol. I could lip-sync everyone one of his songs, and I still have the 10” (not the standard 12”) LP album with his autograph on it. Maybe it is a collector’s item now.

I was later glad to introduce my three children to his songs. In fact, when my daughter, Halee, was in the fourth grade in East Greenwich, she could sing “The Elements” song, listing all of the elements to the Gilbert and Sullivan tune, “The Very Model of a Modern Major General,” from *Pirates of Penzance*. She was always dying for a teacher to ask her class if anyone could name a chemical element. She could not only name but also sing all of them! She never got the chance to perform in front of her class, but she would often sing with her older brother, Seth, when entertaining our family. When Seth was a senior at Wheeler School, he satisfied a music requirement by giving a concert, which consisted of about 14 Tom Lehrer songs.

Golf was another clear memory of Junior Camp. I was one of the few campers who attempted to play it. This meant hitting little plastic golf balls in a designated area near the infirmary, where they would not carry too far away.

One day we were told that we would have a special treat – playing on a real golf course. I was intrigued. We were going to play at a

**Skunk Cabin, 1961:**
Jeff [top row at left] with Uncle Boris Dmitrieff
county club near the capital, at the Augusta County Club. I thought to myself, “Wow, this is where they play that big tournament!” Sub-consciously, however, I was not terribly impressed with the place. I failed to understand what was so special about it.

It was not until many years later, when in my early 20s, that I realized that Augusta County Club in Maine is a far cry from the Augusta National Country Club in Georgia. What was I supposed to know as a 10-year-old? I haven’t played golf since then.

I had a bunkmate, Danny Held, who would regale us with stories about Dracula and Frankenstein. These were really scary when hearing them for the first time. Of course, these stories were only told at night, inside the cabin, after the lights were out. I wondered how this kid knew all about these characters.

I recall a trip where we slept out overnight at Kennebunk Beach. The water was so cold that we saw seals that had come ashore during the night. That same night, one of the campers managed to roll out of his sleeping bag. He ended up sleeping in the sand, and his sleeping bag was washed out to sea. It was a good thing for him that we spent only one night on the beach. When I hear someone talk about Kennebunk, I do not think of the Bush family’s summer hangout.

Each year a panoramic photograph about 18 inches long by seven inches high was taken of the entire Junior Camp. You may have seen the special panorama cameras that would track over 100 degrees on a pivot to capture a large group. One camper would have a special assignment. Starting on the group’s far left, he would run to the center after his picture was taken to be captured once again, then continue running to the far right to be captured a third time. I also recall that the photographer would place his lit cigarette in his ear (lit end out, of course) as a placeholder to capture our attention and encourage us to focus on the camera, as it would focus on us.

Junior Camp had an extensive waterfront and a beach, which boasted a small fleet of rowboats. There were also a dock and a designated swimming area marked off by small floats and ropes. Twice a week, instead of showering, we would take a bath in the lake with soap – whether we needed it or not. There was a premium on
having Ivory soap because it floated.

My favorite activity at Junior Camp was archery. Although I welcomed the challenge to shoot an arrow into a red bull’s-eye, the moments of success were rare.

**Senior Camp**

From the shores of Junior Camp one could see across to Senior Camp, which was located on an island. Originally called Sans Souci, it was renamed Androscoggin Island, but we at the Senior Camp affectionately referred to it as “The Rock,” and I definitely do mean affectionately. It bore no resemblance to Alcatraz.

The island was at least a half-mile from shore, and campers and guests would reach it via a Higgins craft, literally an “LCVP” (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) from World War II. Sometimes whaleboats were used. I did not recall if the whaleboats had their own power or whether they were towed by Higgins craft.

For me, Senior Camp had a special feel and aura about it. I think that part of that feeling was derived from being on an island, with no one else around. It certainly made for a unique experience. Some kids at other camps may feel like they are on an island, but ours was literally an island. I loved it. The allure was created by the physical aspects of the camp and some of the personalities who served there.

The bunkhouses were rustic. There was no electricity. The entrance to each cabin consisted of swinging screen doors. Instead of windows, there were screens. Wooden shutters could be pulled down with a small cord, but a cabin would become very dark. Yet, you could sometimes see through a cabin’s sides, where boards might not fit squarely. A bathhouse with toilets and showers was located at either end of Senior Camp.

My younger sister, Cathy, went to two overnight camps in Maine, Vega and Somerset. Compared to Androscoggin’s Senior Camp, hers were like palaces.

All the bunkhouses were named after animals – Lion, Tiger, Skunk, Aardvark, and even Hellgrammite. The latter is some kind of fishing bait. That was certainly a name that stuck with me!
I recall that one summer I was assigned to Skunk Bunk. That was a special summer, in that we were the only cabin without a resident counselor. We all got along very well. As evidence of our cooperation, we often won the “cleanest cabin” award during weekly inspections. Of course we had been instructed how to make a bed with properly folded hospital corners.

Because we were on an island, there was no place to go during a storm. We just had to hunker down in our bunks. I remember when big rains came, the small depressions on the dirt paths would fill with water, and with pine needles floating on top of the pools, it was hard to avoid or identify where the really wet spots would be.

One summer there was a large lighting strike that hit one of the largest trees on the island. The electric charge traveled down the trunk, then along its roots, and underneath one of the cabins. The six occupants were all temporarily stunned by the lightning charge.

**Favorite Activities and Staff**

Senior Camp had the usual activities of swimming, sailing, canoeing, baseball, and basketball. We also competed in soccer with such neighboring Jewish camps as Winnebago and Kennebeck.

One of my favorite activities was tennis, even though I didn’t think that I played well enough. The head tennis instructor, Francis Soyka, was legendary. His given name was Frantisek Sojka, and he, a Jew, began playing on Czechoslovakia’s Davis Cup team in 1927. When I was at Senior Camp, Francis had to be in his seventies or eighties. By positioning himself in the middle of the baseline, he never had to move much. Of course, at his age, he never moved too quickly, but he still had amazing hands and racquet control. He wore long white pants, a long-sleeved white shirt, and a white tennis hat. He barked out instructions and encouragement in his heavily accented English.

All of Senior Camp’s counselors were referred to as “uncle,” and one of “Uncle Francis’s” most endearing qualities was his artwork. He made very charming pen-and-ink drawings and watercolor paintings of camp life. They were so amusing that they made him an even more colorful character, literally and figuratively.
Personalities like Francis, who were mainstays at Senior Camp, enjoyed very special senior status – their own lodgings. These enhanced the personalities’ aura and the aura of “The Rock.”

Another of my favorite activities was riflery. As with archery at Junior Camp, I liked the challenge and instant gratification of hitting a target. I also had some weird attraction to the lingering smell of gunpowder.

But I also liked volleyball. I remember an instructor from Hong Kong.

I also remember Senior Camp’s head counselor during perhaps my last season. He was Stephen Hassenfeld, a longtime camper, who was nearly seven years older than his brother, Alan. I liked Steve and thought he was a good counselor.

My Big Brother

The first time I arrived at Senior Camp, I was assigned a “big brother.” Stan was three years older than I, and he helped with my transition. Even at 17, he was a bear of a man.

Stan was an outstanding swimmer. When we had competitions against other camps or during Color War – he would dive into the lake, take a few quick, powerful strokes, and reach the other end of the swim area. It seemed that no one would ever catch him. No one ever did! At least not at camp.

It was quite coincidental, several years later, when Stan and I discovered each other at Princeton. I had only begun my freshman year, and he was already a senior. Once again he became my big brother. He helped my transition into college life by inviting me to several social events at his eating club. I have always been so grateful for his friendship. Tragically, Stan died at a relatively young age.

Camping beyond Camp

Senior Camp focused a lot on actual camping. Every summer each age group would take a trip, which often featured both hiking and canoeing. As we got older, the trips became longer and more challenging. During my tenure, we managed to cover a lot of Maine on various trips. I found the true camping experience played

Notes
an important role in my formative years.

With the passage of time, however, the “camping experience” became much romanticized. It’s easy to forget about black flies and mosquitoes. If I honestly reflect on these trips, I can recall the tremendous effort it took to hike up and down hills, through the woods in the heat, and carrying a 35-pound pack and other equipment. There was incessant moaning and complaining by all as we all trudged through a forest.

I preferred canoeing to hiking. At least with canoeing, it was far easier to rest.

I do remember, however, that paddling on some long trips was not always easy or enjoyable. My arms were not that strong, and I would get occasional blisters from the paddle. It was a strain. However, the worst parts of trips seemed to quickly fade from memory. Given the traditions established over many years, one would know which trip to expect the following summer. Each would be longer and more challenging. I could not wait to have a new experience get underway. Not only could I meet the challenges of hiking and paddling, but also I gained self-confidence and a strong sense of accomplishment.

Camping also encouraged teamwork. I might not have been the greatest camper, but we all gathered wood, built fires, pitched and stowed tents. We got to do some cooking and would wash our dishes in a stream or lake. If soap or S.O.S. (steel-wool pads) were not readily available, a gritty riverbed would help remove food remnants.

Camping not only gave me confidence to survive in the wild, but also instilled in me a love of nature and the great outdoors. This is not something you can just imagine; you have to have the
There is something very special about awakening at first light and seeing a lake that is mirror-smooth. You can actually hear the silence, except when interrupted by the mournful cry of a loon.

**Horse Marines and Allagash**

The group for the most senior campers was known as the “Horse Marines.” I have no idea where that name came from. Instead of having a typical bunk of only five or six campers, the Horse Marines slept in a one very large cabin. Maybe it would accommodate more than 20 of us. We enjoyed elite status.

The big event for Horse Marines was a special camping trip to the Allagash. Anyone who knows about the wilds of Maine knows that this trip does not have a lot of easy access. The trip, lasting 13 days and covering over 150 miles, ended at Allagash City, not far from the Canadian border. The craft of choice was a 17-foot Grumman canoe. It was close to indestructible, built by the same people who built airplanes. It was the very type of canoe that I eventually purchased some 10 year later.

The highlight of the Allagash trip was the Chase Rapids, which covers an eight-mile stretch of Class I to III rapids. The rapids were not that challenging, but the water ran quickly, and it was exhilarating maneuvering through the surging water. We had learned to read the river. If one bank was high and one was low, you generally wanted to stay to the high side, where the water was likely deeper.

We also learned to “shoot the V.” As water rushes around a submerged rock, it forms a “V” in a river. If there is second submerged rock nearby, it also forms a “V.” Then, where those two “Vs” converge, another inverse “V” will form. That is the spot to aim for, which should hopefully be free of submerged rocks.

Often the boat would move too swiftly for the bowman to shout out to the man in the stern which way to go. The person in the bow just had to react and direct the canoe along the ideal path. After some time, great communication developed between the paddlers, who can read each other’s actions without having to verbalize what to do. This was teamwork at its best!

I remember that we encountered some lumberjacks, who
had come down from Canada. I was the only one in our group fluent enough to communicate with them in French. The encounter was notable only because they were the only other people we saw for almost two weeks.

I was relieved that the Allagash trip was exclusively paddling because I had far more problems with hiking. It was great to experience the rapids then, but I am not necessarily ready to do so now.

The Allagash was a great precursor and trainer for what I would experience right before my college graduation, when my best friend and I rented a canoe and did about 50 miles on the Upper Delaware in three days. We hit mostly Class I to III rapids. The highlight was Skinners Falls, which our map rated as Class VI. It was definitely challenging. At one point, we were required to shoot the falls, which took about 12 seconds. Though very exhilarating, it was not something that I am anxious to repeat!

Town, Letters, and Visits

From the “The Rock” we occasionally took the Higgins craft to the Wayne boat landing and then walked into town, which was about 500 yards from the pier. A trip to town was always a great and special adventure.

On the way into town, we would pass a sign that offered “night crawlers” for sale. At first, I had no idea what a night crawler was. I later discovered these were large worms used for bait. I thought that Nightcrawler might make a great name for a camp bunk, but it would compete with Hellgrammite.

Beautiful downtown Wayne consisted of three commercial buildings – a post office, a gas station, and the Wayne General Store. The store was about half the size of a standard 7-Eleven store. We went only to the front to buy ice cream treats and penny candy.

Probably like kids at most camps, we were required to write a letter home twice a week, and a letter became our admission ticket to dinner on designated letter-writing days. I was very diligent in sending correspondence home.

But one letter I wrote was especially memorable. Parents’ visiting day was usually scheduled about midway through the season,
and I truly wanted my folks to know how much I appreciated the opportunity to go to camp and how much I would enjoy seeing them. Perhaps I was a bit too diligent because one summer I wrote them a letter telling them how much I truly enjoyed their visit, but I mailed it before their arrival. Of course my parents received the letter before they left Providence. My mother joked that she and my father were almost tempted not to come because it was already such a nice visit.

Meals and Cheers

The camp had a large dining room that would accommodate the entire camp. There were round tables, and campers were assigned to specific tables, but we rotated frequently.

At each meal a camper designated as a server would go up to the front of the hall to retrieve a tray with food for the entire table. The food was typical camp fare – not great and not awful.

I do recall one meal served with corn, the next served with peas, and the third was a combination of corn and peas. I concluded that the cook had merely mixed the leftovers to provide the vegetables for the third meal. However, I remember discovering a large can in the kitchen that was labeled “corn and peas.”

Alas, the chef missed out on a great opportunity. He should have served the mixture first, and then left us all in awe by imagining that he had taken the time to separate the peas from the corn. Now that would have left all us wondering!

There was one meal each summer when a menu on a six-foot piece of construction paper was posted at the front of the mess hall. The menu consisted of dishes using campers’ names. For example, I was always represented by BROWN rice or BROWNed
potatoes. My friend Richard LEAF always found himself in a salad dish. I need not tell you about Peter HAMBURGER.

During meals, some of the tables would spontaneously break out with a cheer. Each camping trip had its own particular cheer, and it would usually be sung out when a group returned from a trip. Some cheers would promote one of the “Color War” teams – either Orange or Black.

I also remember one of the cheers that was a bit weird:

Izzy, Jakey, Mikey, Sam,
We’re the boys that eat no ham.
Gefilte fish is our dish.
Hoykel, shmoykel, poykel.

Well, that cheer should leave little doubt that Androscoggin was a Jewish camp.

**Color War and Hoy Night**

Like many camps, we had “Color War,” but it was a much larger part of our camp experience than at many others. Elsewhere, it may have lasted only a few days. Color War at Androscoggin seemed to last weeks.

There was a championship for each age group in each regular activity. Not only were there tennis matches and baseball games, but also matches in Ping-Pong and horseshoes.

The mess hall had a very large tote board at one end, which spanned the entire wall. The tote board had gradations to note the points for the Orange and Black teams. A little wooden canoe was used as a marker to note the total points. It seemed that the scores were always close, and the final tally was not revealed until the last night of camp.

This last night, known as “Hoy Night,” was a major celebration. I have no clue as to the name’s etymology. The highlight of Hoy Night, however, was igniting a fire, which consumed a giant tower.

It was built over several days from tiers of logs placed perpendicularly to one another. The bottom logs were typically 20
inches or more in thickness and had to be hauled by a tractor to be put in place. The structure easily soared to 25 or 30 feet. The inside of the tower was filled with scrap wood gathered from around the island. I am not sure what else went into the fire.

Often something would be sacrificed on the fire. No- not a human- but a notable sacrifice. One summer a sailboat, having out-lived its usefulness, found its way onto the fire. It was placed about 12 feet above the ground, and a mannequin was placed at its helm.

The fire tower was built in front of a natural hill, where the camp would assemble to watch it being lit. I remember being told that the fire was visible for over 20 miles.

We certainly did not want to venture too close because of its intense heat. Yet, it was always an honor to be chosen to ignite the “Hoy Night” fire. I have never seen a manmade fire that rivaled it.

New Owners

In 1964 Stanley and Barbara Hirsch purchased Junior Camp from Pat Wack’s widow. By 1972, Boris Demitrioff, a gentile with a larger-than-life personality, decided that he would no longer direct Senior Camp. So a year later, the Hirschs decided to begin expanding the “mainland” camp to include ages 8 to 15. Later, the dining hall on “The Rock” did burn down, but, contrary to rumors, it was not the reason why Senior Camp closed. Eventually, the Hirschs’ son and daughter-in-law, Peter and Roberta, purchased Androscoggin, and they still operate it. I have not visited the new camp configuration because it would not mean the same for me.

A Unique Spirit

How fortunate I had been to attend both Androscoggins! There was a unique spirit that I cannot fully describe, a spirit that would be very hard to replicate anywhere. The camp was special because of the people, because of the trips, because of Color War, and particularly because of the island.

Barbara also developed a love of nature and camping over many summers spent at Cardinal, a girls’ camp in Ohio. This was not a Jewish camp, but one more upscale than Androscoggin. It featured
horseback riding and luxurious cabins.

During the early 1970s, before Senior Camp was relocated to the mainland, I took Barbara, my future wife, to see it. In 1974 and 1975, Barbara and I took weeklong canoe trips in Canadian provincial parks. We would never see another boat. I switched from a traditional bow-paddler to an accomplished stern-paddler position, using a fine “J”-stroke to keep the canoe on course. I also felt totally in control when managing all the camping chores that I had once observed others performing. I even managed to portage our canoe by myself when on a half-mile path.

I will not try to romanticize that experience, however. It was not easy, but once again I did derive some satisfaction knowing that I was up to the challenge.

Camping can challenge a relationship, for there is always some difficulty or unexpected event that you have to somehow address and manage. If you get along in the woods, then you really get along. We were in the middle of nowhere and had to totally rely on ourselves.

Recently, Barbara and I returned to Maine with our kayaks to stay at a timeshare on the Damariscotta River. Our hotel was built on the very spot where, I could recall from some 55 years earlier, our Senior Camp group had beached canoes along the shore.

I remembered the spot so vividly because we 13 kids were going to attempt to camp out on a small island near Damariscotta, but its conical shape was not conducive. We would have all rolled into the river. There was also some threatening weather. The counselors made the strategic decision to come to shore where it would be safer.

We hiked up a road to a nearby motel, where all 13 of us, positioned head-to-toe on the floor, shared one room. The counselors got the beds. This was my only camping trip when I enjoyed flush toilets and hot, running water. That memory stayed with me. Today, that little island where we kids and counselors had tried to camp is totally overgrown with tall trees. I could not imagine anybody trying to camp there. I guess we could not imagine it 55 years ago, either.
Our children attended summer camps. Unfortunately, they did not become as enamored or inspired as the two of us.

Yet, Barbara and I continue to enjoy the outdoors. We have an armada in our front yard, consisting of three kayaks and a canoe. The canoe gets no use now because it is too hard to lift atop a car. The kayaks get good use because we usually manage 10 to 15 outings each summer, exploring local waterways with an occasional trip to Maine. We no longer go camping, but I still have fond memories of my camping experiences, all inspired by my summers spent on and off “The Rock.”

author kayaking
in Providence, 2019
Bison Cabin, 1961:
Alan [third from left] next to
Uncle Francis Soyka
Androscoggin and Beyond:
An Interview with Alan Hassenfeld

As Jeff Brown mentioned, Alan was one of his childhood friends and classmates. These exact contemporaries also enjoyed spending many summers together at Camp Androscoggin. Based on the following interview (which I conducted on August 8, 2019), it may be surprising how many of the same experiences and still others they remember.

Alan’s success in the business world is widely known. Soon after college, he began working at Hasbro, the business founded in 1923 by his grandfather, Henry, and his great-uncles, Hillel and Herman. (Indeed, the company’s name is derived from Hassenfeld Brothers.) Alan’s older brother, Stephen, succeeded their father, Merrill, as Hasbro’s president in 1974. Six years later, Stephen became chairman and chief executive officer. By the time Stephen died in 1989, Hasbro, based in Pawtucket, had become one of the world’s leading toy manufacturers.

Alan, who began working at Hasbro soon after college, became vice president of marketing and sales in 1978. In 1984 he became president and, following Stephen, chairman and chief executive officer. Under Alan’s leadership, Hasbro continued its world leadership. He retired in 2003.

All three Hassenfelds have been inducted into the Toy Industry Hall of Fame: Merrill in 1985 (in the first class), Stephen in 1991, and Alan in 1994. Both Stephen and Alan as well as their sister, Ellen Block, have also perpetuated their parents’ leadership of countless Jewish and other philanthropies. The family’s gifts to hospitals in Rhode Island and New York as well as Brandeis University may be only the best known, however. Sadly, it may be forgotten that during the 1950s Sylvia served as Rhode Island’s second national chairwoman of United Jewish Appeal (following Selma Pilavin). Beginning in 1988, Sylvia served as the first woman president of the Joint Distribution Committee.

Although quite modest about his personal and family’s accomplishments, Alan too has helped lead numerous national and international philanthropies. No doubt one of the most significant
is the Jerusalem Foundation. In honor of his commitment to social justice, he has received honorary doctorates from Bryant, Roger Williams, and Johnson & Wales Universities.

It is probably unfair to attribute his love of the outdoors solely to Androscoggin, but Alan and his wife, Vivien, have made their homes in Bristol, Rhode Island, and Fisher Island, Florida.


G: Alan, did your parents, Merrill and Sylvia, go to summer camps?

H: I don’t know about my mother. I know my dad did. He always talked about Camp Modin, a Jewish camp in Maine. A lot of kids from Rhode Island went there.

G: How did your family learn about Androscoggin?

H: I’m not sure how my older brother, Stephen, knew about it. There was a group of Jewish boys’ camps that everybody talked about: Androscoggin, Kennebec, Winnebago, and Takajo. My cousin, Robbie Mann, went to Takajo. I don’t know much about Alton in New Hampshire, but my friend, Steve Logowitz, went there. These were all great camps.

Jewish girls went to Fernwood, Somerset, and Vega. My older sister, Ellie, went to Fernwood and adored it. She sent her daughters there, and they adored it. Ellie’s two granddaughters, Susie’s kids, also went to Fernwood.

G: Did you go to a camp before Androscoggin?

H: I had asthmatic hay fever growing up, so when I was four or five, I was sent to Dr. Utter’s Cragged Mountain Farm in
New Hampshire. He was a pediatrician from Rhode Island. I was there one or two summers. Then I followed my brother, who was seven years older than I, to Androscoggin. No doubt he happily recommended it. He was the senior counselor for one or two summers. Stephen was an all-around athlete.

G: Had you gone to Camp JORI?

H: No. Androscoggin had two camps: Junior and Senior. I probably began attending Junior Camp at age six, in 1954, and continued until I was 10 or 11. Senior Camp was on an island, which the director, known as “Chief,” set up. It was hardcore. There were no bathrooms or showers in the bunkhouses.

I enjoyed baseball and soccer, and I was a good swimmer, but not a competitive one. I was the member of my family most focused on tennis. Having taken lessons since I was six or seven, I was a serious player. I took lessons in Rhode Island with a group of friends from Moses Brown, which included Jeff Brown, Hugh Carson, and John Bloom. Jeff and John also went to Androscoggin.

I entered Moses Brown in kindergarten but left after eighth grade to enter Deerfield Academy. Stephen graduated from MB. I went to Deerfield because I think that my parents wanted to be empty nesters.

G: Did you enjoy Androscoggin right from the start?

H: Yes, I enjoyed most of it. I didn’t love arts and crafts as much as I loved tennis, softball, baseball, riflery, archery, canoeing, and the trips. Everything was great. I loved it.

Many kids may have felt homesick at first, but I had gone to Cragged Mountain Farm. My health had improved, but I still had to get shots once a week. My health never slowed me down.

My first year at Junior Camp I lived in a bunk called Papoose.

G: Did you have buddies who went with you to Androscoggin year after year?
H: Some of my best friendships were formed at camp. I have lost contact with most of these kids, but I’m still in touch with a few: Tommy Gutner and Jimmy Hartman from Scarsdale and Bobby Mann from Philadelphia. I have only the fondest memories of incredible experiences.

There was something called the Kennebec Invitational Tennis Tournament. Two of us campers went there with a counselor and stayed overnight. I went farther in the competition, so I stayed a second night. I played Bobby Einhorn of Takajo and Ray Levy of Winnebago, a big guy. A lot of us were reunited when we went to Penn.

G: Why did so many kids go there?

H: It was a great school. Would I get in today? Maybe, because I really liked to play squash. I was on the team. I had learned how to play at Deerfield. Because of my tennis upbringing, it was an easy transition. I ended up going pretty far during my first year at Penn.

G: How far?

H: I was number nine for men under 18 years in the country.

G: Did you continue?

H: I ended up leaving Penn during my sophomore year and spending six months in the Air National Guard. I was sent to Texas and Colorado. Then I went back to school and came down with mononucleosis, so I had to take the rest of the year off. When I returned to Penn, I got back involved with squash, but then I had a couple of injuries. I had rehabbed twice, but couldn’t go through it again.

G: Is it true that you have gone to several Androscoggin reunions?
H: Yes. As we progress along that line of life, it’s important not to forget those things that were instrumental in helping shape our character.

There’s the story about naming five people who most influenced you. Many people say their father, but they don’t talk about President Kennedy or a governor. They talk more about teachers or counselors.

I can name my first, second, third, and fourth grade teachers at Moses Brown. I can also name my drill instructor in basic training.

Is one of these key people associated with Androscoggin? Definitely, but probably not somebody I could name. It was the whole experience.

One key person at senior camp was Francis Soyka, the tennis coach. He was a Czech Davis cup player. He knew I was good, and he pushed me. If I didn’t run fast enough, he would say, “Hassenfeld, you’re like a pregnant elephant.” The person who replaced him was Lee Teitelbaum. Both were from New Orleans.

In addition to a lot of kids from Boston and New York, there were many kids from Baltimore. For example, the Meyerhoffs and Richard Pearlstone. There was also a group from New Orleans. It was a very diverse group. You had no choice but to bond.

Remember that there was something for everyone at Androscoggin. The arts or theatre, for example. I didn’t spend much time sailing, but there was a group of great sailors.

G: Have you been to more than one reunion?

H: Yes, there was a group that got together in Central Park. It was set up by Stanley and Barbara Hirsch, the new owners. It was leading up to the centennial celebration. I went back for it in 2007.

I remember that the way you got to senior camp was by Higgins craft, a converted PT boat. “Chief,” the director, was very active in shaping character because I remember stories about campers who had served in the military during World War II, but had passed away. “Chief” and then the next owner, Boris Dmitrieff, very much
wanted to build character, which was a central part of the Androscoggin experience.

G: Does “character” mean courage?

H: It means caring for other people and appreciation for America. There was nothing Jewish about the camp.

G: Do you remember any prayers?

H: Yes, “Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub.” Also, “Yeah, God.” I also remember having big round tables in the mess hall.

Jeff Brown was leaner than I was, so he wouldn’t remember, but they weighed you twice a week. I wasn’t fat, but there were times when they put me at the “fat boys” table. It was OK.

G: That sounds cruel.

H: No, it wasn’t. It was a game. Sometimes we learned new words that had four letters. Then at the first night back home, you said things that you shouldn’t have.

G: Did you have a speaking role at the centennial celebration?

H: Not really. There was more of a doing role. We did things that we had done at camp. For example, there was something called “Message to Garcia,” which we did during Color War. To win, somebody had to memorize the message and then recite it. It was wonderful.

G: As much as you loved Androscoggin, were there also things you didn’t like or even hated?

H: I really didn’t like rainy days.
G: Did anybody ever get in a fight or get sent home?

H: To the best of my knowledge, no. It wasn’t that way. You looked out for your bunkmates— for one another. I don’t remember any bullying. Because of Color War, it was much more about helping the “newbies,” the first-year kids on the island. You couldn’t allow for bullying.

I was a lieutenant all the way through. This meant that I led my age group during Color War. There was one for the Blacks, one for the Oranges. And each side had its own captain. I was a captain for my junior and senior years. Don’t ask me if we won or lost. I think that we won one and lost the other.

G: But you enjoyed leadership roles?

H: Very much so.

G: Did these roles have an impact later in your life? In the business world, for example?

H: They had some impact on my experience in basic training in the Air Force Reserve, for example. It was one of those character-building experiences, which also reflected the diversity of the country.

