

Michigan Jewish History



JHSM
JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN



Volume 61 | Summer 2021 | Tammuz 5781

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**, both of blessed memory.



Figures 1-4: (clockwise from top left) Sarah Wetsman Davidson, Ralph Davidson, Joseph Wetsman, and Bessie Handler Wetsman. (Courtesy of Gretchen and Ethan Davidson.)

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MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

The Journal of Jewish Historical Society of Michigan

Volume 61

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Message from Our President

Risha B. Ring, PhD



(Courtesy of author.)

Our Star Is Rising. Nearly three years ago, we adopted this slogan as a lofty goal to work toward.

We have celebrated and shared our collective history since 1959. But three years ago, we moved to the next level when we engaged an American history scholar, Catherine Cangany, PhD, to lead JHSM. We are on the cusp of some major changes, impacting our organization and Michigan Jewish history alike, thanks to her leadership.

Our Star Is Rising.

One of those changes you hold in your hands. *Michigan Jewish History* is now an award-winning publication. Thanks to its redesign and evolution into a peer-reviewed journal, *MJH* was honored in 2020 by the Historical Society of Michigan as Outstanding Printed Periodical. Many thanks to the 2020 issue's authors and members of the Journal Advisory Committee, and a very special thank-you to Managing Editor Tracy Weissman, Creative Expressions Editor Joy Gaines-Friedler, Board Member Michael G. Smith, and Editor Catherine Cangany for their commitment to excellence.

Our Star Is Rising.

Faced with COVID-19, JHSM could have ceased to exist. We chose a different path. We rapidly evolved during the crippling pandemic, providing enriching activities via Zoom, Facebook Live, and YouTube. Our wide variety of programming introduced outstanding speakers from all over the country, reaching an audience of thousands throughout the



world. The founders would have thought our current reach impossible in 1959, but thanks to technology and our own ingenuity, we have made the impossible a reality.

Our Star Is Rising.

We have made tremendous strides in engaging hundreds more supporters. Through our incredible CORE (Community Outreach, Relations, and Engagement) Committee, in the last year alone, we have netted scores of new members and dozens of new partnerships and collaborations that have expanded our network and increased our community of participants.

Our Star Is Rising.

This incredible growth—during the pandemic—spawned an Exploratory Museum Task Force. The committee’s months of research resulted in the JHSM Board of Directors’ decision to move forward on our decades-long dream of creating a Museum of Jewish Michigan. Now we have engaged the world’s foremost museum-planning firm, Gallagher & Associates, to conduct our visitor-experience plan and feasibility study. President and founder Patrick Gallagher spoke about “Why Jewish Museums Matter” at our annual meeting on June 7, highlighting the firm’s work at the recently reopened ANU (Museum of the Jewish People) in Tel Aviv and letting us glimpse the potential of our museum.

Our Star Is Rising.

Even as JHSM continues to do what it does well (first-rate knowledge-production, engaging programs, and meaningful partnerships), our museum will be an important focus for the next several years and will take this organization to the next level, yet again.

Our Star Is Rising. Not just a slogan any more—it is our reality!



Introduction from the Managing Editor

Tracy Weissman, JD



(Courtesy of Paul Stoloff Photography.)

This issue of *Michigan Jewish History* honors members of Michigan's Jewish community who have made lasting contributions through their participation in public life. From the arrival of Michigan's first Jewish residents in the 1760s to the present, Michigan Jews have effectuated positive change through philanthropy, activism, political participation, military service, teaching, board membership, and many other forms of public service. In our increasingly polarized society, participation in public life is more important than ever—not only to protect past achievements, but also to continue to improve the lives of all residents of our state and beyond.

The first of the issue's two peer-reviewed feature articles, Samuel Kole's "Healing the Soul of a City: Carl Levin's Early Career in Detroit," is the winner of our inaugural Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum Award, honoring outstanding original scholarship in the field of Michigan's Jewish history. Kole examines US Senator Carl Levin's early work as an attorney and member of the Detroit City Council from 1970 to 1977. Levin's Jewish identity and experience advocating for civil rights enabled him to obtain widespread support and carry out his progressive agenda while serving on the city council, including tackling one of Detroit's most entrenched problems: housing discrimination.

In "A Communal Bridge: The *Detroit Jewish News*, the Detroit Jewish Welfare Federation, and the Detroit Jewish Community in 1942," Alan M. Hurvitz (z"l) explores the 1942 transition from the *Detroit Jewish*



Chronicle to the *Jewish News* as the main disseminator of public information to Detroit's Jewish community. This transition occurred in part as a result of an alliance that *Jewish News* founder Philip Slomovitz forged between his newspaper and the city's leading Jewish communal organization, the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit. Through their alliance, these two entities mobilized thousands to engage in public service during and after World War II.

This issue also includes a review by University of Washington's Noam Pianko of Lila Corwin Berman's *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton University Press, 2020). Pianko provides insight into Corwin Berman's assertion that American tax laws allowing private accumulation of charitable giving by Jewish communal organizations have played a pivotal role in the political influence of the American Jewish community. Corwin Berman's analysis provides a new lens for thinking about the relationship between the American state and American Jews.

The three contributions to *MJH's* "Interviews, Essays, and Personal Reflections" section each feature Michigan Jews working diligently to educate their communities on difficult topics. In "Reflections on Anti-Semitism and Discrimination," Levi Smith and Barbara Madgy Cohn interview Judge Avern Cohn about incidents of hate and intolerance he has encountered. From employment to housing to private clubs to the Detroit Jewish community's response to the anti-Semitism of "radio priest" Charles E. Coughlin and Henry Ford, Judge Cohn provides a firsthand account of both the progress made and the work yet to be done to achieve a more equitable and inclusive society.

In "Grand Rapids Remembers the Holocaust: A New Website," Robert Franciosi introduces the Holocaust remembrance project underway in Grand Rapids, Michigan. With the help of descendants, project developers hope to share the stories of local Holocaust survivors on a dedicated website. Among the features planned are interactive visual depictions of survivors' journeys to provide a deeper understanding of their experiences.

In "Shmoozing in G-d's Country," Carol Ellstein shares her experiences living a Jewish life in northern Michigan, where individual spirituality drawn from the region's natural beauty is strong, even though the nearest Jewish neighbor may be miles away. Ellstein often finds herself in the role of teacher, educating her community about Jewish beliefs and religious tolerance.

This issue's "Notable Jewish Michiganders in History" section features two of the state's well-known Jewish participants in public life. In "MWWMD Biography—Golda Malka Ginsburg Mayer Krolik: Historic Human Rights Champion, Journalist, and Activist," Jeannie Weiner highlights one of the many remarkable individuals from our Michigan



Women Who Made a Difference online gallery. As a humanitarian, organizer, writer, volunteer, and professional, Golda Krolik devoted her life to helping her community. It was only fitting that she was the 1977 winner of Jewish Detroit's most prestigious award, the Fred M. Butzel Memorial Award for Distinguished Community Service.

