

# MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY



**Исторический снимок встречи амер  
и советских воинов на мосту у город**

*U.S. and Russian soldiers shake hands across the Elbe  
River in Germany, April 1945.*



*WWII Russian Oral Histories by Gitelman; Sinai Hospital Retrospective;  
Detroit's Jewish Brewers; A Salesman in Japan; Michigan Jews in Cuba*

Volume 40

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Michigan Jewish History

is dedicated to the memory of

**Sarah and Ralph Davidson**

and

**Bessie and Joseph Wetsman**

The parents and grandparents of

William Davidson and Dorothy Davidson Gerson

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Cover photo: In April 1945, U.S. and Russian soldiers linked up on a ruined bridge across the Elbe River at Torgau, Germany, marking the imminent defeat of Nazi Germany and the end of World War II. University of Michigan historian Professor Zvi Gitelman has been collecting the oral histories of Russian-Jewish soldiers now in Michigan and discusses his findings about their World War II experiences in this issue of *Michigan Jewish History*. Photo courtesy Naum Levin, from a U.S. government, Russian-language publication.

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# MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

אשר ישאלון בניכם מחר את אבותם... יהושע ד:כא

*When your children shall ask their parents in time to come...*

Joshua 4:21

Volume 40

Fall 2000

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# Soviet Jewish Veterans of World War II Remember: Listening to Oral Histories\*

By Zvi Gitelman

As is well known, Soviet history was “politics projected into the past”; it glossed over, ignored, or distorted painful, embarrassing, or politically unacceptable historical events. One way to recover such “suppressed history” is to interview people who lived through the events. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union a decade ago, historians, social scientists, and journalists have been digging into formerly closed archives and interviewing elites and ordinary people about their lives under communism in the Soviet Union. At the suggestion of Judith Levin Cantor, I undertook to gather oral histories from Soviet Jewish war veterans in order to learn not only about their war experiences, but also about their perceptions of those experiences and how they had changed their lives.

What began as a project in local Michigan Jewish history has mushroomed into an international project. Two hundred nineteen histories have been recorded: 107 in Michigan and 68 others in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cleveland. Twenty histories were taken in Israel and the rest in Moscow. Three “Heroes of the

Soviet Union” and several generals were interviewed, mostly in Moscow. Those interviewed include soldiers and officers, a few partisans and ghetto survivors, about forty women. Most were born in Ukraine, some in Belorussia, Russia, and elsewhere. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed in Russian, translated into English, and edited.



Yevgenia Rivlis, center front, a local Russian-Jewish war veteran and participant in the oral history project, with her World War II buddies, c. 1944.

## Soviet Perspectives on World War II

The Soviet Union bore the brunt of the war against Nazi Germany. For political reasons, Soviet writers and spokesmen deliberately

underplayed the role of the other allies in World War II, but it cannot be denied that the scale of both suffering and combat was greater in the USSR than in any other European country. According to the displays in the 1996 memorial exhibition on



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World War II (known in the former Soviet Union as “the Great Patriotic Fatherland War”), 37.2 million Soviet people died during the war.<sup>1</sup> Of these, almost 8.7 million died in military service and about 23.5 million civilians died. We do not know how many Jewish civilians were murdered by the German *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing squads deployed to kill Jews, Soviet officials, and Communists. Most estimates are that the Germans and their local collaborators killed about 1.5 million Jews living on Soviet territories in 1941 (following the annexation of eastern Poland, the Baltic states, and Bukovina-Bessarabia from Romania).<sup>2</sup> That would mean that 6.4 percent of all civilians who died during the war were Jews, though they made up only 2.9 percent of the population in 1941.

### Jews in the Soviet Armed Forces

Before the war, the proportion of Jews in the Red Army seems to have been commensurate with their proportion in the population, though they were over-represented in senior positions, and it remained so at the end of the war.<sup>3</sup> We do not know how many Jews were in the military during the war, but some estimate it at about 400-500,000, and most sources speak of about 180,000 Jewish combatants who were killed, a casualty rate of thirty-five to forty percent. As Jews were concentrated in the western Soviet Union where the Pale of Settlement had been, and since in 1941-42 the forces confronting the invading Germans and their allies were drawn very largely from the local population, Jews were likely concentrated in units that bore the brunt of the early fighting. They were probably over-represented among the millions surrounded and captured by the Germans in the first months of the war—about a million in Kiev alone. Of 5.7 million Soviet POWs during the entire war, 2.8 million died in the winter of 1941-42.<sup>4</sup> So Jewish participation was extensive, and a high proportion of Jews were involved in combat, with commensurate losses.

### The Holocaust Ignored

Despite these numbers, Soviet authorities and scholars were careful “not to divide the dead” and paid very little attention to the special fate of the Jews under German occupation. The word *Holocaust*, so widely used in the West, was unknown in the Soviet Union. Only during the period of *perestroika*, Mikhail Gorbachev’s attempt to open up and reform Soviet society in the 1980s, did such terms as *kholokaust* or *katas-trofa* begin to appear in Soviet publications. Thus, Soviet audiences were generally not exposed to even the most elementary details of the Holocaust, though in the 1960s, a few volumes were published that did provide more information. Significantly, at least some were translations from other languages.<sup>5</sup> The Holocaust was seen as an integral part of a larger phenomenon—the murder of civilians—whether Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Gypsies, or other nationalities. It was said to be a natural consequence of racist fascism, but one of several reflexes of fascism, which was, in turn, the ultimate expression of capitalism. Thus, the roots of the Holocaust lay in capitalism, expressed in its most degenerate form. Armed with the theory of “scientific socialism,” the Soviets were able to explain in a facile way how so many were murdered.

While the Holocaust was downplayed or ignored in the literature and media aimed at general Soviet audiences, it was much publicized in a highly ideological way among a very specialized and shrinking audience: Yiddish readers and speakers. Almost every issue of *Sovetish beymland*, the officially sponsored Soviet Yiddish





May 9, 1945: Russian soldiers celebrate victory in the “Great Patriotic Fatherland War.” From the collection of Boris Smolyar, a Detroit-area Russian veteran.

monthly, published from 1961 to 1991 (originally with a circulation of 25,000, later reduced to 7,000 and less), contained material on the Holocaust—stories, poems, memoirs, factual information. The journal consistently featured certain themes that served a didactic political purpose. These are: 1) Gentiles frequently saved Jews in occupied territories; 2) Jews who resisted did so for universal, not parochial, reasons; 3) there was much cooperation among all nationalities against the Nazis; 4) the only collaborators with the Nazis were fascists, and nearly all of them now live in the West. Short stories present Russians, especially workers, saving Jews, and wealthy Jews serving on *Judenraten* (Jewish Councils).<sup>6</sup>

### The Legitimizing Myth

Why did the Soviets ignore or downplay the Holocaust? In the absence of explicit archival or published evidence, one can only speculate. First, perhaps the authorities felt that discussing the Holocaust would raise the very sensitive issues of collaboration with the Nazis, especially among Ukrainians and the Baltic nationalities. This would undermine the myths of *druzbbba narodov* (friendship of the peoples) and of a united Soviet domestic front against fascism and might poison relations between Jews and other nationalities. Second, publicizing the Holocaust would inevitably raise Jewish consciousness, as it has elsewhere, and cause Jews to question the viability of their continued existence in a state where some of their neighbors, or their parents and grandparents, had participated in mass murder of the Jews’ parents and grandparents. Third, it would raise uncomfortable questions of anti-Semitism in the Red Army and in the occupied territories. Moreover, it would “divide the dead” and anger other nationalities that had suffered worse casualties than the Jews, though in absolute, not relative, terms. Finally, since World War II had become critical to the Soviet “political formula” (the rationale for the system), “giving it to the Jews” would seriously



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undermine the formula. The Great Patriotic Fatherland War was too valuable a political asset to be awarded to the Jews. It had become the legitimating myth of the Soviet system.

Perhaps the posture toward the Shoah helps explain why some Soviet literature also seems deliberately to avoid Jewish participation in the war effort. For example, a popular writer on World War II, S. S. Smirnov, referred several times to the suffering of the Jews in his three-volume work, but seemed to go out of his way to avoid references to Jews as fighters and resisters.<sup>7</sup> Describing the defenders of the Brest fortress, he described specific individuals as Russian or Armenian or Ukrainian. The one hero whose nationality is not mentioned is Efim Moiseevich Fomin. Lest there be any doubt about his nationality, he is described as "short...dark haired with intelligent and mournful eyes," a political commissar from a small town in the Vitebsk area, the son of a smith and a seamstress. All these are stereotypical characteristics of the Jew. Yet, Fomin is identified only as "the renowned commissar of the Brest fortress, a hero and a true son of the Communist Party, one of the chief organizers and leaders of the legendary defense."<sup>8</sup> Smirnov followed the same pattern when describing Soviet partisans in Italy.<sup>9</sup> Why did he describe Jewish martyrdom in detail and assiduously ignore Jewish heroism? Was this in line with an official directive? Was it the compromise he reached with himself, or, more likely, with a censor? We cannot tell, of course, but the pattern is too consistent to be accidental.

### The Interviews

Analysis and editing of the interviews in this study are not complete as of this writing, but all of the Michigan interviews have been analyzed and form the basis for this article. Space constraints force me to omit here the fascinating descriptions of combat and field conditions, descriptions of people like Leonid Brezhnev or Marshall Rokossovsky, revenge against collaborators and treatment of German POWs, and other topics. These will be addressed in material being prepared for future publication. Here, I will concentrate on some distinctly Jewish aspects of their experiences: the veterans' attitudes toward Jewishness before the war; relations between Jews and others during the war; the role the Holocaust might have played in the consciousness of the veterans, and the conclusions they have drawn from their war experiences.

### Jewish Identities Before the War

Most of the veterans claim that before the war, ethnicity didn't matter much. There was some "*bytovoi*" [everyday] anti-Semitism, but it was not taken seriously. Many point out that they took no notice of others' nationality and, presumably, most others took no notice of theirs. Asya Balina, who grew up in Baku, Azerbaijan, and now lives in Ann Arbor, says of her thirty-two classmates: "Eighteen of them were guys. The class was international. There were Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Georgians, Jews. All of us were very close.... We were friends and there were never any discussions or even an idea about who you were [by ethnicity] .... There is nothing negative I can tell you. I did not feel it [anti-Semitism]. Not in school, in the university, never. I did not feel that I was Jewish." After serving as a physician in the army, she moved to Moscow and married. It was only in 1952-53, she says, that "unfortunately, for the first time in my life I found out that I was Jewish, they let me know." These same professions of excellent relations among nationalities come even from Ukraine or Belarus.



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Though many veterans claim that they were hardly aware of their Jewish identities before the war, their parents were often traditional Jews, and their grandparents certainly so, especially those from the *shtetlekh* of Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, i.e. the former Pale. While grandparents were often fully traditional, parents were usually selective in observance, or one parent would be significantly more observant than the other (and it was not always or even usually the mother). For the most part, the veterans had been passive participants or onlookers in the observances of their parents or grandparents. This is similar to immigrant Jewish patterns in the U.S. Except for those from Moscow, Leningrad, and Baku, most recall Passover *sedarim* and even *shabbat* and festival meals at their grandparents'—it is worth noting how often food is at

the center of their memories and associations. Some tell of having gone to synagogue until the teenage years or until “they closed the synagogue,” or until “it became dangerous” or “I became a Pioneer or a member of the Komsomol.” Ayzik Fainshtein, now in Michigan, recalls: “Before the war, in my childhood, before 1929, while we lived with my grandfather, I went to the synagogue, especially on holidays. And then, when we went to Kiev, and from Kiev to Gorki and after the war I didn't go anymore.”

Mira Galant of Ann Arbor was born in Kremenchug, Ukraine, in 1915. She reminisces: “I remember when my older sister had her first grandson, they did a circumcision.... My father and the boy's father left the house—they could not be present [or they would get into political trouble]. I was there, and as it's usually done with Jews, I held the boy. I don't know what it's called” [sandek]. Galant's father was a lawyer in the People's Commissariat of Justice, her brother-in-law an engineer, both non-Party, but

they had to leave the house. “My grandfather insisted on the circumcision, that's why we did it.” Her own parents were non-observant

but we had matzos for *Peysakh*. But together with the matzos we always ate bread. Nobody then believed in anything sacred. [Yet she says immediately] I remember that my mother always observed Yom Kippur, all her life she fasted. And my sister and I took on the tradition.... Father never did that, only we. And we also brought that tradition here. My sister and I fast on Yom Kippur, and so does my eldest grandson. He decided to do it all by himself. He has just graduated from college and he always observes Yom Kippur. I don't know the history of this holiday. I just know that's how it was in my family.... As for the rest...I must tell you, it didn't really stay with me. [My father] had this saying always, ‘in Erets Yisrael.’ I never understood what it meant, but I understood that it was something profoundly Jewish. But he said it only among us, in the family.



Mira Galant, now of Ann Arbor,  
as a young soldier in 1941.



### The Secret Code: Yiddish

Something similar happened with Yiddish. Many veterans began by speaking Yiddish to parents (though for many, Yiddish was already a "secret code" for parents who did not want children to understand, as in America), but most spoke Russian or Ukrainian to friends or even siblings, and then parents began speaking Russian with the children. Several respondents say that they spoke Yiddish in the shtetl but when they moved to Leningrad/Moscow, etc., they changed over to Russian. One respondent even says, "Until 1925 we spoke Yiddish but after that we spoke Russian."

While they were the first generation of sincere, believing, but not necessarily activist Soviet citizens, they rarely report conflict with their traditional parents/grandparents (perhaps they want to avoid this subject or have repressed/forgotten it). One or two report celebrating when "*Bobeb* [Granny] finally ate *trayf*," but that's exceptional.<sup>10</sup> The difference between them and the Maskilim (enlighteners) of the nineteenth century, who rebelled against their parents and their values, might be that the Maskilim were fighting a conscious ideological battle and were a minority, struggling against inertia, whereas Soviet youth were riding the tide of the times. They were strongly supported by the regime and were content to treat their elders not as ideological enemies, but simply as "old-fashioned people" who belonged to an earlier time, whereas they were confident that the future belonged to them. Remarkable by its absence in our interviews is any description of tension among the generations. Grandparents were often highly observant, parents much less so or not at all, and the respondents became *Komsomoltsy* [members of the Communist Youth League], Party members, good Soviet citizens. Yet the veterans describe going to sedarim well into the 1930s. Almost never do they mock a grandparent for having been religious, or say "You know, they had not yet outlived superstitions and old-fashioned customs." One exception is Semen Gartsman, born in 1922 in Kiev, now in Philadelphia. His grandparents were very religious people, even fanatics. "My grandfather, when I was still a boy, would visit us in Kiev [from Khabna]. And his first duty was to put on something and then stand and pray. I was ashamed in front of the Russian boys, when they would come in and see that my grandfather was praying. At that time religion was prohibited. And I was a Pioneer, and I was afraid I would be laughed at, that I was religious. And we were always instructed against religion. They broke up the synagogues at that time. I would go with my father when I was seven years old, my father would take me to the synagogue, it was all broken up and had been turned into a warehouse for iron and scrap.... My mother would yell at my father, 'what are you doing? You'll leave me with two orphans! Don't go—you'll be arrested.'"

A fair number of the veterans went to Yiddish schools but then those schools were closed, and they went to Ukrainian or Russian schools, the former if they were in smaller towns, the latter if they were in larger cities. They had friends of various nationalities (seemingly more than their Polish-Jewish counterparts).

### Ethnic Relations During the War

Certainly during the war, at least until its latter stages, the veterans paid little attention to ethnicity, claiming to have close friends of various nationalities and denying that Jewish soldiers tended to associate with each other. Yosif Kvasha, born in Medzhibozh, Ukraine, and now living in Boston, observes: "You know what I think? The war years were the purest years of my life. Before the war, nobody cared about anyone else's nationality. If a person did his job well, he was a good man, and if he did



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not he was a bad man, and it didn't matter who or what he was." Moisei Grinblat of Southfield, Michigan, says that during the war, "Honestly, I didn't pay attention to that [nationality] then. At that time, there was only one important issue for us—to fight and win the war." Misha Yablonovski, also of Boston, says that in the army nationality was irrelevant: "We really had no time to discuss these things—whether one was Jewish, or Tatar or Russian. We all looked out for each other and paid no attention to nationality. Because, you know, a person could be next to you one moment and then dead at the next.... We had to look out for each other, such is the way of war. Otherwise, it would never have worked."

It just might be that the pre-war and war periods are being seen retrospectively as better than they were. In comparison with the rapidly deteriorating relations between Jews and others after 1944 or 1945, these appear as halcyon periods. Perhaps in trying to understand how the system they so fervently had believed in could betray them so badly, the veterans point to the war and late Stalinism as a great divide when things changed for the worse. After all, the Soviets themselves acknowledged the existence of anti-Semitism before the war and for a time fought against it.<sup>11</sup> How could the veterans not have noticed it?

There is another possibility. Experience of combat masked whatever tensions there might have been before. As Boris Revich, now in Chicago, puts it, "Starting with the academy until the end of the war I saw no antagonism between the Jew, Ukrainian, Russian, Belorussian. We really had 'friendship of the nations.' Now I see that maybe it's not that way. But we were friends, we loved each other. There was Sergeant-major Begashvili, a Georgian, and there was an Uzbek, Rustem Rustamov. I remember them perfectly, so many years have passed. We had a friendship, a friendship of the front. This is not to the credit of Soviet rule; this is due to the camaraderie that is created in difficult circumstances."



The late Motl Margulies of Southfield, photographed in Berlin in 1945.

The late Motl Margulies of Ann Arbor told his interviewer that when he was stationed in Germany after the war, a Lieutenant Maleyev arrived.

"We noticed that he would always eat at the officers' mess that served really disgusting spaghetti. We never ate it—we had our own channels for getting food. We always had food because we exchanged products or for cigarettes, things like that.... We often organized dinners at different people's places. We never went to the mess hall. Our windows looked out onto the lake; the homes belonged to the aviation staff—it used to be a German aviation school. So this Maleyev came over with his pot of spaghetti, whatever he could get at the cafeteria. Well, a new comrade had arrived, one must have a little drink. So Maleyev drank some and says...He let go and says that the Jews never took part in any fighting. I kept myself in hand. I am usually a hot-tempered man, but I kept calm. Two of my friends got up, opened the



door to the balcony, picked the guy up by his arms and legs, and threw him into the lake, together with his pot." (Q. *The men who threw him out of the window, were they Jewish?*) A. "Russians, Russian guys. All my frontline buddies were Russian. It was at the time when I was still with the regiment. So they threw him out, and a day later, an order came to send him back to Russia."

Perhaps the camaraderie of the war is both exaggerated and is projected back before the war, but this is what the veterans remember.

### A Change in Attitudes

A second matter of consensus is that in late 1943 to 1944, the feeling that nationality does not matter began to change. Medals and promotions seem to be denied to Jews who fought in the same battles and had the same experience as others who got the decorations and promotions. Some report incidents in 1945 when they are told by superior officers that they cannot be decorated or promoted because of their nationality. "Whenever I was nominated to receive an award, the superior officers suggested an award a degree or two lower. Instead of the Red Banner, a Red Star." Indifference to nationality changed profoundly in 1945-46 when veterans returned home, especially in Ukraine. Some met with unconcealed hostility by neighbors and, especially, by those who had moved into their families' former apartments. Many of them complained, took other actions, and sometimes won the apartment back. As Mordechai Altshuler notes, "For many Jews this policy aroused deep feelings of pain and humiliation. They believed that in view of the Holocaust...and of their loyalty to the Soviet Union during the war, not only should they not be discriminated against, they should even be accorded preferred treatment."<sup>12</sup> By 1948, of course, they confronted open anti-Semitism in higher education, employment and on the street.

In reaction, many became more consciously and socially Jewish. Lev Kupershtain, a former intelligence officer now active in the Detroit-area Soviet veterans association, observes: "I must say that when I returned we quickly organized a circle of friends, fifteen people and not one non-Jew. We really became friends. There were always wonderful meetings and we celebrated holidays together and everything.... I would say it was defensive nationalism. We became interested in questions of Jewishness...because of militant anti-Semitism. Plus we felt that especially in Kiev they did not go after those who had served the Germans, the *Polizei* [local collaborators]." Oak Park, Michigan, resident Anatoly Vodopyanov comments:

Even as something as trifling as a lunch break at the SKB where I was working. At a table for four sat four Jews. They didn't spread out. And if one Jew was sitting, a second would definitely come up to him and then there would eventually be four at the table. Jews were trying to get closer to each other and Yiddish words began to slip into the conversation, though no one really knew Yiddish.... An interest and an understanding that you were Jewish began to develop.

Alexander Kalish, formerly of Leningrad and now in Southfield, Michigan, recalls: "To tell the truth, before the war I did not feel that I was Jewish. I knew I was Jewish by nationality and that my parents were Jews. But my Jewish self-consciousness had only begun to develop. Especially after the war, during the Stalin regime...I understood...." He was refused admission to the Military Academy and had a hard time finding a job or even being readmitted to the Leningrad Polytechnic Institute where he had been a student in 1941.



## The Holocaust in the Veterans' Consciousness

Contrary to what some would like to believe, most Soviet Jews in the Soviet military did not see themselves as fighting for a Jewish cause. Perhaps the major point to emerge from the interviews is that while all were born to two Jewish parents and the great majority had childhood experiences with traditional Jewish life, the veterans did not fight in the war as Jews but as Soviet citizens. For most, but not all, the ongoing Holocaust was not a prime motivation in their fighting. Some say they were unaware of the Holocaust until they liberated areas in the western USSR where they could see for themselves what had happened to Jews; most claim to have learned about German mass murders either from letters from relatives and friends or from briefings by the political officers. Since official news, transmitted by the political officers, rarely included mention of Nazi atrocities specifically against Jews,<sup>13</sup> I suspect that what they have in mind are the reports they heard about how the Nazis were treating civilians generally. A few had encountered Polish-Jewish refugees who told them about Nazi persecution, though mass killings had not yet begun when these refugees arrived in the USSR. But even the veterans who had an inkling of the Holocaust say that their commitment and consciousness were Soviet, not primarily Jewish. Some mention that they fought harder because they wanted to show that Jews were fighters, not slackers, but few claim that they fought as Jews against Nazis. They knew they were Jewish and had a clear sense of what being Jewish meant, but it simply did not matter much to them. This makes sense if we take seriously what they say about their ethnic consciousness before the war.

Not a single veteran claims that he did not care at all about the USSR and fought only out of Jewish motivation. Abram Tulman of Chicago, a former air force colonel: (Q. "Did you have any personal reasons for participating in the war?") A. "My main reason was that I was a Soviet citizen and a patriot. I was a patriot. I had a Motherland and I loved my Motherland. I loved it because I paid a high price for it.... All the suffering I went through when I was little: the orphanage, hunger, lack of clothing, no place to sleep. I remembered all of that. I knew that I was defending my Motherland. We talked among ourselves that we'd win the war and start living well. But it didn't turn out that way. Unfortunately, it didn't. That's how it goes."<sup>14</sup>

They believed in the Soviet system, in socialism. One gets the impression that they simply assumed that this was their system, that there was every reason to support it. They were not necessarily fervent ideologues, but unquestioning supporters of the system. They were too young to have experienced and/or considered alternatives (most were born in 1915-25). A few maintained the faith until their departure, especially the career military officers (some of whom left the service as late as the 1980s). These are mostly people who deny anti-Semitism existed, including one who argues that anyone who complains of anti-Semitism is just using this as an excuse for his own incompetence.