Many years after I went to Androscoggin, there was more diversity there. For instance, the camp twinned with Seeds of Peace, which brought Jewish and Palestinian kids together.

G: Did you have any role in that endeavor?

H: Giving, only. There are scholarships that I give to. From what I gather, Androscoggin is still a glorious experience.

I was more fortunate than most campers because I sucked everything I could out of Androscoggin. Whatever I could learn, I learned. I remember receiving the Lone Pine Award and the Roderheimer Award. I was especially proud of the Lone Pine because it was for camp spirit.
I don’t remember Junior Camp so well, but Senior Camp was so completely different. We would go out for two weeks on “The Allagash.” You were eating Dinty Moore stew and PB & J. You were canoeing and portaging canoes for miles. There was nothing easy. We slept under the canoes wearing ponchos. You learned how little things, like mosquitoes, could cause havoc. We had great counselors.

G: Was “The Allagash” too hard for some kids?

H: If it was or they weren’t healthy enough, then they did something else.

I remember one year that somebody from Kennebec, who was a great swimmer, drowned. I think that we had a young kid, who was overweight and had had a heart incident. He may have died.

The trips were so character-building. You had to cook together, pick berries together, and set up tents together.

There was one thing I hated—mosquitoes. At dawn and dusk they caused havoc. If it was raining, it was also miserable.

G: Did you become a counselor?

H: No. One year after camp, probably in 1965, I went with Bobby Mann and Mark Katz, who were from Philadelphia, to a school in Aix-en-Provence. The next summer I went on the Experiment in International Living to Australia. It lasted more than the summer.

G: What did you do there?

H: You lived with a family. Our summer was their winter. Rather than going to school, I worked with children and adults who were mentally challenged. It was great. I also picked grapes because I was in wine country.

G: Where?

H: It was in Victoria, right next to the Outback. I loved it.
But if I had to go to my family’s outhouse in the middle of the night, then you learned to do it too.

I’m still in touch with the Experiment. I tried to reunite some of my fellow Experimenters who went to Australia. Androscoggin was a steppingstone for that experience, at least physically. In terms of character-building, it was absolutely.

G: You weren’t able to be a counselor at Androscoggin while you were in college?

H: No, because during the summer before my sophomore year, I was taking extra courses at Penn. Then I moved on.

G: Do you think that Androscoggin was a Jewish camp because its emphasis on physical fitness and rigor sought to overcome a Jewish stereotype of nerdiness?

H: No. But I now remember that being in Cub Scouts, in Providence, had a Jewish dimension. Jeff Brown and I were in the same pack, and we met at his home at 41 Wingate. His parents were Bette and Howard. She was the pack leader. Steve Logowitz was also a member. Billy Cole might have been part of it too. I didn’t go on to Boy Scouts, but these were good days.

Remember, I left Moses Brown at a very formative time in my life and had to settle into something totally different at Deerfield. Only about four out of 600 students were Jews.

Was there anti-Semitism? Most kids had never met a Jew. In the beginning, if a kid was overly sensitive, he might have experienced anti-Semitism. But I wasn’t overly sensitive. You dish it back. I was accepted immediately.

G: Because you were a star athlete?

H: No, I really wasn’t at Deerfield. There were kids much more talented than I. Two of my contemporaries, Hugh Curry and Luis Glass, were among the top three tennis players nationally who
were 18 years or younger. Oh, yeah, I got my comeuppance. I may have been ranked high in New England.

G: Was Deerfield a positive experience overall compared to Androscoggin?

H: Each in its own right was a game changer for me. Each was a character-builder. I can’t compare the two, but both were great experiences.

G: Did you have some fun at Deerfield?

H: I loved Deerfield.

G: It wasn’t an ordeal?

H: No. You make out of every situation what you want to make out of it. Was basic training in the Air Force an ordeal? Absolutely. But it was still character-building, at least when you look back.

G: That’s a pretty optimistic spin. You could have suffered greatly and still made it through.

H: No, sorry. The glass is always at least half full for me.

G: Most likely, your parents were very happy with the way that you grew at Androscoggin.

H: I hope so. They were proud.

G: Do you remember dances with girls’ camps?

H: Absolutely, during Senior Camp. I even remember the names of some girls. I had a girlfriend at Somerset, Lori Goldman from Philadelphia. I had another from New York at Vega, Alice Ramos. How do I remember these things? They were vignettes.
G: Obviously, the best of Androscoggin has lasted your entire adult life.

H: When I went to the centennial celebration, I took a canoe out and went over to the island where Senior Camp had been located. It's mostly weeds now. The lighthouse is now in disrepair, and the bunks are gone.

Was it Rimbaud or Baudelaire who wrote a poem called *Le Lac*? No, it was de Lamartine. Two lovers were holding hands and going out on a lake on a moonlit night. One of them came back to the lake many years later and felt how eerie it was. The trees and the wind rustling though the leaves were the same, but time had passed him by.

So I am a person who does not look back. The past is the past. If you want to create the future, live in the present. I don’t look back.

G: It wasn’t a sad experience looking around the island?

H: Yes, it was. But I only have the fondest memories of those days at Androscoggin.
Janet and Mel, 1988
Pesach in Ireland, 1978

Melvin L. Zurier

Mel has helped lead our Association for far longer than anybody can remember. Indeed, he joined the board in 1964, when in his mid-thirties. Although Mel became an honorary board member two decades later, he has continued to offer warm friendship and wise counsel. For example, he has helped define and sustain our relationship with Jewish Federation and then the Alliance.

But Mel’s deep involvement with the Association stems from a simple fact: he’s a natural storyteller. This Providence native has been blessed with a keen eye, a sharp wit, and an amazing memory.

Mel wrote his first article for *The Notes* in 1965, when he portrayed Isaac Moses, a perpetual political candidate who won only one race, for State Senate, in 1932. Of course Mel remembered hearing Moses speak in 1948, when both men attended the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia.

As a leading Rhode Island attorney, it was also natural for Mel to write two articles during the early 1970s about “How Jewish Parties Fared in the Rhode Island Supreme Court.” With his friend and colleague, Jeremiah Gorin, he also compiled a key reference tool, a list of the state’s Jewish lawyers who died before 1997. As soon as I began my editorship of *The Notes*, Mel urged me to recruit a writer who could not only update this list but place it within a larger and livelier context. Unfortunately, this has not yet happened, so Mel and I recently recorded several oral history interviews, in which he reflected on generations of Jewish lawyers.

My favorite of Mel’s articles for our journal has nothing to do with the Rhode Island Bar, however. In 1981, he wrote “My Cousin, Mark Twain,” which portrays his quite distant relative, Ossip Gabrilowitsch, who in 1909 married Twain’s daughter, Clara Clemons.

In 2010, Jerry Foster wrote an extensive biographical sketch about Mel, her dear friend. She mentioned that, beginning in college, he has enjoyed writing a journal. Many entries portray his extensive travels. The following article, written in 1978, is one colorful example.
Several weeks ago, when Janet and I were planning a trip to Ireland and had already made our reservations, I woke up to the fact that we were not due to return home to Providence until Saturday, April 22. I realized that Friday evening, April 21 was the night of the first seder. Pesach in Ireland?

Travel Plans

Our itinerary called for us to leave from Shannon Airport on Saturday morning, after spending the last night at Ashford Castle, in the western part of the country. At this point, I thought it might be in order to write to Gerald Goldberg, The Right Worshipful Lord Mayor of Cork, who had been in the United States around St. Patrick’s Day on a good will tour.

I had read an article about Goldberg’s visit to Mayor Ed Koch of New York in an article in The New York Times. It indicated that Goldberg was a devout Jew, whose parents were immigrants to Ireland from Lithuania, and who was something of a curiosity by reason of his being Lord Mayor. He also indicated a sense of humor by offering to find a wife for Mayor Koch (a bachelor), should he ever make a trip to Ireland.

I wrote to Goldberg, a complete stranger, indicating Janet and I would be most interested in finding a Jewish home in Ireland for our last night there with the thought he might be in a position to recommend someone. To my delight, he responded very promptly, indicating that he and wife would be glad to have us as their guests for the seder. In the same letter, he mentioned that his father and uncle were bochurim (students) at the Vilna Yeshiva. He further said he was a mithnagged – a term that sent me immediately to all of our Jewish encyclopedias at home. (Apparently, it means a fulfillment of Lithuanian rabbinic tradition.) His letter also stated that his seder service was strictly Lithuanian – complete with all the Lithuanian nigunim – again back to the encyclopedia. (It means melodies.)

Upon our arrival in Ireland, I contacted Mr. Goldberg at home and informed him where we would be staying our last night. (We had changed our reservations from Ashford Castle to the Imperial Hotel in Cork so as to be available for the seder.) He asked us to
drop in on him at the City Hall when in Cork the following day, on our way to Dublin, for further instructions.

The Lord Mayor, His Office, and His Duties

On Monday, April 17, Janet and I visited Mayor Goldberg at Cork City Hall. We found him to be a most gracious person. He is tall and dignified. He spent more than an hour with us over tea and, in fact, I had to tell him that he had too busy a schedule to spend more time with us. His story was most interesting.

Mayor Goldberg is an attorney – solicitor – not a barrister (who goes to court). He trained at University College, Cork. A native of Cork, he was born in 1912. He has three sons who are attorneys—one of them now living in the United States, working as an executive with an insurance company. Another son, no longer practicing law, is an artist in Dublin. The third son is practicing law in England.

When I asked the Lord Mayor how his family came to Ireland, he told a story that was fascinating, although not unique in the annals of Jewish immigration. His father, Louis, came from a village outside of Vilna in Lithuania. Around age 14 (this would have been about 1882), when threatened with conscription in the imperial Russian army, he deserted, got on a ship in Riga, Latvia, and thought he was headed for Boston. The ship landed at Cork, where he was put off and told that the United States was “the next parish across the Atlantic” - a popular phrase in Ireland.

At this point, the Lord Mayor’s father, without funds, not knowing the language, and a thoroughly frightened kosher boy– set out with a tin cup and a strong will. He walked the more than 150 miles from Cork to Dublin, where he borrowed two pounds and became a “pack man,” meaning a door-to-door merchant. He traveled all over Ireland and wound up in the “you only pay $1 a week” category, selling his wares to farmers and housewives.

When he was 21, he met Rachel, a young lady also from Lithuania, whose family had come to Limerick in more or less the same manner. He became engaged to her, and when she was 17 they were wed (in 1891). In the meanwhile, having saved his money, he brought over his parents and other relatives as well to Limerick.
Mayor Goldberg showed us his father’s naturalization certificate from 1902. At this time he proudly became a subject of his Majesty King Edward VII of Great Britain, son of Queen Victoria. Mayor Goldberg told us that he acquired his father’s naturalization certificate (now proudly framed in his office) on his father’s deathbed.

As indicated, Lord Mayor Goldberg is an attorney. Having been born in Cork, he has practiced there all of his life. Originally an independent, he was elected an alderman in 1967. He later joined Fianna Fáil, the political party of the late Éamon de Valera. The present prime minister of Ireland, Jack Lynch, is a close friend and studied law with one of Goldberg’s sons.

The position of Lord Mayor is an honorary one and largely ceremonial. Fellow members of the City Council choose him. (Cork has a city manager who is actually the executive operating the day-to-day affairs of government.) By tradition, the Lord Mayor does not succeed himself.

Goldberg had been in the City Council for a decade before his election as Lord Mayor. He says that although he has retired from law practice, he is in his office seven days a week. In the performance of his duties, he has traveled frequently to England, to Europe (because Ireland is a member of the Common Market), and to the United States.

The Lord Mayor mentioned that one of his real problems has been how to deal with representatives of the Soviet Union as well as West Germany. Being a devoted Jew, he has very strong and deeply held feelings for Zionism and against Nazism and Communism. Soon he will have to officially greet the Soviet ambassador to England and Ireland, and he is quite concerned about how he should react. He said he had talked with the chief rabbi of Ireland recently about this and was told this might be an opportunity for him to let the Soviet ambassador know that many people are concerned about the treatment of Jews in the Soviet Union.

**Israel**

I asked the Lord Mayor about Ireland’s relationship with
Israel. He said that the late Lord Mayor of Dublin, Robert Briscoe (a Jew), had made a good start in obtaining de facto Irish recognition of Israel but, because of the position taken by the Vatican, there had not been formal de jure recognition until fairly recently. Even today, while Ireland and Israel exchange ambassadors, there is no Israeli ambassador living in Ireland. (Israel’s ambassador to the United Kingdom doubles as ambassador to Ireland.) Similarly, there is no Irish consul or embassy in Israel. What has prompted the interchange of diplomats at all, however, is growing trade between Ireland and Israel. It was not coincidental that the day before our meeting with the Lord Mayor, Janet and I noticed that our orange at Knappogue Castle in County Clare bore the stamp “Jaffa.”

Goldberg gave us the impression that the present administration is far more sympathetic to Israel, and he hopes personally to be able to bring some higher visibility to Israel. In this regard, I asked Goldberg “How does a Jewish person come to become Mayor of Cork?” His initial response was that it’s an indication of how fair-minded people are. They more or less follow the example of JFK becoming President of the United States. Goldberg also indicated that he was something of a national institution. In fact, his words were that the Irish government regards him as something very valuable. It tries to keep him wrapped in cotton yard in order to avoid becoming broken. Lord Mayor Goldberg has served as a good will ambassador. A Jew speaking for the Irish apparently lends a higher amount of credibility than might otherwise be the case.

Further, he is a person of some stature in the community, gained as an attorney. Being aged 66 and at a point in his career where his further political life is not consumed by ambition, he feels a sense of security in being able to say anything he chooses.

In discussing the international situation, with particular reference to Israel, Goldberg said he was a strong supporter of Prime Minister Begin. He indicated he was aware that both in England and in the United States there was a division of opinion among Jews insofar as Begin’s policies are concerned, but that he personally believed that Begin was correct in not being willing to set a specific deadline for withdrawal from the West Bank at this time. He said
that his own sympathies were with the Herut party from which Begin came. One can see the relationship between the feeling of Irish Jews (where there is a tradition of staunch support of political principles, even backed up by violence) with the Irgun and the supporters of Begin.

Sons

Looking around Goldberg’s office, we saw several paintings by his artist son. One of these was of Goldberg wearing his official robe and badge as Lord Mayor of Cork. He also displayed to us some Jewish artifacts – including a megillah and a piece of Yemenite copper jewelry in the form of a yad, an outstretched hand.

In talking about the disappearing Jewish community in Cork, which he lamented, he cited the example of his own three sons. One, for whom he had high hopes that he would remain with him as a partner in his law practice, is now in the United States. Goldberg originally sent him to a law firm in New York with whom he had matters so that the young man might acquire some background in American law. While in the United States, however, his son met and married a young lady from New Jersey, a Wellesley graduate. After their marriage they returned to Ireland. His wife had done some work in television in the United States prior to her marriage. On their return to Ireland, she found opportunities much more limited. (There is only one Irish television station, and it operates on a somewhat abbreviated basis.) Of more significance, however, was the fact that the young lady, who comes from an observant Jewish family, is quite observant herself. She missed the availability of a substantial Jewish community. After she became pregnant, she was determined that her children would be raised among other Jewish people, so she and her husband therefore decided to return to the United States, where they now reside.

Goldberg accepted this, although with some disappointment, but with admiration for the depth of his daughter-in-law’s sincerity. He acknowledged that one of the original reasons for sending his son to New York was the thought that he might find a Jewish wife, and these were the consequences.
Goldberg told us that although he is a worshipping Jew, he is not 100 percent Orthodox. He will ride on the Sabbath, he will even eat food that is not kosher (although he will not eat forbidden foods such as pig or the like). He said that these are compromises he makes and indicated he was at a stage where he did not feel it was necessary for him to make apologies for the manner in which he observed his Jewishness. Certainly one can hardly fault this man, living in a country that is almost 98 percent Roman Catholic and 2 percent Protestant. Goldberg mentioned that the 5,000 or 6,000 Jews in Ireland constitute such a tiny fraction of the population that one practically needs a computer to calculate it.

Cork’s Orthodox Shul
Having arrived in Cork on Friday night, April 21, erev Pesach, Janet and I were early enough to be able to attend the Maariv service in the old Orthodox shul at 10 South Terrace. The building itself is 75 years old. It is tiny and not too clean. It obviously once housed a lot more people than it did when we were there. There were only about 10 or 11 people, barely enough for a minyan when one excludes the little boy with his father. In fact, Janet sat by herself in the balcony. The service itself could have been from any Orthodox shul anywhere. The person who conducted the service read from the bimah rather than at the extreme end of the building (as I’ve seen in some English shuls). The service itself was a regular Litvak Orthodox service, and it all was very, very familiar from my own recollections of the Orms Street Shul in Providence, when I was younger.

Seder in the Lord Mayor’s Home
After the service, we went out to Goldberg’s home in a rather fashionable part of the outskirts of Cork. His home is called “Ben Truda”. His charming wife Sheila was there along with their son David, David’s wife, and their young daughter Trudy. (I wouldn’t be at all surprised if there is a relationship between her name Trudy and the home being called “Ben Truda,” but I forgot frankly to ask.) Also present were an elderly couple and an expatriate Italian professor, who had been interned in England during the war and who settled
in Ireland and was befriended by the Goldbergs. It was fitting that
they were strangers, as were we, at the very warm and pleasant seder
service.

The home itself was very pleasantly furnished with the col-
lections of a lifetime. There were busts, statuary, pictures, and books,
all in extremely good taste. The busts included not only Irish figures
but also one of Chaim Weizmann.

The service itself was familiar, although some of the melo-
dies (or nigunim) were a little different from the type of Dayenu or
Chad Gadya, which we were used to hearing. They were not so dif-
derent, however, that we were not able to join in.

David asked the Four Questions. Trudy was a little bash-
ful but by the end of the evening, she was babbling away as she read
portions of the Haggadah. She was quite precocious for a five-year-
old, and it was a pleasure to have her with us. She eventually fell
asleep in her mother’s arms and departed the seder early.

The dinner itself was beautifully served and was delicious.
Of course there were blessings over the wine, the matzos, the boiled
eggs, the salt water with karpas, and the charoseth. There was the
traditional glass for Elijah. (Incidentally, my own name in Hebrew is
Elijah, and I felt it was sort of appropriate for me to be the visitor at
the seder.)

The main course was a delicious poached salmon. Goldberg
had told us that it was difficult to obtain kosher meat in Ireland. It
had to be brought in from Dublin, 150 miles away, because there is
no kosher butcher in Cork. However, everything was just beautifully
done, and it was by far the best meal we had in Ireland.

As for the dinner table conversation, it was amazingly
catholic (with a small “c”). We talked about Irish history, American
history, Irish Jews, American Jews, Irish families, American families,
Jewish stories from the Old Country, literature, how many grand-
children there were, and so on.

It was hard to believe that I was attending a seder in a
Strange country 3,000 miles from my own. We seemed to be wel-
comed as if we were members of the family and, in a broad sense,
I suppose we were. Janet told me that although she had misgivings

Notes
about going there in the first place (she thought it was a little bold of us to ask for some help in finding a seder), she had no misgivings by the time we had left and looked on the Goldbergs and their family as our friends.

The Haggadah I used was from Mayor Goldberg’s childhood, and there was nothing particularly unusual about it. There was also a Ben Shahn Haggadah (originally published in 1965), but all of the texts are generally the same, even though translations may differ slightly.

After dinner, Mayor Goldberg took a great deal of pride in showing me his library. He puts a great deal of stock in his Jewishness. He has one of the largest collections of Judaica books that I have seen anywhere, including Temple Beth-El’s library. Not only that, but he actually seems to read these books. He told me he had recently reviewed Irving Howe’s book, *World of Our Fathers* (called something else in Ireland), for Irish television. He calls himself a *farbrente* (ardent) Zionist and prides himself on being a *Mishnaggid* (the opposite of a *Hasid*).

Goldberg told us he had been invited to speak on behalf of the UJA (United Jewish Appeal) on a tour of some American cities. He acknowledges that he is something of a curiosity and doesn’t feel hesitant about disclosing his Jewishness or even permitting his position as Lord Mayor to be used, if it could, to help further the cause of fellow Jews.

**Sense of Humor**

He did say that he was unable to participate or to accede to UJA’s request for certain logistical considerations, which I frankly found a little difficult to appreciate. He has been very well traveled, and I think he would be a knockout before Jewish audiences in America. What’s more, he has a good Litvak sense of humor.

Lord Mayor Goldberg even corrected my rendition of a story I had heard the day before from Barney Lewis (the brother of Rabbi Theodore Lewis of Newport’s Touro Synagogue), with whom we visited in Dublin. Lewis had told us the story of the illustration of tact and discretion, when a village shamus (a synagogue official)
was asked to break the news tactfully and discreetly to the wife of a young man and a father who had died very suddenly. When the shamus called on the wife (whom he had never met) he began the conversation by asking, “Are you the widow Bloomberg?”

According to Mayor Goldberg, the way the story should be told is that when the woman responds to the shamus by saying, “I’m not a widow,” he then replies, “I’ll bet you five to one you are now.”

Mayor Goldberg also told us one of his favorites stories (which was not intended to reveal a sense of anti-Catholicism or anti-Semitism). Toward the end of her days, an elderly Irish lady in New York was visited by her priest. While trying to comfort her, he told her what a fine Catholic she was, how he had often heard her confessions, and how he knew her to be a generally devoted and charitable woman. The priest said, “The only thing I can’t understand, Margaret, is why you, as a fine daughter of the church, had only three children. Why did you stop after three?”

“Well, Father,” she said, “when my husband and I arrived in New York from Ireland, someone told us that every fourth child born in New York was a Jew.”

A Common Bond
Janet and I didn’t leave “Ben Truda,” the Goldberg residence, till close to midnight, overcoming their urging for us to stay a while longer. Summing up my impressions, I could say on a somewhat lofty and pretentious plane that there is a certain common bond of understanding, which mysteriously unites Jews in foreign countries under the brotherhood of Abraham. Putting it a lot plainer, however, and more to the point, I can only say that both Goldberg and I feel the same. We both like to be among Jews.

Editor’s postscript
Lord Mayor Goldberg, who completed his term in 1979, died in 2003 at 91 years of age. He was no doubt the most prominent member of Cork’s Jewish community, which had reached its zenith of about 500 individuals during the 1950s. By 1970, it fell to about 20 members. This was well before its synagogue was firebombed in 1982.
Ironically, the Lord Mayor’s family had moved from Limerick to Cork because of an incident known as the “Limerick Pogrom” in 1904. There were no deaths, but Jewish businesses were boycotted for two years. At its peak, around 1900, Limerick’s Jewish community had consisted of about 25 families, almost all of them émigrés from Lithuania. Indeed, like Gerald Goldberg’s parents, Louis and Rachel, many had come from the same shtetl, Akmijan.

The Lord Mayor’s original name and Hebrew name was Yoel, but his older sisters called him Gerald. Thus, he chose Yoel as his middle name.

He married Sheila Smith, a native of Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1936. The wedding was held at her family’s congregation there. In time, she would become known as “Lady Mayoress.”

By 1939, the Goldbergs built a home on Cork’s Rochestown Road. It was a gift from her parents, Alexander and Gertrude, who were known as “Ben” and “Trude.” Hence the name “Ben Truda.”

A leading Cork architectural firm, Chillingworth & Levie, designed the five-bedroom residence on an acre of grounds. Daniel Levie (1875-1963) was actually a Scottish-born Presbyterian.

In 1943, while continuing to serve as a part-time soldier in Cork’s Local Defense Force, Gerald was first elected president of Cork’s Hebrew Congregation. In 1946, there were as many as 4,000 Irish Jews. Presently, there are approximately 2,000, who belong to three congregations (and a fourth in Belfast). In 2016, when only three Jewish men remained in Cork, its synagogue, located in the neighborhood known as “Jewtown,” was closed and put up for sale. For two photographs of the synagogue, see Sharman Kadish’s excellent study, The Synagogues of Britain and Ireland (New Haven: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2011).

Sheila Goldberg, who was particularly interested in the arts, died in 1996. In 2004 “Ben Truda” was sold for 2 million euros, and much of its contents were sold at auction. Gerald, who had built one of Ireland’s finest book collections relating to Jewish history, also wrote about Irish-Jewish history. In 2015, after “Ben Truda” was again remodeled and its land subdivided, the home was offered for 1.45 million euros.

For vivid recollections of Lord Mayor Goldberg (who could be considered both a “Corkman” and a “Corkonian”) see: Dermot Keogh and Diarmuid Whelan, eds., Gerald Goldberg: A Tribute (Cork: Mercier Press, 2008). Some of its early chapters are available online.

Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger: *Radical Reformer*

Robert P. Swierenga

Perhaps the first time I heard about a Rabbi Voorsanger was in 1983, when my great-uncle, Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, mentioned him. Rabbi Magnin served Wilshire Boulevard Temple, in Los Angeles, from 1915 to 1984. One of his nine classmates ordained at Cincinnati’s Hebrew Union College in 1913 had been Elkan Voorsanger, who also hailed from San Francisco. I may have also learned that Elkan’s father, Jacob, had been a rabbi, but I did not see his name in print until I moved to Providence in 1987. There it was on a list of Beth-El’s rabbis, which had been published within a booklet celebrating the Temple’s 125th anniversary in 1980. Though considered the congregation’s first rabbi (rather than *chazan*), Jacob served here for only one year, 1877-78. In the same celebratory booklet, Rabbi William G. Braude wrote a brief essay about three of his predecessors, which included a paragraph about Voorsanger.

Fortunately, in his encyclopedic history of Beth-El, which the congregation published in 1989, Seebert J. Goldowsky included several paragraphs about Rabbi Jacob. Although Seebert noted the brilliance of his subsequent career, he seemed to question whether Beth-El had suffered more than a temporary setback.

During 2018, while researching Rabbi Magnin’s Dutch ancestry, I came across a lengthy portrait of Beth-El’s Rabbi Voorsanger, a Dutch-born Jew whose national prominence was established in San Francisco. This portrait, found in a book by Robert P. Swierenga, seemed especially striking to me because it reflected many of my great-uncle’s attributes.

The following portrait of Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger is derived from pages 303 to 309 of Swierenga’s study, *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora*, which was published by Wayne State University Press in 1994 and is quoted here with the press’s permission. (The portrait’s copious endnotes have been deleted, however.)

Prof. Swierenga, a Chicago native and a proud member of the Christian Reformed Church, taught history at Kent State Univer-
In 1886, Jacob Voorsanger (1852-1908), a native of Amsterdam, began his illustrious career as rabbi of Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco. He became the mentor of the brilliant Judah Magnes, the Western region’s first native-born rabbi. Voorsanger, a man of extraordinary ability and energy, rose to the very pinnacle of renown on the Pacific Coast as the leader for twenty years of the largest and wealthiest congregation in the West. Temple Emanu-El’s membership in 1902 exceeded five hundred families, or more than three thousand souls.

The Voorsanger family had lived in Amsterdam for several generations and Jacob’s father Wolf was a diamond cutter. After the completion of his Hebrew parochial high school program, young Jacob, not yet twenty years of age, left Amsterdam for London to seek his future. After three months he left for Philadelphia where he arrived in 1873. Even as a young man Jacob had a commanding presence, imposing in stature and a forceful personality. Using the resources of the ethnoreligious community, Voorsanger within a few months gained a position as librarian of the YMHA and was appointed assistant cantor by the struggling Netherlandic Congregation Bnai Israel. He then embarked on an extended self-study program to become a rabbi.

Voorsanger left Philadelphia after three years and went on to become one of the most talented and powerful Jewish Reform preachers and journalists in America. He next served one year each as cantor at the Orthodox Adas Israel Congregation of Washington, DC, and then at the Sons of Israel and David Congregation of Providence, RI, which had recently adopted a moderate Reform liturgy. That year (1877) Voorsanger returned to Philadelphia as a delegate to the gathering of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, a
new unity association that tilted toward Reform and eventually became wholly Reform. These activities presaged his gradual shift from Orthodox reader to Reform rabbi. In 1878 Congregation Beth Israel of Houston recognized his growing pulpit skills and appointed him rabbi for the first time. Here he studied privately with a retired rabbi and read assiduously, all of which prepared him for his appointment in June 1886 as junior and in 1889 as senior rabbi of the predominantly German Temple Emanu-El of San Francisco, the leading congregation of the city and the most influential west of the Rocky Mountains.