In the section's second essay, "Ezekiel Solomons: Reexamining Michigan's First Jewish Resident after 260 Years," JHSM Executive Director Catherine Cangany marks the anniversary of Solomons' arrival in Michigan with a new, eye-opening glimpse of his life. Although Solomons was the state's first Jewish participant in public life—provisioning the British army as a fur trader, participating with other merchants to open Michilimackinac's general store in 1779, and more—like most eighteenth-century fur traders and merchants, he also was a slaveholder. This revelation should not result in Solomons' removal from discussions of Michigan's Jewish history; rather it should serve as a call for our community to acknowledge this part of our history and learn from it.

The related educator materials in *MJH*'s "Youth History Education" section offer another perspective on Ezekiel Solomons' participation in public life: his role as philanthropist. A subscription signed by 71 residents of Michilimackinac in 1778, including Ezekiel Solomons and fellow Jewish trader Benjamin Lyons, pledging funds to bring a Catholic missionary to the fort, forms the basis for discussion questions and lesson plans.

The essays and poems in the inspirational "Creative Expressions" section, under the editorship of Joy Gaines-Friedler, focus on sacrifices made by Jewish participants in public life, both in the past and today. The pieces recognize that, although the work is difficult, contributing to the community typically brings with it a vow to do more.

This issue features just a few of the undoubtedly thousands, if not millions, of Michigan Jews who have made a difference by participating in public life. We hope these articles, interviews, essays, and poems serve as a starting point for conversations about your own family and friends who have made contributions, and gratitude for their achievements.



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FEATURE ARTICLE

A Communal Bridge: The *Detroit Jewish News*, the Detroit Jewish Welfare Federation, and the Detroit Jewish Community in 1942¹

Alan M. Hurvitz (z"l)

Introduction by Howard Lupovitch, PhD, Wayne State University

When Alan Hurvitz (z"l) walked into my office at Wayne State University six or seven years ago, his initial aim was to re-immense himself, after a long and successful career as an attorney, into the study of history—an endeavor he had enjoyed as a student. From the outset, it was clear to me and the other faculty who taught him that he had not only an interest and passion for history, but also the olfactory sense of history: the ability to sniff out a story that needs and deserves to be pieced together and told. Within a year, he had decided to pursue a master's degree and write his master's thesis about the Detroit Jewish community during the Second World War, using, among other primary sources, the recently archived *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* and *Detroit Jewish News*. He produced one of the most insightful and eloquently written master's theses that I have ever read.

Alan M. Hurvitz (1956-2018) received a BA in history from Wayne State University and a juris doctor, *summa cum laude*, from Wayne State University Law School. He spent his entire legal career of more than 30 years with the Detroit-based law firm Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn, LLP (now Honigman LLP), where he served in many leadership positions, including as a member of the board of directors and as managing partner of the firm's Oakland County office. He received many accolades and honors during his career.

When Hurvitz left the full-time practice of law, he decided to pursue his love of history, earning a master's degree at Wayne State University in 2017. Prior to his death, he was admitted to the university's doctoral program in the history department.

The topic of Hurvitz's master's thesis, excerpted here by Howard Lupovitch, PhD, derived from Hurvitz's close relationship with various Detroit Jewish communal agencies. Among others, he served on the board of the Anti-Defamation League for several years and on the board and executive committee of the Fresh Air Society (a Detroit Federation agency) for twelve years. He also was active at Congregation B'nai Moshe in West Bloomfield, Michigan.

Including his wife Ruth, Hurvitz is survived by his children, Steven (Tammy), Leah (Oren), and Danny, and grandchildren, Nathan, Aaron, and Asher.

¹ An unedited version of Alan Hurvitz's 2017 master's thesis is available at https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/oa_theses/566/.



In this article, excerpted from his master's thesis and edited for clarity and length, Hurvitz explores simultaneously two historical developments during the 1940s: the transition from the Chronicle to the Jewish News as the main purveyor of public information to the Detroit Jewish community, and the symbiotic working relationship that Jewish News editor Philip Slomovitz forged between his newspaper and the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit, today known as the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. The relationship between the Jewish News and Federation is the "communal bridge" that Hurvitz alludes to in the title: a firm connection between two central and vital community institutions that facilitates the seamless flow of information and support between them. Above all, he lays out a crucial disjunction in mid-twentieth-century-American Jewish history between the comparatively less effective efforts of American Jewry on a national scale during the war years and the more impactful efforts of individual Jewish communities like Detroit. As such, Hurvitz has provided an illuminating case study in Jewish communal organization, politics, and activism that can be a useful point of departure for comparable studies of other North American Jewish communities.

As Hurvitz shows, the changeover from the Chronicle to the Jewish News during the 1940s was more than simply one Jewish newspaper replacing another. The Chronicle was a useful repository of information about Jews in Detroit; the Jewish News, while a similar repository of facts, went a step further and provided analysis and critical views. In other words, the Chronicle was comparable to a mirror—a collection of reflected facts, names, places, events, etc. The Jewish News was more like a window, providing its readers—present and future—with a view of the life of Jewish Detroit.

At the heart of Hurvitz's analysis is Philip Slomovitz and the alliance he forged between the Jewish News and Federation: the leading Jewish newspaper and the leading communal organization in Detroit. Federation supported the Jewish News financially and encouraged Jews in Detroit to read it. The Jewish News helped Detroit Federation mobilize Jews to be more active and supportive of collective, and especially, philanthropic activities. In particular, through their alliance, these two vital entities worked together during and after the Second World War to mobilize congregations, organizations, and individuals to support Zionism, assist Jews languishing under Nazi rule, and oppose anti-Semitism.

As the crisis facing European Jews increased in severity in the early 1940s, Jews living in the United States were in the best position to address the challenges facing the worldwide Jewish community and to help Jews in other parts of the world. Jews in America did not experience war raging in their own backyard; they were, in the eyes of some historians,



not directly involved in the Holocaust, but sat on the sidelines while it was occurring. American Jews were among the first to recover from the Great Depression, propelling them into the middle class faster than their non-Jewish contemporaries. New immigration restrictions severely limited the arrival of Jewish immigrants into the United States, altering the character of the community as more acculturation occurred and Jews became more integrated into the cultural, social, and political mores of America. . . .²

Despite the advantages enjoyed by American Jews, . . . historians have argued that infighting and lack of coordination hampered efforts of American Jewish leadership, both individually and organizationally, to save the Jews of Europe and otherwise promote Jewish interests during World War II. Yet, historians often ignore or minimize the important work that American Jews did in their local communities during the war.³

The Jews of Detroit are an example of the dichotomy between the perceived ineffectual national leadership of American Jewry during the war and successful local leadership. Despite the fact that dissonance and fractionalization affected Detroit Jews, during the war they organized record-breaking fundraising campaigns; served in leadership roles in both communal and civic organizations, including wartime organizations; organized and led institutions to service those in need in their community and abroad; and fought anti-Semitism. In addition, leaders in the Detroit Jewish community coordinated efforts to inform about the conditions of European Jews, and to keep Jewish Detroiters apprised of vitally important issues.