Lev Kupershtain, local Soviet veterans association leader, with his war medals.



## SOVIET JEWISH VETERANS

As regards the Shoah itself, the veterans speak quite dispassionately about the murders of their relatives, perhaps because they did not witness them. However, we may observe the same thing in survivor testimonies from other countries, perhaps because they have lived with this for so long and thought about it so many times, or perhaps because they are trying to minimize the pain. Perhaps this is a military or Soviet stoicism. They display remarkably little emotion when describing the horrors of war, including even their own wounds and suffering. The women show emotion much more freely. One exception is Abram Gulko of Ann Arbor who speaks with passion about Germans, Stalin, and the Soviet system. He also mentions that he has nightmares about the war and sees himself being murdered. But he is nearly unique in this—unlike the American ethos, suffused with the values and terminology of social work and psychology (two largely unknown fields in the USSR, especially at the time these veterans were growing up), in which there is much talk about various post-battle “syndromes.” This may be due to a Soviet ethos of men not dwelling on suffering, being stoic and matter-of-fact, while women can and should show emotion. It’s also possible, though highly unlikely, that the veterans have told their stories so many times that their emotions connected to them are dulled.

Iosif Ushomirski of Oak Park, Michigan, relates how on February 13, 1945, part of his finger was shot off and the commander said, “When we take the dike...you can go to the medical unit. But now you have to get your platoon ready and as soon as you hear the order, start the offensive.” His orderly bandaged the wound and told him to shoot with a good finger. Later a shell exploded “and I lost my left eye, the right eye was slightly wounded and a few fragments got into my skull. At that time there wasn’t any serious artillery fire. That was just a single shell....” They took him from near Frankfurt to a hospital near Poznan. “That was the only eye hospital for the entire front. In two days they had operated on me. Captain—I don’t remember her name—operated on me. In those days they didn’t have any anesthetics or anything. They tied me to the operating table and she just operated on me.” Ushomirskii was not discharged but assigned to non-combat duties and eventually wound up in the NKVD fighting Polish anti-Soviet bands. “I was so patriotic.”

Semen Gertsman (Philadelphia) states rather matter-of-factly: “Fourteen of my first cousins died at the front. My aunt, uncle, two sisters and three male first cousins died in Babi Yar. My uncle, my father’s brother, died at the front.”

What seems to bother the veterans a great deal about the Shoah is that former friends and neighbors were directly involved in killing Jews. One feels great perplexity and injury among those who mention that former neighbors, friends, classmates participated in the murder of their relatives. One veteran tells of his poor Jewish



Iosif Ushomirsky, 1945, inscribed:  
“To my parents from your son  
Sasha, in honor of the Great  
October Revolution for  
eternal memory.”





Now a resident of Oak Park, Michigan, Naum Levin was a decorated young soldier in 1944.

family with many children of their own that adopted the child of a Ukrainian neighbor who had starved to death during the famine of 1932-33. When the Germans occupied their town, the Ukrainian boy turned in his adoptive family. Such incidents seem to have made a greater impression than the German atrocities—understandably. After all, from German “invaders, occupiers, enemies” one expected such behavior, but from “friends, classmates, neighbors?”

### In Conclusion

In the end, the people interviewed are “Soviet people” in at least two senses: 1) many of them were true “internationalists” and paid little heed to ethnicity before the war. As Israel Barsky of Ann Arbor puts it: Only after the war did “we [Soviets] cease to be one people; we started differentiating ourselves from others, that is, Jews from people of [other] Soviet nationalities”; 2) they tend to give very similar answers to questions regarding what lessons are

to be derived from the war. Except for most of the veterans still in Moscow, the others generally assert that the main lesson Jews should learn from the war is that they must have an independent state. Quite a few have visited Israel and sing its praises. Mikhail Kogan of Ann Arbor says that the lesson of the war is

that generally Jewish should live on the territory of Israel. Build their own country. It turned out that we ended up here [in the U.S.]. But when I was in Israel, every scrap of land there breathes with history, and I feel that this is my native land. What we saw, what was created by the hands of the Jewish people on the earth where swamps have been dried, where now eucalyptus forests bloom. Israel’s achievements in all areas are completely astounding. I try to catch every word when I find something out about Israel. I would like to go to Israel again with my wife. A colossal impression. We were there for six weeks, and we drove all over the whole country. And everything astounded us everywhere. I am proud of the fact that Jews can live in their own native land, although life [there] isn’t easy, constant danger. But the fiftieth anniversary of this young country is coming up, and (I think) that it will prosper for many, many years. And millenniums.

The veterans are also very consistent in their praise of the United States. Asya Balina acknowledges that her daughter and son-in-law, both musicians, cannot find permanent jobs in the United States. But “my granddaughter graduated from the University of Michigan. My grandson is in the tenth grade of high school. He is doing great.... I am thankful to America.” Detroit Naum Levin asserts that he would have immigrated to Israel but he followed his children to the United States.

I am a patriot of this country. This is a wonderful country, free, democratic—of course, if it becomes necessary, I shall defend it [!]. I am happy that my children and grandchildren live here.... True, I can’t say that everything



## SOVIET JEWISH VETERANS



Courtesy Naum Levin.

U.S. and Russian military engineers meeting in the town of Torgau, Germany, May 1945. Naum Levin is in the group on the right.

is wonderful here and all ethnic problems have been solved. There is anti-Semitism and there are other difficulties and complications as well, but it seems that the whole world has problems.... Nevertheless, I am glad my children and especially my grandchildren will receive an American education and will become citizens of a great country, of the free and democratic country of the United States.

The oral histories reveal the veterans to be admirers of Israel and of the United States, but at the same time perhaps the only generation of true "Soviet men." The generations that came afterward were no longer true believers. They were not the

people who had fought the good fight for a just and holy cause and for a land they truly loved, but were the sons and daughters of those same people who had learned that their love had gone unrequited. The irony is that Jews who fought in the Soviet armed forces against the perpetrators of the Holocaust fought against a totalitarian regime in the name and for the survival of another such regime.



Courtesy Naum Levin.

A reunion of U. S. and Russian World War II veterans near Torgau, Germany, in 1995.



*\*I wish to express my appreciation to Judith Levin Cantor; to Rivka Latinskaya of the Jimmy Prentis Morris Jewish Community Center, who located the interviewers in Michigan and provided JCC facilities for our training and reporting sessions; and to the following residents of the Detroit area and Ann Arbor who served as interviewers: Evgeniya Beznosova, Boris Gankin, Maya Goltser, Lev Kupershtein, Maria Mochulsky, Lev Paransky, Tatyana Polskaya and Genrikh Schiff. Interviewers outside Michigan include Masha Gerasimova, Rita Kagan, Temma Klibaner, Konstantin Miroshnik, Leonid Miroshnik, Elena Perlman, Svetlana Pritzker, Anna Shternshis, Evsei Tseitlin and Tatiana Vasileva. Luba Burton edited several of the translations. Above all, I wish to thank the veterans for giving of their time and energies and, of course, for helping defeat the forces of fascism. Funding was generously provided by the Stanley and Judy Frankel Support Foundation and logistical support has come from the staff of the Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at The University of Michigan.*

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<sup>1</sup> It is not clear whether this includes deaths from natural causes.

<sup>2</sup> For details, see Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, "A Note on Jews in the Red Army on the Eve of the Second World War," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* 2(18) (Summer 1992), 37.

<sup>4</sup> *Istoriia otechestva* (Briansk-St. Petersburg, 1994), 107, quoted in S. Krakowski, "The Fate of the Jewish POWs of the Soviet and Polish Armies," in A. Cohen, Y. Cochavi, and Y. Gelber, eds., *The Shoah and the War* (New York, 1992), 229-30. The USSR had not signed the Geneva Convention and Soviet captives were not treated as those of other nations. In many instances they were surrounded by barbed wire, deprived of food and drink and left to die. Many were used as slave labor. Nazi policy was to immediately kill all Jews or Communists who were captured. According to John Garrard and Carol Garrard, Germans were ordered to "show special preference when releasing Soviet POWs. German military documents demonstrate that by the end of January 1942, 280,108 Soviet POWs had been released.... Not a single soldier was Russian, but an astonishing total of 270,095 were Ukrainians.... These young men, healthy and trained in the use of weapons, then formed the core of the *Polizei*...though some were employed in a variety of jobs, such as farm work and harvesting." *The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> For example, F. Kral's *Prestuplenie protiv Evropy* (1963) and *SS v deistvii* (1961).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Henrikh Hoffman, "Dos iz geshen in Taganrog," *Sovetish beymland* (SH) no. 2 (1966); Hirsh Dobin, "Der koiech fun lebn," SH no. 3 (1966); and Yekhiel Falikman, "Der shvartser vint," SH no. 8 (1967).

<sup>7</sup> S. S. Smirnov, *Sobranie sochinenii: tom pervyi Brestkaia Krepost', krepost' nad Bugom; vol. 2, Rasskazy o neizvestnykh geroiakh; vol. 3, Stalingrad na Dnepre; Na poliakh Vengrii; Liudi, kotorykh ia videl'* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1973).



## SOVIET JEWISH VETERANS

<sup>8</sup> Vol. 1, 227, 187, 194.

<sup>9</sup> vol. 2, 131, 214-15.

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to contrast this with the Haskalah literature where the conflict between "fathers and sons" is explicit and a major, often tragic, theme.

<sup>11</sup> See Solomon Schwarz, *Jews in the Soviet Union* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1951), part II.

<sup>12</sup> Mordechai Altshuler, "Anti-Semitism in Ukraine toward the End of the Second World War," *Jews in Eastern Europe* 3 (22) (Winter 1993), 43.

<sup>13</sup> This point is made by Yitzhak Arad in "The Attitude of Stalin and the Soviet Leadership Toward the Holocaust," paper presented at "Remembering for the Future 2000," Oxford, England, July 17, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> I have noticed that those who grew up poor and as orphans seem to be the most patriotic regarding the Soviet system. This is probably because the system did more for them, as some became generals and held responsible positions in civilian life, than for those who did not begin life so disadvantaged. I shall explore this further in later publications.

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Photos appearing in this article were collected by the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan in cooperation with Professor Zvi Gitelman, unless otherwise noted.



*Zvi Gitelman is a professor in the Department of Political Science and director of the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. He lectures widely and is a prolific author of articles and books, including A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present (Indiana Univ. Press, Second edition in press). He was the editor of Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR (Indiana Univ. Press, 1997). Professor Gitelman sits on the Advisory Board of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.*



# A Sinai Hospital Retrospective

*Editor's note: Sinai Hospital from its beginning served a special need of the times for the Detroit Jewish community, as well as providing service to the greater Detroit community in an exemplary fashion for more than forty years. As Jewish doctors became more professionally accepted and the economics of hospital administration changed in revolutionary ways, it was deemed necessary to sell Sinai Hospital to the Detroit Medical Center in 1998. The site was merged with Sinai Grace Hospital. The Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit established The Jewish Fund with the moneys realized from the sale of the hospital.*

*This group of articles gives a retrospective of Sinai Hospital of Detroit from five points of view: the historical background by Judith Levin Cantor, curator of the exhibit on the history of Sinai; Dr. Julien Priver, Sinai's eminent first director; Dr. Piero Foa, the hospital's distinguished head of research; the invaluable Sinai Guild; and the roster of the generous major builders of the hospital.*

*We hope this contributes to preserving the history of an important Detroit Jewish institution and its supporters.*





## Before Sinai: A Medical History

By Judith Levin Cantor

*"He who saves a single life, is as if he saved the world."*

### United Jewish Charities Opens First Free Medical Clinic

The Detroit Jewish community has had a long commitment to the healing of the sick and the needy, a basic tenet of the Jewish heritage. At the turn of the twentieth century, Detroit's city directory already listed ten Jewish doctors.<sup>1</sup> Responding to the medical needs of the increasing number of immigrants, the newly-formed United Jewish Charities and the Ladies Society for Hebrew Widows and Orphans opened Detroit's first Jewish free medical clinic for the needy in the offices of Dr. Louis Hirschman. Over a period of seven months, Dr. Hirschman's bill to the United Jewish Charities for the care of twenty-three patients totaled \$49.75!

By 1903, this medical clinic had moved into eight basement rooms in the new Hannah Schloss Center/Jewish Institute on Hastings and High Street. Tens of thousands of needy patients were treated there over the next two decades.

### "Buy a Brick to Save the Sick"

Carrying signs with the slogan "Buy A Brick To Save the Sick," supporters of a Jewish hospital organized by Rabbi Judah L. Levin marched down Hastings Street in March 1912. They collected more than \$7000 in nickels and dimes. The dream of a local Jewish-sponsored kosher hospital was born—to be realized more than four decades later in 1953. This group organized the Hebrew Hospital Association, which invested the \$7000 in land and later in government bonds. Eventually the investment grew to \$52,500, which was contributed in 1950 for the building of Sinai Hospital.

#### Physician's Report.

Detroit, October 26, 1900.

To the Officers of the United Jewish Charities:

Ladies and Gentlemen—I herewith respectfully submit the report of my medical and surgical work among your pensioners for the seven months ending October 31, 1900.

Number of patients treated	23
Number of visits and consultations	359
Number of prescriptions	103
Cost of prescriptions	\$35.75
Average cost	35 cents
Cost of surgical supplies	\$14.00
Number of surgical dressings	144
Average cost per dressing	9 4-5 cts
Total cost for 23 patients for 7 months	\$49.75
Average cost per patient	\$ 2.16
(Or approximately one cent per day.)	

Number of surgical operations	6
Number of cases receiving hospital care	6
Number of deaths	2
Death rate	4.6 p. c.
Largest number of calls on one patient	94
Smallest number of calls on one patient	1

The following diseases were treated:

Adenoids	1	Jaenueroids	1
Appendicitis	2	Intestinal obstruction	1
Blindness	1	Lacerated cervix	2
Bright's Disease	1	LaGrippe	1
Chorea	1	Menopause	1
Chronic Bronchitis	1	Neurasthesia	1
Constipation	2	Necrosis of Tibia	1
Conjunctivitis	1	Ovaritis	2
Epilepsy	1	Paralysis	1
Examination	1	Peritonitis	1
Fractured arm	1	Pulmonary tuberculosis	3
Gall stones	1	Typhoid	1
Goitre	1	Worms	1

I call your special attention to the work of the Visiting Nurses' Association. They made over forty calls on our patients.

Respectfully submitted,  
L. J. HIRSCHMAN, M. D.

Report by Dr. Louis Hirschman to officers of the United Jewish Charities, dated October 26, 1900. Twenty-three patients were treated over seven months at an average cost of \$2.16 per patient.



## New Medical Clinic Combats Smallpox Epidemic

A new Jewish medical clinic was opened in 1922 in two vacated kosher poultry stores on Westminster Avenue in the heart of the immigrant neighborhood, the first time the clinic was in a building of its own. Headed by Dr. Harry Saltzstein, a graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School, this clinic immediately had to meet the challenge of a severe smallpox epidemic which required 820,000 vaccinations citywide. Golda Krolik was the first clinic director.



The North End Clinic on Holbrook Avenue in Detroit, shown in the late 1940s.

## The North End Clinic

A major step forward, the Leopold Wineman Memorial North End Clinic was opened at 936 Holbrook Avenue in 1926, and it became the official Jewish health agency for the indigent in Detroit for the next three decades. With Dr. Saltzstein as chief of staff and Eleanor Jones Ford as director,

more than forty physicians and six dentists donated their professional time and services to the North End Clinic in order to give high quality medical care to those in need. The clinic also was "an incubator for the professional development of the Jewish doctors who devoted time to it," most of whom were then excluded from the staffs of the city's hospitals. Its volunteer staff was the direct forerunner of Sinai Hospital Women's Guild.

## The Dream of a Jewish Hospital

In the meantime, the drive for a Jewish hospital in Detroit continued for another twenty-five years, with numerous meetings and reports and the backing of the Maimonides Medical Society. A 1929 report by Drs. Saul Rosenzweig and David Sandweiss lamented that "90 percent of the Jewish doctors serving the North End Clinic do not have staff appointments in the better hospitals, and therefore must refer their hospitalized patients to other doctors. Furthermore, Detroit needs additional hospital beds." Recognition of the need for a Jewish hospital was growing.



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

During the 1930s and 1940s, the Depression, competing pressing economic needs in the Jewish community, opposing viewpoints, and the World War II effort continued to delay the commitment to building a hospital. By 1938, when there were 344 Jewish physicians in Detroit, support from many groups for a Jewish hospital continued to grow and become better organized.

### The Dream Realized

Finally, following a meeting in the Boston Boulevard home of Maurice Aronsson in 1941 and with a major challenge gift from Israel Davidson, a Federation-sponsored community campaign for funding a Jewish hospital in Detroit was launched. The fund drive, chaired by Max Osnos, could only be completed after the end of World War II, when the thirty-six-acre site on Outer Drive in northwest Detroit was purchased. Nate Shapero and Charles Agree were appointed co-chairmen of the Building Committee; Albert Kahn, Inc. was the architect for the new building; and Dr. Julien Priver of Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York was hired as the first director.

Sinai Hospital opened its doors on January 15, 1953, and soon proved to be an outstanding medical institution making an important contribution to the community of Detroit and to the world of medical science.



The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new Sinai Hospital in January 1953. From left: Max Osnos, president of the Board of Trustees; Dr. Julien Priver, executive director; Nate Shapero, chairman of the Building Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> This historical material is excerpted in condensed form from the exhibit "The Sinai Heritage," curated by Judith Levin Cantor in cooperation with Dr. Herbert Bloom, D.D.S., Ph.D. The exhibit was dedicated in 1993 and was on display in the former Sinai Hospital until 1999. The exhibit is now in storage at the Jewish Community Archives in the Max Fisher Jewish Federation Building.

<sup>2</sup> Harry C. Saltzstein, M.D., *Sinai Hospital and the North End Clinic, Reminiscences of the History of the Jewish Hospital Movement in Detroit*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963, p.25. Dr. Saltzstein, known as the "Father of Sinai Hospital," became the first chief of staff of Sinai.

## Sinai: An Important Contribution to Medical Education in Detroit

By Julien Priver, M.D.

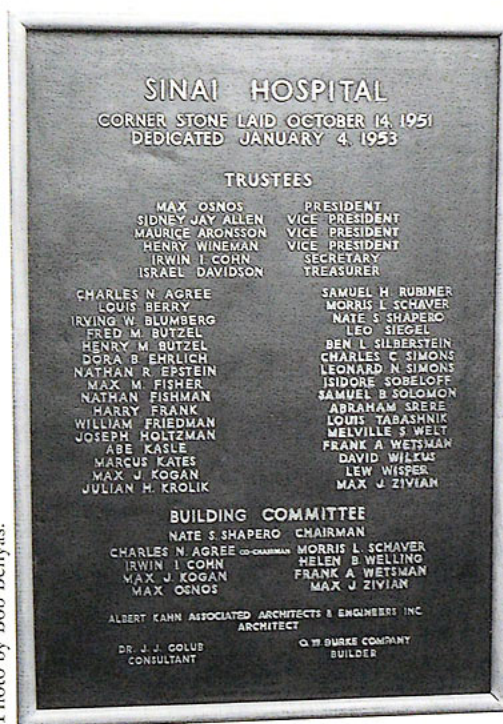
After almost a century of dreaming about its own hospital, the Detroit Jewish community realized the dream in 1953. The final impetus for this realization came from two sources. First, there was a strong feeling that Jewish people had received good care from the existing institutions in the community, many sponsored by other religious denominations, and that the Jewish community had reached a level of maturity and affluence to provide medical services as well. There was ample precedent nationally in the

successful and significant role played by Jewish hospitals in other cities. Second, there was a recognized bias in the field of medical education, which seriously limited the admission and training of Jewish applicants, particularly in the area of surgery. Surgical training was limited also in the sense that only a few students could be accommodated around an operating table or permitted to assist in surgical procedures. Hence, aspiring Jewish doctors and surgeons were strongly behind the idea of a hospital of their own.

### Expecting the Best

This was the atmosphere and situation when I came to Detroit in 1951. I had received my medical degree in 1940 and served after World War II under some of the giants in the medical field from 1946 to 1951. Hence, I knew what would be expected of me by the people behind a Jewish hospital in Detroit, and I made every effort to meet their criteria in my role of executive director. The hospital had to provide excellent patient care, offer the best in medical education, and allow for a modicum of research programs to stimulate and aid the practitioners in the community. It was recognized also that patient care could best be "delivered" in an atmosphere of medical education, because medical students were notorious for keeping the practicing physi-

Photo by Bob Benyus.



The Sinai Hospital cornerstone plaque from 1953.



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

cians on their toes. Interns and residents, freshly up-to-date on the latest medical techniques and procedures, were eager to demonstrate their diagnostic acumen. And it was the patients who benefited from the resulting interchange.

But a crucial question was posed: How to provide the best education? It

was no secret that the physician in private practice contributed to the education of the students. However, the practitioner, fully engaged already by his own patient load, could not drop everything to be at the beck and call of the interns. The solution was to appoint a full-time medical director located on the hospital premises. Henry Ford Hospital was the only institution in Detroit known at that time to have such a director. However, that was an anathema, for it was feared the person in that prestigious position could become a monster and interfere with the livelihood of the busy private doctor! So our hospital had to show that the "monster's" teeth could be pulled, by limiting his practice to patients who were referred to him by their physicians and to assist the private physicians at their request. Further, the director's only remuneration would be his full-time salary. Any opposition to the establishment of a medical director was thus mollified.

With the enthusiastic cooperation of a small but determined corps of medical staff leaders, we were fortunate in obtaining George Eusterman, a distinguished physician retiring from Mayo Clinic, to fill this post, setting the tone and level to be expected from then on. The rightness of this experiment was soon demonstrated when the hospital received from Wayne Medical School a complement of nine candidates for internships, considered at that time almost a miracle.

### People and Facilities for Patient Care

One more feature remained to be added: a source of clinical or teaching material—that is, patients who would be the responsibility of the student interns working directly under the supervision of the faculty. Thus, a sense of their importance in patient care would be engendered in the students—writing orders and making diagnoses—while elevating the rank of the practicing physicians to that of faculty. Thanks



The Sinai medical staff at its first general meeting in March 1953.

In the front row, far left, is Dr. Julien Priver; seventh from left is Dr. Harry Saltzstein, first Chief of Staff.



## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

to the understanding of the Jewish Federation, funding was obtained for 15% of the beds (in what became known as the Staff Service) to be reserved for patients who did not have their own physicians and, often, had come from welfare clinics.

The next step was to bring the distant North End Clinic, the health clinic for the indigent established in Detroit in 1926, physically into the hospital, giving birth to the Shiffman Clinic wing. Now the volunteer caregivers at the North End Clinic had hospital privileges for their patients when needed.



An undated photograph of the original entrance of Sinai's Shapero School of Nursing.

particularly registered nurses, was partially helped with residences obtained for night nurses (always the most difficult to find) and the founding of a school to train practical nurses, which became the Shapero School of Nursing and the Katy Slatkin Residence for Nurses.