In his writings and preaching, or more accurately lecturing, Voorsanger identified with the Reform movement’s radical second generation leaders who would truck no compromise with Orthodoxy or even Conservative Judaism. His hyper-rationalistic theology was based on Darwinian evolutionary naturalism. As a consequence, the Dutchman attacked Orthodoxy and rejected the traditional Jewish doctrine of the supernatural revelation of the law and the prophets. According to Voorsanger, “God grew in history only as the capacity of men’s minds grew to accommodate Him.” He praised the French Revolution for the “good it accomplished then, unwittingly or intentionally, and the benefits which the world enjoys now from its workings.”

The implications of this “religion of reason” for mundane religious life were great. Voorsanger despised “legalism,” “rabbinism,” and “orientalism” in all its forms, including the kosher system, traditional liturgies, ministerial garb, and the Yiddish language. In his first year he moved the Friday evening services to Sunday morning. He read most of the liturgy at the magnificent Sutter Street Temple in English, bareheaded, and without the usual tallith. But there were limits even to his latitudinarian views. He refused to accept rapprochement between Judaism and Christianity, nor would he condone the Sunday Sabbath, both of which were advocated by a few Reform leaders.

Rabbi Voorsanger’s social and political views were as conservative as his theology was radical. He became a thoroughgoing “American Israelite,” a one hundred percenter, who adopted
middle-class values and called for the “complete assimilation” of Jews into the American melting pot. He condemned women’s suffrage, unrestricted immigration, labor strikes, anarchism and socialism, the Democratic party, popular spectator sports such as prizefighting and bicycle races, and even the new-fangled automobile, which he deemed a “terror.” Voorsanger attacked Zionism as a delusion and labeled as “the wildest of all wild dreams” a return to the “Turk-ridden land” of Israel. Above all, as a militant Americanist he denounced in the strongest terms every Orthodox custom and tradition that he deemed oriental and nonwestern. The growing Russian Jewish immigrant ghetto in San Francisco drove him to distraction. In keeping with his cosmopolitan views, the Dutch rabbi helped found Jewish employment and educational organizations and settlement houses, with the intent to hasten the assimilation of San Francisco’s Russian Jews.

In addition to his rabbinical successes, Voorsanger was an educator, journalist, and social activist. In 1894 he began regular lecturing (until his death in 1908) on a voluntary basis in the Semitic Department of the University of California, Berkeley, and annually he lectured on the Hebrew Bible at Stanford University. In 1895 he founded and edited for thirteen years with his brother A. W. Voorsanger the San Francisco periodical *Emanu-El*, which promoted the cause of ultra-Reform and became “one of the most articulate weeklies in North American Jewish life.” He contributed to leading Jewish journals, including the *American Israelite*, and he had previously edited the New Orleans *Jewish South* (1881 to 1883), the Cincinnati *Sabbath Visitor* (1883 to 1886), and the San Francisco *Jewish Progress* (1893 to 1895). His admirers noted that he wrote “with remarkable fluency in a direct, terse style, for he had acquired the English idiom with great rapidity and seldom showed the influence of the Dutch or the German language.” Voorsanger published a biography of Moses Mendelsohn and a history of Emanu-El Temple that included a reasoned defense of Reform. He assisted in translating the biblical books of Obadiah and Jonah for the 1917 English-language Old Testament of the Jewish Publication Society, and he wrote articles on Palestine after his visit there. Voorsanger served on countless...
religious, philanthropic, and civic organizations including the vice presidency of the California Red Cross, which he helped establish. For a man who lacked formal religious training, these were brilliant accomplishments.

Even more important to Judaism over time was Voor-sanger’s tutoring of the gifted teenage scholar Judah L. Magnes of Oakland, who as the founder and first president of The Hebrew University in Jerusalem was the greatest California-born rabbi and one of the outstanding public figures of the modern world. On the recommendation of Oakland’s first rabbi, Myer Solomon Levy, Voorsanger in the early 1890s agreed to tutor Magnes in the sacred Hebrew texts. Throughout his high school years Magnes regularly crossed the bay by ferry to learn all he could from his Dutch mentor. In 1894 HUC admitted Magnes, in part because of Voorsanger’s glowing recommendation, and Voorsanger corresponded regularly with his protégé in Cincinnati, taking a fatherly interest in his academic progress.

Following Magnes’s ordination in 1900, Voorsanger invited him to preach at Temple Emanu-El. “Never have I felt so happy or proud as I do in making way for this lad,” Voorsanger told his congregation, “whom I sent away with a benediction and who now comes back a rabbi in Israel.” Voorsanger even arranged for a stipend for Magnes to begin doctoral study in Germany. “I have always hoped great things for you, and your going to Europe has always been part of my plans,” Voorsanger declared to his understudy shortly before his ordination at Cincinnati. Hebrew Union College trained ministers and not scholars, Voorsanger noted, but the “pew is outgrowing the pulpit in intellectuality.” Only “eminent scholars” can reach the young Jewish intelligentsia, the Rabbi continued. “I want you to become a scholar. I want you to have these years in Germany and a Ph.D. degree, and if possible a Semicher (diploma) from a European college.”

Magnes revered Voorsanger and was deeply affected by his intellect and wide community involvements. But the intellectual father and son gradually parted ways in the following years when Magnes committed himself to the Zionist cause. Voorsanger was
much chagrined but gave Magnes his lukewarm blessing: “You have the future before you. If Zionism is your aim, concentrate.” While the dream of a Jewish homeland is “chimerical” and “in no wise moral,” yet “Jews in America need this vigorous touch of association…” Zionist organizational efforts might give American Judaism “the great lever of ambition and loyalty” that it desperately needed. “I cannot be a Zionist,” Voorsanger declared, “but I can admire… the persistency that seeks to regenerate Israel, to resuscitate its soul, to restore its honor, to rejuvenate its inheritance and I will quarrel with no adjectives in my anxiety to do honor to the man or men who will achieve this hope.” The American Israel was Voorsanger’s concern, not Palestinian Israel. Moreover Magnes’s more conservative views and his incisive critiques of ultra-Reform Judaism for its vapid assimilation of American culture implicitly condemned life at Temple Emanu-El.

Voorsanger’s pulpit appointments, university lectures, and other work increasingly required proper credentials for the self-taught rabbi. Isaac Mayer Wise of HUC, the leading Reform rabbi in America, arranged in 1895 for the college to award him the unusual honorary degree of Bachelor of Theology. This brought Voorsanger a new five-year contract from Emanu-El Temple at an annual salary of $6,000.

The rabbi’s finest hour followed the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire that destroyed the heavily Jewish eastern part of the city. Ten thousand Jews lost their homes, and leading merchants and shopkeepers suffered fire losses in the tens of millions of dollars. Several synagogues and other Jewish institutions were destroyed, including the majestic Sutter Street Temple, which at the time was considered the seventh most beautiful synagogue building in the world. Through his tears at the loss of the synagogue and the venerable Torah scroll which had been donated by Moses Montefiore, as well as the loss of his prized library and all of the temple records and minute books, Rabbi Voorsanger immediately went to work. He organized relief efforts and reconstruction projects, and issued appeals for an estimated $100,000 in Jewish aid that he believed would be needed.
To his chagrin and frustration, American Jewry failed to respond to the disaster. In part this was the result of a report greatly downplaying Jewish homelessness by Judah Magnes, who had been sent to San Francisco by the National Conference of Jewish Charities to assess the damage to Jewish property by the quake and fire. Voorsanger publicly rebuked his former student, but the damage was done. The San Franciscans had to rebuild mainly with local funds. For visible and prestigious projects, these funds were obviously adequate and wealthy persons stepped forward. The merchants had recovered quickly and were soon doing a brisk business at new locations on swank midtown avenues such as Van Ness. Emanu-El’s membership after the fire actually increased to four hundred families and the entire experience of rebuilding restored the sense of mission of the pioneer years. This was Rabbi Voorsanger’s theme at the re-dedication service of the temple. He concluded: “So shall this beautiful edifice, reconsecrated to its high mission, serve indeed as a sacred emblem of the redeemed city by the Gate, its beauty restored, its sins purged, its temple rebuilt, its children reunited in (their) mission.

Voorsanger’s vigorous relief efforts physically exhausted him and aggravated a cardiac problem. The unexpected death of his beloved wife, Eva, the next year further drained him. The following year, in April 1908, while vacationing at the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, CA, he suffered a fatal heart attack. He was fifty-six. From inauspicious beginnings as a poor teenaged immigrant without formal theological training, Voorsanger had parlayed his charismatic gifts and impressive innate abilities to reach the front ranks of the American rabbinate. In keeping with his mature status as the leading rabbi of the West Coast and as one of the most important spiritual leaders of American Reform Judaism in the first decade of the twentieth century, HUC had in 1903 very appropriately awarded him an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity.

Voorsanger’s final bequest to American Jewry was his estimable sons, Dr. William C., Leon M., and Rabbi Elkan C. Voorsanger, although they ranked far below his intellectual protégé, Magnes. William graduated in 1899 from the Stanford University Medical College, then known as Cooper’s Medical College, and after studying
for two years in Berlin and Vienna, he returned to San Francisco to
practice his specialty, the treatment of tuberculosis. Leon engaged
in the flavoring-extract business in the city. Both were members of
Congregation Emanu-El. Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger’s special concern
fell on his youngest son Elkan whom he patiently prepared for the
rabbinate. Elkan was ordained by HUC and became a Junior Rabbi
of a congregation in Saint Louis until May of 1917, when after the
United States declared war on Germany, he volunteered as a military
chaplain and left for France. Elkan Voorsanger was commissioned in
the field as the first Jewish chaplain of the American Expeditionary
Force. He thereby became the first ordained rabbi to receive rank in
the U.S. Armed Forces. He advanced in rank from private to captain
by the war’s end and was decorated for bravery in combat with the
Purple Heart. Elkan stayed on in Europe following the armistice as
head of the first Joint Distribution Committee in Poland to assist
war refugees. Subsequently, he returned to the United States and for
many years served as executive director of the Jewish Welfare Federa-
tion of Milwaukee, a service organization for war veterans. He died
in 1963 after a life of public service. Although never active in the
pulpit, he was always a “rabbi at heart.”
Rhody and Me

Heske L. Zelermyer

Although the author has not lived in our community for 36 years, it remains dear to her. As readers may recall, Heske wrote about her Rhode Island roots in our 2006 issue. She also discussed her Dutch heritage, which curiously relates to the article in this issue about Rabbi Voorsanger.

In her new article, Heske tells us about some of her more recent experiences as Gerald Zelermeyer’s wife – yes, as a rebbetzin. Indeed, she is so proud to have worn this title and played this role in numerous congregations. Surprisingly, however, she did not comment on how this role has considerably changed following the ordination of numerous women!

Fortunately, Heske still feels blessed by her enduring friendships with some of its former members. Alas, the boundaries defining congregational roles disappeared long ago. Friends are friends!

Small places seem to be important in my life. Having been born on the small island of Curaçao in 1944, I moved as a teenager to the small European country of The Netherlands. In 1969 I immigrated to the USA, where I started Part II of my life. While working at Boston University, I fell in love with and married Gerry Zelermeyer. We stood under the chuppah at Congregation B’nai Moshe, his congregation, in 1974.

Gerald and Heske Zelermeyr on their 45th anniversary
Cranston

The following year we moved to Cranston, where Gerry became rabbi of Temple Beth Torah. (In 1981, after its merger with Temple Beth Israel, it became known as Torat Yisrael.) Was I a bit nervous? A bit apprehensive? I was not only a new bride, but also five months pregnant. I was a rebbetzin to boot. None of the first roles baffled me as much as that last one. There was so much to learn.

Rhody turned out to have been the absolute perfect place to start this chapter in my life. It was not too far from loving in-laws and friends and not too far from international airports. I was also not too far from Fenway Park!

The house at 42 Roger Williams Circle seemed like a castle. The yard had a definite future for kids, and the neighborhood seemed cozy. Mind you, cozy, not gorgeous. Roger Williams Park and its zoo were nearby, so they became an added attraction for a future little “Zee.”

When Gerry and I had come down for the interview process, I was totally smitten by Beth Torah’s red ladies’ room and totally puzzled by the snowplow stored in the sanctuary. I had a good laugh when one of the smaller gents on the search committee had to climb into the “parish” by way of a basement window because he had forgotten or misplaced the keys. But I was young, and this was a new chapter in our lives. Cranston seemed to be a good place to start that chapter, and it was!

Gideon Yechezkel was born that first year, in 1975. Gerry had the wonderful idea that we should have Friday night dinners at shul so we could get to meet all the members. The congregation was divvied up into groups, and that’s how many dinners there were. This new mother had to leave her newborn at home.

There were many reasons why Jewish Family Service, based in Providence, would become one of the most beloved places in my new Rhody life. It had a caring and active board, but best of all, it had a caring, funny, and dear director, Paul Segal. He and Roberta are still dear friends! Through this group I was fortunate enough to get the best babysitter in the world, and congregational dinners
became less painful. And my education as a clergyman’s wife began!

As I write this reminiscence in Montreal, where Gideon is cantor of Shaar Hashomayim, an Orthodox shul, I remind myself that a month before his birth, Gerry and I bought ourselves a sukkah. That same sukkah, which I helped build while in an extremely pregnant state of mind, is the same sukkah now used by Gideon and his family! After Cranston, it traveled with us to West Hartford, Connecticut; Curaçao; Marlboro and Fair Lawn, New Jersey; and twice to Columbus, Ohio. The sukkah also spent some time in Boston, where our son, Salo, and his wife were living. Finally, Gerry and I shipped it to Montreal, where we just helped our grandchildren build and decorate it.

Three years minus a month after Gideon was born, our family welcomed Salo Levie. Both boys were so lucky to have those years at Torat Yisrael! They had more loving grandparents than I can now recall. The Orodenkers’ pool was an extra bonus. Evelyn Nussenfeld, (zl) whom little Gideon and Salo dubbed “Nussie,” became the extra branch in our nuclear family. As far as the kids were concerned, the sun rose and set with her. From spoiling to loving, from stories to gifts, Nussie made our stay in Cranston extremely special.

The friends we made in Cranston are still our dear friends. “SueSidel” (one word, also coined by Gideon!) attended both boys’ B’nai Mitzvah and weddings! Burt Margolis taught me how to tie a “half-Windsor” knot (like my father used to!) so the little tykes could wear their “special shul clothes” in style. The Cohen families also supplied us with the most fantastic hand-me-downs for the guys. I would sort them by size and store them in our cedar closet. When needed, Gideon and Salo were allowed to “shop” for the clothes they liked and be dressed like royalty!

Gerry was quite a bit ahead of the times. I remember the first High Holiday season that two cameras were installed in the main sanctuary. One was aimed at the rabbi and one at Jack Smith, the cantor. This way, services were “streamed” onto two TVs in the “overflow” room, which was actually the small cocktail hall, where parents with little kids were encouraged to gather. I strongly felt that I had to set an example, so, pregnant with Salo, I went to the “over-
flow” room with Gideon.

My two-and-a-half-year-old exclaimed, “That’s not where we daven; that’s where we have cookies.” A kind usher took us to the back of the large social hall, which opened up as an extension of the sanctuary. There Gideon announced, “That’s not where we daven either; this is where we have pizza!” Indeed, that was also where bingo games were played on Sundays. To make this story a bit shorter, we ended up in the fourth row of the main sanctuary, and Gideon was happy and quiet as a mouse!

In Cranston I learned to needlepoint from the sweetest and the best! I became a “hooker” and got the absolute best pre-cut yarns for hooking rugs in Pawtucket! In Cranston I also learned about baseball. We took the boys not only to Fenway Park to see Red Sox games but also to see Paw Sox games in Pawtucket. Third Beach in Middletown was always a thrill, and the whaling ship in New Bedford allowed me to have two Captain Ahabs!

My ties with the Jewish Family Service grew stronger and deeper. Not only was I invited to join its board, but also I took over the Moes Chitim committee. A group of delightful ladies handed me that scepter, and together we whipped up specialties from our kitchens and delivered them to the local prison and mental institution. In the institution, Rabbi Jacob Handler of Temple Beth-Israel would conduct a mini-seder, and six-year-old Gideon would ask the four questions.

In Cranston I realized how much there was to learn and how much I could help others learn about these same topics. So I started to give talks entitled: “All you never dared ask your rabbi about Judaism, you can now ask his wife.” I gave this talk in several areas of Rhode Island. While teaching – or rather “explaining” – I learned much about and enjoyed the beauty of this tiny state!

Both boys attended nursery school at the Providence JCC. Gideon entered the first grade class of the newly established Solomon Schechter Day School, which was housed at Temple Emanu-El. He believed that Rabbi Alvan Kaunfer, the principal, was his first rabbi “because the other rabbi is my father.”

Not only were the local clergy warm, welcoming, and
special, but they too became our dear friends. Eleanor Bohnen- of blessed memory- was the first rebbetzin to tell me what could possibly be expected of me and explained what she herself did in that capacity. Anne Zaiman lovingly set my fears at ease!

I had not grown up with this kind of clergy. In my native Curaçao, the lay-rabbi was a friend of the family as well as my science teacher. In The Hague, the lay-rabbi had been my uncle. Frankly, I never expected to become a rabbi’s wife, but love, faith, and fate had different plans for me.

It was not always easy on the boys! No kids their age attended our synagogue, and the area where we lived had no Jewish kids. Our kids attended school in Providence. They played with some boys in the neighborhood, but we wanted them to grow up where our customs and observances would not make them stand out.

One day Gideon referred to his little brother by terms that we did not use and informed me that his friend always called his little brother by that word. So in 1983, Gerry and I decided it was time to leave Cranston. As happy as we had been there, as much as we loved so many people, it was time to think of the future.

I often look back lovingly at Torah Yisrael. The congregation and our friends allowed me a spot where I could grow into “my life”- as a wife, mother, and a rabbi’s wife.

“Colleagues” often ask how I feel about the word or title rebbetzin. Primarily because of my beginnings in Cranston, I can truly state that being called rebbetzin has always given me a heightened sense of responsibility, love, and caring. It is a badge of honor, bestowed upon me by folks often older than I. To them, derech Eretz (decorum, respect, and civility- all wrapped into one) still meant a lot. It became my task to not disappoint!

West Hartford and Other Pulpits

More than 45 years ago, Gerry and I started on this “rabbi path” together. It has been a good run! But one should never – one can never – compare one pulpit experience to another. Similarly, one cannot compare one geographical setting to another- or even opera
What I learned in Cranston became the foundation of who I later became at Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford. If I was a newlywed and a new mother in Rhody, if the kids had the space and the freedom to play within an enormous sandbox in Cranston and had loving grandparents within our congregation, then they further developed into their own personae in West Hartford. Nine years versus 19 years. First grade versus graduating from high school and later college. The demands of each congregation—the gratifications of each congregation—formed both Gerry and myself and had an impact on our sons.

There are rabbinical families who move around the country regularly. We were fortunate enough to have been in two wonderful places during our sons’ formative years as well as our own. If Rhode Island was the “crib” in which I grew up “pulpitly,” then West Hartford was where I grew into “middle-aged” me. Both congregations to pop music.
prepared me to be at Gerry’s side when we started our “emeritus/interim” lives.

Did we retire “too early” from Emanuel? What age would that be?

We soon realized that we were both too young to hang our lyre in the willows. Through his active chairmanship of the Rabbinical Assembly’s placement committee, Gerry was very much aware of and had a great sense of understanding for both sides of the “pulpit coin.” Rabbis and congregations alike required growth and change.

Feeling that we both had something to contribute, Gerry became an “interim” rabbi. His name was presented to congregations that – for a myriad of reasons – were looking for a caring and knowledgeable clergyperson for a one-year stint. They had either lost their own rabbi due to health problems or a disagreement. Many of these congregations had not come to terms with what kind of individual they were actually looking for. Some sought un mouton à cinq pattes (a sheep with five legs or a three-armed paperhanger)! Other congregations were switching directions from a more traditional/Orthodox ritual to a Conservative approach.

For a rabbi, this was often a spiritually slippery and tricky road – though the rituals and prayers remain the same: plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. (The more it changes, the more it stays the same.) For the rabbi’s grandchildren...
wife, however, this means adjusting not only to a new shopping area, but also deciding how actively to participate within an institution.

The first place to which we went on a temporary basis was Curaçao, the place I was born, but where I had not lived for more than 40 years. We experienced three years of tropical bliss, a historical pulpit, and an inspiring edifice, but a forever shrinking Jewish population. On one hand, I was the “daughter” who returned to those who had known me from birth into my teens. Both Gerry and I served as “ambassadors” – for many visiting friends – from both Rhode Island and Connecticut.

In 2005, following Curaçao, we enjoyed the first of two “stints” at Congregaton Agudas Achim in Bexley, Ohio, a suburb of Columbus. After having lived only on the East Coast, we fell in love with the Midwest. At this stage of one’s life, it is quite unusual to forge lasting friendships, but we did. In 2008, we were asked to return to Bexley and help out again, which we lovingly did!

After the Midwest, we were invited to help out in two totally different New Jersey congregations. Each had its own issues requiring rabbinical help. Meanwhile, we enjoyed “jug handle” intersections, buses to Manhattan, motorcycle rides on Park Avenue, and opera at the Met. We left both congregations with a great sense of enrichment.

Florida

For a while, Gerry and I decided that we would start slowing down by helping out an assortment of congregations in the vicinity of our apartment in Daytona Beach, Florida. Conservative and Reform congregations offered us opportunities to teach and to learn about searching, aging, craving, solitude, and loneliness. By giving spiritually, we enriched our own hearts and souls.

It may have begun in Little Rhody, but from that moment on I have always felt that for every ounce of love I have given, I have received a pound of love in return. This has been true throughout Gerry’s career.

Now at 75 years of age – 50 years after immigrating to the USA and after 45 years of blissful wedded life – I have finally hung
up the lyre, thrown in the towel! I have tons of memories and friends all over with whom to keep in touch.

Recently I designed and am now needlepointing six tallit bags for our six grandchildren. As I sit on a couch overlooking the ocean, I count our blessings and my stitches. These are the same stitches I learned all about in Cranston, Rhode Island!
National Day of Prayer & Remembrance for Victims of Hurricane Katrina, National Cathedral, Washington, DC, 2005
I noted in my introduction to Anne Sherman’s 2005 article that nearly 200 congregational rabbis had served the Ocean State. Seven had served for 30 years or more. Rabbi William G. Braude of Temple Beth-El had served longer than any of his predecessors or contemporaries – 42 years – but his tenure would be surpassed by his former assistant and successor, Rabbi Leslie Y. Gutterman, who served 45 years.

In recent years, five more of our state’s congregational rabbis have exceeded the 30-year threshold. These include: James B. Rosenberg, who served Temple Habonim for 33 years; Alvan Kaunfer who served Temple Emanu-El for a comparable period; Wayne M. Franklin, who served Emanu-El for 38 years; and Marc Jagolinzer, who served Temple Shalom for 41 years. After 40 years, Yehoshua Laufer continues to serve Chabad of Providence. How fortunate Rhode Islanders have been!

Longevity may be only one measure of a rabbi’s or a congregation’s strength, however. For a complex variety of reasons, most congregational rabbis move on. Given both its brevity and amazing potential, Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger’s tenure at Beth-El seems exceptionally dramatic (or traumatic). Although Rabbi Kaunfer’s tenure is surely exceptional, it seems natural when, after a brief period at a large congregation, an assistant or an associate rabbi seeks his or her own congregation. In this respect, however, Rabbi Sarah Mack’s tenure is also exceptional, for she has served Beth-El for 16 years.

Whatever the reasons, few Rhode Island rabbis have moved on to much larger congregations or enjoyed far lengthier tenures. Indeed, David B. Rosen is probably the only Rhode Island rabbi who not only moved to a much larger congregation, but also returned to the one where he had belonged as a child!

As he explains in the following article, David’s rabbinate has been unusual in still other ways. (And here I do not refer to his early mastery of computer technology.) For example, he had to come to terms with his own denominational affiliation. Later, he would also have to weigh his second congregation’s strength and viabil-
ity. Rabbi David’s collegiate career as a journalist may also have been unusual. Perhaps by learning to write quickly and succinctly, he also became accustomed to downplaying his own considerable gifts and talents. And perhaps his wife, Marcie’s, too. Then again, egotism and flamboyance may not play well in our little corner of New England.

**Introductory note:** From the time I began working as a rabbi, I kept everything in a large filing cabinet that was bursting with synagogue bulletins, membership rosters, program flyers, and other correspondence from each congregation I served. Unfortunately, in August 2017, Hurricane Harvey ripped through Houston and devastated my synagogue. Everything I had saved was drenched under inches and feet of water. It means that, in preparing this article, I did not have access to any written materials from my professional past, which explains why my story is missing so many details I would have loved to share.

When I arrived in Cranston, Rhode Island, in the summer of 1984, it was to serve in a congregation which, according to the Joint Placement Commission of the United Synagogue and Rabbinical Assembly, I was unqualified to lead.

Simply put, being only four years out of rabbinical school, I was told I did not have the professional or personal experience to assume the pulpit of a 700-family synagogue and was only given an opportunity to interview for the job because there were no other rabbinical candidates left to send!

The placement director was probably right. I was 33 years old and was coming from a tiny, 150-family congregation on Long Island. I arrived in Cranston with a wife and two-year-old child and had no idea where Rhode Island was, let alone Cranston. Maps weren’t particularly helpful because the state was so small that most maps had the words “Rhode Island” in the ocean!

It was difficult for me to imagine then that I would end up staying in this beautiful state for a dozen joyful years and that I would find a loving community that would help grow me into the rabbi I would become.
Upbringing

The journey that would eventually take me to Rhode Island began years earlier when, as a child growing up in Houston, I was raised by two loving parents, Toby and Lester Rosen, who were committed Conservative Jews. My sister Cindy, brother Rick, and I were encouraged to have a strong emotional connection to Judaism and Jewish life.

My mother, in particular, was a strong force in my life. Having grown up in Breckenridge, a small West Texas town with only a dozen Jewish families, she learned early in her life that, if she didn’t create a Jewish world for herself, it wouldn’t come to her. It meant participating in the little temple in her town and otherwise making sure every holiday was acknowledged, lest it be ultimately forgotten.

Though my mother’s parents had modest incomes, they sacrificed to make sure my mother went to the University of Texas at Austin where, in her freshman year, she met my father, Lester. He was from Houston, but unlike my mother, he had little or no Judaism in his childhood. His mother died when he was very young, and his father worked long hours to support the family. Though my dad knew little about Jewish life, he loved my mother and fully supported her attempts to join a synagogue and follow the religious standards she set for our family.

My mother loved living in a big city, but was always afraid that we would be assimilated into the broader Christian environment. It was very important, therefore, that we be raised in a kosher home. She allowed my siblings and me to participate in the Christmas plays at Red Elementary School so long as we did not sing Jesus’ name. At school picnics, my mother always made a point of bringing a kosher hot dog for me to eat, and in December, when our neighbors dressed their front lawns with Christmas decorations, my mother constructed and hung outside our home a six-foot-by-six-foot brightly lit Star of David that nobody driving down Nenana Street could miss!

It also meant that every Friday night in the Rosen household, my mother lit candles, my father sang Kiddush, and we had the best meal of the week, usually brisket and noodles. On Shabbat
morning, I attended the Junior Congregation at our synagogue, Congregation Beth Yeshurun, and then the Sabbath School classes until I graduated high school in 1969. All of this combined to give me a very positive attitude towards Judaism, which I took with me to the University of Texas at Austin. I don’t have any memory of discussing university options with my parents. In the 1960s, entry into UT was automatic if you were a Texas resident and had at least a C-average. Everyone I knew went there; it was close to Houston, the tuition was nominal, and it was highly rated.