Detroit Jewish leaders' ability to coordinate, organize, educate, and inform was greatly enhanced in 1942 when the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit formed a strategic alliance with a newly established English-language Jewish newspaper, the *Detroit Jewish News*, founded by Philip Slomovitz in early 1942. . . . Slomovitz had joined the staff of the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* in the early 1920s and spent most of the next two decades there, building his reputation in the Jewish community and rising to become the editor of what was then the only English-language Jewish newspaper in Michigan.

The *Chronicle* had been in publication for more than 25 years when Slomovitz started the *Jewish News*. Many mainstream Jewish leaders in Detroit had called for a quality community organ that would engage in ethical business practices, report fairly on local, national, and international

²Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 206; Henry Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream 1920-1945, The Jewish People in America Series* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 259; Haskell Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?: The Public Response of American Jews to The Holocaust, 1938-1944* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1985), 30.

³ Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 220; Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?*, 11.



events, and inform its readership on issues of importance to the Jewish community, all while promoting the work of Federation and its constituent organizations. Slomovitz's undertaking was buoyed by more than three dozen prominent community members, who agreed to serve on the paper's advisory board. This support made the *Jewish News* the newspaper "of record." . . .

The *Jewish News*, as a popular, centrist, community-based newspaper, was a valuable communicative tool for Detroit's leading Jewish organizations. . . . The alliance with Federation provided Federation's leaders with an effective platform to promote their agenda of civic and community commitment and social services. [At the same time, it] provided Slomovitz the opportunity (and competitive advantage over the *Chronicle*) to champion his worldview of Judaism and achieve his stated goals of fighting anti-Semitism, advocating for Zionism and other causes, and educating his readership about local, national, and international events. Slomovitz also used the *Jewish News* to advocate for communal involvement and to keep Jews and non-Jews fully informed as to matters of importance to Jews. His claim in the first issue that he would provide that information without partisanship and present all points of view did not prove always to be true, but he still established the *Jewish News* as the best source in Detroit for news and opinions about issues affecting the Jewish community locally, nationally, and internationally, and demonstrated that a strong newspaper could counter the prevailing theme of dissension in American Jewish communal life by providing a reputable community voice. . . .⁴

In *Harmony & Dissonance: Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967*, Sidney Bolkosky asserts that "on the eve of European Jewry's destruction, American Jews presented a bewildered and disunited front," and that Jews in Detroit remained divided in the face of the tragedy besetting European Jewry.⁵ National Jewish leadership may have been ineffectual, but, local leadership, at least in Detroit in 1942, proved effective, particularly through the lenses of fundraising, combatting anti-Semitism, promoting Zionism, informing about conditions in Europe, and not encouraging factionalism. The success of that leadership was in part due to the unique relationship between mainstream Detroit Jewish community leaders and the *Jewish News*.

The Detroit Jewish Community: 1900-1942

The Detroit Jewish community mirrored many of the characteristics of American Jewish communities elsewhere. . . . In Detroit, like in other Midwestern cities, social status and ethnic background may have divided the Jewish residents, but most Jews of all classes and backgrounds tended

⁴ "The Jewish News—Our Platform," *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), March 27, 1942.

⁵ Sidney Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance: Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 177.



to live together either in the same neighborhoods or in neighborhoods very close to each other. . . . During the two decades leading up to World War II, Jews in Detroit continually moved out of the city's Hastings Street neighborhood to areas north and west, settling into two adjoining neighborhoods less than a mile east of Oakland, known as "Twelfth Street" and "Dexter." Congregation Shaarey Zedek straddled the two neighborhoods. While 60 percent of Detroit Jews lived in the Hastings Street neighborhood in 1920, by 1935 just over 10 percent lived there, and 80 percent lived in the Dexter and Twelfth Street neighborhoods. . . .⁶

The congestion of the Jewish population meant that the poor were not adequately supported. Concerned about inefficiencies and overcrowding, the new charismatic rabbi of Temple Beth El, Leo M. Franklin, proposed that all of the Jewish philanthropic agencies in Detroit unite and form one unified federation. Four of the organizations agreed to federate and became the founding agencies of United Jewish Charities in 1899.⁷ The objective of the federation was to increase efficiency, avoid duplication, consolidate fundraising, and in general improve services to the poor. In 1926 the leaders of United Jewish Charities formed Detroit's Jewish Federation as a more formal and efficient way to manage the agencies under its umbrella. By 1938 Detroit's Federation was probably the sixth largest in the country, but it collected more donations and attracted more volunteers and clients for its services than those in larger American cities.⁸

Detroit Jewish agency leaders also had a rich history of participating in secular, civic affairs. For many years Simon Heavenrich, a founder of the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society and an officer and board member of Temple Beth El, served as commissioner and president of the Board of Poor Commissioners, a city agency formed to help impoverished Detroiters. Martin Butzel, also a board member and officer of Temple Beth El, was on the board of directors of the Detroit Association of Charities and served as the city of Detroit public lighting commissioner. David Simons, the first president of United Jewish Charities, was a member of the public lighting commission and was also one of the first elected to the new nine-man Detroit City Council. . . . Fred Butzel, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Detroit Federation in 1942, . . . was active in so many other civic

⁶ Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 32, cites a 1935 study of Detroit Jewry by Henry J. Meyer.

⁷ The four agencies that formed United Jewish Charities were the Beth El Hebrew Relief Society, the Jewish Relief Society, the Hebrew Ladies' Sewing Society, and the Self-Help Circle. See "History of United Jewish Charities," unpublished manuscript, Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives (hereafter Simons Archives), Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit Records (hereafter Federation Records), Box 120, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI (hereafter Reuther Archives).

⁸ The five larger Federations listed were New York, Cleveland, Chicago, Baltimore, and Boston.



organizations (including organizing the Boy Scouts in Detroit) that the *Detroit Free Press* named him Detroit's Most Valuable Citizen in 1947. . . .⁹

Established German-American Jews created, funded, and staffed most of the Detroit Jewish communal organizations serving the newly arriving Eastern European Jewish population, but tensions built between the two populations. Initially, Detroit Jews sympathized with the immigrants because of the horror of the pogroms and the conditions in Russia. As migration increased, however, many Jewish Detroiters became apprehensive. The press called the immigrants "an incursion and threatening tide." Fred Butzel recalled that many felt the need to Americanize the Eastern Europeans for the long-term residents' protection. . . .¹⁰

Tensions increased among disparate factions of Detroit Jews, even among members of Temple Beth El, the oldest, largest, and most prestigious synagogue in Detroit. . . . Although most of the members of Temple Beth El were prosperous, established, German Jews, the membership divided deeply over the issue of Zionism. When Rabbi Franklin, an avowed non-Zionist, retired in 1941, the popular associate rabbi and active Zionist, Leon Fram, did not become the head rabbi, an act that infuriated many Zionist-leaning members of the congregation. The controversy over Rabbi Fram led a faction (including the president of Beth El) to leave and start a new synagogue, Temple Israel, hiring Rabbi Fram as their first rabbi. . . . During this time period, there was no unified Jewish community in Detroit, but rather "several communities each almost hermetically sealed with very little continued interchange among them." The antagonism between them allowed large numbers of Jews to remain un-aculturated. . . .¹¹