Sinai Hospital's well-deserved reputation for medical education brought an affiliation with Wayne University's Medical School, while Columbia University's School of Hospital Administration sent students to Sinai's program. The gift of the Helen and Paul Zuckerman Auditorium and Conference Center to house the daily scheduled lectures and conferences was followed by the donation of the Samuel Frank Library. My election to the presidency of the Michigan Hospital Association in 1970 was less a personal tribute perhaps than a reflection of the esteem in which the hospital was held by the medical community.

### Benefactors Provide for Growth

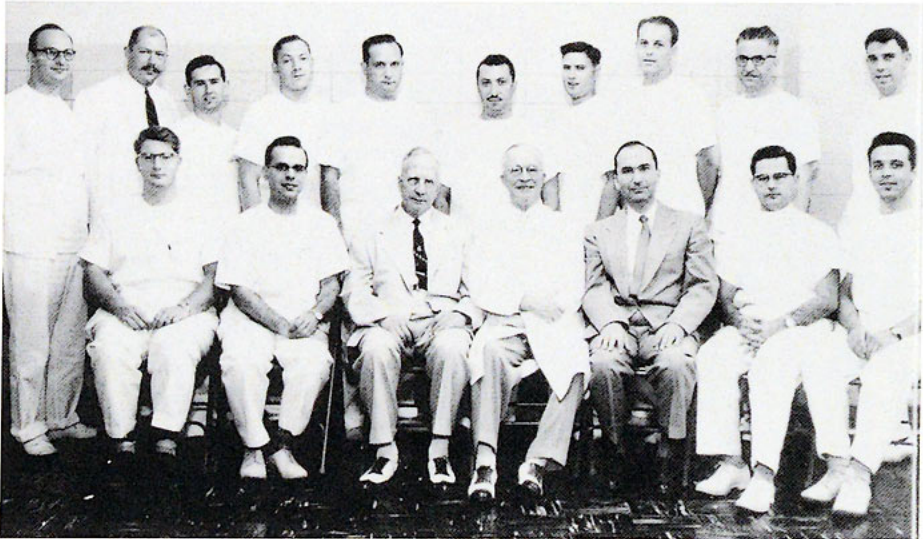
Research, an integral part of the hospital's program from the start, was substantially strengthened by the selection of a full-time research coordinator and further reinforced with the arrival of the Hamburger-Jospay Research Building. The Sinai Guild added its support, dedicating to research the profits realized at its gift shop.

These several activities significantly increased the patient population of Sinai Hospital and the numbers of physicians, mostly Jewish, who felt they had been promised staff appointments. With only 200 beds, the facility as well as its nursing staff would have been overwhelmed and the teaching effort devastated. The Shiffman Clinic gift added a few beds. The critical shortage of nurses,



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher generously made possible the addition of 156 medical-surgical beds, an operation suite of seventeen rooms, and various other facilities that



The House Staff of Sinai Hospital in 1953-54, with staff executive committee members, in the front row, third from left, Dr. Harry Saltzstein; to his left, Dr. George B. Eusterman and Dr. Julien Priver.

considerably enhanced our surgical care potential. And once again the Guild came forward, making possible a much-needed staff residence.

Psychiatry had always been a part of the hospital's program, at first on an outpatient basis only and mainly scheduled late in the day to accommodate the work schedules of the patients. Nationally, the trend was to move psychiatric patients into their local hospitals and out of the state institutions. In the late 1950s, Sinai had on the planning table an inpatient unit of thirty-six beds when, in 1959, the federal government suddenly offered funds for whatever we needed, providing we made our completed application and specifications within twenty-four hours! We made the deadline with an all-night session in the boardroom, assisted by the State of Michigan Department of Health. The result was the addition of a psychiatric fourth floor to the Fisher wing, then under construction, and the acquisition of a full-time psychiatrist from the University of Michigan along with two residents to begin a full-fledged program.

By this time, we had acquired fourteen different specialty board accreditations and had made affiliations with more than nineteen local and state agencies. Whereas other institutions placed dentistry under the aegis of their departments of surgery, we established our program as a separate department, which then developed a Cleft Palate Clinic and affiliation with the Dental School of the University of Detroit. Anesthesia was similarly organized. The anesthesiologists (i.e. those holding the M.D.

degree) supervised the nurse anesthetists. A highly reputed physician was named to head a department of rehabilitation.

### **A Founder and Pioneer**

Clearly the hospital owed its physical growth during the period of my employment to a legion of generous, philanthropic, community-minded Detroit citizens, too great a number for me to name beyond the few I have mentioned, and still many more since my retirement in 1979. But that story I must leave to those who continued to be an active part of Sinai in the 1980s and 1990s. My service was honored by my appointment as Consultant to the Board for life and by a personal note from Isadore Sobeloff acknowledging that I was one of the very few who had "the opportunity to be founders, pioneers, and long-term directors of an institution, all rolled into one person. Do stay around for a long time," he wrote.

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*Julien Priver, M.D., was the founding executive director of Sinai Hospital. He served from 1952 until 1979.*

## **Sinai Hospital Department of Research: An International Center of Learning**

**By Piero P. Foa, M.D.**

Research at Sinai Hospital of Detroit is as old as the hospital itself and was carried out initially under the leadership of Dr. Sidney D. Kobernick, Chief of the Division of Laboratories, and Dr. David J. Sandweiss, Chairman of the Research Committee. Kobernick published pioneering observations on the role of cholesterol in experimental atherosclerosis; Sandweiss studied the role of diet in the treatment of peptic ulcers.

### **Fruitful Collaborations**

Following this tradition and believing that research and teaching are separable and that when these are of high caliber, good quality patient care will follow, the Sinai Board of Trustees established a department of research in 1961, to be housed in its own building. In January 1962, I was appointed chairman of that department, with a joint appointment as professor of physiology at Wayne State University School of Medicine. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Abraham Goldfarb joined me to direct the biochemistry program, and Dr. Albert Whitty accepted the position of assistant director. Whitty was very helpful to many members of the hospital staff, assisting them with his vast technical expertise in carrying out their research projects.



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

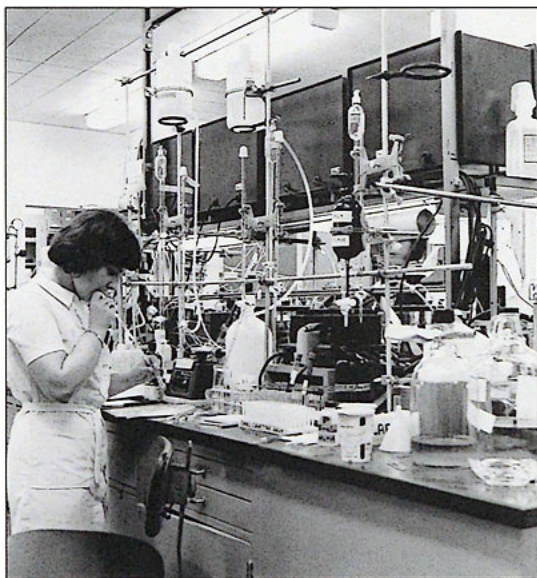
The Sinai Research Department was accredited by Wayne State University for on-the-job experience of its students. Thus, a long and fruitful period of collaboration began between these institutions. The yield was a rich harvest of scientific observations, learning, and service to patients, for the staff and the entire community.

This multi-million dollar program was made possible by the construction of the Hamburger-Jospey Medical Research Building, financed by a generous gift from Louis and Sam Hamburger and Maxwell Jospey, with a matching construction grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Louis Menck of Albert Kahn & Co. designed the building. Yearly research grants were made by the NIH, the National Science Foundation, the pharmaceutical industry, and numerous private foundations and individuals. Important funding also came from the profits of the gift shop operated by the Sinai Guild.

### Research and Publications in Every Medical Specialty

In the mid-1960s the research building was inaugurated officially with an international symposium attended by scientists (including one Nobel Laureate) from North and South America and many countries of Europe. The proceedings were published in a 557-page volume entitled *The Action of Hormones: Genes to Population*.

This and other publications of the hospital staff are bound in fourteen volumes and preserved in the Jewish Community Archives. This collection includes writings from almost every medical specialty and deals with all aspects of medical research including diabetes, movement disorders, brain functions, allergies, emphysema, cancer, psychiatric illnesses, and cryosurgery. Other papers deal with problems of hospital administration, such as the use of disposable supplies, the proper management of drugs, and the avoidance of errors in patient care, research carried out by departments such as the pharmacy, the respiratory care unit, and the nursing staff.



A research laboratory in an undated photo from the Sinai Department of Medical Photography.

Many of these projects were not "ivory tower" endeavors. Important contributions in many areas of medicine were made at Sinai Hospital. The insulin research laboratory was among the first in Michigan to make the measurement of insulin in the blood available to physicians as an aid in the evaluation of their diabetic patients. Our



## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

research on the function of the thyroid led to the serendipitous discovery of a simple and inexpensive, one-hour test of fetal lung maturity, successfully used in more than two thousand cases to determine if a fetus was ready for delivery. The recovery of a young boy from profound circulatory shock led Drs. Ralph Cash and Margo Coen to discover the cause of his ailment: the potentially lethal anticonvulsant drug Elipten. This led to its removal from the market, by order of the Food and Drug



Sinai's research staff gathered in front of the Hamburger-Jospey Research Building. In the center, wearing a dark suit, is Dr. Piero Foa, chairman of the Department of Research.

Administration. A year-long experimental study in animals led Dr. Irwin Small to the development of the mandibular staple, an anchoring device for lower dentures, still used today and the precursor of most modern dental implants.

A team of investigators led by Dr. Adrian Kantrowitz worked on the development of the "aortic patch," a system designed to aid the failing heart and to support patients waiting until a transplant or more definite treatment becomes available. Trail-blazing work by Dr. Hugh Beckman and Robin Barraco, then a candidate for a Ph.D. degree in physiology, led to the use of lasers in the therapy of glaucoma. Begun in the late 1960s, this pioneering work represented the first attempt to use this powerful new tool in medicine, and it was rapidly followed by the application of the laser in gynecological surgery by Dr. Alfred Sherman.

### Contributions to Medicine

Over the years, work done in the Sinai Hospital Department of Research resulted in the granting of ten Ph.D. degrees and nine M.S. degrees in physiology. Of the latter, five were earned by residents in oral surgery under a unique training program established by Dr. Herbert Bloom.



This brief summary is evidence of what was accomplished when the enlightened Board of Trustees and a supportive administration of Sinai Hospital created the fertile ground need to nurture inquisitive minds. We took advantage of the opportunities offered by the collaboration between academia and a community hospital in Detroit to benefit the community and the field of medicine.

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*Piero P. Foa, M.D., Sc.D., is Emeritus Professor of Physiology at Wayne State University School of Medicine and Retired Chairman of the Department of Research at Sinai Hospital of Detroit.*

### **Exceptional Volunteerism: The Sinai Guild**

Volunteer services groups have been a tradition in American hospitals since the eighteenth century, with the official recognition and organization of these hospital auxiliaries under the American Hospital Association occurring in 1949. In the Detroit Jewish community, many who began their volunteer services at the North End Clinic in the 1930s and '40s transferred their work to the new Women's Guild of Sinai Hospital. In 1952, Dora Ehrlich was directed by the hospital trustees to organize the Guild, which began with a group of eight officers led by Celia Broder, the first Guild president. Their mission was to contribute volunteer services to the hospital as needed, interpret the hospital to the community through education of the membership, promote good will and good public relations, and provide various benefit funds to the hospital.

### **Volunteers Across the Community and Across Generations**

The Jewish Welfare Federation provided the temporary services of Beryl Z. Winkelman, an employee of its Social Services Department, to set up the volunteer office according to professional standards. The original membership drive for the Guild enrolled over 900 members, with 175 active volunteers. In 1999, the Guild had over 2,000 members, with approximately 300 volunteers serving the DMC-Sinai Hospital each week. Others serve in various community outreach programs. Several generations of Detroit men and women have served as Guild volunteers. As early as the 1960s, Helen Fenton reported, "We now boast of three families in our membership which have three generations of volunteers."

### **Many Projects Benefit the Hospital**

Before the hospital opened, the Guild worked out of a temporary office to orient and train the first volunteers, with Molly Hartman as first volunteer chair; Helen Fenton to begin the record keeping and the first "Bulletin"; and Alice Zemon to establish the Grey Ladies and Red Cross Service Volunteers. Ruth Shapero, Edith Barnet, Ceil Lefton, Phyllis Allen, and Edith Blumberg contributed the seed money to equip and stock the first gift shop. Through the early years, Mae Newman and

## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

Hilda Kravitz chaired the gift shop, trained the volunteers, and purchased all the merchandise themselves without a professional employee.



The Sinai Guild Gift Shop, in a photo from *Sinai Hospital Reports on Its First Five Years*, published in 1958.

From the beginning, the Guild did not raise funds by direct campaign; Jewish Welfare Federation funds supported the hospital directly. Many projects contributed income to the Guild for the benefit of the hospital. Among these were membership dues, The Babies alumni, baby photo and souvenir birth certificates, radio and TV concessions, bed-side beauty care, tribute contributions, and the Guild gift shop. The gift shop was

one of the Guild's most important and most successful projects. Its profits were always earmarked for the Research Department of Sinai Hospital. Guild profits and tribute monies have supported research and education programs, medical equipment purchases, direct support to individual patients, and a huge variety of other needs.

One of the Guild's tasks was to educate its volunteers, which it has done in a variety of ways. The "Guide to Volunteers" was first published in 1957; it is distributed at mandatory orientation programs. A newsletter, "The Pulse," began publication when the Guild was first organized and was edited by Helen Fenton for fifteen years. It publicized Guild projects and events and circulated to members and to other hospitals around the country. A group of Candy Strippers or "volunteens" was established for young people aged sixteen to nineteen. Educational meetings on health topics are also presented for members.

### Meeting New Needs

In the 1970s, Rose Greenberg introduced the "Service with Love" program as a community outreach program for the aged and handicapped. Still in operation, this project is handled by over five hundred volunteers who call approximately twelve-hundred patients five days a week providing contact and referral services for other needs. Also in the 1970s, the Language Interpreter for Patients program was established, originally to assist Russian-speaking patients at the hospital. The program now has a full-time, paid coordinator who recruits volunteers to assist for in-patient and out-patient appointments. It also includes an educational component for the non-English-speaking patient.



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

More recently, the Guild has supported an emergency response phone system, providing a phone attachment with an emergency pushbutton. This enables the physically disabled or medically frail to have emergency contact with trained staff people who are available twenty-four hours a day. A wide variety of other programs are supported with Guild funds and volunteers throughout the health community.

### Dedicated Volunteers

During the first twenty-five years, there were many dedicated volunteers who worked thousands of hours along with Ida Spear and Sadie Rattner. Of the original volunteers since 1953, the following are still involved: Jane Blumberg, Diane Hauser, Esther Maddin, Lillian Rosenthal, Jean Shapero, and Beryl Winkelman. A number of outstanding volunteers have been active for approximately twenty-five years: Roslyn Aronow, Carol Blacher, Florence Burrows, Lenore Dunsky-Weiss, Pola Friedman, Marlene Gropman, Marian Kantor, Esther Kessler, Cis Maisel-Kellman, Barbara Nemer, Ilene Nemer, Gertrude Resnik, Thelma Rosenbaum, Hope Silverman, and Leah Snider.



Courtesy Beryl Winkelman.

A gathering of Guild presidents in 1987. Front row from left: Ruth Hermanoff, Beryl Winkelman, Roberta Blitz, Lenore Dunsky-Weiss, Ethel Frank. Back row from left: Elisa Falick, Rose Greenberg, Esther Maddin, Pola Friedman, Leah Snider, Diane Hauser. Guild presidents not shown here are: Celia Broder, Alice Zemon, Kiki Sills, Tillie Martin, Jane Blumberg, Jean Shapero, Marta Rosenthal, Hope Silverman, Sandy Schwartz, Rose Rita Goldman, Rusty Rosman.

## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

In 1992, the Guild established an Archives Committee to preserve the history of the Guild. Seven volumes of documents were compiled by Helen Esser Fenton, and this collection has been added to over the years. With the closing of Sinai Hospital, the Guild Archives have been placed in the Leonard Simons Jewish Community Archives at the Reuther Library of Wayne State University.

### **Award-Winning Guild Adapts to New Circumstances**

"The Sinai Hospital Women's Guild is considered one of the most successful and best organized of hospital auxiliaries in this part of the country," Helen Fenton wrote over thirty years ago. Its status has only been enhanced since then, with an impressive list of recognitions and awards for the organization and for individual volunteers. Three Guild presidents, Rose Greenberg, Alice Zemon, and Hope Silverman, served as president of the Michigan Association of Hospital Volunteers. Many Sinai Guild members have received the Heart of Gold Award, given annually by the United Way Foundation and the City of Detroit. The Guild has evolved during the last three years during the transition from Sinai Hospital to Sinai-Grace, moving into new offices in Bingham Farms and affiliating with the DMC Huron Valley-Sinai Hospital in Commerce Township. The Guild's range of services has expanded as the population and its needs have expanded, but its goal of serving the health needs of the community has remained the same since its inception.

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This article is based on an article written in the 1960s by Helen Esser Fenton, a member of the original Board of Officers of the Sinai Hospital Guild. Additional information was provided by Jane Blumberg, Guild president from 1976-78 and daughter of Guild founder and first chair of volunteers, Molly Hartman; Beryl Winkelman, organizer of the Guild office in 1952 and Guild president from 1968-70; and Jean Shapero, Guild president from 1978-80 and daughter-in-law of Guild founder Ruth Shapero.

## **Builders of Sinai**

**As listed in "Builders of Sinai," a photographic exhibit on display at the Sinai-Grace Hospital, a panel taken from the exhibit "The Sinai Heritage," dedicated in 1993.**

Louis C. & Edith B. Blumberg North Wing

Louis C. & Edith B. Blumberg Professional Building

Paul & Helen Zuckerman Auditorium & Conference Center

Fann & Harry Srere & Sons Prenatal Center

Alfred Arndt Srere, Charles Sidney Srere, Martin Louis Srere

Abraham & Anna Srere Radiation Oncology Building

Dedicated by Anna Srere & Beth & Malcolm Lowenstein

Shiffman Wing & Shiffman Clinic

Dedicated to the Shiffman Foundation, Abraham Shiffman, Founder



## A SINAI HOSPITAL RETROSPECTIVE

Samuel & Isabelle Friedman Laboratory Wing  
Nathan Fishman Center—Dept. of Rehabilitation Medicine  
Linear Accelerator—a gift of James & Lynelle Holden Fund  
Max & Rose Zivian Center for Continued Care  
Robert G. & Sylvia M. Zell Neuroradiology Suite  
Harold & Goldie Soble & Family Dept. of Medicine  
    Mr. & Mrs. Allen Soble, Mr. & Mrs. Jerome Soble,  
    Mr. & Mrs. Kenneth Soble  
Samuel Frank Medical Library  
    Given by Mr. Samuel Frank, Mr. & Mrs. Jerome J. Frank,  
    Mr. & Mrs. Harold L. Frank, Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Kolbert,  
    Mr. & Mrs. Kaye G. Frank  
Meyer & Sophie Fishman Emergency Care Center  
Max M. & Marjorie S. Fisher Pavilion  
Hamburger Jospey Research Wing  
    Mr. & Mrs. Louis Hamburger, Mr. & Mrs. Samuel Hamburger,  
    Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell Jospey  
Stella & Rena Frank Sinai Residence  
Harry & Katy Slatkin Residence for Nurses  
Sinai Education Corporation  
Sinai Guild Staff Residence  
Sinai Eye Education Corporation  
Shapero School of Practical Nursing  
    A gift of Nate S. & Ruth B. Shapero Foundation  
    and Cunningham Drug Company Foundation  
Nevins Children's Eye Clinic  
    Charles Nevins Endowment Fund  
    In memory of Kathryn Nevins  
Louis & Vivian Berry Surgery Center  
David I. & Julia Nachman Fellowship Fund  
Isadore and Beryl Winkelman Heart Care Center  
Samuel & Lillian Hechtman Health Center  
Sinai Hospital Guild  
Edward & Lillian Rose Imaging Center  
Maisel Women's Health Center  
    Emanuel & Cis Maisel

*All photos in this article are from the Sinai Hospital Collection, courtesy of the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, unless otherwise noted.*

# Detroit's Jewish Brewers

By Peter Blum

The idea of a Jewish brewer is almost an oxymoron. In ancient times, it was the Egyptians who brewed beer, while the Hebrews preferred to drink wine. In the Middle Ages in Europe, the right to brew beer was never granted to Jews; and in modern times, Jewish businessmen were active primarily as suppliers, in the malt and hop trade.

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*“Only a handful of U.S. brewery owners were Jewish; against statistical odds, two were in Detroit.”*

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Of all the thousands of families that have operated breweries in the U.S. during its history, more than 90 percent were of Anglo-Saxon or German background. German lager brewers gradually replaced English ale brewers, after the 1848 political upheavals in Germany led to increased

emigration to the U.S. Later, there was a smattering of Slavic brewers, a few Czechs in Chicago, along with some Poles and the occasional Beneluxian, Alsatian, or Scandinavian in major cities across the country, including Detroit. Yet only a handful of these brewery owners were Jewish, and against statistical odds, two of them were in Detroit. Little is known about the earlier of them, Abraham Kaufman. Alfred Epstein was president of Detroit's largest brewery in the 1950s.

Brewing in Detroit was already in progress when the Free Press & Advocate newspaper first appeared in 1831 and accepted ads for barley by the Farmer's Brewery. In the 1850s, a dozen ale and lager brewers staked out neighborhood territories, including Bernhard Stroh. The second and third generation of German brewers operated large plants from the 1880s on and dominated the local brewing scene. Ale and porter were still brewed but had become minor segments of the industry. Most drinkers settled for the pale beers made famous by the breweries of Pilsen and Budweis in Bohemia or the darker Munich type from Bavaria.

## Who Was Abraham Kaufman?

Abraham Kaufman's name first appeared in the 1927 Detroit city directory as president of the New England Malt & Hops Company, one of several local suppliers of hopped malt syrup to home brewers. (During the Prohibition era, 1920-1933, home brewing was permitted.) Kaufman's office was at 913 Michigan Street, and his syrup was sold at a number of locations throughout the city. One local source was the former Kaiser-Schmidt brewery just north of the Eastern Market, which became the Ace Malt Company during Prohibition. Another source was Premier-Pabst in Peoria, Illinois, which was the vehicle for Harris Perlstein, the most prominent Jewish brewer to head the Pabst Brewing Company. In any case, Kaufman was evidently



## DETROIT'S JEWISH BREWERS

successful, because when Prohibition was repealed in 1933, he was able to obtain the capital to open a small brewery.

Almost nothing remains of the near east side neighborhood where the Kaufman's Old Holland Brewing Company opened in 1934 at 563 East Larned. Old Holland was mentioned in the trade press only when it went out of business. In spite of being ignored, Kaufman had four good years. He hired an old-time German brewmaster, William Keinarth, who brewed Bohemian-style lager and Empire Crown Ale. A half-and-half blend was also sold.

Just a few years later, it became obvious that a small brewery was no match for the major brewers established before Prohibition—Goebel, Pfeiffer, Stroh, and Tivoli. Kaufman sought bankruptcy protection from creditors, and court jurisdiction was lifted when creditors accepted \$40,000 in stock and some cash. The brewery closed in 1938, and Kaufman disappeared from local directories. On the personal side, all that could be learned was that he lived at 9367 Broadstreet with his wife, Ethel. No photograph of him or his brewery could be located.