Once I arrived in Austin, I found myself overwhelmed with all there was to do, but I struggled to figure out what there was to do Jewishly. My initial thought was to visit Hillel, but I felt uncomfortable there with Rabbi Mickey Sills, a young rabbi who was a hippie to his core! I decided to find some friends with whom I could start a Jewish campus newspaper, which we called the University Jewish Voice. Being editor of the paper opened many doors to me in the years ahead.

In my sophomore year at UT, I received a phone call that would change my life. United Jewish Appeal invited me to be part of a free trip to Israel that it was arranging for Jewish campus newspaper editors. In those pre-Internet days, I had no idea there were other Jewish campus newspapers, but amazingly there were dozens of them.

That trip to Israel, which anticipated the Birthright Israel trips that would send thousands of Jewish college students to Israel years later, changed my life, and that change was reflected in the pages of the newspaper I edited. More stories appeared about Israel, about Zionism, and about Judaism in general. In addition, I discovered there was actually a Hebrew studies program at the University, rich with classes in Hebrew, Judaism, and Islam. I came under the influence of one professor in particular, Eisig Silberschlag, a former
The Rabbinate

At the end of my junior year, the new Hillel rabbi on campus, Jimmy Kessler, pulled me aside and suggested I consider a career in the rabbinate. He felt I might make a good rabbi, and my clear passion for Jewish living would only flourish in a rabbinical seminary.

As someone raised in the Conservative movement, my first inclination was to apply to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, which I did in late 1973, but my interview there was discouraging. Applicants were expected to come to JTS with a strong background in Talmud, including Rashi’s commentary, neither of which I had ever studied in my Conservative upbringing. Further complicating my admission was what I saw at JTS itself. In 1973, there was no place for women, the synagogue had separate seating, and the campus struck me as a dark and dreary place. JTS has, of course, dramatically changed over the years, but that is how it was then.

When I returned to Austin, my Hillel rabbi reminded me that he too had come from a Conservative upbringing but had found the Reform rabbinical school, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC), a wonderful environment in which to learn and grow Jewishly. He urged me to interview there, even though I knew nothing about Reform Judaism.

When I visited HUC’s Cincinnati campus, I was struck by how different it was from JTS. Men and women studied together, and everything was egalitarian. Many students were from Conservative backgrounds; yarmulkes were everywhere and kosher meals were available in the seminary’s dining room. Classes in Talmud, Rashi, and rabbinics were available for beginners and more advanced students alike.

Newly married, my wife Marcie and I made the decision together for me to enroll at HUC, which set in motion a remarkable course of study and experiences that I will always cherish.
mother was overjoyed when I told her about my plans. My father was less enthusiastic. He had always envisioned me, his older son, coming into his women’s wear manufacturing business. He asked me to at least try a year working with him and, if I still wanted to go off to rabbinical school, he promised I would go with his blessing. After only a few months with my dad, I knew it was not for me, and I let HUC know of my desire to start my studies in Jerusalem in July 1974.

Marcie and I set off for Israel nine months later. Our tickets were round-trip, and HUC did not encourage visits home. Israel at that time was a third world country. Housing was substandard, and culinary options were extremely limited. Owning a television was a luxury that few Israelis could afford – and even if you could, there was only one channel.

HUC expected its students to fit into Israeli life as fully as possible, to use our year there to master spoken and written Hebrew and to take a broad selection of courses on archaeology and Hebrew literature and read Israeli newspapers. To her credit, Marcie attended her own ulpan (Hebrew language school) and devoted herself to exploring Jerusalem and the rest of the country. Having been raised in a very Reform congregation, much of what Marcie experienced was Jewishly new to her. Thankfully, she was very open to new ideas and, by the time we left for Cincinnati to continue my studies, she was committed to having a kosher home and continuing the traditional rituals of Shabbat and the festivals, which we had taken on in Jerusalem. Our year in Israel was an extraordinary blessing to both of us, and Jerusalem has become a second home to our family and us ever since.

I enjoyed studying in Cincinnati with HUC’s outstanding faculty, which included giants like Dr. Jakob Petuchowski, a scholar in liturgy and theology, and Dr. Alexander Guttmann, with whom I learned Talmud and grew dramatically in my proficiency. However, as I finished my third year, I began having doubts about whether I could ever really be a Reform rabbi. Marcie’s and my level of observance had increased significantly, and we found ourselves increasingly drawn to a small Conservative synagogue in the Roselawn...
neighborhood, where we and many of our classmates lived.

With ordination just two years away, I decided to take a quick trip to New York City to visit with the executive vice president of the Conservative movement’s Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman. He encouraged me to finish my studies at HUC and to be ordained there. After that, he said, I should come to New York and apply to the Rabbinical Assembly for admission into the Conservative rabbinical body.

So, in 1980, I was ordained a Reform rabbi and, soon thereafter, I was interviewed by the Rabbinical Assembly and given “conditional approval” to join the organization. The RA’s bylaws required me to serve a Conservative synagogue for two years before I could receive formal acceptance. With the RA’s approval, the Joint Placement Commission of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly arranged interviews for me with several small Conservative congregations on Long Island, where Marcie and I wanted to live.

East Meadow

I wanted a small pulpit in order to have time to take post-rabbinical classes in a broad range of subjects, but particularly liturgy and theology at JTS in Manhattan. I thought it would be helpful if I studied with its faculty and also felt at home with the students I would spend my career interacting.

After visiting with several congregations, I ultimately settled on a small synagogue in East Meadow, one of many small towns in Nassau County on Long Island. There being too many synagogues, each fought for many of the same members.

Suburban Park Jewish Center (SPJC) was a 200-family congregation, and most of its members lived within walking distance of the synagogue. It was a lovely area, just west of Levittown, whose tract homes had also been built in the early postwar era.

I don’t remember much about the interview with SPJC’s search committee other than one question asked by the committee’s chairman that apparently got me the job. He posed what I thought was a hypothetical question: “What would I do if I was in the
synagogue and saw some paper towels on the floor in the hallway?” When I responded that I’d pick them up, he jumped up and shouted, “You’re hired!”

I picked up more than paper towels in the four years that followed, but it didn’t bother me. The synagogue was small, warm, and heimish. Because the parsonage was located next door, it felt like an extension of our home.

SPJC was a wonderful congregation in which to begin my career for several reasons beyond its close proximity to JTS. For one thing, the synagogue loved having a young rabbi, and they showed it by welcoming Marcie and me with open arms. When we had our first child, Alysa, in 1982, the congregation shared in our joy. Some of the older members were particularly gracious and enjoyed mentoring the new young rabbi, and I welcomed the opportunity to learn from them.

My wife loved living on Long Island, too. As a special education teacher, there was no shortage of teaching opportunities. East Meadow was a delightful and close-knit community in which to raise our first child.

Nevertheless, living in greater New York was unlike anything Marcie and I had ever experienced. Wonderful kosher restau-
rant were everywhere, and we were only an hour away from the lights of Broadway and all the Jewish cultural and religious experiences the area had to offer. It was a fun place to entertain our parents when each set visited each year.

The decision in 1984 to leave East Meadow was, therefore, a difficult one, but the reality was that, being so small, SPJC could not pay a livable wage for our growing family. With mixed feelings, I called the Joint Placement Commission in New York and asked for a new congregation.

Because I was still categorized as an “A” rabbi, which meant I still only qualified for a small congregation, the options available to me were limited. The Placement Commission basically recommended me to congregations that were roughly the same size and paid the same salary – as the one I was leaving!

Cranston

One day, however, the placement director called with an interesting proposition. He said there was a congregation in Rhode Island that, with 700 families, was technically too large for me. He felt that, at 33, I did not have enough experience, but he was prepared to send me to interview there anyway because the synagogue’s rabbinical search committee had interviewed a large number of applicants and had found them all wanting. He confessed he had no one left to send but me!

Temple Torah Yisrael’s problem was that its previous rabbi, Gerald Zelermyer, had left suddenly for another pulpit a year earlier. Renowned for his speaking prowess and strong personal skills, his departure was a great loss to the Cranston congregation. Rather than allow itself time to recover and then plan a structured search for Rabbi Zelermyer’s successor, the congregation had quickly formed a search committee and begun interviewing candidates. The result was a hurried search, such that when the committee finally agreed on a candidate, the synagogue membership turned down the recommendation and dissolved the committee.

Fortunately for me, by the time I interviewed in spring 1984, a new search committee had been formed and the congre-
gation was clearer on what it was looking for. When I arrived in Cranston to interview, I found a community that was eager to hire a rabbi after going for two years without one. This created a wonderful opportunity for me.

I loved my twelve years at Torat Yisrael. All of my synagogue presidents, starting with my first, Frank Prosnitz, were exceptional men and women who gave tirelessly to the shul and helped me grow into the position.

I was blessed, too, to have a wonderful cantor my first several years, Stephen Freedman, who was a protégé of the distinguished Cantor Gregor Shelkan in Boston. Steve taught me not only how to work with a cantor but how to treat one. He gave me a richer understanding of the role a cantor could play in a synagogue above and beyond the traditional roles of Shaliah Tzibbur and B’nai Mitzvah tutor. He not only became my partner in all that I did, but showed me how to enjoy the close relationships I would enjoy with the many cantors with whom I would work during the rest of my career.

Torat Yisrael was technically in Cranston, but it was across the street from Providence and the state’s largest park, Roger Williams. Within its 435 acres were a zoo, a lake, and beautiful flowers and trees that enhanced our synagogue. Because the parsonage was only a short walk to the synagogue and the park, Marcie and I enjoyed a beautiful, pastoral setting in which to raise our daughter and our second child, Dov, who was born in 1985.

The only real challenge we faced in Rhode Island was the weather! It was delightful sitting in our living room and watching snow fall outside. On too many occasions, though, I had to go out in the snow, either for services or to Lincoln Park Cemetery. When asked years later if I preferred living in the South, where it was too hot, or in Rhode Island, where it was too cold, I always answered that I disliked both extremes, but at least I never had to shovel sweat!

At Torat Yisrael, I learned how to administer a synagogue and what it took to keep a congregation afloat. As rabbi of a mid-sized synagogue, I was the spiritual leader, program director, and executive director— all rolled into one. I was responsible for the monthly bulletin and mailing out flyers. In those pre-Internet days,
printing and mailing were the only ways to reach our members.

When I arrived in Rhode Island, the first personal computers were just appearing in stores like Lechmere. Though lacking hard drives and relying on shuffling, floppy disks, they were miracles to behold. In those early years, however, our synagogue leadership couldn’t understand why I might want a personal computer, and I wasn’t sure myself! But as accounting software (Lotus 123), word processing software (WordPerfect) and desktop publishing software (Adobe PageMaker) became more user-friendly, especially through the creation of Microsoft Windows, no one doubted computers’ transformational effects.

Torat Yisrael was also part of a larger Jewish community that included two synagogue neighbors: Temple Sinai, a Reform congregation led by my colleague and friend Rabbi George Astrachan; and Temple Am David, a Conservative synagogue in neighboring Warwick led by my wonderful friend, Rabbi Nechama Goldberg. It was a special pleasure on many Shabbat afternoons when Rabbi Goldberg would walk to Torat Yisrael and join us for Havdalah and then go out with Marcie and me for pizza. Nechama was the first person to suggest that, after 12 years at Torat Yisrael, it might be time for me to consider a new congregation with new challenges that might push me to become a better rabbi.

On the Providence side of Rhode Island sat two large congregations, and I enjoyed a close relationship with the rabbis of Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth-El. I frequently turned to Emanu-El’s Rabbi Wayne Franklin for counsel and advice regarding halakhic and other ritual issues. Together we created a joint conversion program for Rhode Island’s Conservative Jewish community, which Rabbi Franklin directed and in which I taught. He was in many ways like the senior rabbi I never had in my solo congregations, and I learned much from him. Our relationship continued when I went to Houston, where I had his mother (of blessed memory) and his brother Gordon as congregants. Indeed, his childhood congregation in nearby Wharton eventually became part of mine. I still take great pleasure when Wayne comes to visit his family in Houston.

Rabbi Leslie Gutterman of Beth-El was another strong role
model for me. In particular, I learned from him that it was safe to be oneself on the bimah. A good sense of humor, he taught me, is a wonderful mechanism through which a congregation can feel relaxed and welcome.

Les was particularly helpful when, in 1996, during my last year at Torat Yisrael, the search committee from Houston’s Congregation Beth Yeshurun called to tell me it would be flying to Cranston to observe me at services the coming Friday night. My mazal (luck), the forecast was for a blizzard! Synagogues all over town were canceling services, yet the Houston search committee insisted on coming. Les advised me not to worry and not to cancel services. “Even if no one but the committee shows up,” he said, “you should give a full sermon and run the service as if a thousand people are there. The committee only wants to watch you,” he continued, “and it won’t matter to them who’s there or not there.” He was right and, years later, the search committee members who came still laugh when they think about the “High Holiday sermon” I gave during a blizzard one December night – to a dozen people!

Rhode Island was a wonderful place to raise our young children. The day schools were excellent, and we were particularly pleased to send both of our kids to the Alperin Schechter Day School, which was housed at Temple Emanu-El.

Marcie and I enjoyed a closeness with many wonderful rabbinical colleagues. We were particularly close with the late Rabbi Marc Jagolinzer and his wife Barbara in Middletown. We frequently took trips together to the White Mountains to see the fall foliage and to New York to enjoy Broadway shows and the wonderful kosher restaurants there.

Though Providence’s Jewish community was somewhat small, it was nonetheless an active and close-knit one. The rabbis of all denominations worked together for the communal good, and the Jewish Federation of Rhode Island kept everyone focused on the need to support Israel and Jewish life everywhere. Unquestionably, the saddest moment of my tenure in Rhode Island was the painful decision in 1993 to close the Jewish Home for the Aged because of severe financial circumstances.
At Torat Yisrael, I was blessed to have Max Rothkopf as my Torah reader for almost my entire tenure. He was a wise and gentle man who kept the daily minyan running smoothly thanks to his endless patience and disarming smile.

I was blessed as well to have a consummate educational director in Lonna Picker who, after her years at Torat Yisrael, went on to enjoy national recognition for her many talents and leadership skills. She had played a major role in the creation of the community-wide Harry Elkin Midrasha, which brought together high school children from throughout the region and dramatically improved the learning experience for all of our Jewish kids, regardless of their synagogue affiliation.

As rabbi of Torat Yisrael for 12 years, I spoke to the congregation hundreds of times. I would have loved having an assistant, but unfortunately it would have been too costly for the congregation, as it was for most synagogues under 800 families. Among the countless topics I expounded upon were the following:

- The implications of an announcement by the Vatican, admitting for the first time that “the Church fostered centuries of anti-Semitism and failed to stop the Holocaust” (1994)
- The Israel left behind after the death of Israel’s Prime Minister, Menachem Begin (1992)
- President Bill Clinton’s controversial decision to lift the ban on gays serving in the Armed Forces (1993)
- The fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany (1990)
- Russian Prime Minister Gorbachev’s decision to open the gates of the Soviet Union and to let Jews leave for Israel and beyond
- PLO leader Yassar Arafat’s announcement that, after 25 years, he was ready to recognize Israel and end acts of terrorism (1988)
- Operation Solomon, the historic immigration of 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel
- The first war against Iraq, ordered by President Bush, and its implications for Israel (1991)

Finally, it was my distinct pleasure to establish meaningful relationships in Rhode Island with clergy from a wide swath of...
Christian denominations. In particular, I was grateful for the opportunity to work with Bishop Louis Gelineau, at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was undergoing transformational changes under the leadership of Pope John Paul II. I still remember attending a large ecumenical breakfast arranged by the bishop at the chancery. Perhaps 25 priests and ministers were in attendance, and I was deeply touched when the bishop assured me I could eat anything being served. Even though I was the only Jew there, he had made sure that the gathering was kosher. It symbolized to me the sincerity of Catholic efforts to build a new and stronger relationship with the Jewish world, locally and globally.

When I had applied for the position at Torat Yisrael, the Placement Director in New York said to me that the synagogue’s Achilles’ heel was its location. Over the years, I came to understand what he meant: the heart of Jewish life in Rhode Island was in Providence, not Cranston. Torat Yisrael had resulted from the merger of two needy congregations, Beth Torah and Beth Israel, but the combined synagogue was itself struggling. To complicate matters, younger Jewish families were moving to East Greenwich, a growing area with affordable housing. Thus, Torat Yisrael was betwixt and between and struggling to define itself.

I urged my lay leadership to explore the possibility of our synagogue merging with nearby Am David. My thought was that by selling both buildings and their land, we could build a new combined synagogue in East Greenwich. We would become the only congregation in a growing Jewish area.
To me, it was the best hope for our congregation and Am David.

After lengthy negotiations, votes were taken at both synagogues. Am David’s members approved a merger, but my own congregation’s membership turned it down. A few years later, talks were reopened and new votes were cast. Torat Yisrael’s members voted in favor of a merger, but Am David’s were opposed. Though I understood the emotional connections that many people held at both shuls, I was nonetheless very disappointed. I loved Torat Yisrael and wanted to see it thrive!

Happily, some 17 years after I left the community, and with new lay and rabbinical leadership, Torat Yisrael relocated to East Greenwich. I pray for its continued success and growth!

Houston

At the end of my 12 years at Torat Yisrael, the synagogue leadership had invited me to sign a final contract that would keep me
in Cranston indefinitely. I appreciated the vote of confidence very much. However, with our children then 14 and 11, it seemed to my wife and me a good time to seek a congregation closer to our parents and extended family, most of whom lived in Texas. The decision to leave was given heightened impetus when Jack Segal, the senior rabbi of my childhood synagogue, Congregation Beth Yeshurun in Houston, announced his retirement. My family and Marcie pleaded with me to apply for the position and move “home.”

I wanted to be in Texas, but I was hesitant about applying, which puzzled my family. In truth, I had two major concerns. First, how would it be for me to follow the retiring rabbi, Jack Segal, who was a legendary figure at the synagogue? I still remembered meeting him when he came to Beth Yeshurun when I was 14. Could I begin to fill his enormous shoes? Second but more important, I was concerned about the impact that leading a 2,300-family synagogue might have on my wife and children.

After many heartfelt conversations, however, Marcie encouraged me to apply. After a series of interviews and visits over the next six months, including one Friday night when I nervously delivered the biggest sermon of my life (to more than a thousand congregants), I was invited to become the third senior rabbi in Beth Yeshurun’s 51-year-history.

My new congregation was unlike any other rabbinical position I had ever held, and I was overwhelmed. Fortunately, a large staff of professionals, who made everything run smoothly, assisted me. Because the lay congregational leadership welcomed innovations in programming, religious services, and adult education, the rabbinical and programming staffs always felt free to try new ideas, which made life at Beth Yeshurun exciting.

Working at Beth Yeshurun also gave me something I had always lacked: a team of rabbinical colleagues on staff with whom I could have daily interactions that benefited and invigorated us all. I delighted in the opportunity to work with two world-class cantors, David Propis and Meir Finkelstein, and to be moved by the power of music each Shabbat and Yom Tov.

At the same time, the synagogue encouraged me to be
mindful of my roles as husband, father, and son. In my 22 years as head rabbi, I never took for granted my good fortune in being chosen to lead Beth Yeshurun, the synagogue which had played a vital role in my family’s life since before I was born.

When I chose to retire in 2018, I was gratified to see the young man I had brought to Beth Yeshurun straight out of seminary, Rabbi Brian Strauss, succeed me. He has been like a son to me these last 20 years, and he has handled the transfer of leadership with graciousness and kindness.

When I retired, Marcie and I resolved we would stay in Houston. That decision was put to the test in August 2018, when Hurricane Harvey savagely flooded Beth Yeshurun, our nearby home, and the homes of hundreds of Beth Yeshurun families. In the face of such destruction, we made the fateful decision not to walk away from Houston but to help in its rebuilding. Now in our newly-restored home, and with two of our grandchildren (and their parents!) moving to Houston in the coming months, we see our home being here forever. In the same way that Marcie and I had left a good life in Rhode Island to move our children closer to our parents, so too have our daughter and her family made the same decision.

It’s a beautiful way for us to enjoy our retirement and to thank God for the blessings of a wonderful life. Being in Rhode Island was a big part of my life’s journey. It was there I really became a rabbi, and my memories of Temple Torat Yisrael will always be sweet ones. I can still taste the wonderful challahs I bought each week at Guttin’s and Kaplan’s bakeries and the delicious briskets and chicken I brought home from Marty’s or Spigel’s kosher markets. I will never forget taking our children to feed the ducks in Roger Williams Park or having dinner with friends on sunny Sundays in beautiful Newport.

Those were beautiful times in a beautiful place. May those who have followed me at Torat Yisrael forever enjoy being part of such a delightful community, and may God’s blessings always rain down on the good people I once served and who will always have a place in my heart and soul.
yard on Fosdyke Street
Our Wonderful Years on the East Side, 1983-1994

Avi Shafran

Born in Baltimore in 1954, the author attended its Talmudical Academy through high school and then studied for a year at an Israeli yeshiva. He continued his studies at Baltimore’s Ner Israel Rabbinical College, where he was ordained by the late Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman.

As Rabbi Shafran explains, while teaching in Providence, his journalistic career blossomed. Since leaving the East Side 25 years ago, he has served as the director of public affairs and as a spokesman for Agudath Israel of America, the Orthodox umbrella organization founded in 1922. He is charged with disseminating “an authentic Torah viewpoint that is faithfully and fairly represented.”

Rabbi Shafran writes for numerous publications, including The Forward, Haaretz, and The New York Times as well as Fox News and other media. He continues to write a weekly opinion column for Hamodia, the Orthodox newspaper that is America’s only Jewish daily. Rabbi Shafran still considers himself a teacher, but not within a classroom.

Indeed, his website, rabbiaishafinan.com, has become another educational vehicle. His hundreds of columns there include many of his favorite topics: current events, issues of morality and ethics, anti-Semitism, and politics.

Rabbi Shafran, who is also deeply interested in science and medicine, has written five books. He is particularly proud of Migrant Soul: The Story of an American Ger (Jerusalem: Targum/ Feldheim Press, 1992).

The prolific author met his wife, Gita, in Toronto. His sister made the shidduch. “Sis was right,” he explained to me. The Shafrans reside on Staten Island. Their nine children, all married and with children of their own, reside there and in many other places: Milwaukee; Detroit; Baltimore; Silver Spring, Maryland; and Rockland County, New York.

While Rabbi Shafran has vivid memories of many friends and colleagues in Providence, he and his family are fondly remembered by many here. Indeed, our longtime friend and contributor, Prof. Mike Fink, suggested that I contact him.
In the summer of 1983, my wife, our three children, and I moved from Santa Clara, California to Providence's East Side. I had been offered a position teaching in the New England Academy of Torah high school, more commonly known as NEAT.

The offer had been extended by NEAT’s dean, Rabbi Shalom Strajcher, who served as dean of Providence Hebrew Day School (PHDS) as well. I had been recommended for the position by Rabbi Moshe Miller, a good friend of mine, who served as the high school’s principal. I would be teaching boys’ Talmud and Bible studies and the latter in the girls’ division. (Following traditional Orthodox practice, young men and young women were schooled separately—though that didn’t mean there weren’t interactions between the groups. Several students of mine would end up as married couples.) After several years, I was asked to teach Jewish history as well, to both divisions.

**Initial Impressions**

Providence was very different from Northern California, where I had spent the previous seven years teaching in a Jewish high school, Kerem of California, which had closed. New England’s homes struck me as ancient, and the sky, it seemed, was less blue. And no mountains stood guard in the distance.

When we saw that the apartment rented for us had old cast iron radiators, something I had only seen in some older homes in my native Baltimore, we felt that we had somehow “moved down” in life.

But that feeling soon enough succumbed to Providence’s charms. As summer faded into autumn, I recall the glorious colors of the trees. One, on the corner of Elmgrove Avenue and Fosdyke Street, was positively ablaze with red and orange when the sun hit it in late fall mornings. The bracing chill, hinting of snows to come, also made me realize that Northern California’s sunny but tedious weather had deprived me of the wondrous change of seasons.

Even the radiators proved themselves to be not only wonderful sources of warmth, but musical instruments announcing that temperatures had dropped with their clanging and banging. And
laying socks and undergarments on their metal covers mimicked the fanciest hotels’ clothes warmers. (Our young children even enjoyed placing Corn Chex on the metal, to “toast” them, an endearing but not tempting practice – at least to me.)

The people we met, the friends we made, and the opportunities that presented themselves to us West Coast transplants came to be much appreciated. While the first year entailed some difficult adjustments, at least for me, it wasn’t long before we came to feel that Providence was our home. We hoped to never have to leave it, at least until the Messiah’s arrival, when we would be brought to our ancestral home in the Land of Israel.

Due to circumstances beyond our control, our hope to stay in Rhode Island indefinitely wouldn’t be fulfilled, but we did spend 11 years in Providence. We had six more children over our Providence years, so most spent their childhood there – much to their benefit, my wife and I believe.

Both Gita and I had lived in big cities when we were growing up (she in Toronto, I in Baltimore), and in Santa Clara we had been part of a very small Orthodox community centered around a small yeshiva. Providence was something new for both of us: a city – a capital, yet – that offered so much, although small-townish enough for us to know most of our neighborhoods and to see city officials, including the mayor, on the street.

**A Spelling Bee**

All our children of school age attended Providence Hebrew Day School, and we were happy with the high level of both its religious and secular studies programs. Our oldest daughter, Chava, nine years old at the time, won the school’s spelling bee and qualified for the statewide finals. She was one of only three or four still in the running when she was asked to spell “mistletoe.” The audience, realizing that my wife and I were “ultra-Orthodox” Jews, let out a murmur, which bordered on a groan. Sure enough, our daughter, who was well-read but not greatly exposed to non-Jewish holidays, had never come across the word. So she began to spell it like the closest word she could imagine: missile.
After the bee, Chava and her siblings received a consolation prize in the form of a visit to an ice cream parlor and their choice of refreshment.

Our Neighborhood

Our children were regular visitors to the Rochambeau Public Library on Hope Street, which was a short walk from our house at 14 Fosdyke Street. A librarian there, Dhana, was particularly kind to them, and her desk featured several pieces of artwork some of our daughters had created for her.

Hope Street was a wonderful “Main Street” for the East Side (although, a bit westward lay Providence’s actual Main Street). Its shops, institutions, and amenities made it a picturesque artery for the neighborhood. From Pawtucket down to Thayer Street, where Brown University’s satellite buildings and fraternities abounded – and where the Avon Theatre offered vintage films – we thought of Hope Street as something special. The Orthodox Jewish community had members and synagogues on both sides of the thoroughfare.

As Hope Street approached Pawtucket, there was lovely Blackstone Boulevard, with its broad, green median, a favorite of joggers and strollers. It featured lovely homes and also the building that housed NEAT’s boys’ dorm (and some classrooms) as well as New England Rabbinical College (NERC).

On the far side of Blackstone Boulevard was a stretch of park alongside the Seekonk River. During a break in my teaching hours each school day – and on other days as well – I would sit on its grass and do some translations for Agudath Israel of America, the national organization I would later work for in New York.

Rabbi Avi with son Mordechai and Purim visitor
Brown rowing team would add an element of grace to that quiet, inspiring place.

Another local idyllic locale in our lives was Paterson Park, a grassy playground area off of Angell Street. As a teacher with limited duties during the summer, I was happy to give my wife some quiet time at home by packing our children in our full-size van and taking them to the park during afternoons, weather permitting. As I just sat on a bench, studying a text or doing some writing, the kids would have a great time on the swings, on the roundabout or in the sandbox. I enjoyed watching them and other children enjoying themselves.

**Outsized Providence Personalities**

The mayor at the time of our Providence years was the famous, or infamous, Buddy Cianci, who enjoyed a warm relationship with the Jewish community. As a true politician, he was ubiquitous at Jewish events. Within weeks of our arrival, he attended a gathering where (de rigueur) he was given a microphone for a few minutes. He caused a good amount of laughter when he remarked that he was wearing a yarmulke but one of the local Reform rabbis also in attendance was not. He knew how to regale a crowd (and the Reform rabbi laughed along with everybody).