By 1942 . . . [t]he country was learning to adapt to a wartime setting, creating additional tensions and burdens. Jews were caricatured as desiring to avoid military service, but in fact the percentage of Jews in the service was much greater than in the general population. In Detroit between nine and ten thousand Jewish men and women uprooted their lives for military service during the war. . . . Detroit, as the "Arsenal of Democracy," experienced a rapid increase in population as laborers came from across

⁹ *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, April 12, 1946, as cited in Phyllis Lederer, "A Study of Jewish Influences in Detroit to 1914" (master's thesis, Wayne State University, 1947), 80; "Sayings and Doings," *Detroit Free Press*, April 14, 1895 (announcing retirement of Martin Butzel from the public lighting commission); Avorn Cohn, "A Century of Local Jews in Politics: 1850s to the 1950s," *Michigan Jewish History* 39 (Fall 1999): 4. Also, David Heineman, who was active in many of the Jewish charitable organizations, served as Chief Assistant City Attorney for Detroit and in that role arranged to buy the land for both the Detroit Public Library and the Detroit Institute of Arts, as well as arranged for a \$750,000 endowment from Andrew Carnegie for the Library. Lederer, "A Study of Jewish Influences," 87. Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance*, 336

¹⁰ Robert A. Rockaway, *The Jews of Detroit: From the Beginning, 1762-1914* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 58; "Detroit's Social Engineer Reminisces as told to William I. Boxerman," *Jewish Social Service Quarterly* XVII, nos. 3 and 4, 275, located in Simons Archives, Small Collections, Box 14, Butzel folder 14-31, Reuther Archives, 288.

¹¹ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 15, 1942; Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance*, 272-73.



the country to work in its various factories and war industries, causing housing shortages and adding to the workload of various charitable and social service agencies in the city.¹²

As early as January 1942, Isidore Sobeloff, executive director of Federation, reported that various constituent agencies already felt the effects of the war, both in terms of programming and finance. By July the Detroit Jewish Community Council was struggling with creating organizational activities to support civilian defense and other auxiliaries. Jews became vulnerable to new threats of anti-Semitism, as many Americans blamed the war, and the fact that their loved ones had to fight in it, on Jews. Additionally, as more information about the plight of European Jewry became known, 1942 was a year in which it became painfully clear that what was happening to the Jews of Europe was unlike anything that had plagued Jews before. . . .¹³ To add to the dissonance, in 1942 the publishers and editor of the *Chronicle* (Detroit's only English-language Jewish newspaper and the sole news source about Jewish affairs for those who could not read the 26 Yiddish newspapers) parted ways under what appeared to be acrimonious circumstances. . . .

Philip Slomovitz's Early Life and Career at the *Chronicle*

Although most large Jewish communities had an English-language Jewish newspaper before the twentieth century, one did not exist in Detroit until 1916¹⁴ That year, New Yorker Anton Kaufmann saw a business opportunity, hiring Samuel J. Rhodes as the newspaper's first editor. . . .¹⁵ Some time in the early 1920s, Joseph Cummins, who had acquired the

¹² 550,000 Jews served in the armed forces of the United States during World War II; 11,000 were killed, 7,000 of whom died in combat. Approximately 26,000 Jews received citations for valor and merit, including three Congressional Medals of Honor—one of which was awarded posthumously to Raymond Zussman, who was born in Hamtramck, Michigan, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/statistics-on-jewish-american-soldiers-in-world-war-ii>; <http://1940census.archives.gov>; "American Jewish Year Book Statistics of Jews, Table VII, List of Cities of United States Having 1,000 Jews or More, 1937," http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1941_1942_9_Statistics.pdf; Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 221; Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed A Generation* (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004). Reprint of Alexander N. Kohanski, "Effects of War on the Jewish Community—A Survey of Studies Made by Twenty-Three Communities," *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (December 1943), as found in Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 556, Folder 2, Reuther Archives.

¹³ Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Welfare Federation, January 9, 1940, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 82, Folder 4, Reuther Archives; Jewish Community Council of Detroit to members, July 2, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 537, Folder 6, Reuther Archives.

¹⁴ Another English-Jewish newspaper, *The Jewish American*, was published in Detroit at the turn of the twentieth century, but quickly became the official publication of Temple Beth El and reflected the views and activities of Temple Beth El. *The Jewish American* was discontinued before the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* started publishing. Exchange between Jan Durecki, archivist at the Franklin Archives, and the author, dated April 5, 2016.

¹⁵ "Chronicle Celebrates 31st Anniversary," *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, January 11, 1946.



Chronicle from Kaufmann, hired Philip Slomovitz to be the paper's editor. Slomovitz was born in 1896 in Nowogrodek in the Russian province of Minsk. His family moved to the Russian city of Lida, where he earned a diploma from the government-sponsored Russian-Jewish school, completing the equivalent of a high-school education at thirteen. His family immigrated to the United States in 1910 and settled in New Jersey, where he became deeply interested in politics. His uncles were politicians there. Slomovitz would attend political meetings (held bilingually in English and Yiddish) with them, where he met his local congressmen. Only in his early teens at the time, he convinced one of the congressmen to send him the *Congressional Record*, which he received and read for the next 60 years. He also was one of the national organizers of Young Judea, a Zionist youth organization. He later claimed that he spent all of his spare change to attend Zionist conferences or buy Zionist literature. He spent a year at Rhodes Preparatory School in New York, and then enrolled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. . . .¹⁶

Slomovitz's time at the University of Michigan set him on his life's path. He found his love of journalism and became the night editor of the *Michigan Daily*. He also continued his close association with Jewish life both by serving as president of the Menorah Society (the predecessor to the Hillel campus organizations) and by cofounding a Zionist student organization. After college he took a job with the *Detroit News* as a reporter on the copy desk. He also contributed weekly to the *Detroit News* religious page, writing articles about the Jewish National Fund and other Zionist organizations and topics. Once he started working, he spent his spare and leisure time organizing young men and women for the Zionist cause.¹⁷

After two years with the *Detroit News*, Slomovitz began working for the *Chronicle*. A few years later, he went to New York to edit two different Jewish publications. He came back to Detroit to edit a new English-language Jewish newspaper, the *Jewish Herald*. It offered comprehensive coverage of the Detroit Jewish community, and was full of ideas and idealism, but stayed in business for only a short time before the *Chronicle*'s owners bought the competitor and closed it. Slomovitz became editor of the *Chronicle* once again and stayed there until 1942. During his time there, Slomovitz gained a national reputation and became a Detroit Jewish communal leader. He founded the Detroit branch of the Jewish National Fund and held of-

¹⁶ Slomovitz biographical information comes from either Robert A. Rockaway, "To Speak Without Malice: An Interview with Philip Slomovitz, Jewish Journalist," *American Jewish History* 80, no.1 (October 1990), or Alan Hitsky, "The End of an Era," *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), February 19, 1993.