Courtesy Stroh Brewery Company Archives.



Alfred Epstein, c. 1945.

### Alfred Epstein: A Major Jewish Brewery Executive

Alfred Epstein was the middle child of Samuel and Sophia Epstein, born in 1894 between his brother, Elias, and his sister, Sarah. The Epstein family lived in the small Austrian town of Teschen, where Samuel was the town schochet or ritual slaughterer. After a few years, the family moved to Berlin. Elias immigrated to the United States in 1910 and started a warehousing and food supply business. The rest of the family followed after World War I; Alfred arrived in 1922 and went to work for his brother.

The family lived on Longfellow Street on the near west side of Detroit. Alfred married his brother's secretary, Edna Feldstein in 1925, and their son, Herbert, was born within two years. Alfred's strong, independent personality was evident in 1928 when he moved to Barrington Street and three years later to Berkshire Street in Grosse Pointe, not an exclusively Jewish neighborhood. It took friendship with a judge to circumvent the restrictive covenant in effect at that time in the area barring Jews from moving in. Epstein was a member of Temple Beth El in Detroit and contributed significantly to the United Jewish Appeal.

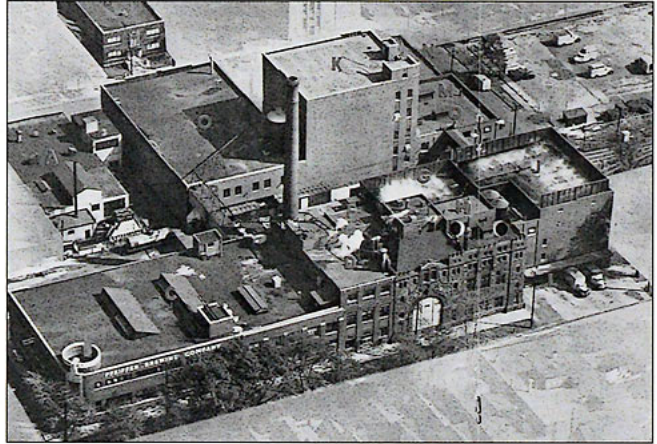
### Prohibition Ends, Business Brews

Brother Elias's business, the State Products Company, prospered during the 1920s. When Prohibition was repealed, he started a brewery supply business with a partner. This got Alfred interested in the dormant brewing industry, and he invested in the Pfeiffer Products Company. This was the former Pfeiffer Brewery on Beaufait



Street in Detroit, which had been founded in 1889 by Conrad Pfeiffer with his relatives, the Breitmeyer family.

When Prohibition was repealed and beer returned in 1933, Alfred joined William G. Breitmeyer in getting the brewery on stream. Breitmeyer was president and Epstein, vice-president. Epstein was not trained as a brewer, but he knew purchasing and had good skills for organizing a business, and no doubt was a "quick study" about beer. He called on suppliers for malt bottles and other supplies, arranged for credit, and promoted a stock offering used for new construction and better equipment. Brewmaster Fred G. Haas had the first "Pfeiffer Famous" ready for sale in May 1934 and followed with the dark Würzburger-style in July. The next year, 1935, was a banner year; volume sold almost doubled to 200,000 barrels of 31 gallons each.



The Pfeiffer Brewery on Beaufait near Mack in 1946.

Courtesy Stroh Brewery Co. Archives.

### On the Fast Track

When Pfeiffer went public in 1935, William Breitmeyer left the company. It is likely that he was not in agreement with Epstein's agenda and decided to cash in his equity, but no first-hand accounts survive. In any case, by 1936 Epstein had a contract as president of Pfeiffer and was very much in charge. Pfeiffer became one of the very successful revival breweries. The impish mascot, Johnny Pfeiffer ("say Fifer"), first appeared in 1940 as a cheerful and popular advertising symbol. It was a major factor in promoting sales of the "Famous" brand.

The end of World War II was the beginning of a steep growth curve that, by 1949, boosted Pfeiffer to the top of beer sales in Detroit and into the top dozen nationally. The plant had to be expanded continually. A brewery in Flint was bought solely to produce draft, which freed needed capacity at the Beaufait location.

Courtesy Stroh Brewery Co. Archives.



## DETROIT'S JEWISH BREWERS



The Board of Directors of Pfeiffer Brewing Company, 1950.  
Alfred Epstein is seated, holding papers.

Courtesy Stroh Brewery Co. Archives.

In the 1950s, Epstein was on the fast track. Pfeiffer was one of the “Big 3” breweries in Detroit, along with Stroh and Goebel. Epstein was instrumental in organizing Drewery’s U.S.A. in South Bend, Indiana, becoming its board chairman. He moved to a large, lakeshore home on Windmill Point in Grosse Pointe. His son, Herbert, joined the brewery as advertising manager in 1952 and became marketing vice-president the following year. He, too, lived in Grosse Pointe with his wife, Ellen. An ethnic joke making the rounds at that time indicates that they did not escape the underlying prejudices facing Jews of the day. Beer salesmen and drinkers at local bars at that time would ask what the difference was between Stroh and Pfeiffer beers, the answer being that one was fire-brewed and the other, “heb-brewed.”

### Pfeiffer Fails

After a three-year peak, sales of Pfeiffer beer began to fall off in the mid-1950s. The great plant expansions had stretched technical supervision, and the beer lost favor. A union strike that began on April 1, 1958, dragged on for forty-five days and permitted out-of-state beers to gain a strong foothold. All Detroit brewers were hurt, but particularly Pfeiffer, which had borrowed to finance the expansion. Funds needed to service a debt could not be used for marketing at a crucial time.

Herbert Epstein stayed in marketing until 1958, later assisting his father as executive vice-president. Alfred retired from active management in 1959 at age 64, but continued to serve as board chairman. Herbert assumed the presidency and was able to stabilize sales. However, labor costs and competition from out-of-state brewers

increased, and in March 1963 Michigan's legislature raised the tax on beer to the highest level in the Midwest, from \$1.25 to \$6.61.

Perhaps taking the advice of France's Marechal Foch—"I have no reserves, my flanks are under pressure, all I can do is attack"—Pfeiffer reinvented itself in 1966 in a daring gamble as the Associated Brewing Company and acquired several regional brewers. In 1969, Associated Brewing ranked tenth in size nationally and generated earnings, but none of the brands, which included Pfeiffer, Schmidt in St. Paul, Piels in the East, Drewery's and Sterling in Indiana, showed growth. The great Detroit home brewery had been closed in 1966, as the sales volume of the Pfeiffer brand was insufficient to keep it operating. Five years later it became obvious that Associated Brewing also had no future, and in 1972 the various breweries were sold to competitors.

Alfred Epstein died in 1976 at age 81. He worked as hard as anyone to revive a brewery that had been shuttered by Prohibition. He took over when he was convinced he was the right man and could do better. There are great memories of the "golden" post-war years in the brewing business. In recent years, brewing in the Detroit area has resumed as it began—in the home, in pubs, and on a very small scale. One recent guide to small breweries in the Great Lakes region lists twenty-five in southeast lower Michigan.<sup>2</sup> If the past is prelude, large breweries may be operating in the area again in years to come.

<sup>1</sup> The production of beer was illegal, but as long as home-brewed beer was not sold, there was little enforcement. Producers of hopped malt syrup were careful not to mention beer or brewing on their labels; the syrup was "for beverages, food, and candy."

<sup>2</sup> John Bice, *Tap into the Great Lakes: A Guide to the Brewpubs and Microbreweries of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio & Wisconsin* (Holt, MI: Thunder Bay Press, 1999).



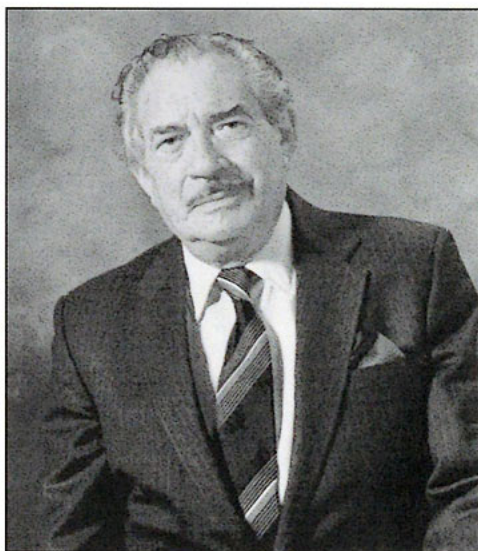
*Peter Blum is the author of Brewed in Detroit: Breweries and Beers Since 1830 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999). He worked for The Stroh Brewing Company for nineteen years in brewing development and became the company's archivist. He is a member of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.*



# Profile of a Labor Activist: Harold A. Shapiro

By Mark L. Kahn

Life in rural upstate New York during the years after World War I and during the 1920s was still based on a traditional farming existence. Harold Shapiro grew up in such a traditional community in Jeffersonville, NY, where farmers produced dairy products and eggs for the New York City area. These farmers, during the late 1920s, engaged in a rebellion that made a permanent impression on the young Hal Shapiro. Reacting to falling milk prices, they decided to throw away their milk instead of selling it below cost to the large dairy companies. Years later, Shapiro recalled that "soldiers came and blocked the farmers' way." His memory of this action was vivid, he said, because "I knew these people and understood their actions." It



Harold L. Shapiro

was Shapiro's first exposure to collective action. Along with his grueling experiences during the 1930s Depression, that milk strike contributed to Harold Shapiro's emergence as a dedicated labor organizer and fighter for civil rights. Until his death in 1999, Shapiro was a prominent and effective figure in labor unionism and politics in Detroit, in Michigan, and around the U.S.

## A Strong Role Model

Sam Shapiro, Hal's father, was a Jewish immigrant from Russia who landed in New York City around 1900 at age 12. He married Sadie Rossovsky in 1911. The young couple moved to Liberty, New York, where Sam Shapiro worked for his brother, and then to the small town of Jeffersonville in the foothills of the Catskill Mountains, where the Shapiros established a small general store in the center of town. The Shapiros were the only Jewish family in Jeffersonville, but they were fully accepted in the community, and Sam became a community leader and influential in Democratic Party politics in upstate New York. Harold was born in 1915. The family adhered to Jewish traditions, despite its isolation in this rural community. Harold became a bar mitzvah in New York City in 1928.

## Adventures on the Road

As a teenager in the early 1930s, Shapiro moved to New York City. He stayed with an unemployed uncle, attended evening classes at a nearby college, and looked for work. He finally found a job, “hard work,” in a toy factory. One day, he asked to be excused from overtime in order to attend class, explaining, “If I don’t go to school tonight, I’ll be thrown out.” He was fired. Shapiro persisted in his schooling, but could find no other work. When his uncle could no longer provide him with lodging, he and a friend decided to hitchhike across the country via Florida (where it would be warmer). After many wild adventures—begging and stealing food, hiding in freight cars, being apprehended by railroad guards and arrested by police, sleeping in fields, picking up work when possible—they ended up in California and found jobs as truck drivers for about ten dollars per week.

## Encounters with Labor

Shapiro reminisced in 1983 that during those years on the road he would encounter “Wobblies,” members of the International workers of the World, and engage in long discussions with them about their radical ideas, especially in regard to the exploitation of labor and their belief in socialism. The Wobblies “made a strong impression on me,” he remembered, bemoaning that today’s youth can’t grasp how difficult life was during the Depression or the hopelessness that prevailed. Doubting the Depression in America could ever end, Shapiro came to believe that a job was the most important thing in life, without which he could not hope to raise a family.

After supporting a San Francisco longshoremen’s strike led by the militant labor activist Harry Bridges, Shapiro returned to New York City in 1936. He found work as a shipping clerk at Paris Decorators, a manufacturer and seller of draperies and curtains with about eighty employees on two floors of a loft building in downtown Manhattan. In 1937, when the legal minimum wage was thirty cents per hour and the Fair Labor Standards Act required time-and-a-half for overtime, Paris Decorators paid only twenty-five cents per hour and demanded mandatory overtime for no pay at all. Shapiro contacted the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) and its Furniture Workers Union in 1937, led a successful two-week strike, won a signed labor contract including a pay increase of ten cents per hour, and was elected shop steward by the newly unionized employees of Paris Decorators.

Shortly thereafter, Esther Karson moved from Chicago to New York City after three years of college, found a clerical job at Paris Decorators, and met Hal Shapiro there. After they were married on New Year’s Day 1940, Hal quit Paris Decorators to join the staff of the Furniture Workers Union as a full-time organizer.

## Uncle Sam Doesn’t Want You

Wanting to be directly involved in World War II, Shapiro applied for the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) in 1942. At the U.S. Army Induction Center in Fort Dix, New Jersey, he achieved the highest grade on the written exam and demonstrated fluency in school-learned German. Despite these strong qualifications, however, an



interviewing officer notified Shapiro that his ROTC application was rejected because of his involvement with a communist union.

Still wanting to support the war effort in some way, Shapiro headed northwest and found a job at the Kaiser Shipyards in Vancouver, Washington, inspecting welds on Liberty Ships. Esther followed and obtained work in the Kaiser personnel office. Both were disturbed by the blatant discrimination against Black employees, whom the trade unions would not accept as full members. Hal was soon fired by Kaiser in retaliation for his vigorous



Harold and Esther Shapiro, 1988

efforts to assist Black workers in obtaining their rights. Esther was also terminated, allegedly because she was pregnant. They were then evicted from their Vancouver housing project because of social visits from Black friends.

Hal promptly found another job, this time across the Columbia River in Portland, Oregon, as an electrician in a smaller shipyard producing PT Boats. Andrea, the Shapiro's first child, was born there. Expecting Hal would soon be drafted, the family returned to Chicago in 1943, considering it a better location for Esther and Andrea. Hal was working as a truck driver there when a letter from his draft board advised him that he was "relieved" of his draft obligation. No reason was given.

### Opening Doors for Black Workers

The Shapiros met Abe Fineglass, head of the Fur & Leather Workers Union (FLWU), in 1944. Fineglass needed a business agent to manage the FLWU's local unions in Detroit, and he invited Shapiro to fill that spot. He agreed, and the family moved to Detroit, where their son, Mark, was born in 1946. Quickly recognized as an effective union organizer and negotiator, Shapiro soon became a statewide FLWU representative. In this role, his heaviest responsibilities included huge tanning plants in Boyne City and Petoskey. He also represented the employees of Detroit furriers, whose proprietors and skilled cutters were predominantly Jewish.

Shapiro was increasingly concerned about discrimination against Blacks and sought to open doors for them in organized labor and in the community. In 1948, he led a successful effort to install Coleman Young as the first Black member of the Wayne County (Detroit) CIO Council. Young and Shapiro became good friends. Shapiro, now FLWU president, was also deeply involved in organizing the National Negro Labor Council (NNLC), designed to push for greater participation of African-Americans in union leadership. He was elected a vice president in 1951 when NNLC was formally launched in Cincinnati.

As it grew in membership and influence, NNLC came to be regarded as subversive by Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Shapiro, Coleman Young, and Dave Moore, a Black union activist, were subpoenaed by HUAC but refused to provide the committee with NNLC's membership lists and other records. According to Moore, NNLC had created thirty-five chapters and helped many Blacks to obtain union office before it was disbanded in 1956 to protect its members against HUAC attacks.

### Organizing in the South

The Fur & Leather Workers Union merged with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters during the early 1950s. Shapiro became an international representative on nation-wide call. Meatpacking plants were now an important additional arena for his union-organizing activities. One small bargaining unit he inherited was composed of meat-cutters employed by the Detroit Kosher Butchers Association (of which more later).

Shapiro's focus shifted during the early 1960s to helping unions organize in the southern states. He was a pivotal organizer of Michigan Friends of the South, an informal volunteer group supporting Martin Luther King, Jr., and various civil rights activities in the South. Many of the meetings and activities of this group took place in the Shapiros' Detroit home. The Shapiros' son, Mark, spent three years in the South in the mid-'60s as a "freedom fighter" for integration and voter registration. For seven years starting in 1967, Hal spent most of his time in Texas border areas organizing unions under highly hostile conditions and often-violent opposition. He was beaten and imprisoned many times. He also worked with the United Farm Workers Union to organize southern cannery workers. Esther, Andrea, and Mark remained in Detroit during these years, and Detroit continued to be Hal's home base for union and community activities.



Courtesy Esther Shapiro.

State Senator Jack Faxon, Harold Shapiro, and State Senator Coleman Young celebrate passage of the law banning the kosher label on foods not properly certified, 1966.

### Michigan and Detroit Politics

Shapiro consistently supported Coleman Young in all of Young's political campaigns. During the 1960s, when Young was a state senator in Michigan, Shapiro and State Senator Jack Faxon persuaded Young to act on behalf of the Kosher Butchers' Association (KBA). The KBA was upset about the frequent abuse of the "kosher" label for



## PROFILE OF A LABOR ACTIVIST

food marketing purposes on items that were not in fact kosher. Subsequently, in 1966 the state legislature adopted an effective law banning the use of the term "kosher" on products not properly certified as such.

Hal Shapiro's intensive union activities in the South continued through about 1974, after which his focus returned to the Michigan area. It was in that same year that Esther decided to accept Mayor Coleman Young's invitation to create and direct a new Detroit Consumer Affairs Department, an assignment she handled with great success for twenty-four years. Reappointed in 1994 by Detroit's new mayor, Dennis Archer, she served as Consumer Affairs director until her retirement in 1998.\* Esther observes that the Shapiros "never negated their Jewishness, which was very important to us." Although the family did not join a temple, Andrea and Mark attended secular Jewish Sunday schools and received a good education in Jewish traditions, according to Esther. The family's social life and close friendships were, however, "always a total mix" of people.

### A Detroit Police Commissioner

Hal Shapiro decided to retire in 1980, at age sixty-five, from his post in the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union. Esther says, "Some changes in the union movement made Harold uncomfortable." But he stayed active in the community and remained a close associate of Mayor Young, who appointed Shapiro in 1983 to Detroit's Board of Police Commissioners. He served on the Police Commission for two terms, 1983-88 and 1993-95, and was its chairman during 1987-88. As a police



The gavel is passed as Hal Shapiro becomes chairman of Detroit's Board of Police Commissioners, 1987. From left: Commissioner Richard P. Kughn, Shapiro, Commissioner Roy Levy Williams, Commissioner Sharon Miller.

## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

commissioner, Shapiro reviewed thousands of citizen complaints alleging police misconduct; implemented, with the commission, internal corrective action when appropriate; acted to protect the rights of both citizens and police; and formulated written procedures for policing pickets while preserving their First Amendments free speech rights.

Shapiro earned a reputation for objectivity and fairness among Detroit residents as well as the city's police officers for his seven years of Police Commission service. In addition, during the late 1980s, he headed Detroit's "Red Squad Review" Committee, created by Mayor Young, to implement legislation entitling people to see their McCarthy-era files. Shapiro himself was, of course, one of the people in those files.

For more than five decades, until his death in September 1999, Harold Shapiro was a dedicated, courageous, and effective fighter for civil rights and economic justice, especially in the workplace. An enterprising biographer may investigate how Shapiro's early years in a non-Jewish, upstate New York agricultural area and his grueling Depression-era experiences as a hobo and casual worker impelled him to evolve the profoundly motivating social values to which he devoted his constructive life.

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\* Esther Shapiro is currently self-employed as a consumer consultant to non-profit, government, and business organizations, teaching classes on consumer practices, and lecturing on fraud avoidance. She has received wide recognition for her consumer activities, including the 2000 Lifetime Achievement Award of the Anti-Defamation League. She is a past president of the Consumer Federation of America.



*Mark L. Kabn is emeritus Professor of Economics at Wayne State University, where he specialized in labor economics and industrial relations until his retirement in 1985. In the Jewish community, he served on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Vocational Service (1963-72), the Board of Governors of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit (1976-82), and the Board of Directors of the Jewish Home for the Aged in Detroit (1978-93). Kabn has a B.A. degree from Columbia University (1942) and a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University (1950). Mark Kabn thanks Esther Shapiro for her cooperation and assistance,*

*as well as Harriet Saperstein, a neighbor and long-time friend of the Shapiros.*



# A Jewish Salesman in Japan: Diary of a 1928 Journey

by Judith Laikin Elkin



Cover of the ship's card from the S.S. *Tenyo Maru*, from Ben Laikin's 1928 voyage to Japan

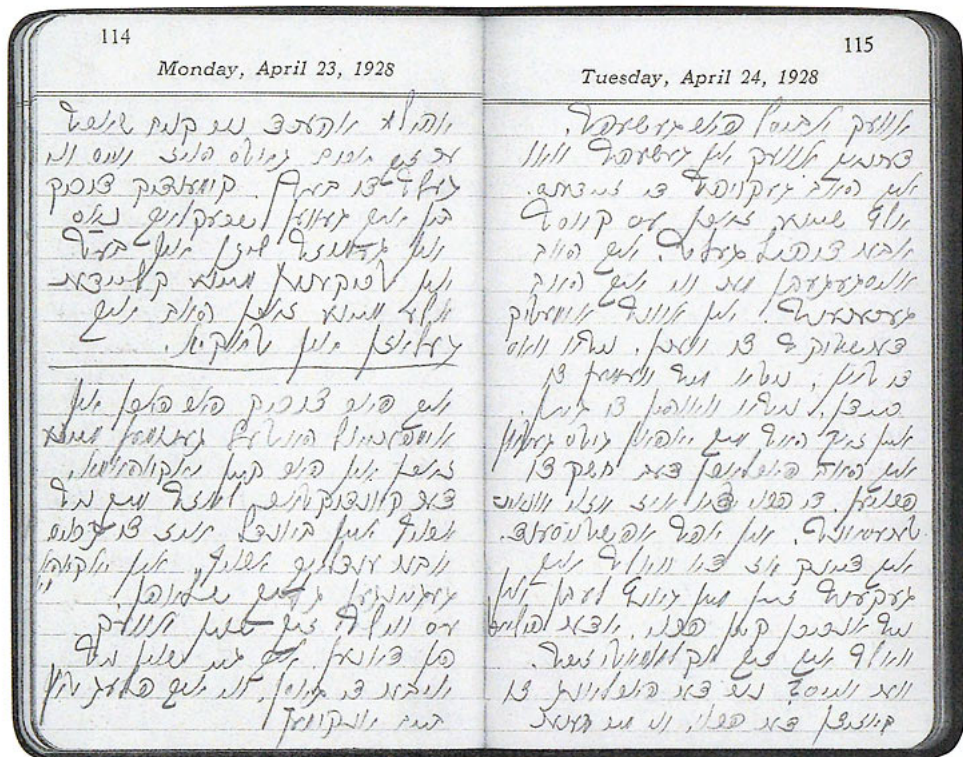
Ben Laikin arrived in America from Russia on Erev Pesach 1914 and died in Southfield, Michigan, on Erev Pesach 1979. He had moved his family to Detroit in the catastrophic year 1929. There he built up a business in wiping cloths—"one of the more successful entrepreneurs of this industry," according to historian Sidney Bolkosky. Having arrived in America with five dollars in his pocket, Laikin ultimately became president of his national businessman's association. At the same time, he developed into a formidable community activist during a crucial period of growth, controversy, and achievement for the Detroit Jewish community. Laikin was a founder and officer of the Jewish Community Council, the Farband Folk Shule, and the Jewish National Fund, whose president he became in 1950. A leader in Poale Zion, he served as president of the General Zionist

Council of Detroit in the critical years leading up to formation of the Jewish state.