Among the other personages particularly memorable to me was Professor Jack Neusner of Brown. At first, I had a few unpleasant interactions with him. Once, he offered me a compliment, which I took (rightly or wrongly) as condescending. He said something like, “If you work at it, you can become a scholar of Judaic thought.” I responded somewhat cheekily that I preferred, rather, to become “what scholars of Judaic thought study.”

The professor and I tangled in the pages of a local newspaper, *The Jewish Herald*, several times. I honestly don’t remember about what – but I had the strong impression that he did not look upon me kindly during those days.

Years later, though, when I had moved to New York and he to upstate’s Bard College, he wrote me fairly often and always in appreciation of things I had written recently. He expressed his feeling...
that, as a writer in Jewish media, I represented Orthodoxy accurately. And he, as an academic, valued accuracy, of course. He sent me several of his books and he mentioned me in subsequent ones, so our interactions in his later years were entirely pleasant. I was saddened by his illness, then his passing in 2016.

Another outsized Providence personality to whom I became close, while I was still living in Providence, was Rabbi Baruch Korff. He was known as “Nixon’s rabbi.” Rabbi Korff must have read my opinion pieces in The Jewish Herald and The Providence Journal because he asked me to edit one of his books. As I recall, it had already been published, but he wanted to have it edited before its second printing.

I would visit him often and sit and talk to him about his personal history. I was honored to be asked to deliver a speech at the ceremony when his papers were donated to Brown’s Hay Library. I remember being very flattered afterward, when President Vartan Gregorian sought me out to tell me how much he enjoyed my words. I traveled from New York back to Providence in 1995 to visit Rabbi Korff when he was terminally ill and was touched when, in a state of morphine-induced calm, he asked me and another visitor to sing songs from the Jewish liturgy.

I also have fond memories of Brown’s Hillel House, where I held weekly study sessions. It was evident from the pounding above our first floor, makeshift classroom that more Jewish students were interested in Israeli dancing, but the 10 or so regular attendees of our evening get-togethers were a very enjoyable bunch. We had many intellectually stimulating exchanges.

A local lawyer, Thomas Pearlman, was someone who truly fascinated me. Although he seemed to have had a limited Jewish educational background, he was a great force in supporting the local Orthodox institutions, especially PHDS, NEAT, and then NERC. Although I, for the most part, only knew and admired him at a distance, he provided the nexus that led me to meet the legendary Orthodox leader, Rabbi Moshe (Morris) Sherer, who was president of Agudath Israel of America. He was the person who eventually invited me to join that national organization’s headquarters in Manhattan.
Sometime during the late 1980s or early ‘90s, Mr. Pearlman had received an award at Agudath Israel’s annual dinner in New York, and a number of Providence’s Orthodox residents attended in his honor. It was there that I met Rabbi Sherer, with whom I had occasionally corresponded. I merited to work with Rabbi Sherer for two years before his death in 1998, and I have remained with the organization to this day.

A Providence resident with a truly important connection to my family, but whom I didn’t know about when we moved to Rhode Island, was Dr. Melvyn Gelch, a highly respected neurosurgeon. My wife serendipitously met Mrs. Gelch one day on the sidewalk in front of our house. I don’t remember how the connection became apparent, but it turned out that he was the person who had sponsored my Polish-born father, whom the Soviets had banished to Siberia during World War II, to immigrate to this wonderful country. Dr. Gelch’s father or uncle, Chaim Gelchinsky, was a distant relative (the husband of my paternal great-aunt). Just as my father had shortened his name from Szafranowicz, so had the American Gelchinskys shortened theirs.

When the connection between our families became apparent, we visited Dr. and Mrs. Gelch in their home off of Grotto Avenue, between Blackstone Boulevard and the Seekonk River. Had it not been for Dr. Gelch, my family might not have come to Providence or even the United States! My father, virtually a penniless young man at war’s end, was able to come to these shores and become a citizen only because of Dr. Gelch’s kindness to a distant relative.

Then there was a truly memorable personality, Dorothy Frank Fox (and later, for a short while, Dorothy F. F. Levenson). “Mrs. Fox,” as everyone knew her, was an older divorcee who lived in a large home on Rochambeau Avenue, two blocks from our own. She was what many people might call “eccentric.” To us, she was simply a delightful lady. She would routinely host neighborhood children for “stuffed animal parties”— for which each child had to be accompanied by a furry toy animal. She reveled in her “Mrs. Fox” name, and sometimes “Mrs. Aardvark,” but always offered treats to
animals and their respective children.

At some point, Mrs. Fox confided to me that she was distraught at having discovered that a relative had been buried in a grave that Mrs. Fox had purchased for herself. It was next to her mother’s grave. A local rabbi had given permission for the burial. I wrote an article for *The Jewish Herald* or *The Providence Journal* about her saga, and she was deeply grateful that her story had been told. I also put her in touch with a respected New York rabbi, who assured her that she didn’t have to be concerned about her mortal remains’ final resting place.

Several years later, Mrs. Fox moved to an assisted living home in Jerusalem, which allowed her to joyfully assert her independence. She regularly attended lectures and concerts and constantly expressed her happiness with life and her friends, among whom she counted my wife and me. “I’m so privileged!” she gushed to my wife, as she pointed to her window’s majestic view of Jerusalem.

We kept in touch with Mrs. Fox for many years. When she died in 2012, Gita and I discovered that she had made good on her threat to include us in her will – something we had protested repeatedly when she brought it up. We had the honor of erecting the memorial stone at her grave, which lies in the holy ground of Jerusalem, in Har Hamenuchot.

**Chevra Kadisha**

The topic of burial leads me to recall Providence’s *Chevra Kadisha* or Jewish burial preparation society. It consisted of dedicated men and women ready to tend to the traditional religious preparation of bodies for interment. My wife and I were privileged to occasionally participate in that holy task, but the true heroes of the corps were the regulars, Orthodox Jews attending to the final arrangements of all local Jews.

The mainstays of the *Chevra Kadisha* were, and remain, Rabbi and Mrs. Abraham Jakubowicz, both of whom have been wonderful teachers at PHDS for many years. More than two decades after we moved to New York, one of the Jakubowicz daughters suggested that her brother might be a good match for one of our
daughters. The two, as it happened, had played together as toddlers but had not been in contact since. They are now happily married with three children, and they remain one of our closest bonds to our _alteh heim_ – Yiddish for “old country” – Providence.

**Rabbi Braude**

A memorable burial service was the final interaction I had with the scholar Rabbi William Braude, whom I came to consider a friend. Although I am an Orthodox rabbi (of the sort referred to as “ultra-Orthodox” or _haredi_) and he was the senior rabbi of a Reform temple, Beth-El, he asked me at some point to study a Talmudic text with him. As I recall, he was having problems with his eyesight and was perhaps waiting for a new pair of glasses. I readily agreed to study with him because I am always happy to study Jewish texts with any fellow Jew. We had several study sessions, and I think we bonded.

Rabbi Braude once regaled me with the story of a Beth-El service held in November 1938, soon after the loss of shuls and lives in _Kristallnacht_. When some local refugees from Germany attended
and wore their hats, some of the regular congregants complained to Rabbi Braude. This was a shocking departure from the Reform “tradition,” which required bare heads in temple. Rabbi Braude noted, however, that Nazis had taunted traditionally religious Jewish men by making them remove their hats, and he could not request them to do so.

Rabbi Braude, whose upbringing had been Orthodox, wrestled with the issue of men wearing hats for many decades. The turning point came after March 1965, when he had marched with Rev. Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. Many rabbis, including Reform ones, had worn yarmulkes to identify themselves as Jews. So at his Rosh Hashanah sermon in 1965, he spoke about what he had learned about wearing yarmulkes in Alabama. As he concluded his sermon, he recited the Shehecheyanu blessing – said at a special occasion like a holiday– and placed a yarmulke on his head.

The congregation was stunned, but I read later that some of the men present had carried yarmulkes with them and promptly followed suit. Rabbi Braude continued to cover his head in worship until his death in 1988. I attended his funeral, of course. And I was surprised that, after the service, those in attendance left before the casket had actually been buried. A few shovelfuls of earth had been placed on the casket but the holy task of actually covering its entirety was left to the operator of a small bulldozer, who was employed by the cemetery. Knowing that Jewish religious tradition mandates that a deceased person not be left unburied, I picked up the shovel and proceeded with the actual burial. It was very hard work and my back ached afterward, but I only let the bulldozer finish up after I had sufficiently filled in the grave.

**NEAT**

My tenure at NEAT continued through all the years we lived in Providence. As I explained, I was primarily a religious studies teacher—mostly Talmud, Bible and Jewish law for the boys’ division—and mostly Bible for the girls’. I eventually taught Jewish history classes, as part of the secular studies curriculum, in both divisions.
And for the last years we were in Providence, I served as religious studies principal for the boys’ division as well.

In 1985, around our second year in Providence, the New England Rabbinical College (NERC), a post-secondary yeshiva headed by Rabbi Eliezer Gibber and Rabbi Yosef Lipson, opened. Its students shared dormitory and classroom space with the boys’ division of NEAT. I became very close to those rabbis and to some of their students, and there was Talmud-study interaction between the high school boys and the older ones.

The boys’ high school division of NEAT no longer exists, however. Indeed, the expectation of its closing became the impetus for our moving from our beloved Providence in 1994. Nevertheless, NERC continues to draw students from across the country to high-level Jewish studies.

The elementary school to which NEAT was loosely attached was Providence Hebrew Day School, and it still exists. As mentioned above, all of our school-age children attended this school, and we were very happy with both its Jewish and secular studies departments.

Teaching at NEAT was a special pleasure, although challenging in many ways. The sheer number of teaching hours would take a toll on my voice and stamina. Because students in both the boys’ and girls’ divisions lived in dormitories, the Sabbath was, in a way, a “working day” as well. We had to oversee not only prayer services but programming over weekends.

I am in touch even today with several of the students I had the honor of teaching over our Providence years. Some of them have gone on to great accomplishments, in academia, the rabbinate and, most important of all, parenthood. I recently stood under the chuppah of the daughter of one of my students, and I had the honor of reciting one of the marriage blessings.

Although my “day job” was with NEAT, I also occasionally wrote opinion pieces for The Providence Journal. Robert Whitcomb, the editorial page editor during those years, was very kind to me. He published almost everything I sent him, on a variety of topics, usually written from an Orthodox Jewish perspective. This was my
first foray into “op-ed” writing, something I have done for numerous Jewish and general media over many years and which I continue today.

**Moving On**

In the mid-1990s, the administration at NEAT underwent a change. The vision I had for the boys’ school – molding it into a somewhat traditional dormitory-based yeshiva high school for young men who didn’t fully fit the mold of other *yeshivot* – seemed to be fading. Local supporters of NEAT and its board preferred a more “community-oriented” institution.

At least that is how I understood things. Not one to involve myself in institutional politics, I may have had an incomplete comprehension of events, and I may have an incomplete memory of them today.

But the bottom line was that, in 1994, I turned down Rabbi Sherer’s offer of a position at Agudath Israel because I wanted to remain in teaching. Then, after being informed that changes at NEAT were in the air and that I could not be guaranteed my long-standing position in the future, I reconsidered my situation. So I reconnected with Rabbi Sherer, and my family ended up leaving our beloved Providence. It was so ironic that we departed to New York, a place I had always said would be the last place on earth I would want...
to live in. As the Yiddish proverb has it, “Man plans and G-d laughs.”

My wife and I tried to break the news of our impending move to our children in a happy way, as a special surprise, and introduced it as great news. But their expressions told us we had failed in our attempt, and that they were as saddened by the thought of leaving as we were.

It was a painful separation, and I had tears in my eyes when I drove away in a U-Haul van with some of our possessions. (Most had been sent ahead by moving van.) But my wife also drove our van, out of the East Side and onto Route 95.

But these had been eleven wonderful years, years we look back on now as having been a singular blessing.
In Starbucks office
Jim enjoys telling stories – perhaps as much as he enjoys reading them. Clearly, stories are indispensible components of his lifelong love of learning.

As he mentions almost parenthetically in this article, Jim taught for seven years at Connecticut College while leading Temple Habonim. So a question naturally arises: why didn’t he plan on becoming a professor and devoting himself to scholarly endeavors?

Although I haven’t asked him that question, I can imagine some of his answers. For instance, despite his preference for certain writers, he enjoys broad vistas – the freedom to roam far and wide. Additionally, Jim is interested in engaging learners of all ages, and he probably doesn’t much care about giving exams or grading papers. Most importantly, however, he believes in both the beauty and power of wisdom. Thus, learning is far more than a challenging regimen of intellectual exercises. Wisdom inspires and commands a person to live a responsible, fulfilling, and honorable life.

Yet, Jim fully accepts the idea that there are limits to human understanding. Not everything does or should lead to academic scrutiny!

I can see, moreover, that Jim, unlike many professors, readily acknowledges his own disappointments, frustrations, and shortcomings. Ironically, his sense of vulnerability has probably deepened his intellectual and spiritual yearnings. Yet, if his articles for The Notes are any indication, he may now have scaled some additional, insightful summits.

In my 2017 article for this journal, the first in an autobiographical trilogy, I began to explore certain aspects of my evolving identity as a congregational rabbi. Upon further reflection, I have been able to weave together more of the many threads that have enabled me to function as a community leader.
I have found Jack H. Bloom (1933-2016), who was both a rabbi and a psychologist, to be particularly helpful in explaining myself to myself. Bloom’s central idea is that a rabbi, like other congregational clergy, is a “symbolic exemplar.” His groundbreaking book, published by Routledge in 2002, was *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar: By the Power Vested in Me*.

As most congregational clergy have discovered, to be perceived as a “symbolic exemplar” is both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side of the ledger, at many of the life cycle rites at which I have officiated, I temporarily possessed the power of being more than Jim Rosenberg. Far beyond the blemishes and shortcomings that make me human, congregants would transform me into the living embodiment of 4,000 years of Jewish tradition, a sacred vessel for transmitting God’s healing presence.

Similarly, during my hundreds of visits to hospitals and nursing homes, the people I visited, frequently feeling at their most fragile and helpless, often chose to see me not as Jim Rosenberg but as “The Rabbi.” For example, many years ago, before there was a Hasbro Children’s Hospital, sick children were placed in the drab and dreary Potter Wing of Rhode Island Hospital. I remember visiting a young girl from Temple Habonim, who had a seriously fractured a leg. When I stepped up to her bedside, she was all alone; her mother had briefly left the room. We exchanged pleasantries for a few minutes, and then I headed back to the Temple. As I was leaving Potter, I heard the young girl say to her returning mother: “Mommy, the RABBI was here! The RABBI came to visit me!” Not Jim Rosenberg, who meant nothing to her, but the RABBI!

The curse of being perceived as a “symbolic exemplar” is the mirror image of the blessing. At times congregants have been unable to see me as a person who may suffer from physical and emotional exhaustion, from marital stress, from recalcitrant children, and from professional burnout. Unfortunately, some congregants have insisted that I be Jewish for them, that I make it my priority to meet their obligations. Consequently, when overwhelmed with the role of “symbolic exemplar,” almost all congregational clergy ask themselves: “Who will comfort the
comforter? Who will respond to my own neediness?"

Temple Israel, Boston

Just a few days after my ordination at Manhattan’s Central Synagogue on June 6, 1971, a moving van took our belongings to Brookline, Massachusetts, where my wife Sandy and I were to live for the next three years. During that time I served as one of two assistants to Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn of Boston’s prestigious Temple Israel, a Reform congregation of 1,800 families that was housed in a huge, easy-to-get-lost-in facility on the Boston-Brookline border. By the time I left the Temple at the end of June 1974, the professional staff also consisted of a cantor, an educator, and a synagogue administrator supported by a team of teachers, secretaries, and janitors to keep the well-oiled machine humming.

When I arrived at Temple Israel, I was the low man on the professional totem pole. In contrast to my experience as student rabbi at Manhattan’s Temple Beth Or of the Deaf, where I was the sole professional, I had to adjust to the fact that I was to make no synagogue-related decisions without first consulting with Rabbi Gittelsohn.

It did not take me long to learn of my need for prior consultation. Within days of beginning my assistantship, I was assigned to lead a relatively small Friday evening “chapel” service. Because a section of Torah was to be read at this service, I made sure to practice the chanting of the assigned verses, a skill I had developed in rabbinical school. Mere seconds after I began the traditional chant, a large number of congregants began murmuring to each other, a not-so-soft buzzing of the bees. “What have I done?” I asked myself. Apparently, I was the first individual ever to chant Torah at Temple Israel. While the synagogue did employ a distinguished musical director, Dr. Herbert Fromm, it chose not to hire a cantor until my third and final year as assistant rabbi.

A day or two later, Rabbi Gittelsohn confronted me with, “Who gave you permission to chant Torah?” All I could think to answer was, “That’s what most Jews do when called to the bimah to read Torah. Do you have any objections?” In this particular case,
Rabbi Gittelsohn gave me the green light; by the time I left the Temple, many of those called to the Torah chose to chant rather than to read without melody.

My biggest adjustment to the realities of rabbinical life at Temple Israel was finding a way to respond to the burden of nonstop professional obligations, which consumed the majority of my waking hours and drained me of physical and emotional energy. It is not surprising that such 24/7 do-it-now demands placed considerable strain upon Sandy’s and my young marriage– the onset of a struggle for family-work balance that I never managed to resolve satisfactorily throughout my rabbinical career. Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Couples’ Club, Young Leadership – in my second and third years, advising the large synagogue youth group – religious school, double and triple bar/bat mitzvahs Shabbat after Shabbat: always a meeting to attend, a class to teach, an individual to counsel, a worship service in which to participate.

Because there were many elderly congregants, I also found myself making numerous visits to hospitals and nursing homes. During my three years at Temple Israel, I officiated at more than 90 funerals; within a six-day period during my first summer in Boston, I took part in eight funerals. On one of those days, I officiated at a late-morning interment at the Temple’s relatively distant Wakefield cemetery, ate a sandwich in the company of the gravediggers, and waited for the second funeral procession, at which time I officiated at the second burial.

I was not prepared for the intensity of my workload. With so many needs to meet, I was already feeling depleted: how long could I keep up this pace? I began to wonder if I had chosen the wrong profession.

Much to my dismay, I was compelled to admit to myself that I was emotionally favoring those families who had chosen to bury their dead at the nearby Baker Street cemetery while resenting those families whose burial plots were in faraway Wakefield or Sharon. How could I continue to be a rabbi, a person of genuine compassion, of rachmones, when I harbored such selfish feelings? Moreover, Temple Israel had the policy that we rabbis were not to...
attend *shivas* because our schedules were already overcrowded—a policy that made it even more difficult for me to bring comfort to grieving families.

The press of work at Temple Israel and my lack of opportunity to slow down and reflect led me to commit some serious faux pas. One Friday evening, during my first fall in Boston, I made a blunder that quickly made the rounds among my colleagues in the Central Conference of American Rabbis. This was a blunder that brought many of them some measure of comfort because they could say, “At least I never did anything like that!”

Following a Friday evening service, I was standing next to Rabbi Gittelsohn and Rabbi Paul Menitoff, the other assistant during my first two years, dutifully shaking hands and making small talk with congregants as they made their way through the receiving line on their way to the coffee, tea, and sweets at the Oneg. Standing before me was an older woman whom I mistook for someone else. Refusing to keep my mouth shut and be thought a fool, I opened it and removed all doubt by asking: “And where is your husband tonight?” She replied, “You accompanied him to Sharon (the cemetery) yesterday.”

As I reddened with embarrassment, the widow’s lady friends reddened with rage. Before they could tear me apart, the widow, Florence Winograd, demonstrated that if Judaism had a place for saints, she would be standing on that hallowed ground: “No need to apologize, Rabbi. I realize that you didn’t take part in the funeral service yesterday. I understand that Rabbi Gittelsohn assigned you to go with the hearse to Sharon to perform the burial. You never had the opportunity to meet with me or my family.”

Mrs. Winograd could have ended my career there and then; but instead, with her display of exceptional grace, she restored my faith in the better angels of human nature—in particular, the angel of mercy.

Some months after that embarrassing but ultimately edifying episode, I learned one of the most significant lessons of my career. Judy Robbins was a vivacious, focused 30-year-old mother of two, and both she and her husband, Norman, were well-respected
members of our thriving congregation’s young leadership. One Saturday evening, as Judy and her husband were getting dressed to go out for dinner, a blood vessel burst in her brain; she died a week later at Beth Israel Hospital.

Just minutes after Judy’s death, I was standing in the hospital corridor when her mother came rushing towards me, screaming “How can God do this to me?” Taking the grieving mother into my arms, I said softly, “Sometimes we have questions for which there are no answers.”

Months later Judy’s mother approached me at a Temple event and asked if I remembered what I had said to her at Beth Israel; I let her know that one doesn’t forget an experience like that. The mother continued, “If you had tried to offer ANY explanation for Judy’s death, I would have slapped you across the face.”

Over the years I have tried to remain loyal to my hospital encounter with Judy’s mother. In my rabbinical role, I have time and again tried to bring at least some measure of comfort to grieving men, women, and children. Nevertheless, in this attempt to bring comfort, I have been careful to add, “I do not know why this has happened.” To put it somewhat differently, I can be present, and I can help soften the intense loneliness of the bereaved; but I must refrain from offering “explanations.”

I was approaching my 27th birthday when I began working at Temple Israel, my first full-time job. Beginning with kindergarten, I had spent the previous 22 years as a student, the last five of which were in rabbinical school in New York. At long last I had left my ivy tower and, ironically, was spending my three years at Temple Israel wondering if I had bit off more than I could chew. At least I was honest enough with myself to admit that I would never be a “good fit” in a large, corporate-style synagogue: too many moving parts for me to establish the quality of personal relationships that I find fulfilling. I still remember attending an annual meeting at Temple Israel, when its president, dressed in a dark, three-piece suit, began his address with “Welcome, members of the corporation…I mean, congregation…”
Temple Habonim, Barrington

I officially began my 33 years as rabbi of Temple Habonim—what was then called Barrington Jewish Center—on August 1, 1974. A few weeks earlier, Sandy and I, along with our almost six-week-old daughter, Karen, moved into a center-stair colonial at 3 Old Chimney Road in Barrington’s Hampden Meadows neighborhood. Being from New York City, Sandy had never before lived in a single-family house. We remained in that home, finishing the basement and adding a master bedroom over our family room, until the spring of 2007, when, following my retirement, we moved a 15-minute drive away to a condo on Providence’s East Side.

Temple Habonim turned out to be a far better fit for me than Temple Israel. When I began working for them—better, with them—the Barrington congregation had about 80 families—mostly young—who gathered in a small, renovated, white house at 147 County Road. I have frequently described Temple Habonim as “a growing institution that refuses to become institutional”; today the congregation numbers about 220 families.

In contrast to my role at Temple Israel, I was chief cook and bottle washer at Temple Habonim, the Pa in a Ma-and-Pa operation. Marjorie Blowers, my faithful and competent executive secretary, served as the beloved Ma during my entire 33 years with the congregation. Of course, the small size of the synagogue family, especially during the early years, came with its own set of problems. I had to learn more than any rabbi should ever know about plumbing and heating systems: first at 147 County Road—and beginning in 1980—at the congregation’s new home at 165 New Meadow Road.

Temple Israel’s size and wealth meant that it could sponsor a wide variety of programs and speakers. Nevertheless, despite Habonim’s limited budget, through the intense efforts of our talented and dedicated lay leadership, we continue to be able to sustain a level and quality of programming about which every member can be proud.

In addition to my finding much professional satisfaction during my more than three decades at Habonim, Barrington proved
to be a good place in which Sandy and I could nurture and nourish our nuclear family. We arrived with our infant daughter, Karen; our son, David, was born almost five years later in April 1979, and both our children attended grades K through 12 in Barrington’s excellent public schools.

But no man or woman is fully prepared for the tasks of parenting. As Sandy and I struggled to guide our daughter and son through the challenges that came with each stage of their development, I became ever more humbled by the enormity of the task. I came to realize how vulnerable we felt when confronting our children’s inevitable shortcomings. Whenever a teacher would offer constructive criticism regarding Karen or David, despite what my head told me, my heart told me that the teacher was criticizing me, pointing out my failures as a parent.

I would like to think that the never-ending complexities of being a parent have made me a better rabbi, teacher, and counselor. Sandy was also an educator, having had a long career as a reading specialist in New York, Massachusetts, and then at Providence Country Day School, Lincoln School, and for almost two decades at Barrington’s public schools.

As Sandy and I began moving towards an empty nest, Karen went off to Columbia College and then found work in the Big Apple. She later moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where she became a much-loved teacher, married, and gave birth to Lucy, the first of our five grandchildren. After earning his degree at Tufts, David has spent many years at the Rashi School in the Boston area. I had the privilege of officiating at his marriage in Temple Habonim’s sanctuary just weeks after I retired.

During my more than three decades at Habonim, I had ample opportunity to develop a sense of what it means for me to be a congregational rabbi. Fortunately, most congregants – most of the time – had the maturity and the sensitivity to know when I was feeling it necessary to function as a “symbolic exemplar” and when I was functioning as Jim Rosenberg. For example, when a man who almost always called me “Jim” began a phone conversation with “Rabbi,” I knew immediately that he needed me to be a “symbolic
exemplar”: to arrange a funeral for a family member, or, perhaps, to discuss a serious issue with regard to his teenage son. Switching back and forth between Jim Rosenberg and “Rabbi Symbolic Exemplar” has remained a tricky business to this very day; but I have been fortunate to have served people who have known when to call upon different dimensions of my identity.

I well understand that there is a profound difference between how I view myself and how others choose to view me. But what has been far more important to my own sense of Jewish identity and to my own sense of rabbinical authenticity has been my commitment to lifelong learning. I am grateful that my congregants at Habonim have encouraged my efforts to grow as a student; they have recognized that for me to grow as a teacher, I must continue to grow as a student.

When I was given the opportunity to teach at Connecticut College, in New London, from the fall of 1980 through the spring of 1988, the Temple leadership offered me wholehearted support, even though this necessitated some serious juggling of my schedule.

The Habonim family also approved of my dedication to interfaith involvement both on a local and statewide level. I found our annual Barrington church-synagogue adult education classes of four to six sessions to be a particularly exciting environment in which to grow through our open and honest Jewish-Christian dialogue. The aim of our stimulating give-and-take was never to convince others of the correctness of our views but rather to listen to the truths held dear by those with whom we disagree.

The deepest source of my learning during my 33 years at Habonim was my ongoing engagement with our sacred texts – in particular, with the fathomless immensity of our Tanakh, our Hebrew Bible. Our yearly cycle of Torah readings proved to be a welcome and enriching return to the core of our Jewish identity. Every year during our service on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we would take yet another look at chapter 22 of Genesis, the Akedah – Binding of Isaac. Every year we found something new and significant to bring home with us. As the ancient sage Ben Bag Bag says of our Torah, “Turn it and turn it, for everything is in it.” (Pirkey
Over the years, I have had the opportunity to explore with congregants a number of Biblical texts in addition to the five books of our Torah. During our six-week adult education classes, we have engaged with such diverse texts as Job, *Song of Songs*, *Kohelet* (*Ecclesiastes*), and the story of King David found in *I* and *II Samuel*, and the very beginning of *I Kings*. Our *Tanakh*, our Hebrew Bible, is not a book but a library composed over a thousand years – a library of poetry and prose, of religion and history, of lore and law… worlds without end!

Admittedly, it has taken some time for me to grasp how much my ongoing companionship with ancient Hebrew texts has helped shape my identity as an individual, as a Jew, and as a rabbi. In their brilliant book, *Jews and Words* (Yale University Press, 2012), the father-and-daughter team of Amos Oz (1939-2018) and Fania Oz-Sulzberger argue that Jewish continuity is dependent upon our ongoing engagement with our foundational texts. On the very first page, the well-regarded Israeli author and his daughter, a professor of history at the University of Haifa, declare: “Ours is not a bloodline but a textline.”

Looking back over my 33 years at Habonim, I have derived most satisfaction from my role as a teacher – a role made possible by my commitment to being a lifelong student. Perhaps my most significant legacy has been to inspire at least some of my congregants to join the textline of our people.