¹⁷ Slomovitz to Rabbi Max Weine, November 7, 1977, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 120, Philip Slomovitz Letters folder, Reuther Archives.



fices in the local and national chapters of many communal organizations, such as the Zionist Organization of America and the American Jewish Congress. Always an advocate of Jewish education, he was instrumental in establishing the United Hebrew Schools of Detroit.¹⁸

He founded the American Jewish Press Association in 1942 and served as its president for the first ten years of its existence. He was also a founder of the World Federation of Jewish Journalists and was a vice president of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. He was a born leader and organizer, driven and independent, and even though he was legally blind for most of his life, he typed his own material until he was 92. Perhaps because he came to Detroit as a young adult, he did not associate solely with other Eastern European Jews, but made lifelong friends with a diverse range of Jews in the city, including many of the leaders of Detroit Federation and other important Jewish institutions.¹⁹



Figure 1: After discovering his love of journalism while a student at the University of Michigan, Philip Slomovitz went on to found the Detroit Jewish News in 1942 and became a leading voice in Detroit's Jewish community. (JHSM collections.)

¹⁸ Ilyne Mendelson and Ronald Siegel, "The Jewish Press in Michigan 1900-1973" (class paper, Library of State of Michigan, Lansing, MI, 1973), 11. While Slomovitz maintained that the *Chronicle* bought the *Herald* to keep him as an editor, other versions of the story suggest that either the *Herald* owners wanted to leave town or that the *Chronicle* was merely trying to end competition. For varying views, cf. Rockaway, "To Speak Without Malice," 8, and "Chronicle Celebrates 31st Anniversary," *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, January 11, 1946.

¹⁹ Rockaway, "To Speak Without Malice," 8; Hitsky, "The End of an Era."



The *Chronicle's* Editorial Content in the Late 1930s and Early 1940s

In some ways, issues of the *Chronicle* during the late 1930s and early 1940s were not much different from early issues of the *Jewish News*. The similarities are unsurprising, given that Slomovitz was the editor of the *Chronicle* during this period. On the other hand, there were certain viewpoints and news articles in these *Chronicle* issues suggesting that Slomovitz may not have had free rein over the paper. For example, the first issue published after Kristallnacht, the two-day riots in Germany in 1938 perpetuating violent and murderous acts against Jews and destroying Jewish businesses, had a front-page article about a seventeen-year-old Jew who assassinated a German diplomat in Paris. Although the assassination was the pretext for the riots that swept through Germany the next two days, the article mentioned little about the riots or the damage to the Jewish community in Germany.²⁰

Although the news reporting and editorial content may not have reflected Slomovitz's opinions entirely, in other ways the paper did focus on issues important to him. Slomovitz aggressively fought against anti-Semitism: he used the *Chronicle* to run numerous editorials and articles exposing anti-Semites and anti-Semitic activities. The *Chronicle* regularly reported on "radio priest" Charles E. Coughlin's anti-Semitic broadcasts and the efforts to stop him. It also covered Henry Ford during his anti-Semitic period, through his 1927 apology and retraction, and his announcement after the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor that anti-Semitism is "un-American." It published details about an East Coast radio station being denied a license because of anti-Semitic content. And it criticized a *Saturday Evening Post* article (written by a prominent Jew) that could be read as anti-Semitic.

Many of the *Chronicle's* issues included articles about the Zionist movement and the movement to create a "Jewish army" under British command, both causes dear to Slomovitz. . . . The January 2, 1942, issue included an opinion piece on the front page supporting the notion of turning a portion of the Dominican Republic into a Jewish settlement. The author, a Jewish Zionist philanthropist, acknowledged that many Zionists would criticize his idea for its distraction from the momentum behind creating a Jewish national homeland in Palestine. He was undoubtedly right. . . .²¹

²⁰ *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, November 11, 1938, 1.

²¹ *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, issues of November 11, 1938; December 12, 1941; January 2, 1942; January 23, 1942; and January 30, 1942.



The Founding of the *Detroit Jewish News*

Philip Slomovitz left the Chronicle in February 1942. . . . He “rallied his resources, rallied his community and some of its biggest names” to start the Jewish News that same year. . . .²² At the time, the Chronicle had been the established English-language Jewish newspaper in Detroit for more than a quarter of a century. Yet, investors risked not only their monetary investment, but also their community relationships by endorsing a competing newspaper and its strongly pro-Zionist position. . . . Despite his lofty goals of fairly reporting on all aspects of the diverse Jewish community, Slomovitz represented mainstream Jewish Detroiters’ thinking. A portion of the community was sympathetic to socialist or communist policies, but Slomovitz was not interested in pursuing those points of view. . . .²³

Slomovitz had good relationships with several important national political figures, including Michigan Senator Prentiss Brown, US Treasury Secretary Robert Morgenthau, and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, with whom he corresponded. He also had friendships with Zionist leaders Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise. . . .²⁴

Additionally, he counted Detroit’s leaders as supporters. Fred Butzel, a Jewish News investor and board member, and perhaps the most important communal and civic leader at the time, endorsed the paper in its first issue with a front-page quote: “A Well Published Jewish Paper In Detroit Is Long Overdue. . . .”²⁵ Many minutes of Federation’s governing bodies spoke of the need for an English-language Jewish newspaper with sound editorial policies that was responsive to community needs. . . . A subscription solicitation letter that Slomovitz sent to the Jewish community in March 1942 stated that an English-language Jewish newspaper needed to be more than a gossip source and should keep its readership fully informed of “what is transpiring in the world at large, in American Jewry, and in the principal communal agencies functioning in our midst.” He claimed that until then, information necessary to understand the Jewish position

²² Alan Hitsky, “In the Beginning: A Major Community Newspaper Is Born at a Time of Adversity,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), March 27, 1992. [Editor’s note: Hurvitz indicates in his full thesis that prominent Jewish Detroiters Walter Fields, Maurice Schwartz, and Leonard Simons, among others, were instrumental in helping Slomovitz start the *Jewish News*.]

²³ Slomovitz to “Morris,” undated, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 120, JWF/*Jewish News* folder, Reuther Archives.

²⁴ Senator Prentiss Brown to Slomovitz, July 30, 1942, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 120, Letters to Slomovitz folder 5, Reuther Archives; Slomovitz to Treasury Secretary Robert Morgenthau, undated, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 120, Letters to Slomovitz folder 7, Reuther Archives; Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 10, 1942; Abba Hillel Silver to Slomovitz, January 25, 1945, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 117, Abba Hillel Silver folder, Reuther Archives; Rockaway, “To Speak Without Malice,” 14.