What many people who knew Laikin did not know about him is that he was also a world traveler at a time when few people traveled the world. His farthest reach was to Japan, where he traveled on behalf of S. Shapiro and Sons of Baltimore, a firm engaged in recycling textiles, a.k.a. rags—that is, *schmattes*. Laikin had started with the firm in 1924 as a shipping clerk, then moved out on the road as a buyer and salesman. With a knack for commerce and the confidence of his employers, he expanded his territory, until one day it seemed not all that strange for him to add Japan to his route.

A four-day transcontinental train ride brought Laikin to the Pacific coast, where on February 29, 1928, he boarded the S.S. *Tenyo Maru* homeward bound from San Francisco. The ship docked at Kobe, Nagasaki, Shanghai and Hong Kong, but Laikin





Two pages from Ben Laikin's diary during his sojourn in Japan.

disembarked at Yokohama. He carried with him a diary in which he daily recorded his experiences in the Yiddish that came more naturally to him than English. He spoke not a word of Japanese, which must have lent his negotiations an intriguing flavor. His lack of knowledge of the language gave rise to several amusing incidents, such as the time he approached a hotel desk clerk, demonstrating how cold he was by shivering and hugging his arms. Profuse acknowledgement followed. Laikin returned to his room to await arrival of a blanket, but was unprepared for the beautiful but blanketless young woman who knocked at his door.

After business hours, Laikin spent his evenings wandering the streets and observing the passing parade. His meals in restaurants, theater performances, random encounters with individual Japanese, all went into his diary, which he wrote nights to relieve the tedium of evenings alone in his hotel. His observations, recorded years before the all-penetrating impact of world war, American occupation, Yoko Ono, and the globalization of Western culture, allow the contemporary reader a glimpse into Japanese society and culture in the 1920s. His views were filtered through his value system, molded by his childhood in a Russian shtetl and by the cheder education he received there. As they say, you can take the boy out of Pobolov, but you can't take



## A JEWISH SALESMAN IN JAPAN

Pobolov out of the boy. I was particularly interested in his comments about women and their role in society, which seem to me much in advance of his time.

The following paragraphs are excerpted from Laikin's diary and from a letter he wrote home to his wife, Anna. I have paleographed them from his unique handwriting and present them in my own translation from the Yiddish.

TOKYO, MARCH 25, 1928

*"...a little lonely as I have no one with whom to speak a word. When I finish my business, I go alone to walk around the city, that is to say, around the Ginza, to relax.... Difficult for a European to understand their life. Hand labor is very cheap. Men drag wagonloads of merchandise that a horse would scarcely be able to pull. Laborers earn from 1.50 to 2 yen a day; women from 85 sen to 1 yen per day. But living expenses are high. Family clothing is expensive. 4-5 kimonos are worn at one time. Shoes are also expensive. The usual wooden shoes cost from 3-5 yen and every 3 months or so they must be replaced. Men's clothing is even worse. A man also wears 4-5 kimonos, and a householder's must be of good cloth, costing him from 50 to 100 yen apiece. Also, an overcoat is needed—and that's just one outfit! One must have something to change into. For good reason, they are adopting European clothing styles.*

*Meanwhile, this is still a land for the man. She bows to him. She walks behind him. She stays in the home, he goes out to business. It won't take long and the woman will become emancipated. Will she gain anything from this? The upper class will, the lower class will not. Capital will enslave her instead. More and more women are going into factories. Now they sell themselves under contract for from one to five years.*

*Friday at 10:30 in the morning there was a small tremor. Not knowing what it meant, I gave it no importance. The Japanese cock their ears and wait to see what will happen. No damage was done. Strange how people become accustomed to circumstances. They talk about earthquakes the way we talk about rain. Usually they expect that there will be more earthquakes, but they hope that they will not be as horrible as the one in 1924, when 200,000 people died in Yokohama and Tokyo. However, these cities are becoming more beautiful, as the new streets are broader.*

*The principle food is fish, much of it raw, with half-cooked greens with the taste of sour salt mixed with straw. Rice in the place of bread. One eats with little sticks, sipping hard. Printing and books occupy a large place in life. Among street kiosks, every third one sells books or paintings. When there are no customers in the stores, the men sit reading. Of course, I don't know what they are reading!*

*Saloons also have their place, but you don't see drunks on the street. In Yokohama I saw not one...the saloon is also a restaurant. One eats and drinks, mostly beer, while girls serve the tables. They are very respectable and I never noticed any bad behavior by a customer toward a girl, although her duties, apart from serving, include keeping company with the diners. I was also in a few cheaper places where the waitresses drink with the customers; but I never saw any improper behavior....*

## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

SATURDAY, MARCH 24

*Off to a park. Stands sell a variety of merchandise, mostly knick-knacks. People enough to suffocate one. Then to the street of theaters. In one place, three girls are dancing; one sings, or rather screams, one beats a drum, and the third plays an instrument like a mandolin or balalaika. The crowd stands and claps. I pay 20 sen and go where the path leads me. Coming out, I find I have been in the Yoshiwara, the world-renowned red light district. The government makes a business of this.*

*There are 6000 girls here in hundreds of houses. An entire district. There are four exits, guarded by police. No girl can go out. On the street, under glass, are pictures of the girls. At each house, a man stands over a fire pot and calls out to passing men to come in. You must buy a ticket (12-15 yen) in order to enter and then you can take any girl you like, according to her picture. In the earthquake several thousand girls died here because they had no way of saving themselves, there was no exit.*



Ben Laikin, center, surrounded by Japanese geishas in 1928.  
Other figures in the photo are unidentified.

*From here, my guide took me to another district behind the town. Here, girls were sitting in the windows, only their faces showing, and calling out to customers. Guys walk around looking and making fun of them. A feeling of pity gripped me for these unfortunate creatures. They solicit freely and the men laugh at them. I saw a few houses and then went back to the hotel. A feeling of shame gripped me. This is what we men have created!*

OSAKA, MONDAY, APRIL 1, 1928

*Largest city in Japan, more than 2 1/2 million inhabitants and the industrial center of Japan, a sort of Chicago.... In the evening, I went with a customer to a geisha house. How refined! No bad behavior in evidence. Although the girls' official duties include amusing the customers, they don't permit the men to touch them. Exactly as though sex didn't exist for them. White men could learn from them in this instance, particularly men in America....*



## A JEWISH SALESMAN IN JAPAN

TUESDAY, APRIL 10

*In the evening, I went to eat at a Japanese restaurant and as usual there were geisha girls waiting on the tables. Mine was pretty and very lively, which is an exception because Japanese girls are calflike and without any cheerfulness, or any expression at all on their faces. For the first time, I was tempted. But go talk to her.*

TUESDAY, APRIL 24

*In the evening, I was choked with sadness. Nothing to do, no one to talk to, nowhere to go. One thing Japan has done for me is that I have lost my appetite for women. The woman here is so uninteresting and aloof I think I could live here my entire life without touching one. Or would I acclimate? Who knows?....*

\* \* \*

Laikin returned home aboard the Canadian Pacific steamship Empress of Canada, which left Yokohama April 27. So eager was he to get away, that he had boarded ship the previous day.

Ben Laikin, my father, returned to Baltimore just in time for my birth. As a child, what impressed me most about his unusual journey was that, unable to imagine my existence, my father had failed to buy me a kimono like those he brought my older sisters.

Peering all these years later into his experiences by means of his diary and correspondence, I am impressed by his observations about women. He formed a strong distaste for the bearing of the geishas, trained to give ritualized, non-emotive service to men. He missed his own expressive, highly vocal family life, where emotions of all kinds were freely vented. The contrast could not have been greater.

On April 4, 1928, Laikin had written in his diary: "The first seder. My heart is very sad. I consider myself not to be religious, and yet I long for the old traditions...." True to his values, the last words he spoke, sometime in March 1979, were to his housekeeper, Viola Cunningham. He asked her to check the calendar and tell him the date of Pesach. Punctually on Erev Pesach, as I and my family were sitting down to the seder in another town, he died, having attained sixty-five years in America since the day of his arrival as a youth of seventeen.

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<sup>1</sup> Sidney Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance: Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967* (Wayne State Univ. Press, 1991), p.144.



*Judith Laikin Elkin, the historian of Latin American Jewry, is associated with the Frankel Center for Judaic Studies at The University of Michigan.*

# A Year in the Life: The Home Relief Society in 1964

by Heidi S. Christein

A few years ago, books of photographs and documentary films about “a day in the life” of a city or a country were quite popular. These projects did not provide enough information to make all aspects of the subject understandable. After all, most things cannot be explained in a day. What these projects did do, however, was provide a view into someplace unknown, to highlight what happened, if even for a day, in an unknown, unfamiliar, or inaccessible place.

## Mending the Social Service Net

Using the technique of “a day in the life,” I would like to present “a year in the life” of a seemingly forgotten organization in the Detroit Jewish community: the Home Relief Society. The records of the Society do not quite fill one slender box in the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives. The papers do not reveal exactly

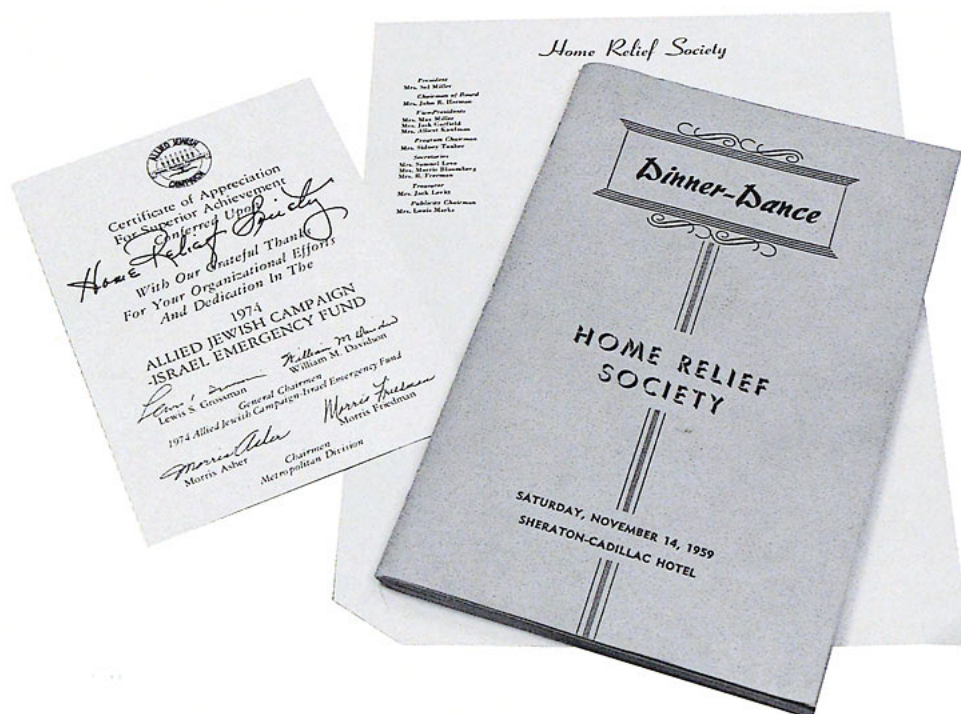


Photo by Bob Benyas.

Some materials from the archives of the Home Relief Society.



## THE HOME RELIEF SOCIETY IN 1964

when the Society began, although in speaking to various women in the community, some remember their mothers being members in the 1930s. A 1959 dinner-dance program lists Mrs. Harry Shulman as "honorary president 1923-1932," so the Society may have begun to aid those who did not share in the prosperity of the 1920s. There is also no indication in the records of exactly when the Society ceased operations; there are scattered records as late as 1975.

What the records clearly show is a consistent level of caring and concern for needs great and small of their fellow human beings by a group of women who gave of their time and resources without thought of recompense or public acclaim. The ladies of the Home Relief filled a void in the social service net in Detroit. They assisted those who did not officially qualify for government aid, they put those who did not know how to ask for aid in touch with agencies that could help them, and their small donations helped those whose bad luck overwhelmed them for a time. They were a group who, when a call came, were ready that same day to take milk to a needy child, provide shoes to one whose feet were unshod, and secure a place to live for those that lacked shelter.

### White Gloves and Circle Pins

Why 1964? Several reasons. First, the very existence of the records; 1964 is fairly well documented. Secondly, and more importantly, is the "idea" of the 1960s as an iconic time. The mid-1960s are widely viewed as a time of prosperity in the United States. The shortages and hardships of World War II were past, the Korean conflict was over, and pictures of Vietnam were not yet broadcast into the nation's living rooms every night. Ladies wore white gloves, suburban sprawl was not yet a reality for most people, and families gathered in front of the television for an evening's entertainment. There were difficulties, of course: the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was still a raw wound in the national psyche, but President Lyndon Johnson was working to keep the nation united. It was the year Martin Luther King, Jr., won the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent efforts in the arena of civil rights. Unrest in the streets of America was a few years off yet, and the image of the nation's youth was still based on the ideal of circle pins and crew cuts. In the Jewish community of Detroit, the vast mobilization on behalf of a threatened Israel was three years away. Therefore, as far as any year is typical, I choose 1964 to present The Year in the Life of the Home Relief Society.

For the Home Relief Society, 1964 began with a January 10 board meeting. "After a delightful luncheon, which our hostess Mrs. John Herman prepared for us..." the meeting began, according to the minutes. The program for the Officer's Installation Luncheon was discussed, and the publicity chairman reported that a notice about the installation would appear in the local papers as well as in the Jewish News. "Mrs. Abe Sinaberg, Light Chairman, said she had arranged for the sale of a new Memoriam Light.... The base of this light is made in Israel; therefore the sale of this light would not only benefit the Home Relief Society, but would aid Israel's economy."

### Cases in Need

The Society had several fundraisers each year, as well as ongoing projects to generate money that the women would use for direct assistance of those in need. "Our President, Mrs. Max Miller, spoke on a case, which was referred to her by Mr. Crystal of the B'nai B'rith organization. Mrs. Miller pointed out that this case had been refused

aid by other agencies and organizations, but Mr. Crystal had confidence in the Home Relief Society when he called on us, that we would give Emergency Aid. This was done....”

Case was the term the Society used to refer to those people whom they helped. People were identified as either case M (if their last name began with the letter M) or as the “case on Tyler,” if they lived on Tyler Street. Even in the case records, which were kept separate from the meeting minutes, the real names of the people who received assistance were infrequently noted.

The January minutes include the reading of a note from a case thanking the Society for their kindness. Finally the President asked as many of the Board members as possible

to stay to help address the installation meeting notices to the membership, since the corresponding secretary had been ill and therefore unable to perform the task. “As usual, the call for “Emergency Aid” was answered, and the majority of the members present remained and the notices went out on time.”

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*“Helping people in various ways to make life a little easier for them.”*

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At the installation luncheon on January 27, 1964, the installing officer spoke of “the good work the Home Relief Society was doing in the city of Detroit by helping people in various ways to make life a little easier for them. As Dr. Drews, well-known psychiatrist, said, ‘The Home Relief Society does pre-professional Therapeutics to these cases, thus helping them at the first step.’”

### The Value of a Dollar or Two

The Home Relief Society met for the next time on February 14, 1964. The hostess was thanked for her gracious hospitality and then a number of reports were made. The dues report stated that \$295 in dues had been collected, the annual fundraising affair was discussed, and six new cases that had been serviced were reported on. A call had just come in that morning, and a volunteer was assigned to see that case that same afternoon. The treasurer reported that there was \$5,549.95 in the savings account; \$25 had been spent for emergency aid, \$35 for food, \$18 for fuel, \$108.42 for milk that month. Various other amounts were listed in the expenditure column for printing costs, utilities, and other organizations that the Society supported.

At the regular Society meeting in March the usual business was conducted; reports were made, and progress on their fundraising was noted. As far as the cases, they “were all taken care of for Passover by sending them gift certificates from Federal’s so that they could buy something new....” And “Mrs. Kaufman’s troop of Girl Scouts have toys to be given to our cases.”

Mrs. Abe Schmier hosted the regular meeting of the Society in her home in April, and the minutes thank “the hostess for her gracious hospitality.” One of the members was also singled out: “Adeline Tauber is really a girl who wears many hats. She is always willing to take over somebody’s job when the need is there. While Mrs. Friedenberg was in Florida, she took over the Program job, then when Marie Marks was away, she took over the Publicity.” This “pitch in and help” attitude seems common of most of the ladies (and they were all ladies, in the white glove sense of good manners, gentility, and



concern for others) who were members of the Society. The minutes continue with the usual reports and then interject "Mrs. Alice Ferar, one of Home Relief's members of many years, has returned to Detroit after living in California for about 20 years, attended the meeting and the Home Relief Society welcomes her back." Another member was commended: "Mrs. Brody sold 75 Litter Bags and turned in a profit of \$18.75. That gal sure is some worker and really has Home Relief in her heart." Mrs. Brody's efforts almost covered the costs of food that the Society bought for their cases in April. The litter bags were one of many fundraising devices the Society used throughout any given year so that cases could be helped.

In the context of the mid-1960s, \$18.75 was an amount of cash that could go far in the Society's efforts to help their cases. A new pair of children's shoes could be bought for \$5.99; a woman's house dress from Hudson's was advertised for as little as \$12.99; \$4.44 is what a bedspread from Sears cost. If grocery stores ran special rates, it was possible to buy teething biscuits for 23 cents a package, ten jars of baby food for 99 cents, and two 10-ounce packages of mixed frozen vegetables for 49 cents.

### Food, Shelter, and Clothing

While most cases were reported on in detail separately from the regular meeting minutes, in April the "S case" made the general meeting minutes. "Mother lives there with 2 daughters. One daughter 23 years old has 6 children and was deserted by her husband, so she works and her 16 year old sister was taken out of school in order to take care of these children. Their condition is deplorable. Mother applied for ADC Aid for Dependent Children [a government assistance program] but will not get it until June. Sent \$25 worth of groceries."

The cases received assistance regardless of where in the area they lived, their religion (only a tiny number were noted in the records as being Jewish), race, or nationality. Occasionally, if someone was a recent immigrant, the country of origin appears in the records, usually in connection with arrangements for language classes.

The minutes of the May 25 meeting noted "the big job we have to do today is to find better living quarters for many of our cases." Presumably a number of recent cases were having trouble either finding homes or keeping the ones they had. Many of the budgets from 1964 contain the line item expenditure "rent" under the assistance given notes. The meeting concluded with a book review, presented by Rabbi Irwin Groner of Shaarey Zedek. The meetings often concluded with an educational or entertaining presentation for the benefit of the members.



A Home Relief Society member,  
Mrs. Meyer L. Prentis, c. 1930.

Photo by Max Habrecht, courtesy Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit.



Courtesy Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit.



Another active member of the Home Relief Society, the late Sadie Cohn, with her husband Irwin Cohn.

In June the general meeting and board meeting, which were usually held separately, were combined and was "in the form of a picnic." All the visiting guests were urged to join the Society, and an abbreviated business meeting was held, but "a motion was made to dispense with further business and the rest of the afternoon the girls enjoyed themselves by playing bridge, etc."

There apparently was no meeting in July, as no minutes exist and the treasurer's report for July is combined

with that of August. But on August 21, 1964, at the regular meeting, the Financial Secretary reported the Society had "172 paid up members, 44 still unpaid."

### Personal, if not Professional, Fundraising

In the fall, the ladies again reported on a number of their cases, which were recorded in the September minutes. "Case C" involved a family where "Wife was committed so man could not work as he had to take care of the children. Paid rent." Case on Tyler: "a divorcee, needed help so sent money to tide over." Also in the September minutes are the updates on the progress of the annual fundraising luncheon. Only 297 tickets "were out so far...and ads were coming in very slow." However, "Mrs. Marks asked her Gas Man for an ad and got one."

This type of personal solicitation today might be seen as unprofessional, but since the Society was not bound by governmental regulations or a monitoring body, the women were free to do what they felt was right to make their efforts a success. And if asking the gas man for an ad got them a donation, they were willing to make the personal, if "unprofessional," effort.

Plans and last minute worries over the annual fundraising luncheon that would be held November 4 fill much of the meeting minutes of October 1964. Over \$1100 had been collected for ads, and over 400 tickets "were out." By the time the November meeting of the board convened on the 13th, the minutes record that business was back to usual. The hostess was thanked for her gracious hospitality, and the cases that were assisted were summarized. A small note indicated that the annual fundraiser had made a profit.

By the end of 1964, the final tally for the annual fundraiser was in: \$3,400. And the casework went on. The Hospital Visiting Committee had visited four Jewish patients in Herman Kiefer Hospital and had brought the patients candy, fruit, and "other goodies." "Some new clothes for an emotionally disturbed girl at the Lafayette



Clinic" had been purchased and delivered, and "Hannakah checks were sent to all the cases so that they could buy some new clothes for the holidays." The meeting concluded with the President calling for "an executive meeting for Tuesday at her home for the purpose of discussing changes in by-laws."

### Working with Others

There are two significant matters that the minutiae of the meeting minutes do not do a good job of recording. One is the extent to which the Home Relief Society worked in cooperation with other groups to assist those in need, especially the "chronic cases" who required regular help. In the folder of case reports, each case is detailed and exact dollar amounts and other assistance from the Society are listed. Also listed is the support (financial or other) that each case may have received from other organizations. For example, "Case in Dearborn. Mr. & Mrs. (old people) needed glasses. Lions Club will contribute." In another instance, "Mother of 31 years. 6 children, 6 mos. to 10 yrs. Deserted by husband. On welfare. Waiting for A.D.C. Living with parents in two bedroom home.... Has nothing at all for home. Found furniture from Member of Infant Service....The following groups will contribute. Zedaka-\$15. Med. Aid- \$10. Bicor Cholem-\$10. Youth Education-\$25. Rodin Club-\$10. Infant Service-\$15. Primrose-\$10." In another case, "Mrs. L. is divorced. Works as barmaid. 3 children. Boy 18, Girl 15, Boy 8. Sending daughter to live with father for summer. Bad neighborhood where now living. Needs to find summer day camp for 8 yr. old so she can continue working. Made arrangements with Sheruth League who will send boy to Day Camp for the summer."

The other aspect that is only occasionally mentioned in the meeting minutes, but which appears more frequently in the case reports, is how the donations of the Society helped to get someone through a difficult period so they could regain their independence. One case records the fate of a Polish couple who came to Detroit. He was an engineer and she was a teacher. He had secured a job at an auto agency and while working was in an accident in which both legs were broken and he also sustained abdominal injuries. Doctors estimated his recovery time to be at least five months. The wife had to care for the husband; his compensation did not cover their needs. The Society made arrangements for care so that the wife could attend English classes and thus get her teaching certificate and find work so the family would be self-sufficient again. The case reports end with the following notes: "We help a few of our cases by sending \$5 and \$10 each month until we find it is not necessary anymore. We also help other organizations...and they have always helped us when we ask them."

### A Memory Deserved

Because it was a volunteer group, the Home Relief Society's mechanics of bureaucracy did not grind slowly; it had no bureaucracy. The members went out into the community and simply gave home relief. And for their simple acts of charity, they deserve to be remembered.



*Heidi S. Christein is the director of the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. This is her second article for Michigan Jewish History.*

# Harriet and Irving Berg: Planted Like a Tree

by Miriam Weisfeld

*Harriet and Irving Berg grew out of Michigan's artistic community, and they've nourished it for half a century. Through his sculpture and her dance, they've contributed to Detroit's artistic community as teachers, performers, exhibitors, and enthusiasts. Detroit's cultural life has benefited from their energies.*



Photo by Bob Benyas.