**Retirement, Providence’s East Side**

A colleague who has recently retired told me how much he treasured his feeling of “spaciousness.” Now in my thirteenth year of retirement, “spaciousness” still seems the appropriate word for the experience of not being tied down to the inflexible demands of serving as a congregational rabbi; “spaciousness” also means, however, that I am still living a busy life – marriage, children, grandchildren, reading, writing, time for some travel – but on my own terms, according to my own calendar, in response to my own needs and desires.
In addition to this feeling of “spaciousness” is my sense of freedom, of liberation from the constraints that my professional role had placed upon my words and my deeds. Let one example suffice. Three years after my talented successor, Rabbi Andrew Klein, had established himself as Mara d’Atraḥ, the Aramaic term for “Master of the Place,” we agreed that I would begin to preach the sermon on Yom Kippur mornings. This arrangement would allow me to maintain a connection with the congregation as its rabbi emeritus and would afford Rabbi Klein some small measure of relief from the burden of High Holy Day preparation.

For my first Yom Kippur sermon following my retirement, I chose to speak about J Street, a national pro-Israel/pro-peace organization of American Jews that takes a somewhat left-of-center position in its strong advocacy for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I confess that I would not have delivered this sermon had I still been the acting rabbi because it would have ruffled more than a few feathers. Before my retirement, I felt that it was most important for me to strive to bring people together even at the cost of some self-censorship.

Shortly after I spoke as rabbi emeritus, a man obviously unhappy about what I had said approached me and asked how I could give a sermon like that, a sermon unlike any I had ever given. Without batting an eyelash, I responded only half-jokingly, “Because now you can’t fire me.”

This past June 28, I turned 75. A few weeks later I emailed a college friend of mine on the day he celebrated his 75th and commented, “Despite what some people say, 75 is not the new 45.” I am feeling my age.

One morning last February I moved the wrong way, sending my lower back into spasm. An orthopedic specialist advised me that if all went well, given that my x-ray showed severe arthritic degeneration of my spine and accompanying scoliosis, I would probably feel better in four months or so. As the doctor had predicted, by mid-June – after chiropractic, myofascial release, acupuncture, and heavy-duty physical therapy with “homework” in the form of new and difficult exercises to add to my routine – I did
feel much better.

Sometime around Passover a friend of mine, Michael Baron, asked me if I would officiate at his marriage to Judy Norkin. The wedding was to take place on the last Sunday in July on Nantucket. Given the fact that driving between Providence and Barrington put a strain on my back, I did not see how I could say “Yes.”

Nevertheless, the unique circumstances of our friendship made it impossible for me, Jim Rosenberg, to say “No.” What had brought us so close together was that on the very same day in October 2009, Michael’s first wife, also named Judy, underwent surgery for ovarian cancer in Boston while my wife Sandy was being operated on for ovarian cancer at Women & Infants Hospital in Providence. Rita Astrachan, wife of George Astrachan, who had been rabbi of Temple Sinai in Cranston, knew the Barons and asked Sandy if she would be willing to contact them. Our friendship developed very quickly because all four of us were living under the Damoclean sword, with Judy and Sandy undergoing the rigors of treatment at the same time. The wheels of fate turned without rhyme or reason; my wife has survived, to our good fortune; but Judy succumbed to her cancer in February 2013.

Given our shared history, how could I say “No” to Michael when he asked me to officiate at his wedding to Judy Norkin, who had stood by her husband during their twelve-year battle with cancer? When I said “Yes,” I did warn Michael of my physical problems and insisted that he have a firm backup plan.

The Rev. Linda Simmons, a Unitarian-Universalist minister who had brought much comfort to the bride-to-be during her husband’s long illness, was to co-officiate. She agreed to sign the wedding license issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In addition, Michael reassured me that, if necessary, I would be covered by his son-in-law, Rabbi Peter Stein, who served with great distinction at Temple Sinai in Cranston before becoming senior rabbi at Temple B’rith Kodesh in Rochester, New York.

On Sunday evening, this past July 28, in an historical white church that doubles as Congregation Shirat HaYam during the summer months, I had the honor and the privilege of pronouncing
Michael Baron and Judy Norkin husband and wife “according to the law of Moses and Israel.” My lingering physical limitations necessitated that my “wedding shoes” be somewhat faded gray Brooks Beast sneakers. Because the steps ascending the center aisle from the bimah on which the chuppah stood did not have a railing for me to hold, Rev. Simmons most graciously took my arm in hers as we proceeded upward to a “higher place” – both symbolically and in actuality.

On the Monday morning after the ceremony, as I sat on the top deck of a ferry speeding to New Bedford, I realized that I had reached a significant turning point in my life as a rabbi. Though standing under the chuppah with Michael and Judy had filled me with transcendent joy, I realized that I would never again perform a wedding ceremony. The reason was as clear as the blue sky above me: at my age, I can no longer trust my body to get me from point A to point B. Had this wedding been scheduled for May – and not the end of July – my back would not have permitted me to travel to Nantucket. Though I derive personal and professional satisfaction in officiating at life cycle events, I have come to realize that I can no longer agree to do so. I do not wish to disappoint myself or others because of my age-related infirmities.

While I can no longer count upon my body to cooperate, my mind – kayna harah – still seems to be working. So I continue to read and write and thereby nourish my sense of self as a lifelong learner.

Yes, I will continue to derive nourishment from the classics of Western civilization: Shakespeare’s plays, especially his tragedies; Dostoyevsky’s novels, especially Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov; and Melville’s Moby Dick.

Nevertheless, as I journey through this final stage of my life, I find myself being drawn more and more to the Hebrew language: to such poets of modern Hebrew as Chaim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) and Yehudah Amichai (1924-2000). But it is the ancient Hebrew texts that most give me a sense of who I am, from whence I have come, and whither I am going; they ground me in the millennial chain of Jewish tradition. These ancient texts are essential
in shaping my quest for both past and future.

Let me conclude by turning to the words of the first half of verse 49 from Psalm 89: “Mi gever yichyeh v’lo yireh mavet?” (“What person shall live and not see death?”) I was still a teenager when I first saw those Hebrew and English words on the white front cover of a paperback collection of essays on death and dying. Now that I have passed my 75th birthday, I am living those words far differently. With every passing decade, I have been rewriting those words even as they remain the same, reworking their relationship to my blood and bone and brain. To paraphrase what is written on the first page of the Oz family’s Jews and Words, the half verse from Psalm 89 is a vital fragment of the textline – not the bloodline – that has given us Jews our immortality.

Speaking most personally, I can only hope that my small contribution to the textline of my people will outlast the few years allotted to me on this good earth.
Four Synagogues and a Hillel House:
Notes from a Quick Trip to Rhode Island

Samuel D. Gruber

The author is an internationally recognized expert on Jewish art and architecture as well as the historic preservation of Jewish sites and monuments. A native of suburban Philadelphia, he earned his bachelor’s degree in medieval studies at Princeton in 1977. Having written a dissertation on the medieval Italian hill town of Todi, he earned his doctorate in art and architectural history at Columbia.

Sam was founding director of the Jewish heritage program of the World Monuments Fund. For a decade, beginning in 1998, he served as research director of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad. As president of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments, he continues to advise congregations, communities, and governments on Jewish heritage preservation projects in Europe and America. For example, he has been a consultant to the New York Landmarks Conservancy on its statewide survey of synagogues.


Sam has taught at numerous colleges and universities in the Empire State. For example, since 1994, he has been a lecturer in Jewish studies at Syracuse University. Beginning two years ago, he has been a visiting associate professor of Jewish studies at Cornell.

While leading Gruber Heritage Global, a cultural resources consulting firm, Sam writes three blogs and contributes to many websites. Since 2008, he has maintained his own impressive website: https://samgrubersjewishartmonuments.blogspot.com.html.

Given our deep mutual interests, which include photography, Sam and I were destined to become colleagues and good friends. I preceded him in Columbia’s graduate program by several years,
however. We finally met in 2005, when both of us were invited speakers at Cornell’s celebration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America. Fortunately, Sam and I have seen each other on some of his recent visits to Rhode Island. He is slimmer than I and has a full head of hair, but we do look like brothers!

Readers of *The Notes*, like every student of synagogue architecture, are well acquainted with Newport’s Touro synagogue, the oldest extant Jewish house of worship in North America. But beyond Newport, how much else is known about Rhode Island’s Jewish sites, and how many visitors to the Ocean State have seen or experienced its many lesser-known Jewish buildings? Perhaps more than any other state in New England, tiny Rhode Island offers in very close proximity of one another some amazing treasures (and anomalies).

Over the last forty years, I have made countless, quick visits to see out-of-the-way synagogues: often in remote corners of Eastern Europe and sometimes in small towns across the American South. Although Providence is only a six-hour drive from my home in Syracuse, which has its own landmark synagogue, the Temple Society of Concord, built in 1910, I had never given this capital city and its Jewish past a similarly quick but intense look.

Fortunately, in June of last year, I accepted an invitation to visit Woonsocket’s remarkable B’nai Israel Synagogue, a mid-century masterpiece designed by the Boston architect, Samuel Glaser, and discuss its future.¹ Then I decided to add a day to my trip and see how many interesting Providence synagogues I could visit. This article is a brief account of what I saw and learned.²

I wanted to understand the Woonsocket structure within a broader context, but also to identify some common themes across Providence’s synagogues that might warrant further study or could be developed to stimulate Jewish tourism in Rhode Island beyond the well-known Newport sites. Of course I had visited Touro and its nearby Jewish cemetery, and I have also visited and written about Providence’s Temple Beth-El, but most of Jewish Rhode Island was new to me. And I imagine that it may be new to many Rhode Island
In the past few years, I have also been searching out and
documenting American synagogue wall paintings and stained-glass
windows, and I knew from *The Notes* editor, George Goodwin, that
there were important pre-World War II examples in Providence. To
these, I was happy to learn about some significant postwar works,
too.

For many years I have also been trying to expand our
knowledge of American Jewish architects, especially in the late 19th
and early 20th centuries. Although colonial-era architect Peter Har-
rison, a gentile, is well known for his design of Touro, his successors
among synagogue architects remain mostly anonymous. Remark-
ably, I learned that all the synagogue buildings I planned to visit were
designed by Jewish architects and decorated by Jewish artists. Only
the Brown-RISD Hillel complex, the most recent addition to this
cultural ensemble, breaks this trend. Providence congregations, at
least after World War I, employed American-born Jewish architects
and builders.

During my two-day visit, I studied buildings designed
by several Jews: Harry Marshak (c. 1895-1973), Jacob F. Krokyn
(1881-1960), Percival Goodman (1904-1989), and Samuel Glaser
(1902-1983). Only Goodman, the most prolific synagogue architect
of the post-World War II era and a provocative architectural thinker,
is reasonably well known. To my knowledge, the notable Providence
modernist Ira Rakatansky (1919-2014) designed only one syna-
gogue, but it was never built. Similarly, Maurice Finegold (born in
1932), a prolific and highly accomplished synagogue architect who
established his practice in Boston, never received a synagogue com-
mmission in his native Rhode Island.

Providence by itself presents a remarkable overview of some
major 20th-century trends in synagogue art and architecture, and
at just four sites I was able to experience almost the full range of
American Jewish tastes, influences, and aspirations. These syna-
gogues include, for example, the intact, East European immigrant
shul of Congregation Sons of Jacob and the nearly contemporane-
ous Temple Emanu-El, which presented to Christian Providence
a monumental, classically-inspired public face for the city’s newly acculturated Jews in the 1920s. Then, for the postwar period, there are the elegant simplicity of Temple Beth-El; the 1950s expansions of Emanu-El; and finally the much newer contextualism of the Brown-RISD Hillel, whose recent, unobtrusive expansion celebrates Providence’s old Protestant history. By examining the locations, art, and architecture of these four sites, we can learn a lot about Providence’s 20th-century Jewish history and, by extension, the greater American Jewish experience.

Visitor to these sites might ask, “Why can’t Jewish leaders and architects agree on what a synagogue should look like and how it should properly function?” Or, flipping the question, visitors might observe, “There is such diversity within Judaism. As a congregational religion, it has proven itself remarkably adaptable and flexible, and that, in part, may be part of the story of its survival.”

While I doubt anyone else will want to spend so many hours as I did in these places in so short a time, I do recommend all the visits to anyone interested in Jewish art and architecture. I would like to thank all the synagogue officials who helped set up my schedule only a few days in advance of my visits. I’m confident that other visitors will be as warmly received. Of course, the best way to experience a synagogue is to join its congregation for prayer and study. For Jews, the Sabbath is a day of rest, but it is also, ironically, the best time to see a synagogue building at work.
First Stop: Sons of Jacob

Having driven to Congregation Sons of Jacob early in the morning, I was met by Harold Silverman, its president. Together we proceeded to investigate the building from bottom to top and back again. Sons of Jacob is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and both its building and art share elements with the Walnut Street Shul in Chelsea, Massachusetts. (It too is listed on the National Register, and I have also recently visited there.) Both synagogues include well preserved sanctuary wall paintings on the ark wall and ceiling.9

Sons of Jacob, founded in 1896 on Shawmut Street and now located on Douglas Avenue, is Providence’s oldest extant Orthodox congregation. It is also the last synagogue still in use in the historic Smith Hill neighborhood. The ground floor was built in 1906 – but as was often the case with Orthodox, immigrant congregations-construction often stalled due to lack of funds. Thus, it was not until 1922 that local builder/architect Harry Marshak designed the
upstairs sanctuary. He was probably the first Jewish contractor, functioning as an architect, active in the Providence area.

According to the National Register report, Marshak was born in the mid-1890s in Central Falls, Rhode Island, to Jacob and Minnie Ficofsky Marshak, who were Russian immigrants. Harry apparently had no professional training as an architect, but he worked for builders and then in 1923 opened his own firm, Nationwide House Plan Service. He remained as president for 45 years until his retirement in 1968. During his lengthy career, Marshak built homes on Providence’s East Side for such prominent Jewish families as the Silvermans, Leaches, Feins, and Gladstones.¹⁰

In 1921, about the time he designed the sanctuary of Sons of Jacob, Marshak also designed Temple Beth Israel, at 155 Niagara Street, and in 1958 he designed the addition to Congregation Shaare Zedek (the former Temple Beth-El) at 688 Broad Street. Late in his career, Marshak virtually stopped building houses and concentrated his efforts on preparing house plan books to be sold in loan companies and lumberyards. He died in 1973 at the age of 79.¹¹

The synagogue barely survived the widespread demolition of the North End during highway construction in the 1960s and ‘70s, and the two-story, brick structure now sits precariously close to Interstate 95 that slices through the city. The topography of the old neighborhood has been drastically changed, and the neighborhood’s demographics have entirely changed, too. Though Sons of Jacob
is an active congregation, a tiny group must struggle to maintain a minyan and fund the ever-mounting expenses of maintaining a large, old building.

Significantly for an Orthodox synagogue (but not unusually in many American cities), the ark is placed against the west wall. The outside of the synagogue is dignified, and its stained-glass windows are visible along the northern flank facing Douglas Avenue.

Between 1923 and 1936, the congregation's president, Sam Shore, oversaw the decoration of the sanctuary and probably painted some of the work himself. This includes the signs of the zodiac, which surround the ceiling's large, central field – an open, cloud-streaked sky.12

The ground floor's Beth Midrash is well preserved, and this is where daily and weekly worship now takes place. The off-center ark, with its delightful landscape paintings, is especially precious. Even more so is an exquisitely detailed papercut attributed to Shore. The themes of this papercut are repeated in similar fashion in the sanctuary’s painted decorations.

I hope that whatever repairs and changes are necessary in the future that this lower-level space remains little changed. It is now a rare example of what was once common in immigrant shuls: the combination of spaces for prayer, study, and social gatherings. There may be a temptation to modernize this space, or to clear parts of it entirely for exhibitions or educational events, but any changes should be careful and modest.

Upstairs one passes through a vestibule in which a large marble plaque commemorates the synagogue's founders and donors. One the other side of this wall, inside the rear of the sanctuary, is a large wooden plaque with the names of congregants who have served in the American and Israeli military.

Sons of Jacob's sanctuary – high, wide, and filled with light – is impressive. But its most striking feature is its many wall paintings. Above the ark is a mural depicting two lions supporting a tablet bearing the Ten Commandments. This painting, framed by a wooden arch, is made to resemble marble. Surmounting the ark is a painting that resembles blue sky. It is framed by painted red cur-
tains tied with gold cord to columns at its sides. Such curtains, which are common elements in painted synagogues of Europe and America, recall the parochet of the Jerusalem Temple. Such curtains often open to reveal celestial or paradisical landscapes.

The sanctuary’s paintings, found above the windows of the upper ark wall, include four animals: a tiger, an eagle, a deer, and a lion. These animals refer, of course, to a passage in Pirkei Avot (Wisdom of the Fathers, 5:23):

Judah ben Teima used to say: Be strong as the leopard, swift as the eagle, fleet as the gazelle, and brave as the lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven. He also used to say: The impudent are for Gehenna and the affable for Paradise. (He used to pray): May it be thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, that the Temple be rebuilt speedily in our days, and grant our portion in your Torah.

The area from which the chandelier hangs is painted to resemble an elaborate medallion, like that in Chelsea’s Walnut Street Shul. But this motif is a common in other painted ceilings of this period, including theaters, ballrooms, and other sorts of elaborate interiors. The fronts of the women’s gallery are also painted to suggest inlaid marble panels, and the posts supporting the gallery are painted to resemble marble columns.

Sam Shore, the congregation’s president, may have painted the mazoles (zodiac signs that double as symbols of the twelve Jewish months). Like the scheme in many American Orthodox shuls, Sons of Jacob has a nonfigurative image – a well – which has replaced Aquarius, the traditional symbol of the water carrier. Elsewhere in this panorama, however, humans mingle with animals. Of course Sagittarius is the symbol recognizable as half-man and half-horse. Finally, the symbol of Gemini – two children on a seesaw – is espe-
cially endearing. As far as I know, it is unique, but it is quintessentially American.

Sons of Jacob is now part of the Rhode Island Jewish Museum, an effort founded in 2016 to tell the Ocean State’s story of Jewish immigrants. At the time of my visit, however, it was clear that the museum and its website were more of a concept than an actuality. Only the building itself and its old-world style interiors are on view. There is still little to inform the visitor about the significance of the place.

Thanks to Mr. Silverman and a few others, however, the structure still stands, and the lights still shine. Though much work is needed to preserve the synagogue, the small congregation has steadfastly kept the building – and its Jewish identity – intact. The museum organizers have ambitious plans to restore the synagogue as a centerpiece for storytelling, presumably much like the Eldridge Street Synagogue project in New York City or perhaps like some of the many European synagogues that have been restored during the last few decades. These serve both as exhibition and worship spaces. Sons of Jacob’s goal is an admirable one, though based on my 30 years’ experience in this field, the path to getting there will be long and hard.

My advice, as a first step, is not to view this building and its history alone, but to look carefully at how they link with other local religious, historical, and artistic sites. This approach will benefit tourism and cultural-event planning. Many European countries have an advantage because of their governments’ engagement in planning and funding cultural endeavors.
Second Stop: Temple Emanu-El

Temple Emanu-El was established as a Conservative congregation in 1924, when Jewish leaders in Providence grappled with ways to retain a younger generation of American-born Jews who had little interest in continuing traditional religious practices. The new congregation, encouraged by New York’s Jewish Theological Seminary, was intended as an alternative to both old-world Orthodoxy and new-world Reform. A site on Providence’s East Side that was part of Brown University’s botanical gardens was purchased, and a domed, Byzantine-style sanctuary was completed in 1927. Although Emanu-El’s sanctuary is roughly contemporaneous with Sons of Jacob’s sanctuary, the two structures present themselves quite differently.

Unlike Sons of Jacob’s start-and-stop schedule of planning and construction, Emanu-El benefited from steady funding. A building committee led by Samuel M. Magid was appointed to decide what type of building was needed, choose an architect, and get the structure built. Magid went immediately to work. Having already visited some newly constructed synagogues in New England, he quickly planned a trip to inspect a newly erected synagogue in Newark, New Jersey. Thus, in February 1926, when Emanu-El leaders engaged the Boston architectural firm of Krokyn, Browne and Rosenstein, they had firm ideas in place for their new building. The Krokyn firm, led by Jacob Krokyn, a Boston-born Jewish graduate of Harvard, was already prominent in New England and well known for its synagogue work. The new Emanu-El was certainly intended to compare favorably with its newest counterparts in the Northeast.

On April 7, 1926 the Krokyn firm issued lengthy specifications for the proposed Providence synagogue to 13 Rhode Island contracting companies, thereby inviting bids on the project. The new

Notes
Emanu-El, speedily erected, was dedicated on September 18, 1927.

In his long account of the formation of the congregation and the planning and construction of its building, Rabbi Israel Goldman (1904-1979) wrote nothing about its style nor its decoration. Though other rabbis were more intimately involved in aesthetic decisions about their buildings, these seem to not have been matters of great importance to him. Perhaps as a very young and new rabbi, he knew that these decisions were better left to congregational elders.

Rabbi Goldman, who served his congregation from 1926 to 1948, later wrote:

The first High Holy Day services held in the incomplete vestry were memorable for those who attended. The floor was still in its rough cement stage. The walls were still unplastered, and the steel work, together with the lathing and bricks, were visible. Overhead there was only a partial roof, so that it was necessary to place a huge tarpaulin covering to keep out the rain. But the vestry, even in its incomplete and raw stage, assumed for those present the atmosphere of the ‘Beauty of Holiness’ when it was converted into a House of Worship. Hangings were placed on the walls. Newspapers covered over with linoleum were placed on the damp floor. Flowers and palms adorned the platform and auditorium. A spirit of joy and pride prevailed despite the sparseness of physical comforts.17
Emanu-El’s main sanctuary is a good example of the traditional tastes of its time. The original entrance was up the imposing exterior steps from Morris Avenue. Congregants passed through a triple-portal, whose doors were set between four, tall, fluted pilasters. The inscription overhead, written in large Roman letters, proclaimed: “Seek Ye the Lord and Live.” Three roundels set between the pilasters are decorated with menorahs and a Jewish star. Above these motifs, set into the attic wall, are the tablets of the law surmounted by a crown. All three symbols (menorah, star, and decalogue) declare that this building is neither a courthouse nor a bank nor some other civic structure. It is unabashedly a Jewish house of worship.

Looking higher up, one sees an octagonal drum from which rises an unadorned dome. This arrangement telegraphs the interior arrangement: a large, open, unencumbered space beneath a spreading, saucer dome, which is supported by large piers. Each side wall is filled with six, tall, narrow-arched windows, with modest decoration,
but each with two distinctive, stained-glass compositions.

This series of stained-glass windows was most interesting to me, partially because they were created by the Henry Keck Stained Glass Studio in my hometown of Syracuse. Apparently not installed until several years after the building’s dedication, the windows were designed by Samuel Worden and apparently custom-made for the synagogue. They are decorated with symbols and vignettes of Jewish holidays, concepts, and even a few images of real and hoped-for buildings. One of these decorations, a representation of Temple Emanu-El itself, was a memorial window donated by the family of Samuel Magid, the head of the building committee. Before World War I, Jewish motifs in stained-glass were less common; instead, designers had often adapted Christian motifs for Jewish use.

According to records in the Keck Studio’s archives, Emanu-El’s windows were designed in 1934 and presumably installed shortly thereafter. The records state that Stanley Worden designed 26 large windows, which represent the history of the Jewish faith. Seven windows followed: six with symbols of Psalms and one circular design. The Psalms windows, once installed in the Fishbein Chapel of Emanu-El’s 1953 addition, are now displayed upstream in a new chapel.

Some of the images used in the sanctuary windows, which are quite striking, are unknown to me from any other source. We do not yet know the sources of Worden’s designs or what role congregational leaders or Rabbi Goldman played in suggesting them. Because images are identifiable by Hebrew inscriptions, often quoting or paraphrasing a biblical or a Talmudic passage, surely some Jewish expertise was provided. Yet, it may have been provided in Providence or Syracuse.

As Emanu-El’s congregation continued to grow and prosper during the postwar period, the decision was made to expand its structure rather than relocate to a more suburban location. This of
course became the norm in so many other American cities. An educational wing was completed in 1953 for the rapidly expanding religious school. It also included a second sanctuary.

Emanu-El expanded again in 1959, when Percival Goodman designed a wing with social halls and other event spaces. By taking advantage of the sloping site and the elevated sanctuary building, this new wing is deliberately subservient to the still-grand, domed sanctuary. The wing’s austere design also emphasizes horizontality.

A local artist and Brown professor, Walter Feldman (1925-2017), created a large mosaic over this wing’s otherwise modest entrance. The mosaic’s large composition consists of various stylized Jewish symbols against a field of pale colored tiles and stones. The forms recall several sources: biomorphic designs by such Surrealists as Joan Miró and Alexander Calder as well as recent American synagogue art. Some notable examples are: Robert Motherwell’s large vestibule panel painting for Goodman’s B’nai Israel in Milburn, New Jersey, and Adolph Gottlieb’s enigmatic, symbolic windows for New York City’s Park Avenue Synagogue and Brooklyn’s Kingsway Jewish Center.21

Feldman had previously made his mark in a Providence synagogue by designing mosaic floor panels for the front patio and
foyer of Goodman’s Temple Beth-El, completed in 1954. Decades later, Feldman also designed a large mosaic panel above the Beth-El stairwell that descends from the main vestibule.

Feldman returned to Emanu-El in 1968, when he decorated its large social hall with an expansive series of oil paintings on Masonite panels. Like the sanctuary windows, these paintings also relate to biblical history, Jewish holidays, and other appropriate themes, but they are entirely abstract. As a result, viewers may enjoy a more challenging aesthetic and didactic experience.

Temple Emanu-El has also gathered an impressive art collection, which merits further comment. Still another notable commission is a fine bronze relief, “Torah-Law-Light,” which was crafted in 1980 by Elbert Weinberg (1928-1991), a noted Hartford sculptor.22
Third Stop: Temple Beth-El

My first stop in Providence after lunch was Beth-El, where I had visited several times. Nevertheless, it appears to me fresh on each visit.

Of course Beth-El, still officially known as Congregation Sons of Israel and David, is Providence’s oldest Jewish congregation and one of the oldest Reform congregations in New England. Chartered in 1855, it is the only Rhode Island congregation to have erected three synagogues: the first, on downtown’s Friendship Street, in 1890; the second, on Broad Street, in South Providence, in 1911. (This empty and deteriorating building has not yet been given a new use.)

Goodman, the eminent and prolific American synagogue architect, designed the third Beth-El, which was dedicated on the East Side’s Orchard Avenue in 1954. Not only was he able to design the entire structure; his innovative concept remains one of the most beautiful and well-maintained mid-century modern synagogues in the country, if not the world.

The new synagogue is relatively low and unassuming, articulated on the exterior by broad, gentle arches that define the vaulted sanctuary. The directness of the design reflects in no small degree Rabbi William G. Braude’s influence. Not only did he champion the project; he immersed himself in the details of choosing an architect and in helping the young architect find his way. Many details about the commission and its evolution were documented in George Goodwin’s definitive article, which appeared in the spring/summer, 1993 issue of American Jewish Archives.23

Most of the exterior walls are made of brick trimmed with limestone. The traditional language of religious architecture has been dispensed with. Today the synagogue, set on a corner site, can perhaps be mistaken for a high school or a sports complex. Goodwin, a Temple member, wrote: “As a modern building, Beth-El lacks the solemnity, and perhaps the authority, of traditional religious
architecture. It is physically and emotionally accessible, however. The temple is orderly but not stuffy, friendly but not chatty. It conveys a quiet dignity, eloquent in its understatement.”

From Orchard Avenue, one enters a large foyer with Feldman’s multicolored pavements. The foyer is a transitional space between outdoors and in, the secular world and the religious, and, even within the complex, between the everyday and festive. Large windows allow a clear view to the landscaped outdoors. The foyer opens into the meeting hall on the left and the sanctuary on the right.