²⁵ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), March 27, 1942, 1.



on various issues was not accessible to Jews in Detroit. The *Jewish News*, as a community newspaper, would place service to the community over profit—very comforting words to mainstream Jewish leaders. . . .²⁶

The editorial direction of the *Chronicle*, at least as represented by various opinion pieces printed in the seven months after Slomovitz left, confirms why mainstream leadership threw their support behind the *Jewish News*. In addition to supporting a bi-national solution in Palestine, anathema to mainstream Zionists, the *Chronicle* published several editorials advocating for a federation of European countries—in effect, a United States of Europe, as opposed to balkanizing or otherwise weakening Germany. It also offered several pieces opining that the German people were as much the victims of the Nazis as other Europeans and should not be collectively punished. . . .²⁷

In addition to the quality of Slomovitz's work, his platform, and his many relationships, *Jewish News* investors were most desirous of maintaining a public forum for Slomovitz's advocacy on various Jewish issues Slomovitz saw his editorial role as a defender of American ideals and Jewish traditions. He wanted to use his editor's desk to advocate strongly for those ideals. He believed that a newspaper must ardently urge effective action. He maintained many English-language Jewish newspapers verged on failure because of their wishy-washy editorial stances: "Wake up!" he urged Detroiters, borrowing from a Jewish Press Service news release in praise of another aggressive periodical: "This is the age of fighting—not whining—Jews . . ."²⁸

Since the 1930s, Federation had published its own monthly publication Slomovitz had served on the editorial committee.²⁹ By 1942 those days were over. . . . Some Federation leaders. . . . proposed entering into an arrangement with the *Jewish News* to allow the newspaper to serve as its official news organ. . . . Federation's executive committee reviewed and approved the proposed relationship on June 26, 1942, . . . merging its internal newspaper with the *Jewish News*. As the official newspaper of Federation, the *Jewish News* would include all articles and advertising submitted by Federation leaders and would keep Federation's donors informed about all Federation agencies' activities, in addition to including

²⁶ Minutes of Meeting of Jewish Welfare Federation Board of Governors, January 18, 1944, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 13, Folder 4, Reuther Archives; Minutes of Meeting of Executive Committee of Jewish Welfare Federation, June 26, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 82, Folder 4, Reuther Archives; Slomovitz to "Dear Friend," undated, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 547, Folder 7, Reuther Archives.

²⁷ Editorials, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, issues of May 1, 1942; June 19, 1942; June 26, 1942; August 21, 1942; August 28, 1942; September 4, 1942; and October 2, 1942.

²⁸ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), June 26, 1942.

²⁹ Editorial, *Federation News*, July 1933, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 122, Folder 1, Reuther Archives.



pieces on Jewish life and current events that members of the executive committee thought important to disseminate.

The terms of the merger included agreements that the *Jewish News* would provide each Federation donor who did not personally subscribe to the *Jewish News* with an issue at least once a month; in return the *Jewish News* would receive fifty cents per donor annually. The *Jewish News* would publish Federation's news or ads without charge. And to the extent the *Jewish News* made a net profit, the amount would be offset against the fifty-cent donor fees. . . . Additionally, [by virtue of a voting trust agreement], [Federation's] executive committee intended to exercise control over *Jewish News* policies. . . . An editorial board, comprised of Slomovitz and members of Federation . . . , would set the policies for the *Jewish News*. . . .³⁰

That Federation had such control over a theoretically independent and community-based newspaper raised eyebrows and criticism. But receiving Federation's financial support was not a new concept. In many communities where the English-language Jewish press had failed or was financially insolvent, the local Federation would either take over the paper or provide significant financial support. Some criticized such arrangements, concerned the *Jewish News* would serve only as another arm of Federation. On the other hand, as historian Jonathan Sarna has written, "Between a bland paper and none at all, the former was preferable."³¹

The voting trust arrangement clearly gave Federation great influence over policies at the *Jewish News*. . . . Despite the formal governance structure and Federation leaders' assertions that Federation had the right to control the newspaper, Slomovitz claimed he never felt constrained and never was restricted. This assertion would seem inapposite to the facts, but even without the voting trust arrangement, it was unlikely Slomovitz would have printed an article critical of Federation or its associated agencies, as he did not believe in airing community organizations' "dirty laundry" in print. By nature he avidly supported Federation and its constituent agencies. . . .³²

The owners of the *Chronicle* . . . quickly challenged the [arrangement]. . . . Some leading Federation members tried to bring peace by brokering

³⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Jewish Welfare Federation, June 26, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 82, Folder 4, Reuther Archives; Minutes of Joint Meeting of Board of Governors of the Jewish Welfare Federation and the Board of Directors of the Detroit Service Group, June 29, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 13, Folder 4, Reuther Archives.

³¹ Jonathan D. Sarna, "The History of the Jewish Press in North America," *North American Jewish Press*, 1994 Alexander Brin Forum, 5, <http://www.brandeis.edu/hornstein/sarna/americanjewishcultureandscholarship/historyofthejewishpress.pdf>.

³² Rockaway, "To Speak Without Malice," 9; see also, e.g., Slomovitz to Isidore Sobeloff, October 7, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 547, Folder 7, Reuther Archives; Slomovitz to Sobeloff, December 19, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 547, Folder 7, Reuther Archives; Butzel to Slomovitz, December 24, 1942, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 23, Fred Butzel folder, Reuther Archives.



a merger between the *Jewish News* and the *Chronicle*. . . . Following failed merger talks [and several years of other unsuccessful efforts, *Chronicle* owner Joseph Cummins] decided to air his grievances in public. . . . Beginning in late June 1945, . . . [he ran in the *Chronicle*] front-page headlines and articles blasting the arrangement for eight weeks in a row. . . . Within months [following this] failed campaign, Cummins sold the *Chronicle* to an outside party.

The first Federation-endorsed issue of the *Jewish News* was not published until September 25, 1942, but from the beginning of the newspaper's publication, Federation had an ally in Slomovitz. A comparison of various issues of the *Jewish News* and the *Chronicle* during 1942 reveals that the *Jewish News* was the better vehicle for the goals desired by Federation: comprehensive information about local, national, and international events affecting the Jewish community, a mainstream editorial policy favoring Zionism and emphasizing the need to be both a good American and a good Jew during the war, and a large amount of publicity and information about various programs and fundraising efforts effectuated by Federation and its constituent agencies. The *Chronicle* was disadvantaged by its inability to access national and international news reporting agencies. But in any event, some of its editorial policies and content choices would have created discomfort among some mainstream Jewish leadership in Detroit.

From its inception, the *Jewish News* reported and editorialized about national and international topics of Jewish interest, such as anti-Semitism, Zionism, the creation of a Jewish army, and the tragedy unfolding in Europe, as well as local topics, such as anti-Semites Charles Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith, Detroiters serving in the war and on the home front, and, most of all, Federation and its fundraising efforts. . . .