Harriet and Irving Berg, 2000.

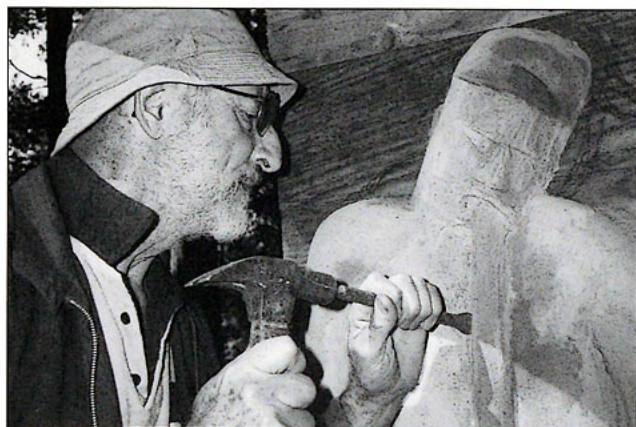
## A Window on the World

From his apartment window, sculptor Irving Berg enjoys a great view. He can point out where he was born, where he met his wife, where he earned his art education degree, and where his sculpture is exhibited. From the historic Park Shelton building in Detroit's Cultural Center, Irving and his wife Harriet Berg, a dancer and choreographer, survey the city that nurtured their creative aspirations with a dynamic community of artists and educators in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Bergs in turn have spent their careers nurturing other aspiring artists. Their support radiates from that apartment in the Park Shelton: across the street, at the Detroit Institute of Arts, Irving guides young museumgoers through exhibits of other artists' works, as well as his own. On the other side of Woodward Avenue sits the main branch of the Detroit Public Library, where Harriet works and performs. She also is involved with the Detroit Historical Museum and the International Institute, both within walking distance. And down the block is the Center for Creative Studies, where the Bergs frequently attend exhibits and recitals to support their young, artistic neighbors.

That apartment window also affords a great view of Wayne State University, where it all began. "It was 1943," Irving wrote in a 1997 article for *Inside Wayne State*, "...and I took a sentimental stroll around the first floor of Old Main." That stroll ended at the table where Harriet and other fine arts students sat reading (what else?) Shakespeare.





Irving Berg at work.

Irving stopped to join in, and his rendition of the Bard's verses must have captured Harriet's imagination. Three years later, they were married.

### Partnership in Art and Life

Why would the Bergs leave this apartment and its perfect view? To go to summer camp.

For twenty years, Irving has been Artist-in-

Residence at Camp Maas, a Tamarack camp an hour's drive north in Ortonville, Michigan. One of his sculptures adorns the dance barn where Harriet teaches Israeli and contemporary dance to campers. This sculpture is just one symbol of the Bergs' partnership in art and in life. They eagerly show off photos of Harriet's students dancing at the dedication of Irving's sculpture garden, and others of young dancers creating a human sculpture inspired by Irving's art.

"I never do anything without discussing it with her and sharing my ideas," Irving says. "She's got pretty good taste in the arts. You know," he adds slyly, "she has a teaching certificate in art education." They both do, of course, and they credit the same circle of mentors and friends for inspiring them to teach and create in Michigan.

### From the Renaissance to Contemporary Israel

In the early years, Harriet made annual pilgrimages to New York during the golden age of modern dance to study with legends such as Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham. But she always returned to Detroit, where Irving was teaching and heading the art department at Cass Technical High School from 1965 to 1987 and keeping an eye on their two children. Back in Michigan, Harriet founded several dance troupes, including the Renaissance Dance Company, which specializes in sixteenth-century dance, and the Madame Cadillac Dance Theatre, which illustrates the eighteenth-century history of Detroit's French settlers through dance. They have performed in many venues throughout the years, including the annual Wassail Feasts at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

### Judaism through the Arts

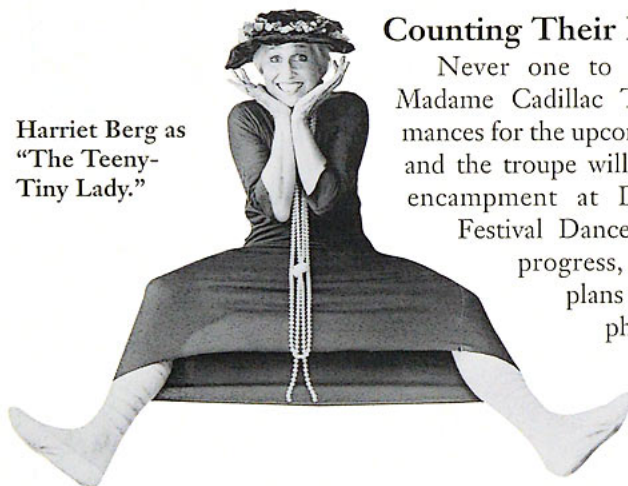
One dominant theme that emerges in the work of both Bergs is a cultural commitment to Judaism. This year, 2000, marks Harriet's fortieth anniversary as a dance instructor at the Jewish Community Center. In December 1999, the Festival Dancers—Harriet's all-female Israeli dance troupe—celebrated its thirty-fifth year.

Irving's body of work includes thirty-five Jewish-themed wood and concrete sculptures at Camp Tamarack, and every camp season begins with children lighting his giant concrete menorah.

"In my work at the Jewish Center," Harriet explains, "[I love] the idea of using dance to teach people about Judaism and to use all of the arts as a vehicle for grabbing people's attention and making it more meaningful." Harriet says that she and Irving also felt spiritually fulfilled by expressing their Jewishness through art: "We are probably what you'd call secular Jews, and [art] is our contact with Judaism."

Irving says he is grateful for the permanent context that Camp Tamarack has provided in which their work can be remembered. "I loved the idea that I didn't have to carry sculpture to a show. I just did a piece of sculpture, planted it in the ground..." "Planted like a tree," Harriet finishes.

Harriet Berg as  
"The Teeny-  
Tiny Lady."



### Counting Their Blessings

Never one to rest, Harriet will lead her Madame Cadillac Troupe in numerous performances for the upcoming Detroit 300 celebrations, and the troupe will be part of an urban colonial encampment at Detroit's main library. The

Festival Dancers troupe is still a work-in-progress, according to Harriet. She plans to bring in guest choreographers to work with that troupe, and they will perform for the Jewish Women Artist's awards ceremony at the JCC this year.

The Bergs are fond of reminiscing about Detroit's vibrant artistic community—about the half-dozen Jewish-owned galleries that were downtown and about the exhibit opening for which Harriet danced in the street. The Arwin Gallery, one of their favorites, exhibited a life-size horse made of auto bumpers, created by John Kearney in 1971. The horse now stands in front of the Children's Museum, where Harriet has performed. The Bergs can see that from their window, too.

Sitting in front of that spectacular view of Detroit's cultural life, past and present, Harriet reflects: "We definitely felt that we had a community that supported us and appreciated us and enabled us to do our own work and that we could give back to that community. I guess that's what you call being blessed."



*Miriam Weisfeld is a native Detroiter and is currently involved in Collective Collaboration studies, which involve writing, directing, and acting, at York University in Toronto, Ontario.*



# Celebrities & Celebrations

## Journal Honors Wetsmans & Davidsons

*Michigan Jewish History* honors two generations of a distinguished family who were pioneers in the establishment and growth of Jewish communal institutions in the twentieth century in Detroit. In appreciation for the



Ralph Davidson

Guardian gift to our Heritage Council by Guardian Industries, Inc., and its chairman William Davidson, the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan is proud to dedicate the journal in memory of Sarah and Ralph Davidson, parents of William Davidson and his sister Dorothy Davidson Gerson, and in memory of their grandparents Bessie and Joseph Wetsman. These families were devoted to strengthening the Zionist movement and perpetuating their Jewish



Sarah Davidson

heritage, and have passed this legacy on to their children and to future generations.

Newlyweds Bessie and Joseph Wetsman emigrated to America from the Volhynia region in the Pale of the Settlement in 1886 during the major exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe. First settling in Iowa, the daughter Sarah, often known as Sal, was born in the town of What Cheer, the second of six



Joseph Wetsman

children. In 1905, the family left Iowa to make its home in Detroit. Joseph served as the president of Congregation Shaarey Zedek from 1920-1922, during a period of explosive growth of the local Jewish population. In the 1920s, he traveled to Palestine, an awesome voyage, along with his friends D.W. Simons and David Zemon, where they bought a choice plot of land on Mt. Scopus overlooking Jerusalem. In 1916, Bessie and Joseph had as their house-



Bessie Wetsman

guest for ten days the founder of the new organization of Hadassah, Henrietta Szold, in order to promote Hadassah and Zionism in Detroit.

A special accomplishment for young women of the time, in 1908 the Wetsmans' daughter Sal had graduated Detroit's Central High School, whose building is now "Old Main" of Wayne State University. Sal went on to take a job as secretary to Rabbi Abraham Hershman of Shaarey Zedek. During Henrietta Szold's 1916 visit to the Wetsman home, Sal worked tirelessly to organize a local chapter of Hadassah. Sal,

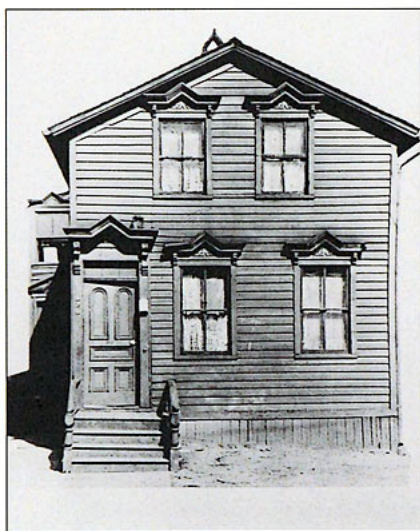
along with her sister Fan, became among Detroit's most ardent supporters of Hadassah. Each of them served as president locally, and Sal also was elected president of the Central States region of Hadassah.

Ralph Davidson married Sal Wetsman in 1920 in a wedding in her parents' Virginia Park home. Ralph and his four siblings, the children of Louis and Sarah Davidson, had been raised in Hillman, Michigan, where his parents had a department store. In 1915, when their home and store were destroyed by fire—a common scourge in early Michigan—the family moved to Detroit, where Ralph was introduced to Sal. Ralph's mother, Sarah, was from the same province of Volhynia as the Wetsmans, and Louis Davidson, Ralph's father, also became active in Congregation Shaarey Zedek. A successful businessman, Ralph became known for his generosity and his warm personality. He died prematurely at the age of fifty-seven in an automobile accident, along with Fan's husband, his brother-in-law Morse Saulson. Like the family into which he married, he was dedicated to family, the Jewish people, and his community.

## Michigan's First Congregation Celebrates 150 Years

[A] “well authenticated account is to the effect that its organization was directly due to the advent from New York of a couple by the name of Isaac and Sophie Cozens...at the beginning of the year 1850, and at once took up their abode at a house near the corner of Congress and Antoine Streets, where a few months later the first *Minyan* held in the State of Michigan convened for worship.” This is the description of the beginnings of Detroit's Temple Beth El as written in 1900 by Rabbi Leo M. Franklin, who headed the congregation for forty-two years, from 1899 until 1941. In 2000, Temple Beth El, now based in Bloomfield Hills, celebrated its 150th anniversary with a series of events and programs, culminating in a “Musical Retrospective” in May at the Bonstelle Theater in Detroit, the congregation's home from 1903-1922.

The enduring and illustrious history of the “Bet El Society,” as it was called in 1850, has been well documented in many places, including *Michigan Jewish History*, which published a four-part series by Dr. Irving Edgar between 1970 and 1980. The Temple has served as an influential part of the Reform movement in Michigan and the U.S., and its rabbis and lay leaders have played important roles in many areas of religious and civic life. Today, with a membership of about 1600 families, Temple Beth El



The Cozens house in Detroit, site of the first meeting of the “Bet El Society” in 1850.

Courtesy Rabbi Leo M. Franklin Archives, Temple Beth El, Bloomfield Hills, MI.



presents a wide array of religious, educational, and social action programs. Its vitality will no doubt provide it with another successful 150 years of worship, service, and progress.



**Cantor Chaim Najman  
of Congregation  
Shaarey Zedek.**

## **Cantors' Assembly 2000 Convention Held in Detroit**

Over three hundred cantors from across North America and abroad attended the fifty-third annual convention of the Cantors' Assembly at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn, May 21-25, 2000. Community highlights of the convention included the gala Weisberg Concert at Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Southfield with fifteen outstanding cantors and the Kol Zimrah Choir of Chicago, a dinner banquet honoring Sarah Laker on her ninetieth birthday, and a special event honoring Cantor Larry Vieder at Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills.

Cantor Chaim Najman, national president of the Cantors Assembly and Cantor of Congregation Shaarey Zedek, served as chairman of the five-day convention.

Cantors assembled for study, prayer, song, and collegiality. Seminars and educational workshops were presented, including discussion of the Cantor of the Twenty-First Century. Additionally, there was presentation of new music by leading composers in synagogue music today, such as Cantor Shalom Kalib, Charles Davidson, Dr. Michael Isaacson, and Srul Glick.

## **The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring: Looking Forward to a Second Hundred Years**

In 1892, a group of poor, Jewish immigrant workers from Eastern Europe banded together in New York City and, eight years later in 1900, formally organized the Arbeter Ring, the Workmen's Circle. The ideals of this organization were to create an alliance of individuals who could strive to improve the conditions of workers and provide benefits for its members. The focus of the Circle moved beyond the workplace to the sphere of Jewish culture, attracting tens of thousands of members, drawn by the spirit of companionship and camaraderie. Jews from Poland, Germany, Czechoslovakia, and other countries conversed in their common Jewish language, or mother tongue, Yiddish.

This year, to commemorate the beginning of the Workmen's Circle's second hundred years and celebrate its future, the Michigan Branch has established the Second Century Endowment Fund. This is a foundation to help ensure the future of the Workmen's Circle in Michigan.

The first Michigan Branch, Branch 156, was founded in 1907 in Detroit by local immigrants, attracted by the fraternal and insurance benefits, and eager to meet other Jews who shared their love for Yiddish, their non-traditional approach to Judaism, and their politically progressive, pro-labor ideas. Charter members Joseph Bernstein ("Mr. Workmen's Circle"), Sol Schkloven, Alex Levitt, Philip Roth, Celia Axelrod, Nathan Vinacow, Harry Lipsitz, Max Skolsky, Jacob Wexler, Sam Silverstein, Joseph Heideman and Ben Woloch set up shop in Detroit. Many families gave their time and resources to build Workmen's Circle in Michigan, including the Kalb family, the Brownsteins, the Roths, the Kleinmans, the Shiffrins, the Lipshitz family, and the Reismans. From the beginning, the women's division was vital to the establishment and growth of the organization. In 1917, the Workmen's Circle cemetery was established in Macomb County.

The Michigan organization grew and evolved, residing today in Oak Park. Ongoing activities include year-round holiday observances, Secular Sunday School classes for children from kindergarten through age thirteen, secular/cultural Bar and Bas Mitzvah celebrations, educational meetings and films, lectures, social events, Warsaw Ghetto commemoration and musical programs for young and old. Members receive benefits such as health and life insurance at group rates, free gravesites and burial services at reduced costs at the organization's cemetery. In development currently are Jewish cultural life-cycle observances, including celebrations for baby naming/bris and wedding ceremonies, and graveside services for the deceased.

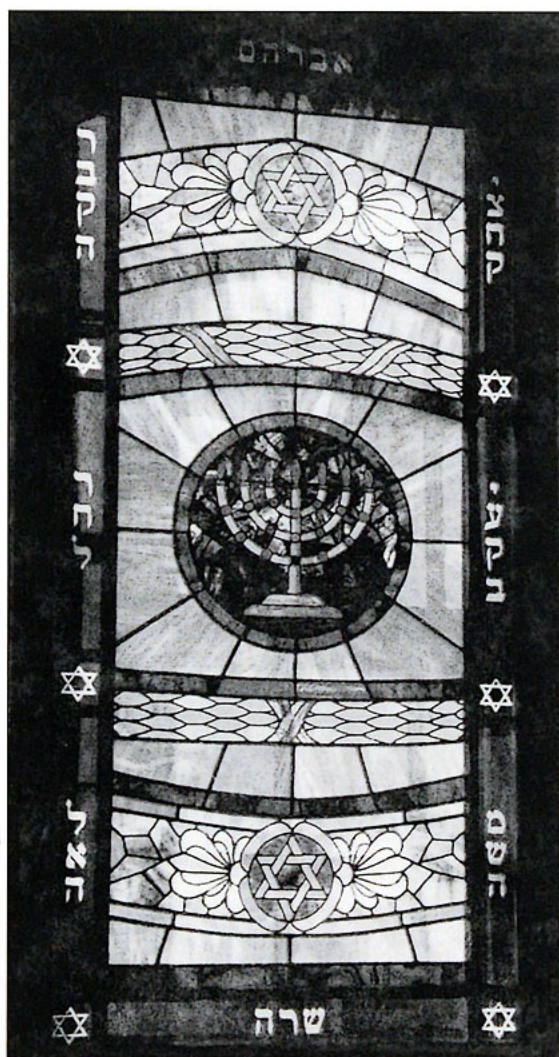
Facing the twenty-first century and the changes it will bring, the Workmen's Circle will continue to meet the needs of all who seek to enrich their lives in this warm and supportive Circle of Jewish Culture. —*Karen Siersma Rosenstein, Michigan District Director; with thanks to Sara Caplan, Estelle Cohen, Norma Shiffrin, and Dr. Melvin Arnoff.*

## **New Detroit Synagogue Emphasizes History**

Is this another sign of Detroit's continuing revitalization and healthy diversity? The first new synagogue founded in Detroit in the last twenty-five years opened its doors for Shabbat service on May 6, 2000. Its name, the Reconstructionist Congregation of Detroit (RCD), tells part of the story. RCD is affiliated with the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, a branch of Judaism founded in New York City in the 1920s by Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan. The new congregation is located in downtown Detroit, near what was the neighborhood of most of Detroit's Jewish families in the early decades of the twentieth century, Lower Hastings Street. The RCD's guiding principles and bylaws include a commitment to a continuing Jewish presence in Detroit.



Photo by Harriet B. Saperstein.



Stained glass window originally designed for Mogain Abraham on Farnsworth Street in Detroit. It was restored and installed at Congregation T'chayah in 1982, and will be rededicated at the new Reconstructionist Congregation of Detroit later in 2000.

city, such as Mogain Abraham, Temple Israel, and Congregation T'chayah. Members plan to hold a special dedication of a stained-glass window from Mogain Abraham (formerly on Farnsworth Street) in time for the High Holidays this year.

Information about RCD is available at 313-566-5412 or 313-393-1818. —Carol Weisfeld.

“Most of our members live in Detroit,” says RCD President Matthew Schenk, “but we also have members from Dearborn, Southfield, Livonia, Keego Harbor, Windsor, Ontario, and Lincolnwood, Illinois. The crucial element for our members, I believe, is not whether they live in Detroit, but how they feel about the city, and about the city’s Jewish community and heritage.” Schenk, who is twenty-eight, is Legislative Assistant Corporation Counsel for the Law Department of the City of Detroit. He lives in Detroit’s Lafayette Park with his wife and one-year-old son. “Initially RCD will hold Shabbat services the first Saturday of each month. We can walk to our synagogue,” Schenk likes to point out. “It’s wonderful to be able to do that again in the city.”

RCD rents space in the Wayne County Medical Society building, near Detroit’s Eastern Market. Its windows look out on I-375, which was Hastings Street until the freeway was built in the 1950s. Part of RCD’s mission is to restore objects connected with Detroit’s Jewish heritage, and to make the past come alive through educational programs. RCD’s sanctuary and library are furnished with pews and artifacts either donated or loaned by synagogues formerly located in the



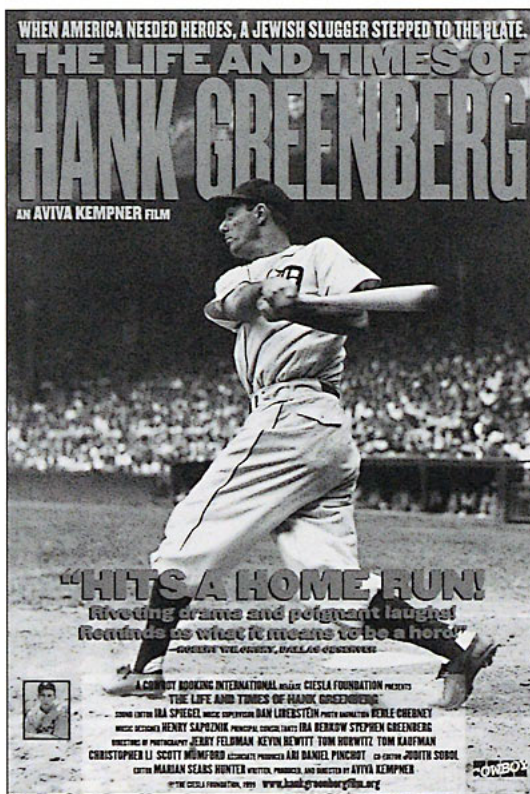
## Kempner Brings Greenberg Back to Detroit

A homecoming of sorts occurred last spring for baseball star Hank Greenberg and filmmaker Aviva Kempner. The much-anticipated Michigan premier of Kempner's documentary, *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*, was held at the Detroit Film Theatre at the Detroit Institute of Arts and at the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor.

Kempner grew up in the Detroit area and graduated from Cass Tech High School. She has fond memories of attending Tigers' games with her father, and her interest in Greenberg stems from that time. She credits her appreciation of history to her stepfather, Dr. Milton Kovensky. Although it centers on Greenberg's career, the film also depicts an era in the history of Detroit that many remember fondly.

The film was thirteen years in the making, and Kempner drew on many Michigan resources to research and shoot the film, among them the archives of the *Detroit Free Press*, *Detroit News*, *Detroit Times*, *Detroit Jewish News*, the Detroit Public Library, and the Detroit Tigers archives. She also used collections at the Burton Historical Library, the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, and Temple Beth El. Photos, memoirs, and interviews from private individuals in Detroit and Michigan were also important sources, including the Irwin Cohen Collection and Harriet Colman. The Michigan Humanities Council, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, and the Michigan Jewish Sports Hall of Fame were among the funders of the documentary.

*The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg* has been shown across the country from Washington, D.C. (Kempner's home) to Los Angeles, and in Jerusalem, receiving rave reviews everywhere. Recently, it crossed the \$1 million mark in box office receipts, making it one of the top twenty grossing U.S. documentaries of all time. Kempner has said that, with all the success the film has had, "bringing it home to Detroit was an exciting and emotional milestone" for her. "The film is my love letter to Detroit and to my father and the truths he taught me."



Courtesy Ciesla Foundation.