Beth-El’s signature element is the sanctuary vault, which is simultaneously great and grounded. It rises only 32 feet but appears higher. The vault lacks the excess drama of architect Eric Mendelsohn’s contemporaneous synagogue designs in St. Louis and Cleveland, with which Goodman was well acquainted. Beth-El’s vault rises from the walls and returns to them, sheltering the congregation beneath. Symbolically, the vault can be seen to rise from the ark wall and bimah, spreading Torah, as well as rabbis’ and cantor’s
words, to the congregation.

When adjacent classroom walls are collapsed, the main sanctuary seats nearly 1,000 congregants. The diamond-pattern of the sanctuary’s trusses, within the copper-sheathed vault, create the space’s primary decoration. Clerestory windows, designed like Roman thermal windows, fill the space with shifting north and south light. Given the size of the sanctuary, the ark, nestled at the east end, is a modest affair.

As he had successfully done with his synagogue in Millburn, New Jersey, Goodman integrated modern art into his design.
Beth-El’s clerestory windows are sandblasted with inscriptions. Ibram Lassaw designed the bronze, skein-like columns that flank the ark. They are called Pillar of Fire and Pillar of Cloud. (The Museum of Modern Art selected one for inclusion in the 1954 Venice Bien-nale exhibition). David Hare created a Calderesque menorah, which appears to float to the left of the ark. He also made the eternal light-originally designed to burn olive oil – but subsequently transformed to run on electricity. As previously mentioned, local artist Walter Feldman also designed mosaic decorations – perhaps the best of his career.
Fourth Stop: Brown Hillel

My last stop of the day in Providence was the Glenn and Darcy Weiner Hillel Center at Brown University (which also serves RISD’s students and faculty). The expansive center combines three historic buildings through a contemporaneous one. The result is more than 25,000 square feet, allowing extensive programming as well as simultaneous services for all three major branches of American Judaism. None of the worship spaces is architecturally distinctive, but the large Winnick Chapel, built on the center’s upper floor, is light-filled and very inviting.

The complex is evidence that Jews can fit in anywhere.
Unlike some Hillel houses, such as Moshe Safdie’s design at Harvard, the Providence Hillel blends in. Ironically, because of its architectural respect for its much older neighbors, the Brown Hillel complex may be easy to miss.

Although Brown had established a Hillel chapter in 1947, it was not until 1963 that its leaders refurbished the 1878 former Froebel Hall at 80 Brown Street and named it Rapaporte House. That small, chalet-style building had been the first kindergarten in the state and only the second kindergarten training school in the country. There had, however, been a slight Jewish connection. In 1925, after the structure had been converted into a dance hall, the newly established Temple Emanu-El held Yom Kippur services there.

As the Jewish presence at Brown steadily increased, Hillel required significantly more space. Fortunately, during the mid-1990s, it acquired two neighboring structures: both late 18th-century, Federal-style houses. The brick house at 100 Angell Street had been built in 1797 for Samuel Eddy, a three-term member of Congress who also served as a chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. Between 1868 and 1872, it was home to a Brown president, Rev. Alexis Caswell; then, for most of the 20th century, it served as an apartment house. The house at 106 Angell was built in 1798 by William Holroyd, also a lawyer.

Thus, all three historic buildings could be integrated within an expanded facility. While respecting the character and scale of the older buildings as well as the surrounding residential neighborhood, the new design also includes some innovations, such as a garden and terraces for outdoor functions and meditation.

Earl R. Flansburgh & Associates developed the Hillel complex’s master plan. In 1997, Fred Babcock of Babcock Design Group and Cornelis de Boer of Haynes/de Boer Associates, a local firm, were hired to design the integrated facility. The handsome and unique facility was completed in 2004.

When I left the Weiner Hillel Center, evening was coming on. It was time to call it day. I drove to a motel near Woonsocket, so the next day I’d be ready for my final synagogue tour, a working meeting, and lunch.
Fifth Stop: B’nai Israel, Woonsocket

I had only seen photos of B’nai Israel, which should be listed among America’s iconic synagogues. I consider it a modern masterpiece. Unfortunately, B’nai Israel remains mostly unknown to scholars, architects, and the general public. Part of this neglect is due to the fact that the new Woonsocket synagogue had not been included in Richard Meier’s seminal 1963 Jewish Museum exhibition, *Recent American Synagogue Architecture*, or its catalogue, which became a handy reference.

I was surprised by B’nai Israel’s setting; the long, residential Prospect Street is lined with substantial Victorian houses. The juxtaposition of the synagogue’s expressive modernist form and the older residential styles was startling. It recaptured for me what it must have been like for much of the country, when modern buildings first began to intrude upon traditional towns and cityscapes. In new suburbs, modern buildings seem more at home alongside housing tracts, malls, and highways. But in Woonsocket’s North End, B’nai Israel, despite its setback from the street, still stands out. Though a low building respectful of its setting, this is no architectural wallflower.

B’nai Israel, dedicated on September 16, 1962, was designed by the Boston-based architect, Samuel Glaser. He had previously built Temple Shalom in Newton, Massachusetts. George Goodwin, who wrote the definitive article about Glaser and his synagogue for *Rhode Island History*, described the building fully. He said in part:

> As he had with Temple Shalom in Newton, Glaser devised an essentially symmetrical plan. The sanctuary and auditorium, bisected by a vestibule, form one long pavilion; when the sanctuary’s 260 seats are occupied, 400 folding chairs can be placed in the auditorium. A garden courtyard, called a Court of Festivals, is reached through sliding glass doors. The corridor around the courtyard leads to a lounge, a kitchen, six classrooms, offices, a library, and a chapel. Most of these rooms face the courtyard; a few face a rear parking lot. These interiors are uncluttered, bright, and cheerful. The synagogue’s lower level – reached from the vestibule by a grand curving staircase beneath crystal chandeliers, or via a rear staircase (there is no elevator) – contains a vast central space surrounded by kitchens, food service
areas, cloakrooms, lounges, and exhibition cases forming a small museum.

B’nai Israel combines a rich variety of materials and textures. The main pavilion is reinforced concrete, decorated at its northern and southern ends by polychromed brick. Dark woods are used for hallway paneling and overhead beams. The corridor outside the chapel is clad with white marble. At the top of the corridor wall, inscribed in Hebrew, is the *Kaddish*, the prayer for the dead. Beneath, in neat rows, are the names of deceased congregants...

Glaser’s expressive concrete architecture structure serves as a frame for a dazzling set of enormous, triangular, stained-glass compositions by the Israeli artist, Avigdor Arikha (1929-2010). Indeed, the brilliance of Arikha’s 30 windows merits the most attention. Goodwin wrote that the windows “may be the finest ensemble in a modern American synagogue.” He added: “Perhaps the architect thought about this medium in terms of his own name, although
glass has meant something altogether different – and horrifying – to world Jewry since Kristallnacht in 1938.27

Ziva Amishai-Maisels, a great scholar of Jewish art and a professor emerita at Hebrew University, recently assessed the importance of B’nai Israel’s windows:

I have written about Arikha in my book, Depiction and Interpretation: The Influence of the Holocaust on the Visual Arts, and have always found him to be a fascinating and very important artist. The windows are one of his last and most successful forays into abstract art and should be preserved at all costs, whether in a synagogue, museum or any public place available, not only for their historical importance but for their beauty. They are not only important in a Jewish or Israeli context, but internationally, as he was an internationally renowned artist, starting from his abstract stage.28

The Woonsocket synagogue’s sanctuary was further embellished by a parochet (Torah curtain) and other textiles designed by Anni Albers (1899-1994). The synagogue also has notable artwork by Ludwig Wolpert (1900-1981) and a bimah design by Glaser’s colleague, Antonio de Castro (1930-2017). The architect himself donated an outdoor sculpture of a menorah, shaped like a Burning Bush, by Beverly Pepper (b. 1922). This artist later gained fame for her monumental works.

Through congregational aspirations and architectural expressiveness, B’nai Israel is related to a significant group of important, mid-century, American synagogue designs. To me, the Woonsocket shul is especially comparable to Minoru Yamasaki’s much larger North Shore Congregation Israel, in Glencoe, Illinois. Although completed in 1963, it was designed at the same time as Glaser’s synagogue. Both buildings appear to be broadly based on the
concept of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting), which was described in Exodus as the Israelites’ first designated religious space. The *Mishkan* is described in modular terms, mostly as a framework (Exodus 15-25).

In the late 19th- and early 20th-centuries American Jews focused on the idea of the Temple, and felt comfortable enough in their new American home to call their synagogues “Temples.” Happily, they adapted Greco-Roman (as well as Byzantine) temple forms for synagogue architecture (as in Providence’s second Beth-El and in Emanu-El). But in the postwar period, the idea of a temporary tent of meeting, erected in the desert for wandering people, had great appeal, especially in the combined context of post-Holocaust communal trauma and the widespread American exodus of Jews from cities
to rapidly expanding suburbs.

In addition to Yamasaki’s influence, Goodwin has rightfully pointed out the relationship of Glaser’s use of concrete, especially in the sanctuary ceiling beams, to work by Marcel Breuer. Similarly, there is a correspondence in the position and form of B’nai Israel’s entrance vestibule to Philip Johnson’s design at Congregation Kneses Tifereth Israel, in Port Chester, New York, though overall, Glaser’s work is quite different than Johnson’s. While B’nai Israel is dynamic and expressive, Kneses Tifereth Israel is rational and cool.

Among many important religious buildings of the 1950s and ‘60s, B’nai Israel now suffers from changing demographics as well as changing tastes and styles of worship. Woonsocket’s small but spirited Jewish community peaked in 1962, when its new synagogue was dedicated. Now it may consist of only a few dozen families. Even if the congregation were to shut its doors, something must be done to rescue and refurbish this mid-century masterpiece. Fortunately, an endowment has been established to maintain B’nai Israel’s cemetery.
Conclusion

Leaving B’nai Israel after five hours of oohing and aahing (yes, kvelling) over its splendid windows and discussing strategies for ensuring its survival, I felt overwhelmed – and a bit exhausted – by my whirlwind tour of Rhode Island synagogues. And I know that there is still much more to experience of the past and present. Few metropolitan areas offer such a startling variety (or mishmash) of historic and modern synagogues as does Providence. I imagine that even many native or longtime residents of Rhode Island are unaware of this amazing variety of treasures and curiosities.

As I drove away from Rhode Island, I felt that its highly impressive synagogues should no longer be completely overshadowed by Touro’s eminence. While heading home to Syracuse, I began to imagine a more detailed and systematic description of these buildings, their art, and history, which in many ways represent a splendid sample or microcosm of the American Jewish story. Perhaps Rhode Island, as a cradle of religious liberty, should create its own heritage trail, guidebook or website to benefit residents and visitors alike.

Endnotes

1 I would like to thank Prof. Madeline Caviness of Tufts University for inviting me to participate and the congregation’s leadership for organizing the building tour and subsequent workshop discussion.

2 I would like to thank my friend, George Goodwin, editor of The Notes, for joining me for lunch on my visit and accompanying me on the afternoon stops. George is, of course, an encyclopedia of knowledge about Rhode Island Jewish history. He is also one of the best researchers and writers about American synagogue architecture. I thank him for inviting me to contribute this article to The Notes.


4 Information on Harry Marshak was compiled in the National Register of Historic Places, designation for Congregation Sons of Jacob, prepared by Robert O. Jones and Patricia Raub, 1989.


“USA: Wall Paintings at Sons of Jacob in Providence, Rhode Island,” in Samuel Gruber’s *Jewish Art and Monuments* (June 12, 2018), online at: https://samgrubersjewishart-monuments.blogspot.com/2019/01/usa-wall-paintings-at-sons-of-jacob-in.html

Jones and Raub, National Register designation.


Much of this history comes from the congregational website:
https://www.sonsofjacobsynagogue.org/history

At least one other synagogue in the Providence area had extensive pictorial murals. This was Sons of Zion, an Orthodox congregation that stood just down the street from Sons of Jacob at 45 Orms Street until its demolition in about 1970. Murals above the ark in both Providence synagogues show red curtains tied at the sides to columns, a common motif used in Eastern European synagogues. While the curtains in Sons of Jacob’s mural frame a blue sky, those in Sons of Zion’s opened to reveal a landscape, probably representing the Holy Land. Paintings of Jerusalem and other views of the Holy Land appeared in many Eastern European synagogues.

See the congregational website: https://www.teprov.org/history-mission


Jacob Frederick Kroky, a son of Davis and Leah Kroky, was (July 14, 1881-Dec 3, 1960) graduated from Harvard College in 1903 and from the University’s Lawrence Scientific School three years late. After further study in Europe, he apprenticed in Boston with Coolidge & Shattuck, and then opened his own practice in about 1915. He formed a partnership with Ambrose Browne in about 1921. Arthur Rosenstein, also a Jew, was a partner before 1930. See: https://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections-access/capobject/?refd=AR001.USMA.0800.002.

Kroky & Browne worked on several Boston-area synagogue designs, including: Mishkan Tefila in Roxbury (1925) and Temple Emanuel (1937) in Newton (1937). See: Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool*, 263-64.


19 As, for example, in Pittsburgh’s Rodef Shalom. See Gruber, American Synagogues, 40-45.

20 Reed, Henry Keck, 141


25 On other Hillel centers, see Samuel D. Gruber, “USA: A Well Designed Hillel House at Trinity College,” (Oct. 8, 2014) and “USA: After 20 Years, Safdie’s Harvard Hillel Building Retains its Charms,” (Jan 21, 2015), both online at: Samuel Gruber’s Jewish Art and Monuments.


28 Email message sent to Prof. Madeline Caviness of Tufts University in 2018 and shared with the author.
Picasso Museum,
Barcelona, 2019
My Editorship

George M. Goodwin

The following address, marking the 15th anniversary of my editorship of our shining journal, was presented at the Association’s 68th annual meeting on May 6, 2019. Contrary to the words used to publicize the meeting, I did not dwell on my “trials and tribulations.” Thankfully, there have been relatively few!

So how did I become the eighth editor of The Notes? And what has sustained me for 15 years, only two short of Seebert Goldowsky’s record? What have I been able to accomplish? What more do I seek to accomplish? And when will I be ready to pass Seebert’s torch to my successor?

Small and Larger Strides

In some sense this story begins with my friend, Charlotte Penn, a fellow Beth-El congregant and a longtime Association officer. In 1994, seven years after Betsey and I had moved to Providence and joined the Association, she recruited me to become a board member, under Aaron Cohen’s new presidency. But I’m equally grateful to a subsequent Association president, my Temple friend and neighbor, Gene Weinberg, who in 2003 encouraged me to serve as the Association’s president, though I had not yet been an officer. I am also grateful to another former president and Temple member, Bob Kotlen, for his friendship. I believe that he coined the term Rhode Island Jewish “Hysterical” Association.

The simple fact is: I never aspired to become an editor of our journal or any other. I never even thought of myself as much of a writer. Many decades ago, if I had artistic aspirations, they were mostly visual. As you may recall from my Notes article in 2017, I enjoyed drawing and painting from quite an early age. In high school, I taught myself to become an editorial cartoonist, and as a senior I
drew a caricature of every senior for our yearbook.

Yes, I always loved reading books, newspapers, and magazines and listening to and telling stories. I wrote about some of these youthful predilections in my 2016 article, when I explained how important summer camps were in shaping my career as a letter writer. Of course I loved receiving letters as much as sending them, and my family has saved more than 1,200.

In college, while majoring in art history, I was inspired and encouraged by several professors. Slowly, I became a more ambitious and accomplished writer. Fortunately, my five-year ordeal as a graduate student never extinguished my curiosity or love of self-expression. But why did writing a dissertation have to be so punishing? I had composed a first draft within a year.

For many years after graduate school, I didn’t want to think about academic writing and publishing. Instead, I dedicated myself to teaching art history and to oral history interviewing: listening to others tell their stories. And I continued to sharpen my eye through beginning to collect art and through photography.

Regrettably, I didn’t begin to enjoy writing again until 1983, when, eight years after completing my doctorate, I returned to graduate school. But my two-year program in Jewish communal studies at Hebrew Union College, the Reform seminary in Los Angeles, was in many ways quite rewarding. Of course Betsey too made my life so much happier.

Over two summers, I savored the requirement to keep a journal. And within my first year at HUC, I wrote a master’s thesis, which, I believe, was at least as good as my dissertation.

Then I worked for a few Jewish federations, where my writing was limited to more conventional tasks, such as taking minutes and drafting newsletters and reports.

Rather than abandon my art historical studies, I soon integrated them within American Jewish history to focus on synagogue architecture. For example, I created an important exhibition and symposium for my congregation, Mt. Zion Temple in St. Paul, Minnesota, which focused on its important avant-garde architect, Erich Mendelsohn. And you may recall, following my stint at Federation
here, I worked two years under Rabbi Les Gutterman’s guidance and during Bruce Sundlun’s presidency as Beth-El’s archivist. I couldn’t have been happier organizing its collection of documents and photographs, creating a gallery of Temple history, building an oral history collection, and collaborating on a video documentary. During this period, I also wrote a short history of Temple Emanuel in Andover, Massachusetts, where Betsey grew up and her family still belongs.

By the early 1990s, midway through any conventional academic career, I finally persuaded myself to reconsider publishing by writing an article about Percival Goodman’s distinguished 1954 design of our Beth-El. In 1993, long after its acceptance, it was finally published in HUC’s *American Jewish Archives*. When reprinted in 1994, under Judy Cohen’s editorship, it became my first of more than 25 articles in *The Notes*. Some of my articles and reviews also soon appeared elsewhere, in such publications as: *American Jewish History*, *Modern Judaism*, *Western States Jewish History*, *Faith & Form*, and *Rhode Island History*. Thanks to Prof. Calvin Goldscheider of Brown, I was also honored to write two entries for *The Encyclopedia Judaica*.

**The Association’s Anthology**

A major turning point occurred in 2003, when I became the Association’s president. I thought that we should publish an anthology of notable articles to celebrate a milestone, the fiftieth anniversary of *The Notes*, which would occur the following year. I believed that its publication record was truly remarkable; the Association had become a national model for state and local Jewish historical societies. Indeed, there is still nothing comparable in New England.

So I attempted to recruit an editor, who would select and organize the articles and write introductory and concluding remarks. I approached a few academicians, including a Brown professor who taught an occasional course on American Jewish history, but she was not in the least bit interested. She explained that such an anthology would not help her gain tenure. Who could have predicted that such a narrow focus would eventually lead her to the presidency of Williams College?

This young professor did not seem to know or care that
two of her senior Brown colleagues, Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider, had taken great pride in writing for *The Notes*. Both men, as members of our community, had also served on our board. Fortunately, other distinguished Brown academicians, such as Alice Goldstein, Maurice Glicksman, and Stanley Aaronson, would also contribute to our journal. For that matter, three professors at other Rhode Island institutions, Albert Salzberg, George Kellner, and Michael Fink, have been its editors. And many other professors at URI, such as David Gitlitz, Linda Levin, and Albert Silverstein, had written for or would soon contribute to *The Notes*.

Eventually, several gentile professors would also write articles. The first was Pierre Morenon, an archaeologist at Rhode Island College. The next was Bill Simmons, a Brown anthropologist, who was my fellow trustee of the Rhode Island Historical Society. The most recent professors were Jennifer Illuzzi and Arthur Urbano, historians at Providence College.

Somewhat naively but sincerely, I invited Jonathan Sarna, the hugely accomplished and influential professor of American Jewish history at Brandeis, to edit the proposed anthology. He had lectured to our Association in 1994, and his article, “What’s the Use of Local Jewish History?” was published the following year in *The Notes*.

Although Sarna declined my overture, he recommended Ellen Smith, his junior colleague. Fortunately, she was interested and helped obtain commitments from Brandeis University Press and University Press of New England to publish a volume in Sarna’s distinguished series on American Jewish History, Culture, and Life.

After gaining our board’s endorsement of the anthology, I accepted major responsibility for fundraising to underwrite its publication. Generous gifts were obtained from many donors, including Association leaders, Jewish Federation, and especially the Dorot Foundation, which was led by the late Ernst Frerichs, an esteemed Brown professor of Judaic and religious studies.

Given my familiarity with local archives, I thought that I could help Ellen with the selection of photos. So, being rather compulsive, I examined about 10,000 to arrive at 125. I also helped Ellen...
select articles, devise a timeline, and compile a bibliography. She alone was responsible for abridging some of the longer articles and writing an introductory essay.

Unfortunately, when Ellen fell far behind her deadline for completing the manuscript, my dear friend, Stanley Abrams, who chaired the Association’s publications committee, and I became quite concerned. We even considered the remote possibility of replacing her, but then she abruptly resigned. So we were forced to find a successor. Again, I never considered myself a viable candidate, but Stan reassured me, so I nervously accepted his battlefield commission.

Not only was our anthology published on time and within budget, but its scope and quality far exceeded our expectations. Ultimately, Ellen and I shared credit as coeditors. I still consider my contributions to this volume among the most thrilling and gratifying of my career. You may recall our excitement when Jonathan and I spoke in October 2004 at the Association’s publication party.

Stan Abram’s Suggestions

I remain grateful to Leonard Moss, a retired literature professor who succeeded Judy Cohen as editor of The Notes. During his six-year tenure, he accepted almost all the articles I submitted. Indeed, he may have liked a few! Yet, never having lived in Little Rhody, Len had not fully experienced many of our community’s joys and sorrows. When he relocated with his family to central Massachusetts, he decided to resign his editorship.

So Stan and I faced the significant challenge of finding his successor. Because there were no obvious candidates among contributors to The Notes or other local professors, I began to assemble a different kind of list. I clearly remember trying to persuade two native Rhode Islanders who had never written for our journal to try the editorship for a couple of years, but neither was tempted.

Then Stan asked the obvious question, one I had never considered: “Why don’t you give it a try?” Although interested, at least in theory, I still thought that I was unqualified. Yes, I could easily brainstorm potential topics, and I felt no reluctance about trying to recruit writers, but I didn’t think that I knew enough about
writing, specifically the subtleties of style. I also didn’t think that I could serve simultaneously as the Association’s president, a trustee of Heritage Harbor Museum, and as editor. A year earlier, it had been a burden for me to serve concurrently as the Association’s president and as president of Providence’s Hebrew Free Loan Association.

Yet a considerable incentive for me to accept the editorship, at least provisionally, was Stan’s recommendation that the Association spend more on our publication. New issues could be lengthier but also more visually appealing. This meant hiring a graphic designer, and Stan had an accomplished professional in mind. This was Bobbie Friedman, a member of our community, who soon recommended a new printer, Signature, in East Providence.

Casting aside further worries, I thought that I would give the editorship a try. Yet, I wanted to perpetuate Len Moss’s principal innovation, which was writing a brief introduction to each article and author.

An Unwritten Law and a Telescope

Too soon, however, I had to come to terms with an unwritten law, which had been perpetuated by many of my predecessors, especially Seebert Goldowsky. He firmly believed that The Notes should bypass recent history. Unlike most professors and professional writers, he thought that it was necessary to wait approximately 50 years before a topic could merit serious consideration. This was in some sense a posthumous or miraculous view of history: it had to be dead, buried, and perhaps forgotten before it could be resurrected!

I believe that Seebert’s clinical mindset was reflected in other ways. The expression of personal opinions, for example, was mostly inappropriate. Indeed, our communal history should be understood scientifically, primarily through the abundant citation of sources. Alas, Seebert saw history as a rather solemn enterprise, one meant to be both instructive and therapeutic.

Let me interject that I still consider Seebert a friend, and I have no intention of diminishing his legacy. But I also think that it was difficult for him to become emotionally engaged in his extensive scholarship, which included a biography of a pioneering Rhode
Island surgeon and an encyclopedic history of Beth-El.

An incident still vivid in my mind may also illustrate Seebert’s reserve or inhibitions. In 1989, after his Temple history had been published, I asked him to autograph my copy. This is exactly what he did, without adding a message, such as “Best Wishes” or “Enjoy, Neighbor.”

Although an expert on Beth-El’s history, he was also in some sense an onlooker. In fact, he was fond of Rabbi William Braude’s reference to him as his “favorite agnostic.” I believe that Seebert, like many of us, built a kind of congregation or havurah within our Association. Perhaps we are the little shul that never quite fulfills its promise yet manages, against great odds, to survive and prosper. Neither Seebert nor I ever imagined that I would follow in his editorial footsteps and become, in some sense, his protégé. And because he completed his sixteenth issue at 78 years of age, I may not have yet reached my apogee. Conversely, perhaps neither of us knew when we lost our stride.

When I began planning my first issue, I surveyed every previous one to determine which topics had been neglected. Unfortunately, I decided, a very large number had. So I quickly drew up a list of prospective articles, which I have continually updated.

Yet, sooner rather than later, I realized that making a list was an almost pointless task. No matter how many good articles get published, they automatically suggest several more. Inevitably, the future never seems to catch up with the past; indeed, the past seems to increasingly overwhelm the present. Every important topic invites, if not commands, reexamination.

Does this mean, therefore, that nothing is ever resolved? No, but most important topics can and should be reinterpreted by a younger generation. Yet, the very notion of “importance” is continually shifting. So it makes sense, at least occasionally, for a writer to ask, “Through which end of my telescope am I gazing?”

Seven Lessons

I do think that my first issue, in 2004, was useful in establishing a prototype and possibly a pattern. At the very least, I began
to learn seven lessons.

The first, in terms of practicality, was that I could never expect to receive more than a few submissions. So I needed to become a kind of salesman, not a Professor Harold Hill, but rather a believer in the quality and longevity of my product.

A second lesson I learned quite early, one I had understood as a teacher, was that editing The Notes requires a dialogue, which, if successful, might lead an author to a series of articles. While aware of some of my own limitations, I could gladly offer suggestions regarding clarity, emphasis, and organization. Seldom, however, did I insist on changes.

Conversely, a few writers demanded my obedience or they would withdraw their articles. One author actually threatened to sue me for wanting to use some of her childhood letters that belonged, without conditions, to a sister historical society.

I slowly began to learn a third lesson. The purpose of our journal is not to glorify our ancestors and elders or cast them in an excessively favorable light. Rather, the best way to honor our fathers and our mothers is to portray them more naturally. Whatever their heroic aspirations, sacrifices, and achievements, they, like us, were flawed human beings.

Yet, as Jews and as Americans, we believe that every life matters. So our journal honors every deceased member— the extraordinary and somewhat ordinary— with an obituary. Over 15 issues, I have felt honored to write more than 275, including those for my own parents.

Perhaps a fourth editorial lesson I began to learn was that Rhode Island’s Jewish history is both exceptional and typical. Yes, our community was hugely important during the colonial and early federal eras, and Newport’s symbolism still shines. But our more recent history – whether we like it or not – closely resembles other New England communities. Ours has been at times both insular and fragmented. Indeed, even by Jewish standards, we have often been a contrarian lot.

A fifth lesson should be much easier to grasp. We Jews, having been at least occasionally silly, vain, and foolish, should find...
much relief through laughter.

A sixth lesson is that every reader does not have to love every article. This should be true of any journal or anthology. Occasionally, I have asked unhappy or disappointed readers, “Then why don’t you write an article, in your own way, for the next issue?” But this quite seldom happens.

A seventh early lesson was that, inevitably, mistakes get made. No matter how many times an article is rewritten or a galley proofed, some small errors go unnoticed. Of course once an issue is printed, these glaring imperfections jump off a page.

Once one of our past presidents became irate over a factual mistake, which, he insisted, any “true” Rhode Islander would have known. So he made two suggestions: our publications committee should not only proofread every article, but it should also reevaluate the merits of every article provisionally accepted. Yes, I soon learned that a team of proofreaders could be quite useful, even if some of the best catch different glitches. The idea that a committee could overrule my negotiations with a writer was unacceptable, however. Somebody has to be in charge.

For years I begged this past president to write his own article. He said he would, but then he envisioned a dilemma. “If my reminiscence of kindergarten were accepted by The New Yorker,” he asked, “could it also be published in The Notes?” I replied, “No problem!”