Federation's 1942 Fundraising Campaigns

Following America's formal entry into World War II, local leaders of both Detroit's Federation and other American Federations recognized that their 1942 fundraising campaigns would be very different. Campaign literature promised that every dollar spent would be "aimed to promote the well-being of our country," either directly for the war effort or to support essential civilian services. . . .³³

The 1942 Allied Jewish Campaign, Federation's annual fundraising effort, received both front-page and inside-page coverage in the *Jewish*

³³ "Financing of Jewish Programs in 1942: A Report to the 1942 Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds," committee report, February 1, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 336, Folder 9, Reuther Archives; "The Home Front: Local, Regional and National," AJC report, undated, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 336, Folder 9, Reuther Archives; "1942 Campaign Information: Detroit Allied Jewish Campaign," internal report, undated, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 336, Folder 9, Reuther Archives.



News every week during the campaign season, even though it occurred well before the Federation/*Jewish News* relationship was formalized. The April 10, 1942, issue covered the official campaign opening and included, among other coverage: a front-page story and large photo of Henry Wineman, the 1942 campaign executive committee chairman; several articles about the campaign, including notices of two rallies; an editorial about Zionist leader and campaign speaker Abba Hillel Silver (“the first major expression of community solidarity for our great fund-raising effort”); and a half page devoted to how the collected funds would be allocated. . . .

A number of the articles and editorials were written with Federation strategies specifically in mind. . . . Guest editorials and articles connected the campaign to the war and patriotism. . . . For example, guest editorialist Isidore Sobeloff warned readers to guard against becoming so absorbed in the “grim task of destroying our enemies that we forget to keep our own house in order.” He reminded readers that the campaign was both a Jewish and an American cause, a democratic cause, and humanity’s cause. Even guest editorials not directly related to the campaign supported it. At the end of a guest editorial about a European Jewish leader who had died in prison, Fred Butzel added the tag line, “Is there any limit to our obligation to help in this emergency?” . . .³⁴ The *Jewish News* continued to feature the 1942 campaign even after its conclusion. The back pages of the June 26 and July 31 issues urged contributors to pay their pledges. . . .³⁵

Many Federation members unexpectedly became involved in a second major campaign in 1942 when Federation leadership agreed to merge the annual campaign into the “war chest” for the duration of the war. Detroit’s Federation was one of the first in the country to join the local war chest. . . .³⁶ Many communities across the United States had created war chests or similar umbrella organizations to amalgamate the many foreign and local relief appeals for money into one large campaign each fall, with the proceeds raised then allocated among the various participating agencies, in much the same manner as Detroit’s Federation had allocated contributions raised by the general campaign.

In Detroit Wineman, Butzel, and others relied upon the *Jewish News* to inform Detroit Jews about the war chest, how it would coordinate with the recently completed 1942 campaign, and why donors were asked again to dig deeply into their pockets. Federation leaders elected to make the war chest the focal point of the first Federation-backed issue of the *Jewish*

³⁴ “For Victory on Every Front,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 8, 1942; “Julius Seligsohn—Martyr,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 15, 1942.

³⁵ “Can Money Be Spent for Relief Today?,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 10, 1942.

³⁶ At the time that Detroit Federation joined, only the Federations in Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Kansas City had joined their communal War Chests. Sobeloff to Maurice J. Sievers, September 30, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 583, Folder 1, Reuther Archives.



News, published on September 25, 1942. It included comprehensive coverage of the war chest drive, scheduled to start a month later. . . .³⁷

Slomovitz called the war chest the greatest mercy campaign on record in his editorials. He observed that the Jewish community owed a responsibility to “the millions of Hitler’s victims.” He asserted that American communities could not be divided into different groups providing relief to the war victims. Undivided loyalty was needed. As such, all organizations should avoid conducting appeals for funds until the end of the war chest drive. Some Federation members, both locally and in other communities, worried that participation in the war chest might have a negative impact upon relations between Jews and non-Jews. But Slomovitz saw the war chest’s opportunity to improve those relations. He felt the drive was “certain to bring us closer to our [non-Jewish] neighbors.” . . .³⁸

When it was apparent that the war chest drive would be successful (campaign leaders projected that it would raise more than \$1 million over its stated goal [of \$5.8 million]), Slomovitz included a page 2 story about the drive’s success and its meaning: “as Jews, the campaign has served as the greatest, the most favorable instrument for better community relationships in the history of Detroit. . . .”³⁹

Detroit Jews participated in one other major civic monetary drive that year: war bonds. As was the case with the war chest, many Federation leaders and war-chest leaders also took leadership positions in the war-bond drive. The *Jewish News* carried numerous editorials and cartoons urging readers to buy war bonds. For example, a cartoon of an open Bible in the August 14, 1942, issue was captioned “To Keep an Open Bible—The War against Paganism—Nazism and Fascism—Buy War Bonds.” . . .

In July Franklin Hills Country Club, the oldest Jewish country club in Detroit, started a unique bond drive. Members undertook a “Beat the Axis” dinner party. Each attendee had to buy at least a \$1,000 war bond. The club raised \$365,000 at the affair, which the club president claimed was the “only event of its kind in the country.” A month later, Knollwood Country Club, another local Jewish country club, increased the stakes by holding an affair to raise \$1 million for war bonds. It enlisted the *Jewish News* to lend its support and publicize the event. Slomovitz wrote in an editorial that “the eyes of the Axis are upon us—we dare not fail.” The affair raised \$1.5 million. . . .⁴⁰

³⁷ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), September 25, 1942.

³⁸ Editorials, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of September 25, 1942, and October 2, 1942; Samuel Gerson, Executive Director of the Jewish Welfare Fund of St. Louis, to Sobeloff, September 3, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 583, Folder 1, Reuther Archives; James I. Ellmann to Executive Committee of Jewish Community Council, memorandum, August 6, 1942, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 537, Folder 6, Reuther Archives.

³⁹ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), November 20, 1942.

⁴⁰ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 1, 1942.



Anti-Semitism

A portion of the funds raised by the campaign each year was earmarked to fight domestic anti-Semitism through organizations like the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League, and, on a local Detroit level, the Jewish Community Council. American Jews experienced a drastic growth in anti-Semitism from the 1920s to the 1940s. The timing of the rise was particularly sensitive for Jewish Americans because they were constantly afraid that if the violent anti-Semitism occurring in Germany could happen in that highly cultured country, it also could happen in America. Fears of spurring anti-Semitism often drove the way Jews viewed other issues of importance to the Jewish community. For example, despite the fact that European Jews desperately needed to emigrate, even such a progressive Jewish leader as Rabbi Leo M. Franklin believed in immigration restrictions, because to increase the number of Jewish immigrants could lead to conflicts and misunderstandings. He asserted that new Jewish immigrants should not adversely affect the status of established American Jews, and that if America could not absorb them, efforts should be made to find other places for them to settle. . . .⁴¹

Slomovitz was deeply invested in the war against anti-Semitism. He wrote numerous editorials and articles while at the *Chronicle* identifying its sources and advocating aggressive action to combat it. He continued his battle at the *Jewish News*, and it became a repeated theme in the paper. Federation leaders, believing that educating readers about anti-Semitic activities was part of their core mission, fully supported Slomovitz's efforts.