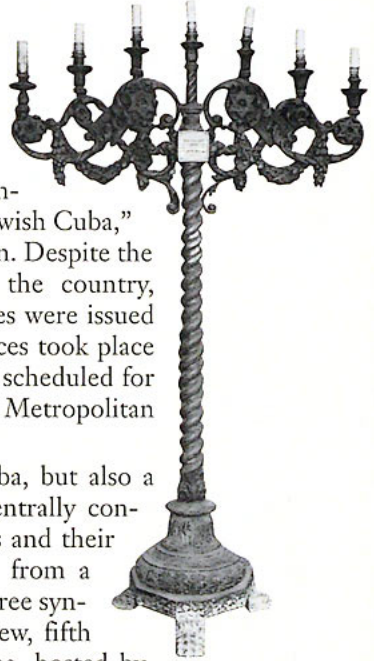


## Michigan Jewish Community Meets with Cuban Jews

During this past year a kind of history was made: the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit sponsored a trip in December 1999 for thirty people called "Jewish Cuba," led by Dr. Robert and Myrtle Everett and David Magidson. Despite the difficulties of traveling to Havana and the rest of the country, Department of State and Department of Treasury licenses were issued through U.S. exchanges. A second trip under JCC auspices took place in March 2000, led by Rabbi Leonardo Bitran. A third is scheduled for November 2000, sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and also led by Rabbi Bitran.

The Michigan travelers saw massive poverty in Cuba, but also a determination by the Cuban people, even under the centrally controlled, communist system, to create lives for themselves and their families. The fourteen-hundred remaining Jews (down from a high of more than sixteen thousand) gather at Havana's three synagogues, as well as one in Santiago de Cuba and at a new, fifth congregation. The Jewish Community Center in Havana, hosted by the Conservative-affiliated Patronato Synagogue under the leadership of Dr. José Miller, provides meals, Hebrew school, and other services for the community. Cuban Jews are determined to reclaim their Jewish identity.

Travel under the auspices of organizations like the JCC and the Federation creates the kind of people-to-people contact that is the real hope for the future. Even in the short time we were there, we could see on every Cuban face an expression of hope: "It is possible to be in control of your own life." Knowing that they now can aspire to this control gives hope both to them and to us for a brighter Jewish future. —*David J. Magidson*



In Havana last December, members of the JHSM visited Adat Israel Orthodox Synagogue, which houses a century-old, hand-carved wooden menorah (see above).

Trip leader David Magidson is fourth from the right;

Rabbi Leonardo Bitran is on the far left.

## Seferim/Books

### Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World's Most Famous Passion Play

by James Shapiro  
Pantheon Books, 2000, 238 pages

Jews are passionate about passion plays and for good reason. Throughout the centuries in Europe, wherever such a drama thrived, Jews did not. Once the traditional story of the “suffering, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus” unfolded and the Jews were accused of killing Jesus, audiences on occasion sought retribution, sweeping through villages and towns, slaughtering and burning, seeking vengeance whenever they could.

It was only in the middle of the twentieth century, after World War II, that Jewish organizations felt that the time was right to speak out about these plays. Christian leadership around the world had begun to rethink their understanding of theology, and there were changes in liturgy, pastoral education, and sermon material reflecting internal Christian struggles to understand the role of the Church in context of the Holocaust. First the American Jewish Congress and then the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee voiced their concerns. They addressed the Catholic Church and Christians worldwide. Then their attention turned to the directors, writers, and actors of the most abhorrent long-running passion play—the infamous Oberammergau Play in Bavaria. Each of the Jewish groups lent their expertise in working with Christian groups as they strove to improve Christian-Jewish relations and to combat anti-Semitism. They committed resources and time to work with and through the Catholic Church on this and other issues. It was hoped that inevitably Oberammergau’s script and the scripts of other such plays would be altered and that anti-Semitism would not be an end result of a long cultural and religious tradition for the Church and its communities.

James Shapiro’s most recent work, *Oberammergau: The Troubling Story of the World’s Most Famous Passion Play*, thoroughly examines the history of passion plays. Shapiro is a professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University





in New York and a historian of the theater. His book accurately expounds on the personalities involved in the shaping of the modern production, and he brings home to his readers why this particular play is so troublesome to Jews and so attractive to the world. It is in his retelling of the exchanges between the Oberammergau representatives and the American Jewish Committee leadership (among others) that I am reminded of the involvement of one Michigan leaders.

"In the middle and late 1970s," according to Rabbi James Rudin, Senior Interreligious Advisor of the American Jewish Committee, "Oberammergau was a 'really hot issue.' There was a real chance for a new 'old' play and Detroit's Miles Jaffe was a key player in the dialogue." In 1977, Jaffe traveled to Oberammergau with a delegation of the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission. "As National Chairman, he was instrumental in the negotiations," reminisced Rabbi Rudin, "and he was also a true representative of Jewish concerns." Miles Jaffe, now deceased, had served as chapter president of the American Jewish Committee in Detroit. He was involved in a wide range of local civic and cultural activities, but his main love was engaging the interreligious community in dialogue with the hope of diminishing misunderstanding and anti-Semitism. He felt strongly that Jews ought to know more about Christians and Christians needed to understand why Jews were wary of Christians and to learn more about Judaism.

In those long but crucial meetings in 1977 with Oberammergau representatives, Jaffe attempted to impart the range of Jewish concerns. He and his fellow delegates were sensitive to the economic, cultural, and social needs of the town of Oberammergau, whose residents were indeed torn in half. Those who wanted to maintain the status quo—the traditionalists—eventually won over the reformists. Although the play's script did not change, a town vote was close enough to put everyone on notice about how divided they really were. Jaffe returned to Austria to see the play in its entirety in 1980 and then came back to the States to speak about the play to AJC chapters around the country. As he served on the AJC's National Board of Governors, he helped shape future policy regarding this difficult issue. He appreciated the Bavarian culture and understood the importance of tradition, but felt that continuous pressure was necessary to encourage change. "He was a realistic negotiator and represented AJC well," said Rabbi Rudin in a recent conversation.

In 1989, I came to Detroit to accept the recently vacated position of AJC Michigan Area Director. Just a few months before the newest Oberammergau production was to begin, Miles Jaffe sat me down and suggested that his work should be continued. It was with that in mind that the members of the local chapter and I contacted the Catholic Archdiocese and began a relationship, which today remains strong. When asked, we review local renditions of passion plays. When we learn of travel groups organizing trips to Oberammergau, we offer informational packets to the travelers and welcome opportunities to meet with the groups. University alumni organizations coordinating trips to Oberammergau always receive information from the AJC office.

James Shapiro's book is a valuable addition to the literature on Oberammergau. While scholarly in its scope, it is very accessible to the general reader interested in the history, cultural import, and controversy of the passion play.

What the future will hold for Oberammergau, God only knows. But according to Rabbi Rudin, there is not much more that can be done: "The Passion Play story line is fundamentally flawed from the Jewish point of view and no matter what script, costuming, scenery, or general production changes are made, the outcome will always be disappointing when viewed through Jewish eyes."

*Reviewed by Sharon Shapiro, the Michigan Area Director of the American Jewish Committee. She is not related to the author James Shapiro.*

## My Love Affair with America: The Cautionary Tale of a Cheerful Conservative

By Norman Podhoretz  
The Free Press, 2000, 248 pages

Norman Podhoretz is the former editor of the respected journal *Commentary* and an influential and controversial member of the New York intelligentsia for the past fifty years. His "Love Affair with America" begins with a nostalgic description of the wholesome influences of a close Jewish family life that permeated his childhood and adolescence in Brooklyn during the Depression of the 1930s. He gratefully acknowledges the dedicated teachers, at that time in many communities around the country largely of Irish-Catholic descent, who had the clairvoyance to detect in him a spark of the hunger for learning and nourishingly kindle it into an inextinguishable flame of learning. Podhoretz proclaims his debt for the gift that gave rise to his lifelong love for words, reading, and the treasure of the English language. This love enhanced his participation in the social and cultural ferment of America and the world of his time. He discusses the experiences that solidified the gestating principles that were to govern him: a merit scholarship at Columbia University, at a time when there were quotas against Jews; a fellowship at Cambridge University, when there was resentment against the U.S. for the war in Korea; and his term as an enlisted man in the U.S. Army. In sequence,

MY  
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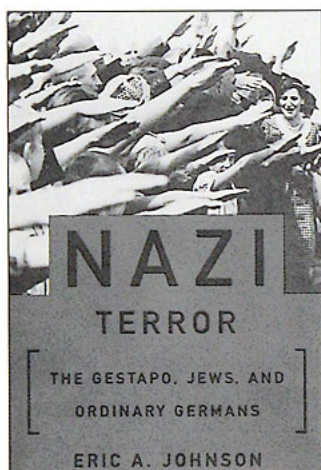
he recognized the potency of ideas and the written word; felt and exercised the need to defend our country against bias; and experienced acceptance, without overt prejudice, in the polyglot U.S. military, which to him represented a microcosm of America.

As a junior editor at *Commentary* in the mid-1950s, Podhoretz's intellectual and professional development was furthered in defending the U.S. from the contempt and ignorance of its domestic and foreign critics. However, we are told, by the late '50s, social and political events were foiling his fulfillment of a "richer and more exciting life." In 1960, he became the editor of *Commentary*, chosen because of his notoriety and independence, and he changed the goals and mission of the journal. Podhoretz abandoned his role as a defender of our country. He had become "so sure of myself [as a patriot]...I thought nothing of criticizing or attacking American for its imperfections." He rationalized any subliminal guilt arising from his written imprecations since he believed they were part of a dialogue among intellectuals and were not read by the "masses." His recoil from his early opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam and his consternation with the direction evolving in the Civil Rights Movement catalyzed his subsequent disillusionment with both causes and his movement away from "leftist anti-Americanism."

One might speculate that such swings could only be interpreted as the vacillations of a participant with chameleon-like traits. Instead, Podhoretz clarifies how one can grasp the social/political pendulum and swing adeptly and comfortably from Left to Right. Moreover, with hindsight, some humility, careful use of his beloved words, and the wisdom of a septuagenarian, he theorizes that when real-life social and political national imperfections interfere with an idealized concept of American democracy held by a naive or perfectionistic, patriotic citizen, a seduction of thought processes and ideals may sway him or her toward the right or left. The path followed is also determined in part by such factors as background, personal experiences, and one's fellow travelers/ideologues. Frustrations and disillusionment may turn to bitterness, fulmination against America, and even violence among those zealots less constrained. Podhoretz's current attitudes toward issues such as affirmative action and bilingual education are representative of the direction his strident love of America is taking.

This autobiographical overview of our country's last seventy years portrays the tortuous path Podhoretz followed. Ultimately, to achieve some inner peace and to wholesomely express his credo, he closes with thanks and praises in gratitude for the opportunities he has been afforded and for the greater good that permeates the spirit of our country. He urges us to accept the wondrous opportunity and largesse provided in America and to try to understand and deal rationally and patiently with its flaws.

*Reviewed by Charles B. Clayman, M.D., a professor of medicine at Northwestern University and an editor of The Journal of the American Medical Association. He is a member of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.*



## Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans

by Eric A. Johnson

Basic Books, 1999, 636 pages

Cologne. The trial was over in four days. Schäfer, the fifty-three-year-old former head of the Cologne Gestapo from October 1940 to January 1942, during which time the Jewish “evacuation” to the east was organized and set in motion, maintained that he had only adhered to the existing [Nuremberg] laws, that the Jews had been well treated, and that he had no personal responsibility because he was only following orders from higher party and SS officials.

Schäfer was sentenced to serve six years, nine months in prison, minus the time already spent awaiting trial, and to forgo his civilian rights for three years after being released.

“Only following orders” is one of the spoors that Eric Johnson followed in analyzing more than eleven hundred Special Court and Gestapo records in the archives of Cologne, Krefeld, and other German cities, from which he produced *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans*. Johnson, a history professor at Central Michigan University, spent ten years researching his book.

Daniel Goldhagen, in his similarly thick volume *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Knopf, 1996), found the Germans to have suffered from a chronic anti-Semitism that could be purged only with the destruction of the Jews. Some apologists see the behavior of the “average” German citizens as no more abhorrent than that of any other people caught up in the grip of an ubiquitous totalitarian state. Johnson comes across as closer to, but not in full agreement with, the former idea rather than the latter. Hannah Arendt's characterization of the “banality of evil” he finds unacceptable. The absolute inhumanity of Nazi Germany Johnson does not debate; the evidence is inarguable.

Neither does Johnson find it necessary to counter the phantasm “I did not know”—repeated by the man-in-the-street and the defendants in the Nuremberg and so-called denazification trials. The “secret” of deportations, mass murders, and death camps was common knowledge, as has been often and meticulously documented. Johnson devotes several pages to the sometimes-overlooked BBC broadcasts beamed to Germany during the war (tuning in was a punishable offense, but tune in the Germans did) and to the rain of leaflets dropped from allied aircraft over Germany. He is convinced that ordinary Germans knew.

There is, of course, an ever-burgeoning Holocaust literature based on the evidence and the accounts of eyewitnesses and survivors. Johnson's major contributions are to provide insight into the everyday functioning of the Gestapo and the police, several of whom he follows from cradle to grave, to define the “average” or “ordinary”



German citizen who actively or passively accepted the Nazi terror; to examine the patina of legality devised to cover the actions of the "Jewish Desk" and the courts; and to record the savage madness that burned in the "ordinary" German in a last vengeful spasm as the Allies invaded their homeland. Johnson concludes that the persecution and murder of millions of innocent people "would not have been imaginable without the loyalty, complicity, and silence of the German population, of whom only a minority by their own admission were motivated by the fear of being denounced or accused. Most went along willingly, if they did not condone all of Hitler's policies."

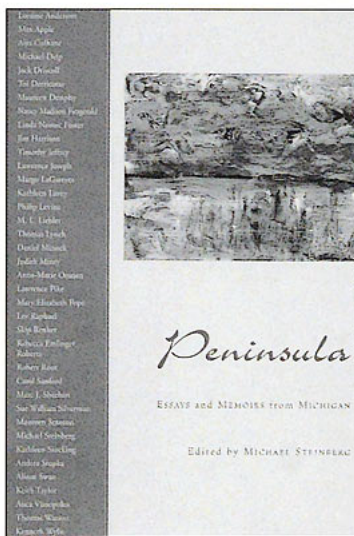
*Reviewed by Dr. Bernard Goldman, a member of Michigan Jewish History's Editorial Committee and the Heritage Council of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan.*

## Peninsula: Essays and Memoirs from Michigan

Edited by Michael Steinberg  
Michigan State University Press, 2000,  
270 pages

If you seek a pleasant peninsula, as our state motto goes, look around you. And if you need help in really looking, pick up this volume of essays about Michigan. Here you'll find every place—from Detroit to the UP, from Grand Rapids to Saginaw — and everyone — all colors, religions, ethnic backgrounds, and identities. In this anthology, thirty-eight writers present memories and observations of their lives as Michiganders, ranging from disillusionment with a lost Detroit to a paean to the northern lights seen from the Keweenaw peninsula.

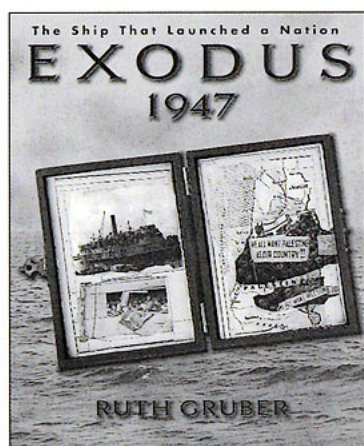
Several essays will appeal to readers looking for specific Jewish content. Max Apple reminisces in "The American Bakery" about his Lithuanian grandparents, who settled in Grand Rapids after World War I but never quite left the shtetl. Even forty years in the "wilderness of America" did not convince his grandmother to give up speaking Yiddish. Apple's wry commentary on their gentile neighbors is delightful reading, as are his reflections on how the conflicts between Yiddish and English brought him a lifelong appreciation for words. In "The Return," Philip Levine drives between Detroit and Lansing looking for his father's past.\* Lawrence Pike brings back the golden days of Detroit baseball—Hank Greenberg, Briggs Stadium, and the radio broadcasts heard in Saginaw—in his essay about Harry Heilmann. An appreciation of contemporary life in Okemos is the subject Lev Raphael's essay. He tells us how he, a New Yorker, Jew, and partner in a gay relationship, set down roots in Central Michigan. Among the most moving passages in this book is his description of a life-



changing Rosh Hashanah service. Anca Vlasapoulos shares her memories and heartaches as a young immigrant to Detroit from Rumania in the 1960s.

A number of these essays highlight the ambivalence so many Michiganians feel about living on this peninsula, which has given opportunities to many but set limitations on others. More than a few writers tell about their struggles to accept Michigan as home. Overall, though, they give us an appreciation of several aspects of our state: its physical beauties, the varied pasts of its inhabitants, and the richness of its human resources.

\* See Laura Berman's review of Levine's *The Mercy*, in *Michigan Jewish History* 39, 1999: 52-53.  
*Reviewed by Aimee Ergas.*



## Exodus 1947: The Ship That Launched A Nation

by Ruth Gruber  
Times Books, 1999, 204 pages

In 1947, Ruth Gruber, one of the first women foreign correspondents, was the only American journalist to watch the ship Exodus limp into Haifa harbor. She followed the ship to Cyprus, France, and Hamburg. Her riveting reports and photographs, originally published in the *Herald Tribune* and *Life* magazine, were eventually compiled into the book *Destination Palestine: The Story of the Haganah Ship Exodus 1947* (Current Books, 1948). The book influenced world opinion and policy at the United Nations. It is considered instrumental in the decision to create a Jewish state.

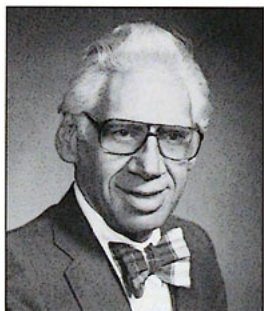
Now Gruber has updated and revised her classic and published it with a new title, *Exodus 1947: The Ship That Launched A Nation*. A new opening chapter and seventy previously unpublished photos have been added. New text is drawn from interviews with many of the survivors on their lives before boarding the Exodus, as well as updates on the fate of some survivors. Sara and Chanina Kam, whose daughter and grandsons live in Ann Arbor, are among those highlighted. Also included is Detroit-area resident Harry Weinsaft, who was the security officer on the Exodus. His experiences were profiled in *Michigan Jewish History* in 1997 (vol. 37, pp. 6-8).

This revised addition of Gruber's book, with its more complete story and additional photos, loses none of the punch of the original and preserves a harrowing and fascinating event in Jewish history.

*Reviewed by Harriet Siden, Vice President of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, and a member of its Heritage Council.*



# In Memoriam



## Walter L. Field 1901-1999

### Entrepreneur and Man of Letters

When Walter Field, “a man for all seasons,” passed away in December 1999, the Detroit Jewish community lost a major contributor to its present and its history. His life spanned the entire twentieth century, and he had a long and remarkable career ranging from business and journalism to Zionism, education, and poetry.

Field came to the United States through Canada as an illegal immigrant from Poland, and made his way to Detroit, where he established the Mac-O-Lac paint manufacturing company in 1931. His lifelong passion was to foster Jewish education opportunities for young people. He was active in the Detroit Zionist movement, and was an influential member of Congregation Shaarey Zedek.

Field was a close friend and supporter of journalist Philip Slomovitz, and Arthur Horwitz, current publisher of the *Detroit Jewish News*, recalled that in 1942 Field became one of the original backers of the *Jewish News*. Horwitz reflected on his friend in the *Detroit Jewish News* last December, saying, “Walter was a remarkable man with a remarkable mind who cared deeply about the Jewish people and their highly disproportionate contribution to civilization.... It would have warmed his heart if he had known that Albert Einstein was picked by *Time* magazine as the most influential person of the twentieth century.”

Field was also an author and poet. In 1963, he published *A People's Epic: Highlights of Jewish History in Verse*, a history of the Jewish People in rhyming three-line stanzas. In 1989, this book was chosen by a committee of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem to be translated into Russian and sent to Jews in Russia. Field also wrote booklets on religious philosophy: *Gleanings from the Bible*, *The Tale of the Horse*, and *Symphony of Threes*. In 1993, Field was a founder of the Commission for the Dissemination of Jewish History. The commission published weekly newspaper columns that appeared across the country entitled “Jewry's Role in Human Affairs,” profiling leaders in Jewish history. Field also sponsored lecture series at Wayne State University and the University of Michigan. He served on the board of Directors of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, and in 1989 the Walter and Lea Field Jewish History Fund sponsored a Jewish history contest for sixth-grade students, administered by the JHS. In 1997, *Michigan Jewish History* profiled Field, then ninety-six, and his contributions to Jewish history, spotlighting his new educational website, [www.dorledor.org](http://www.dorledor.org). In that article, he was called “probably the world's most senior electronic publisher.” (vol. 37, 1997: pp. 13-15)

Walter Field was honored by the Michigan State Legislature in 1988 and also received an “Eight Over Eighty” award from the Senior Adult Jewish Hall of Fame. His contributions to Detroit's Jewish history are especially appreciated by the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan. —Alan Kandel.



## **Sarah Friedman 1903-2000**

### **Yiddish Teacher and Preserver**

A premier Yiddish teacher and preserver of that historic language was lost to the Jewish community with the death of Sarah Friedman in February 2000. Yiddish was a lifelong passion for Friedman, who was born Sarah Weisman in Biala, Poland, in 1903. She came to Detroit with her family to Detroit in 1923. A young man she knew from Biala, Morris Friedman, had no sponsor to come to the U.S. and immigrated to Argentina. In 1925, the twenty-two-year-old Sarah traveled alone, quite unusual in those days for a woman, to Buenos Aires to marry Friedman and sponsor his immigration to Detroit. They were married for sixty-six years until his death in 1991.

The Friedmans were an important force in preserving a special aspect of Jewish heritage: the Yiddish language. They were among the founders of the Sholem Aleichem Institute in Detroit and endowed a chair for Yiddish teachers at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. Sarah Friedman taught, performed, and promoted Yiddish literature in many venues. She was a respected resource for students and experts around the country. Her collection of Yiddish literature, manuscripts, and letters was extensive. Before her death, she donated the library to the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, MA, and personal papers to the YIVO Institute in New York. The Friedmans were active supporters of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, participating in many of its programs over the years. Morris Friedman served on the JHS board of directors.

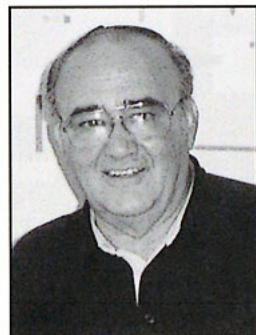
Sarah Friedman was a major force in recognizing Yiddish as a unique part of Jewish history and preserving it for the future. She leaves behind an active legacy of scholarship and resources.

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## **Joseph "Joe" Kramer 1923-1999**

### **Engineer, Photographer, and Active Volunteer**

An esteemed member and volunteer of the Jewish Historical Society, Joseph Kramer passed away in December 1999. A lover of Jewish life and history, Kramer was part of a group brought together to organize the files of journalist Philip Slomovitz, who donated his large collection to the Society in 1991. The collection is now in the Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives at Wayne State University.





## IN MEMORIAM

Joe Kramer was a mechanical engineer with a degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He served in two wars—World War II, during which he was a prisoner of war, and the Korean War. He worked on the Redstone Missile for the United States space program. Kramer settled in Detroit in 1949 and was an engineer with the Ford Motor Company.