Gaining Momentum

If my early issues of The Notes were at least moderately successful, then I remain indebted to two people. The first of course is Stan, a kind and sweet person who gave me enormous freedom and encouragement. No less important is Bobbie, our original designer. We eventually learned that our work was a synthesis of texts and images, which could include not only photos but also drawings, charts, and maps. Even a Rembrandt etching! I don’t remember ever squabbling with her during our 11 issues together! But I do understand that she eventually needed a rest and then a new challenge.

I dare say that my introductory remarks to the 2004 issue
were fairly accurate. I hypothesized that articles are “most effective when bridging the recent past and the near future, binding one generation to another.” I hadn’t yet realized, however, that I was engaged in sacred work.

My first issue, with 11 articles, was rather short. The next issue contained 14, as did most others. While Anne Sherman, the Association’s wonderful office manager from 1991 to 2015, was always worried about an issue’s actual weight, I worried about its weightiness.

Thus, I learned to rely on many accomplished writers. Unfortunately, Eleanor Horvitz, the Association’s devoted archivist-librarian, who had written more than 30 articles, was no longer able to contribute. But I eagerly turned to her dear friend and colleague, Geraldine Foster (the Association’s first woman president), who had written 15 articles with Eleanor or on her own. In my first issue, Jerry, who was much interested in overlooked professions, focused on florists. Although often claiming to be retired, she wrote several more articles, including a few of my favorites: about Mah Jongg in 2007 and about Jewish car dealers the following year.

In my second issue, Anne Sherman, following Jerry’s example, compiled a key reference tool: a list of Rhode Island’s congregational rabbis. Before her retirement, Anne wrote a few more articles, and Jerry wrote a glowing tribute to our dear friend. Whatever we attempted, Anne always made the task so much easier.

Although I could not fully appreciate it at the time, Susan Brown’s article in my first issue, about her parents’ escape from Germany to Colombia and her upbringing there, led to 16 articles related to the Holocaust. Several survivors wrote their own articles, and so did a few of their kin. For example, Prof. Al Silverstein helped present his father, Henry’s, two-part memoirs. The lengthiest memoir of my editorship, which I adapted from Ray Eichenbaum’s autobiography, appeared in four parts. Ironically, it fully portrayed but did not dwell on the Holocaust. It was the story of a good and courageous young man and his beloved family. Likewise, Ruth Goldstein’s articles in our last two issues were about two survivors whom she still loves as sisters.
Beginning with my first issue, I was eager to publish some light-hearted topics, so I happily included Al Silverstein’s article about the Cornish Horrors, Rhode Island’s Sherlock Holmes club, which he helped found and still leads.

I established another precedent in my first issue: reprinting an essay or a chapter from another publication so readers had another chance to enjoy it. I used a portrait of Prof. Israel J. Kapstein from Jay Barry’s book, *Gentlemen Under the Elms*, about distinguished Brown professors. The bookend to this article did not appear until our last issue, when Israel’s son, Jonathan, wrote a splendid article about his heroic uncle, John.

Fortunately, many contributors to my first few issues, pleased with their initial efforts, continued to submit articles. For example, Philip Miller, the distinguished librarian of Hebrew Union College in New York City, delighted readers with three articles related to his upbringing at Temple Emanu-El. Harold Tregar also wrote three articles about his youth in Providence. And Richard Israel wrote three articles about his youth in Woonsocket, his tenure as the state’s first Jewish attorney general, and his key ruling as a Superior Court judge. Following Gene Weinberg’s suggestion, I used three installments from his brother, Gerald’s, memoirs of World War II service. In our next issue, I look forward to a third article by Rabbi Jim Rosenberg.

Because Jewish history has been global, I was pleased to welcome articles by friends and strangers who, like Roger Williams, Susan Brown, Jim, and me, were newcomers to Little Rhody. For example, two professors wrote about their upbringing and education in Great Britain. Of course Judith and Peter Wegner also happened to be married to each other. Heske Zelermyer described her upbringing and early adulthood in Curacao and in Holland. Rui Pereira, a tireless Portuguese genealogist, presented his extraordinary findings about his ancestors, Aaron Lopez and Jacob Rodriguez, who had settled in colonial Newport. In 2014, Rui was working as an engineer in Hawaii, but Betsey and I were able to meet his charming mother in Lisbon! Fortunately, he and I are still in touch.

Our journal seeks outstanding articles by students, and sev-
eral undergraduates and a few graduate students have won or shared the Eleanor Horvitz Prize. A recent winner, Shai Afsai, has written many articles based on his bibliographic research and far-flung travels.

Among writers who have resumed writing for our journal, I must pay homage to one of my favorites, Prof. Michael Fink, better known as “Mr. RISD.” Since 2005, he has enriched 13 issues. Yet, quite often he disproves my theories or illustrates them with more delicious examples. Long into the future, I will evoke this elder brother’s sense of whimsy, wonder, irony, and beauty.

As you well know, in addition to my editorial responsibilities and remarks, I have contributed my own articles to almost every issue. So I fully understand the criticism that there may be too much of me.

But I also believe that, after 15 issues, my editorship has become a lot easier. Somehow, I have gained the confidence, patience or fortitude to tackle almost anything that grabs me or whatever stands in my way.

Of course recent issues have benefitted from several newer colleagues and friends. And all of the Association’s presidents have been helpful, often by letting me do my thing.

Prof. Mel Topf, our nineteenth president, has been especially helpful. He had previously been active on our board, and we bumped into each other again at Stefano and Nunzio’s, our favorite barbershop on the East Side, which is also Mike Fink’s and Al Silverstein’s. Fortunately, when Mel succeeded Stan Abrams as chair of the publications committee, we learned to trust each other’s judgment. Recently, he has lent his legal expertise to the long series of articles about the disputed ownership of Touro’s rimonim.

I’m delighted that Steve Logowitz, a Providence native and my college classmate, succeeded Bobbie Friedman as our graphic designer. After completing a distinguished career in Boston, he had planned a leisurely retirement. But through new challenges, I learned to much admire his stylistic elegance and his attention to the tiniest details. As for computer technology, he has forced me to enter the late 20th century.
Measuring Our Success

So, after editing approximately 200 articles spanning 3,000 pages, I approached Prof. Jonathan Sarna with another bold idea. Why not publish a companion volume to the Association’s anthology, *The Jews of Rhode Island*, in his illustrious series? Before we could begin a discussion, however, he sadly explained that this would not be possible, for University Press of New England was going out of business. Our Association would have to find another publisher.

Yes, it surely sounds egotistical, but I believe that it would be more difficult to select 15 impressive articles from the past 15 issues than Ellen Smith was required to do with 50 issues. While I accept some credit for our journal’s transformation, much more belongs to my colleagues. Together we have reached a higher plateau.

At this juncture I would also like to thank a few more friends and supporters who have helped sustain and elevate our efforts. One, whom readers will probably never meet, is Brian Mannix, a manager of Signature Printing. He and his staff get things done without delays or excuses and are proud of the results.

Another of the Association’s key friends and supporters has been attorney Norman Bolotow. As a trustee of the Harold A. Winstead Foundation, he has helped us publish *The Notes* since 2007 as a way to memorialize his dear uncle. And as a trustee of the Gertrude Regensteiner Revocable Trust, Norman helped make the largest gift to our recent capital campaign, which resulted in the naming of our Regensteiner Offices.

For decades, thanks largely to Mel Zurier’s dedication and leadership, the Jewish Federation played a symbolic role as our landlord. More recently, the Alliance made a major in-kind gift, which allowed us to customize our new space. But I also believe that many Federation and Alliance leaders – laypeople and staff- have never quite figured out what we do or know how well we do it. Somehow, after decades of considerable accomplishments, we remain the community’s best-kept secret. Or too few members of our community treasure our past.

Long ago the Rhode Island Historical Society helped nurture our Association, and it was under my friend Albert Kly-
berg’s leadership that the dream of Heritage Harbor Museum was launched. I have been privileged to serve on the Historical Society’s board for ten years, and I have also been proud to contribute to its journal, *Rhode Island History*. Considering the distances we have traveled, isn’t it time that we retire the word “Notes” and call our journal *Rhode Island Jewish History*?

While so amazed and impressed by what our little organization has been able to accomplish, I am also worried about its future. Given recent demographic trends, what will become of our resilient community and its noble institutions? Who will help sustain us? Indeed, given the passage of so many key events and epochs in Jewish, American, and world history, what will younger writers have to say about their relatively peaceful and prosperous times? Will they even be inclined to commit words and images to paper? Please, Dear God, don’t allow our beloved journal to morph into a Twitter account!

Although I may sound somewhat pessimistic, I am truly proud and grateful. I have so much enjoyed playing important roles within our organization, and I hope and pray that I can continue being useful a while longer. If I have found an intellectual, artistic, and spiritual home here, then surely others will follow. Thank you, dear friends and colleagues, for this extraordinary privilege and opportunity. Amen.
Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association
65th Annual Meeting

The landmark meeting in the Baxt Social Hall of the Dwares Jewish Community Center, was held on Sunday afternoon, May 5, 2019. Mel Topf, the Association’s nineteenth president, welcomed approximately 80 members and guests and led the business portion of the meeting.

After a motion was passed to waive the reading of minutes from the fall meeting, Mel introduced officers and board members who will accept new terms. He also introduced two new board members, Cynthia Benjamin and Dr. Larry Ginsberg. The board’s secretary, Ruth Breindel, cast her ballot to approve the election. Mel declared that the board was officially installed.

Kate-Lynne Laroche, the Association’s director, gave an update about recent projects and initiatives. She explained that much information about recent activities could also be found in the Association’s newsletters. Kate-Lynne invited members to serve on standing committees and mentioned that the redesign of our website is still underway. Finally, she announced that a secretary would be hired, hopefully within a month.

For the David Charak Memorial Program, once again sponsored by the Arline Ruth Weinberg Memorial Fund, Mel introduced the afternoon’s speaker, Dr. George M. Goodwin, a past Association president. He gave a riveting speech on his 15 years as editor of The Notes. Several contributors to our journal were present, as were some additional special guests, including Rabbi and Mrs. Leslie Y. Guterman. George answered several questions and elaborated on other points.
After the program was completed and the meeting officially adjourned, members and guests enjoyed a festive collation.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth L. Breindel, Secretary
In Memoria:

November 2, 2018-November 1, 2019

Bazar, Banice C., born in Providence, was the youngest of the late Jenny (Bloom) and Samuel Bazar’s five sons. He was predeceased by his son, Joseph, and his wife, Beverly.

Mr. Bazar earned his bachelor’s degree in chemistry at the University of Rhode Island with the Class of 1951. After becoming a basketball fan as a freshman, he attended Rams games for decades.

Mr. Bazar, who had served in URI’s ROTC program, worked as a civilian chemist at Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio. Later commissioned as an Army second lieutenant, he served in Korea with the 388th Chemical Smoke Generator Company. Details of his harrowing service there are found in the 2011 issue of our journal. He was awarded a Bronze Star.

Mr. Bazar began his civilian career in business by selling consumer products at military post exchanges. Soon he opened an office in East Providence and then several around the country. A natural salesman, he also opened distribution companies in Alaska and Hawaii.

Later, Mr. Bazar, who lived in Providence, became involved with jewelry manufacturing. His various companies became known as the Bazar Group. Still later, through Beverly’s initiative, the couple owned and operated a ski resort, the Inn at Waterville Valley in New Hampshire.

A founding member of Crestwood Country Club, Mr. Bazar also belonged to the Providence Jewelers Club, the Plumb Club, the 24 Karat Club, and Aurora Civic Association. He was a member of Temple Beth-El and a life member of our Association.

Mr. Bazar is survived by his sons, Peter and David (our Association’s longtime treasurer), and his daughter, Karen Bergel.

Died on September 20, 2019 in Providence at the age of 90.
Beller, Dr. Hilliard, born in Brooklyn, New York, was the son of the late Sophia (Aronson) and David Beller. He was predeceased by his wife, Leila (Ehrenstein).

A specialist in English literature, Dr. Beller earned his doctorate at New York University and taught at several colleges and universities. He was also a gifted editor, who served the Rhode Island Historical Society for two decades and the Rhode Island Publications Society for more than three. As with students in a classroom, he gently guided and encouraged his scholarly colleagues. No doubt some of his skill was due to his long and deep experience as a competitive chess player.

Dr. Beller, who was often seen walking near his home on Providence’s East Side, is survived by his daughter, Susan, and his dear friend, Frances Scribner.

*Died on June 4, 2019 in Providence at the age of 84.*

Drolet, Rodolphe, born in Woonsocket, was the son of the late Marguerite and François Drolet.

Having a passion for motorcycles, he owned his own shop in Pawtucket, where he built and repaired these vehicles. He derived a special joy in designing and building motorcycles for people with disabilities.

Mr. Drolet, known to friends and family as “Rudy,” had a deep interest in history. He eagerly discussed Rhode Island Jewish history, for example, with his mother-in-law, Geraldine Foster, our Association’s first woman president and a frequent contributor to this journal as well as *Rhode Island Jewish Monthly*.

Mr. Drolet is also survived by his wife, Vivian, whom he married in the chapel of Temple Beth-El.

*Died on May 26, 2019 in Cranston at the age of 70.*

Eisenberg, Marilyn, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Molly (Fink) and Morris Young.

She earned her bachelor’s degree at the University of Rhode Island with the Class of 1953 and earned a master’s in guidance and counseling at Rhode Island College in 1972. For 32 years a vocational
and guidance counselor in the Woonsocket public schools, Mrs. Eisenberg retired in 1996. She had created the “Adopt-A-School Program,” one of the state’s first business and education collaborations. Mrs. Eisenberg is survived by her husband, Benjamin, and their daughters, Ellen Shafner, Nancy, Marcey Propp, and Susan.

Died on February 18, 2019 in Sarasota, Florida, at the age of 91.

Frank, H. Alan, born in Providence, was a son of the late Belle and Haskell Frank. He was predeceased by his son, Robbie.

Mr. Frank, known to many as “Bud,” earned his bachelor’s degree at the University of Rhode Island with the Class of 1951. He then went to work for Union Paper & Stationery Company, the company founded in Providence in 1898 by his grandfather, Moses Frank, and then led by his father, Haskell. “Bud,” in turn, managed the company for 45 years. In 2010 it became known as Admiral Packaging.

“Bud,” an outstanding salesman with a deep concern for customers, also introduced innovative equipment and technologies. He shared laughter with friends and strangers alike. Since 1997, Moses’s great-grandson, Harley, has led the Frank family business.

Mr. Frank was a golfer, skier, and pilot. At 70 years of age, he also tried bungee jumping. When not cheering the Red Sox or Patriots or attending concerts at Tanglewood, Mr. Frank enjoyed traveling to many parts of the world.

His philanthropic interests included the Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center, the Israel Tennis & Education Centers Foundation, and Sophia Academy in Providence. He was a member of Temple Emanu-El and a life member of our Association.

Mr. Frank is survived by his wife, Ellie, their son, Harley, and their daughter, Lisa Edelson.

Died on August 24, 2019 in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, at the age of 89.

Geltzer, Ellen B., born in New York City, was the daughter of the late Felice and Otto Barth.

She studied French at Smith College and graduated with the
Geltzer, Mildred, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late David and Anna Geltzer. She also studied at the Sorbonne and earned a master’s in French at Columbia University. She later taught high school.

Ms. Geltzer, who enjoyed playing tennis and Scrabble, was an enthusiastic dancer. She also enjoyed photography, gardening, and being with friends.

Ms. Geltzer, who lived in Providence, was a supporter of the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design and was a member of Temple Beth-El.

She is survived by her son, Dr. Allen, and her daughter, Amy Chernoff.

Died on September 13, 2019 in Providence at the age of 78.

Ginsberg, Helen, born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Anne (Cohen) and Samuel Margolies. She was predeceased by her husband Harris.

Mrs. Ginsberg graduated from Pawtucket West High School and studied at the University of Rhode Island and Bryant College. For many years she managed Dr. Alfred Jaffe’s orthodontics practice. She later took over her husband’s advertising business, HG Sales.

Mrs. Ginsberg, a resident of Rumford, was a member of Temple Beth-El and its sisterhood. She also belonged to Hadassah and was a volunteer for Meals on Wheels. She much enjoyed Mah Jongg (as explained in the 2007 issue of The Notes) and travel.

She is survived by her son, Dr. Lawrence, an Association board member, and her daughter, Brenda Kluk.

Died on October 22, 2019 in Providence at the age of 88.

Goldstein, Gerald, born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, was a son of the late Phyllis and Louis Goldstein. He was predeceased by his wife, Jane (Efros).

Mr. Goldstein studied business at the University of Rhode Island and, following his graduation, became involved in several enterprises. For example, he was the founder and president of Town & Country Cleansers in Warwick and East Providence. He similarly owned and managed Kent Cleansers in Cranston and Providence and then Deli On The Square, on Wayland Square, in Providence.
Another of his businesses included Town Uniform Rentals in Warwick.

Mr. Goldstein, who lived in Warwick and later Cranston, was active in numerous civic and volunteer organizations. For 16 years, while minority leader of the Warwick City Council, he served on every committee. He was also a member of the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council, a co-founder of Rhode Island Citizens for Clean Water, and a member of the advisory board of the state’s Department of Employment Security. Additional affiliations included the Kent County Cancer Crusade, Warwick Rotary Club, and Palestine Temple of the Shriners.

He is survived by his daughter, Jill.

*Died on September 16, 2019 in Cranston at the age of 92.*

**Goldstein, Prof. Sidney**, born in New London, Connecticut, was a son of the late Bella (Howscha) and Max Goldstein.

Prof. Goldstein earned three degrees in sociology: his bachelor’s in 1949 and his master’s in 1951 at the University of Connecticut and his doctorate in 1953 at the University of Pennsylvania.

In 1955, after teaching two years at Penn’s Wharton School, he joined the Brown University faculty. By 1960 he had become a full professor. His hope of developing a population studies and training center was realized within a decade. He directed this program for 25 years. In 1977, Prof. Goldstein was named the George Hazard Crooker Professor of Sociology. In 1993 he became an emeritus professor; in 2005 a conference room was named in his honor.

Prof. Goldstein’s special interest as a demographer was the migration of populations within countries, especially from rural to urban areas. His analyses began with the United States and Denmark, but soon expanded to Asia, Africa, and Central America.

Prof. Goldstein was a prolific author of books, monographs, articles, and conference papers. Accordingly, he received numerous prestigious fellowships and awards. But Prof. Goldstein also derived considerable pride from teaching. Even after mentoring over 100 Brown students from America and around the world, he remained involved with many.
Prof. Goldstein’s extraordinary career was celebrated in the 2007 issue of our journal. Two years earlier, he had received the Laureate Award from the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population. Highlights of the president’s award speech were published, as were highlights of Sid’s response.

Beginning in 1963, with his study of Rhode Island’s Jewish community, Prof. Goldstein also specialized in American Jewish demography. As a result of his influence, he was widely regarded as the dean of American Jewish demographers.

When it came to his own Jewish community, Prof. Goldstein was as much an activist as social scientist, however. He served on the board of the former Jewish Federation and became a vice president of its Board of Jewish Education. For 35 years, beginning in 1966, he served on the board of our Jewish Historical Association. Both he and Alice—his wife and colleague—also wrote numerous articles for The Notes. One of their last but most important was a 50-year history of Temple Am David, their beloved congregation in Warwick. They had joined its predecessor, Temple Beth Am, in 1959, even before its synagogue was erected. In later years, he served as the congregation’s vice president and chaired its ritual committee.

Prof. Goldstein also knew how to have fun. For example, he enjoyed gardening, travel, photography, and stamp collecting. Only four years ago, after he and Alice had relocated to Lexington, Kentucky, to be closer to family, he took up landscape and portrait painting.

Prof. Goldstein is survived by Alice and their children, Beth, David, and Brenda.

*Died on August 5, 2019 in Lexington at the age of 92 (one day after his birthday)*.

*On September 23, hundreds of Sid’s dear friends, colleagues, and admirers joined Alice and her family at the Dwares Jewish Community Center for a glowing memorial tribute.*

Gozonsky, Dorothy A., born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Ruth (Woolf) and Joseph Adelson.
She graduated from Pembroke College at Brown University with the Class of 1952. Sixteen years later, she earned a master’s degree in speech pathology at Boston University.

Mrs. Gozonsky is survived by her husband, Edwin, and their daughters, Judi Golias and Diane Goodman.

*Died on November 4, 2018 in Providence at the age of 87.*

**Lindenbaum, Bess,** born in 1911 in Lanovits, Poland, was a daughter of the late Chana and Nathan Rosenberg and was a step-daughter of the late Rivka Rosenberg. She was predeceased by her husband, Charles, and their daughter, Roberta Fox.

Mrs. Lindenbaum was honored in 2015 by the Glocester Heritage Society in Chepachet and with an article in our journal. At that time, she was not only 104, but also well and in high spirits.

Nathan Rosenberg had immigrated to Rhode Island in 1914, but his four motherless children were unable to reach our shores until 1921. When they joined him on Main Street in Chepachet, its Jewish community grew to five members.

Mrs. Lindenbaum attended Chepachet schools before studying at Providence’s Commercial High School. Even after her marriage to a New York City resident in 1933, the couple remained in Chepachet. Bess and Charles did not move to Providence until their two children entered high school. Concurrently, the family also began its lengthy affiliation with Temple Beth-El.

Bess and Charles, who became active real estate brokers, investors, and owners, remained loyal to northwestern Rhode Island. She continued her business endeavors until turning 97. In 2002, following her husband’s death, she moved to Royal Palm Beach, Florida.

Mrs. Lindenbaum enjoyed gardening, baking, and playing bridge as well as theatre, movies, and concerts. She and her husband traveled to numerous countries.

Mrs. Lindenbaum, a life member of our Association, is survived by her son, Ken Linden.

*Died on January 27, 2019 in West Palm Beach at the age of 107. When asked in 2015 about the key to her longevity, she replied,*
“It’s not that I’m careful with my diet. Why not ask the Lord?”

Mellion, Hope B., born in Providence, was the daughter of the late Rebecca (Kortick) and Herman Abrams. She was predeceased by her husband, Benjamin.

Mrs. Mellion studied at Bryant and Pembroke Colleges before serving with the Navy in Washington, DC, during World War II.

A charter member of the Cranston-Warwick chapter of Hadassah, she received its Woman of Valor award in 1964. For many years she also volunteered for the Rhode Island Community Food Bank and Ronald McDonald House, both in Providence. Additionally, she devotedly served as a reader for the blind and on local radio stations.

Mrs. Mellion enjoyed playing bridge and Mah Jongg and dressing fashionably. Her culinary skills included baking, especially lemon chiffon whipped cream cake.

She is survived by her sons, Richard and Michael.

Died on February 2, 2019 in Warwick at the age of 95.

Orson, Dr. Jay M., born in Yonkers, New York, was the son of the late Gertrude (Marshall) and Samuel Orson. He was predeceased by his wife, Barbara (Tuschner).

Before entering Cornell, Dr. Orson served in the merchant marine. He earned his bachelor’s degree with distinction in chemistry with the Class of 1948. The following year he earned a master’s in chemistry at New York University. He obtained his medical degree at New York Medical College in 1953 and then completed an internship at Grace New Haven Hospital in Connecticut.

Commissioned as a first lieutenant and then promoted to captain, Dr. Orson served with the Air Force in Korea from 1954 until 1956. Subsequently, he completed a residency in pediatrics at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

After moving to Providence in 1959, Dr. Orson cofounded Pediatric Associates. He typically began receiving calls from patients’ parents at 6 AM. After spending a full day in his office, he drove his
VW Beetle to make house calls before returning to his home in Pawtucket. He was committed to serving families from all walks of life and across Rhode Island.

As a specialist in pediatric endocrinology, Dr. Orson was a clinical associate professor at Brown University’s Medical School. He also taught in Uganda and Australia. Even in retirement, he taught reading in Providence public schools.

Dr. Orson enjoyed jogging on Blackstone Boulevard and fishing. Given his wife’s starring roles at Trinity Repertory Company over 25 years, he was of course a theatre enthusiast. He served on our Association’s board and was a member of Temple Beth-El.

Dr. Orson is survived by his twin daughters, Beth and Diane, and his son, Ted.

*Died on August 9, 2019 in Providence at the age of 91.*

**Rabinowitz, Warren,** born in Providence, was a son of the late Hannah and Benjamin Rabinowitz.

Having earned a bachelor’s degree in business administration at Bryant University, he worked at Apex, Blaustein & Associates, and then owned his own firm, Galaxy Marketing. He also served as an adjunct professor of marketing at Rhode Island College until his retirement in 2000.

Mr. Rabinowitz served in the Army National Guard. He enjoyed the outdoors, weekly tennis matches, and relaxing with his family. He was a life member of our Association.

Mr. Rabinowitz is survived by his wife, Susette, and their sons, Jon and Gary.

*Died on January 18, 2019 in Boca Raton, Florida, at the age of 77.*

**Resnick, Kenneth,** born in Providence, was a son of the late Ida (Teverow) and Israel Resnick. He was predeceased by his wife, Harriet (also known as Chaya).

A graduate of Hope High School, he served in the merchant marine and in the Navy before earning a bachelor’s degree at the University of Rhode Island. He worked in his family’s business, Artis-
tic Leather Manufacturing.

A devout Zionist, Mr. Resnick lived in Israel for several years during the 1950s. He met his future wife, Harriet, while volunteering on a kibbutz. In 1972, after having started a family in Providence, the Resnicks made *aliyah*. They settled in Haifa, where Mr. Resnick worked as a sales manager for Industries Trading, Ltd.

Mr. Resnick, a life member of our Association, is survived by his son, Murray, and his daughters, Shira, and Tamra Erez.

*Died on November 13, 2018 in Haifa at the age of 91.*

**Sadler, Frances,** born in Providence, was a daughter of the late Sadie (Godfrey) and Samuel Pepper. She was predeceased by her husband Harold.

She earned her bachelor’s degree at the University of Rhode Island with the Class of 1975. A bookkeeper for Providence Shipyard for five years, she later worked for Martin Dittelman’s accounting firm for two decades, retiring in 1994.

Mrs. Sadler, a longtime resident of Cranston, was a founding member of Temple Sinai and a past president of its sisterhood. She was also a past president of Temple Beth-El’s garden club and a master teacher of Ikenobo. She was a past president of the PTA at Stadium Elementary School in Cranston.

Mrs. Sadler was a life member of Hadassah, Brandeis University Women, and the National Council of Jewish Women. Because she was a life member of our Jewish Historical Association, it is not surprising that she also belonged to numerous book and history groups.

Mrs. Sadler, who lived for seven years in Lake Monticello, Virginia, is survived by her sons, Carl, Philip, and Alan, and her daughter, Shirley Stewart.

*Died on February 27, 2019 in Charlottesville, Virginia, at the age of 93.*

**Seigle, Richard S.,** born in Providence, was a son of the late Natalie (Rosen) and Saul Seigle.

He graduated from Syracuse University and was employed
for 43 years in the jewelry industry.

Mr. Seigle was a member of Temple Beth-El, Ledgemont Country Club, and Hebrew Free Loan Association of Providence. He is survived by his wife, Evelyn (Gottfried), and their sons, Seth and Adam.

_Died on April 5, 2019 in Providence at the age of 70._

**Sprung, Dr. Sonia,** born in Ukraine, was a daughter of the late Clara and Victor Mendelson.

During the Nazi invasion of the former Soviet Union, she and her family were forced to flee 1,500 miles east to Kazakhstan. There she completed her studies and began her medical practice. After World War II, while working for the Joint Distribution Committee, Dr. Sprung treated Eastern European refugees who had made their way to Munich.

In 1951, Dr. Sprung, her husband, and their young daughter, who were stateless Jews, were able to reach America. They settled in Brooklyn, but Dr. Sprung was required to obtain American medical credentials, which meant serving again as both an intern and a resident.

Dr. Sprung, who practiced pediatrics in Providence for four decades, retired at 75 years of age. Her grateful patients included three generations of some families.

Dr. Sprung, who walked almost daily along Blackstone Boulevard and also traveled widely abroad, was a member of Temple Beth-El and later Temple Emanu-El. She was a life member of our Association.

She is survived by her daughter, Edie Nadler.

_Died on January 25, 2019 in Providence at the age of 97._
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