A believer in community service, Kramer volunteered for the Detroit Radio Information Service (DRIS), Cranbrook Schools, the Midrasha-College of Jewish Studies, and the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan. As an amateur photographer, he photographed many old synagogues and shuls in the Detroit area. These photos were exhibited at the Jewish Community Center in West Bloomfield and then mounted in a scrapbook and donated to the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan in 1994. Joe Kramer's work for JHSM and the community will be missed. —*Alan Kandel.*

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### Norman Drachler 1912-2000

#### Detroit Schools Superintendent

Retired educator Norman Drachler, who served as superintendent of the Detroit Public Schools from 1966 to 1971, passed away in May 2000 at the age of eighty-eight. He was profiled in this journal in 1997 as one of the leading school superintendents in Michigan (vol. 37, 1997: pp. 15-17).

Drachler came to the U.S. from what is now Ukraine with his family in 1929. He received a bachelor's (1937) and a master's (1939) degree in education from Wayne State University, and a Ph.D. in education from the University of Michigan in 1951. Drachler joined the Detroit Public Schools in 1937 as a teacher and rose to become superintendent in 1966. He led the Detroit schools during a volatile period in its history and was widely praised for his leadership, his skills as a problem solver, and his encouragement of the hiring of African-American teachers and administrators. After his resignation in 1971, Drachler took the leadership post with the Institute for Educational Leadership, funded by the Ford Foundation. His book, *Bibliography of Jewish Education in the United States*, received the 1996 Reference Book Award from the Association of Jewish Libraries. In reviewing it for this journal in 1997, Rabbi Daniel Syme wrote that it is "a precious legacy from a master teacher to generations of disciples yet unborn."

Profiling his brother for *Michigan Jewish History*, Sol Drachler wrote: "He is still remembered by his colleagues for his use, in 1967, of Judaic sources in his calming talks to striking teachers. Seeking inspiration in his own heritage, he truly has been a significant leader in the history of Detroit schools."



## School Days

### The Jewish Historical Society of Michigan's Yearbook Project

It has been said that the years we spend in high school are the most important and memorable years of our lives. The friends we make last forever, whether we see them every week or only once every ten years. We will always be a child to our parents, and we will always be an adult to our children. But we will always be seventeen years old when we are with our classmates from high school.

In high school yearbooks, our youthful selves are captured forever, as are the activities, interests, fads, and "the look" of our era. And looking at yearbooks from older generations creates a historical document of that time different from what you find in a history book. The pictures preserved there are worth thousands of words, more concise and more accurate than any historian could write. The Jewish Historical Society of Michigan has launched a project to collect and preserve these concise and accurate historical documents—the yearbooks and reunion books of Detroit area private and public high schools attended by Jewish students. Each and every Detroit area Jew—past and present, prominent or plain—is part of our history and will be recorded for posterity.



Photo by Jim Grey.

Yearbook project managers Marc Manson, left, and Jim Grey peruse some of the old yearbooks that have been collected.

Looking over their shoulders is Chuck Domstein, a long-time teacher at Oak Park High School. Domstein has donated yearbooks from the high school covering over thirty years of its history.



The collection is growing fast as word spreads around the community. As of August 2000, more than 460 items had been collected and donated, including the 1928 *Centralite* from Detroit Central High School, the 1957 *Capri* from Mumford and the 1968 *Henry Ford High School Galaxy*. There are more recent yearbooks from Hillel Day School, Birmingham Groves and Southfield Lathrup High Schools, as well as many others.



## SCHOOL DAYS

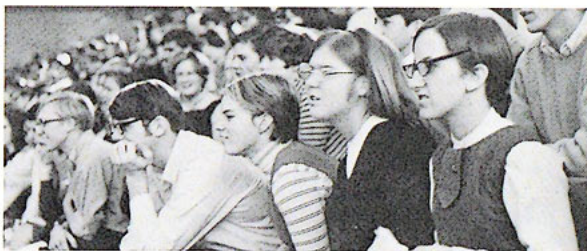


donors of their own books and bookgatherers, going to their relatives and friends to add to this historic collection.” Members could also become involved with data input, as the project plans to create a computerized index of people pictured and mentioned in the books. Cook emphasizes, “Your work can benefit our kids and grandkids years from now, or someone in Phoenix, say, who has no photo of his grandparents from the 1910s, but knows they lived in Detroit. He’ll be able to find their names in the index, determine the school and graduation year, and access the books for photos and what clubs they were in.”

Cook comments that people are sometimes reluctant to part with their yearbooks or those they have from parents or older relatives. He suggests that donating the books is a wonderful tribute or memorial; bookplates will be added to the books honoring the original owner and the donor. “What better way to ensure that your relative is included in the history of Jewish Detroit?” Cook asks. Teachers and school administrators are also invited to contribute to this project.

There are plans for the yearbook collection to be available to the public in the future and to create an exhibition based on the books. The project leaders would also like to invite current high-school students to add their books to the collection. Volunteers are welcomed to help collect yearbooks and to create a computerized index of them. Donations to help maintain the collection will also be gratefully accepted. For information about the yearbook project, contact Marc Manson, (248) 661-8515, MDMCO\_USA@aol.com; or Gerald Cook, (248) 851-0517.

*This article was adapted from an essay by Marc Manson, with the assistance of Gerald Cook.*



Photos from the 1969 Birmingham Seaholm Piper.

# Footnote from the Editor

by Aimée Ergas

An appropriate reference for this year's volume of *Michigan Jewish History* might be the holiday of Simchas Torah, when we celebrate endings and fresh beginnings. We end the twentieth century with pride by publishing our most comprehensive index to date of the thirty-nine previous volumes of *Michigan Jewish History*, 1960-1999, compiled by Dr. Bernard Goldman. Members and subscribers will receive a copy of the index with the journal this year. The index will be updated with each new volume of the journal, and the entire index will be posted on our website, eventually supplemented by an index of photographs. We expect it to be a wonderful resource for researchers and writers.

The past is kept alive as the future brings two exciting opportunities for fresh beginnings. A generous grant to the Jewish Historical Society's Heritage Council from Guardian Industries, Inc., not only insures that *Michigan Jewish History* will continue to be published, but allows us to contemplate new ideas and resources for the journal. We hope you will see the results of this in future volumes. Continued generous support from the Max M. Fisher Jewish Community Foundation, which made possible publication of the index, also allows us to enter the twenty-first century as a member of the World Wide Web. Plans are advancing for our website to include information about the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, as well as past issues of *Michigan Jewish History* and the index of the journal. Please check out [www.mich-jewishhistory.org](http://www.mich-jewishhistory.org) in the next six months or so and find out what the future of *Michigan Jewish History* looks like.

In the course of publishing volume 40, we called on the help of many people far and wide, in many organizations to provide information, resources, facts, and advice. Though they are too numerous to thank individually, this journal would not be able to maintain its high quality without their help. The service of members of our editorial committee is appreciated, and many thanks go to our talented photographers-on-call, Jim Grey and Bob Benyas, who are always generous with their time. Each of the authors who contributed to this volume deserves thanks for their expertise, their generosity, and their patience. Steve Fishman and Monica Ickes of Goodwill Printing, Heidi Christein of the Jewish Community Archives, and Betty Rollins also contributed much appreciated help. My personal and professional thanks go especially to Judy Cantor, for her generous and untiring support. As always, we are interested in comments, suggestions, and ideas from our readers.



# Jewish Historical Society President's Report, 1999-2000

by Joan Braun

As the bride to the twenty-first century, 1999-2000 proved to be a very good year for the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan. We continued to follow the precepts set down in our mission statement and our bylaws: To foster the collection, presentation, and publication of materials on the history of the Jews in Michigan. We have sponsored and promoted tours, lectures, meetings, and publications that inform the community about Michigan Jewish history and activities.



Photo by Jim Grey.

Touring Comerica Park in July, from left; Rob Kaplow, co-chair, Irwin "Mr. Tiger" Cohen, Joan Braun, JHSM president, Jim Grey, co-chair & past president.

## The Yearbook Project

Our ongoing Yearbook Project gained momentum this year. Close to five hundred books have been collected to date. Yearbooks of all varieties are being collected from public, private, and parochial schools and universities around the Detroit area to be preserved as historical documents. This project is being promoted by Gerald Cook, Marc, and Jim Grey, who plan to develop a website that will contain all the photos plus an index of all faculty and students. For details on the project and how everyone can participate, please read the related article in this issue of our journal.

## Tours, Exhibits, and Speakers

Our tour of Tiger stadium in July 1999 kicked off our fiscal year. The visit was especially poignant since we knew Tiger Stadium had only a few months left before it closed. Irwin Cohen, "Mr. Tiger" himself, treated us to a lecture and slide show before



## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

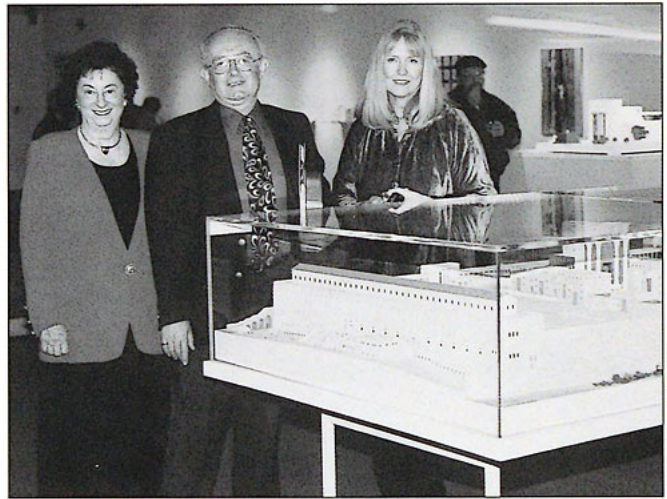
the tour. Under the auspices of Jim Grey, JHSM past president, another tour took place one year later, in July 2000, of the Tigers' impressive new home, Comerica Park.

The opening-night lecture for the exhibit "The Mountain of the Lord: An Exhibition of Architecturally Accurate Models" was our final event for 1999. The Janice Charach Epstein Gallery at the Jewish Community Center mounted the exhibition made up of scale models of the First and Second Temples and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem designed by Dr. Leen Ritmeyer. The speaker, sponsored by the Gallery with the cooperation of JHSM, was Dr. Robert Stieglitz of Rutgers University, an archaeologist who has directed excavations in Israel and Greece.

The new year 2000 began with a private viewing in January of the exhibition "Ancient Glass from the Holy Land." We were the guests of Guardian Industries Corporation and its chairman, William Davidson, at its beautiful headquarters in Auburn Hills. Dorothy Davidson Gerson was the honorary chair for this unique program, which was attended by many of our members.

In addition to the glass exhibit, we viewed a video of the glassmaking art of Dale Chihuli, a world-renowned decorative glass artist. A Chihuli "glass garden" flanks the stairway from the main level to the lower level of the Guardian Glass Building, making that area a colorful and fantastic backdrop to our event. At the program, officers of the JHSM presented Mr. Davidson with an inscribed glass plaque in grateful appreciation of his Guardian-level gift to our Twenty-First Century Heritage Council, to underwrite publication of *Michigan Jewish History*.

We featured several other historically interesting programs during the year, which were well attended by members and non-members alike: A visit to the Detroit Historical Museum to see "On the Air," an exhibit of early Detroit radio, as well as the ongoing exhibit "Frontiers to Factories," showcasing Detroit manufacturing from the birth of the city in 1701 to the present; a lecture at November's Jewish Book Fair by author Bea Kraus, who wrote *A Time to Remember: A History of the Jewish Community in South Haven*, which was reviewed in last year's issue of *Michigan Jewish History*; and our famous tour of Old Detroit, hosted by Adele Staller, Gerald Cook, and Judy Cantor. The tour in May



Mrs. Natalie Charach, left, who with her husband Manny is First Chancellor of the JHSM's Heritage Council and co-founder of the Janice Charach Epstein Gallery, with guest speaker Dr. Robert Stieglitz, and Gallery director Sylvia Nelson, with the Temple Mount archaeological model.

Photo by Jim Grey.



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT



Photo by Jim Grey.

At the world headquarters of Guardian Industries. From left: Byron Gerson; Dorothy Davidson Gerson; Ralph Gerson; Aimee Ergas, holding plaque presented to William Davidson; Ruth Rattner, curator at Guardian Industries; Judy Cantor, Joan Braun.

was so successful that another was scheduled in July to accommodate the demand.

In April, our immediate past president, Jim Grey, received well-deserved accolades for his outstanding service to the community from both the Jewish War Veterans of Michigan and Temple Israel's Men's Club, which chose him as its Man of the Year.

### Kandel Receives Simons Award at Annual Meeting

Highlighting the JHSM annual meeting and luncheon was the presentation of the tenth annual Leonard N. Simons History Award. Professor Sidney Bolkosky, a previous recipient of the Simons Award, presented this year's award to Alan Kandel for his excellent history articles in *Michigan Jewish History* and his archival work on the Philip Slomovitz Collection at the Jewish Community Archives. The keynote speaker, Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, of the Birmingham Temple, treated us to a historical review of the



Photo by Jim Grey.

Author Bea Kraus at the Jewish Book Fair with, from left, her husband, Harold Kraus; Judy Cantor, author of the Foreword; Marilyn Shapiro, editor of Kraus's book; JSHM president Joan Braun; and Jim Grey, past president.



## MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

influence of Jews on the City of Detroit during the past centuries, anticipating the celebrations of Detroit 300 in 2001. Because he grew up in the city, Wine could conjure up many memories shared with



Photo by Bob Benyas.

Featured speaker  
Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine.



Photo by Bob Benyas.

The 2000 Simons History Award was presented to Alan Kandel. From left: Professor Sidney Bolkosky, award presenter; JHSM President Joan Braun; Alan Kandel; Stanley Meretsky, past president and chair of nominating committee.

audience members of coming of age in Detroit.

Please join us in our continuing efforts to provide you with varied and informative programs in the coming year.



Photo by Jim Grey.

The Officers and Board of Directors, 2000-2001

Standing, left to right: Charles Mayer, Harriet Siden, Myrle Leland, Cynthia Brody, Adele Staller, Benno Levi, Judith Cantor, Irwin Shaw, Marc Manson. Seated, left to right: Bette Schein, Suzanne Shifman, President Joan Braun, Ida Levine, Cynthia Mandelbaum, James Grey.



# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN

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Membership, tributes, and endowments to the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, founded in 1959, support the collection, commemoration, and publication of the history of the Jews of Michigan. *Michigan Jewish History* is the oldest continuously published journal of local Jewish history in America. All members receive a copy of this journal and it will be forwarded to new members. For membership information, please contact the Jewish Historical Society.

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The Guardian's name will appear as the endower of the journal.

Trustees, Chancellors, Deans, Fellows and Collectors become life members. The Heritage Council will continue to be listed in this journal, *Michigan Jewish History*, which circulates to libraries and universities around the world.

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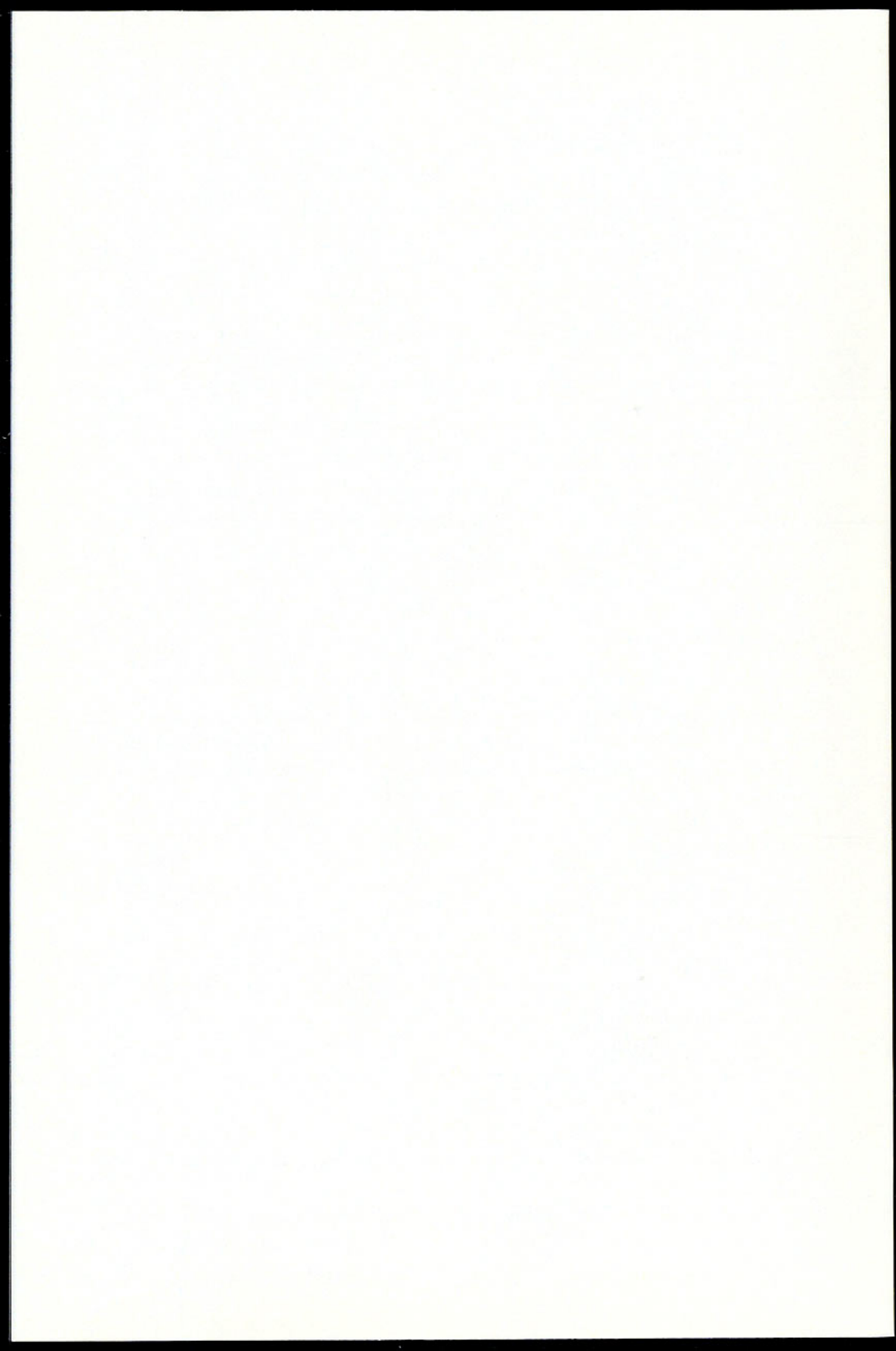
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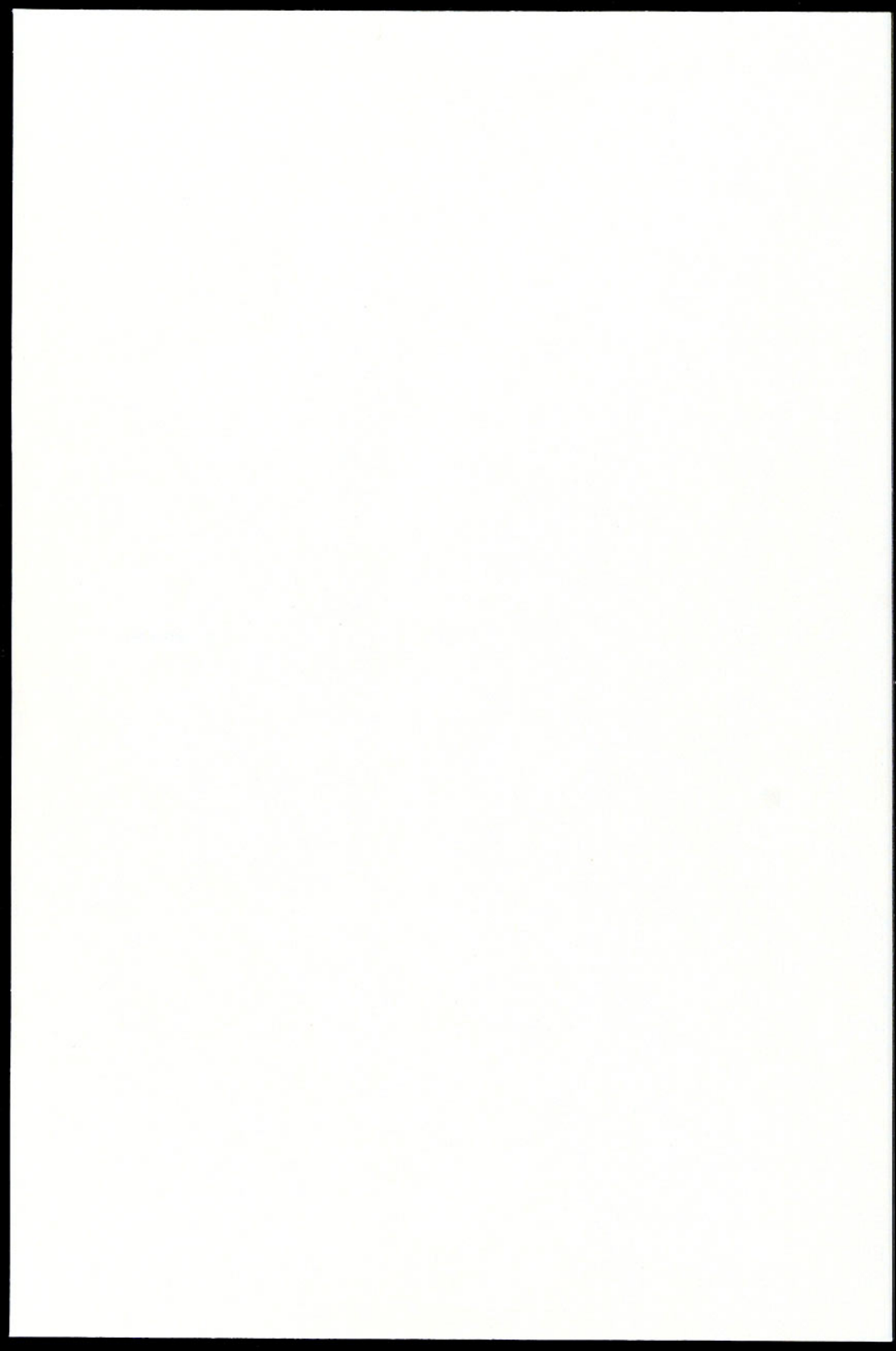
**The Society profoundly appreciates the support of the Heritage Council**

Categories of membership in the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan:  
\$25 Single; \$36 Family; \$15 Organizations; \$100 Corporate Annual; \$250 Life

Tribute cards will be sent on request for contributions received.







The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial statements. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses and income. The document provides a detailed explanation of how to categorize these transactions correctly, ensuring they are recorded in the appropriate accounts. It also highlights the need for regular reconciliation to identify any discrepancies early on.

The second part of the document focuses on the preparation of the financial statements. It outlines the steps involved in calculating the net income, starting from the sales revenue and subtracting the cost of goods sold and operating expenses. The document provides a clear breakdown of the components of each statement, such as the balance sheet, income statement, and cash flow statement. It also discusses the importance of presenting the information in a clear and concise manner, using appropriate accounting conventions and standards.

The final part of the document addresses the audit process. It explains the role of the auditor in verifying the accuracy of the financial statements and providing an independent opinion on their fairness. The document describes the various procedures used by auditors, such as sampling, vouching, and analytical procedures. It also discusses the importance of communication between the auditor and the management, as well as the need for transparency and cooperation throughout the audit process.