Both the *Jewish News* and the *Chronicle* would run articles about anti-Semitism. But an incident involving the *Saturday Evening Post* reveals the philosophical differences between the two newspapers on the appropriate way of addressing the issue. The *Saturday Evening Post* ran an article by a Reform Jew, Milton Mayer, "The Case Against the Jews." The article was highly critical of American Jews, particularly those who attempted to assimilate completely. Mayer asserted, among other things, that tremendous anti-Semitism in tenement areas had arisen because of "the Jew's tenement profiteering," claiming "there are few employers as conscienceless as the Jewish sweatshop operator. . . ." He concluded that the inevitable collapse of America after the war "will remind a bitter and bewildered nation that 'the Jews got us into the war.'" The article created a sensation and many periodicals and writers responded to it, including Irving Howe, who quipped that, at best, Mayer should have called his article, "The Case Against Some Jewish Members of the Capitalist Class."⁴²

⁴¹ Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 208; Lloyd P. Gartner, "Immigration and the Formation of American Jewry: 1840-1925," *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* 11, no. 1/2 (1968): 226; Bolkosky, *Harmony and Dissonance*, 255, citing Dr. Franklin's sermons.

⁴² Irving Howe, "The *Saturday Evening Post* Slanders the Jewish People," *Labor Action* 6, no. 14 (April 1942): 4.



Both newspapers carried a good deal of coverage about the story, including front-page articles on April 3, 1942. In a short editorial the same day, Slomovitz wrote in the *Jewish News*:

But the final upshot, in the article by Milton Mayer, is of a nature to arouse the indignation of all fair-minded Americans. The young Chicagoan, presented as a “modern Jeremiah,” assumes to display the cloak of a Prophet in a spirit which gives the impression that there are no decent people, and as if Jews and non-Jews alike are bad. A person who generalizes has not the right to judge. Milton Mayer generalized in his article. He did not differentiate between the good and the bad, the creative and the speculative—either among Christians or Jews. To him, it is a case of bad Jews learning bad examples from Christians who are equally bad. We consider it poor judgment. We look upon his article as an unfair attempt to wash dirty linen in public and to drag out the dirt that is non-existent. In the main, people are not evil-minded or foul in their practices. It is the exception to the rule that makes for the undesirable in life. But when the Saturday Evening Post provides a platform for one who generalizes as if there were little good left in American life, this important magazine renders a disservice to all Americans. . . . Simply because a trio of Jewish writers were called upon to produce the sensational Post series does not exonerate its editors from having committed a blunder which is highly insulting in its very nature.”⁴³

The *Chronicle* editorial the same day was two full columns and refuted Mayer’s charges line by line in an articulate, measured fashion. While Slomovitz viewed the issue as a black-and-white case of blatant anti-Semitism, the *Chronicle* editors took a more nuanced view, and called Mayer a gifted writer in a later editorial.

When the firestorm continued for over six weeks, the *Chronicle* defended Mayer in yet another editorial, saying that there was no reason that his article should have been met with such “vituperation and billingsgate.” The editorial argued that Mayer was not a traitor or an anti-Semite, but rather a “high-minded, perfectionist, critical” Jew. . . . The debate between

⁴³ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 3, 1942. Slomovitz would attack all forms of anti-Semitism—not only the blatant sort typical of Fascist and other hate groups, but also the more latent type that created quotas for, or restrictions against, Jews in school admissions and employment. See, e.g., “Charge of Discrimination in Med Schools Made on Floor of House of Representatives” and “Race Discrimination Must End,” the latter about discrimination in firms holding large war contracts. Interestingly, Slomovitz’s principled views did not extend to some business relationships. J. L. Hudson Company was a consistent advertiser in the *Jewish News*, despite posting want ads into the 1940s stating that positions were only open to gentiles. *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), June 5, 1942; *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), June 26, 1942; Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), June 5, 1942; Bolkosky, *Harmony and Dissonance*, 237–38; Howe, “Saturday Evening Post Slanders the Jewish People,” 4.



Slomovitz at the *Jewish News* and the *Chronicle* editor reveals a basic philosophical difference. Slomovitz was prone to attack anything with even a whiff of anti-Semitism, while the editor of the *Chronicle*, even if he found the subject matter disagreeable, was more interested in preserving civil rights and free speech. . . .⁴⁴

Chronicle management also took a more nuanced position on Father Coughlin and his anti-Semitic newsletter, *Social Justice*, than Slomovitz. The *Chronicle* ran a number of articles about the end of *Social Justice*, some of which were much more detailed and provided a better picture of the facts. But in its editorials, the *Chronicle* stressed Coughlin's right to have his day in court and receive a "fair and impartial trial." Furthermore, while complimenting the justice system for finding *Social Justice* guilty of violating the Espionage Act, the *Chronicle* noted that the followers of *Social Justice*, while "botched and bungled human beings," could now channel those feelings usefully once the "vitriol" of *Social Justice* was out of their systems. Given his black-and-white view of the issue, Slomovitz would not have printed anything close to that.⁴⁵

Slomovitz also targeted Gerald L. K. Smith during the 1940s. Smith was a demagogue who moved to Michigan to run for the senate seat held by liberal democrat Prentiss Brown. . . . Slomovitz did not usually endorse political candidates, but he ended one of his Purely Commentary columns by noting that while Smith's opponent in the upcoming Republican primary was a decent man and a good campaigner, no one should assume that Smith would be defeated, especially since he had Coughlin's supporters. He urged his readers to vote against Smith and repeated the message three weeks later. Smith was defeated in the Republican primary and eventually moved out of Michigan. . . .⁴⁶

Zionism

Another topic on which Slomovitz refused to take a back seat was Zionism. In the early-to-mid twentieth century, the American Zionist movement was fragmented and deeply inefficient. Until the Second World War, a majority of American Jews did not support Zionism. . . . Despite their differences, the major Zionist movements eventually joined forces and formed an umbrella agency called the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), originally led by Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. The ZOA experienced numerous internal battles, and by the Second World War, was

⁴⁴ Editorial, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, April 3, 1942; Editorial, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, May 15, 1942. Ultimately the pressure applied to the editors of the *Saturday Evening Post* caused the *Post* to issue an apology in the form of a retraction. Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 24, 1942.

⁴⁵ Editorial, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, April 24, 1942.

⁴⁶ Arthur Vandenberg to Philip Slomovitz, August 28, 1943, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 139, Arthur Vandenberg folder 3, Reuther Archives; Editorials, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of May 8, 1942; August 7, 1942; and August 29, 1942.



jointly led by Stephen Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. Wise favored a quiet diplomacy and believed that getting Jews out of Europe and into Palestine took precedence over the creation of a national state. Silver, by contrast, believed that only with “sovereignty would rescue be possible.” He advocated aggressive public action and nationalism as a first priority. The two leaders and their separate beliefs would eventually come to a head in 1945 and nearly destroy the Zionist movement at a critical time. . . .⁴⁷

Philip Slomovitz was a passionate Zionist by the time he was a college student. He believed in aggressive action, and served as the connection between the ZOA and [close friend and Zionist, Senator] Arthur Vandenberg, a connection that became very important when Vandenberg became chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. . . . In the fight between Silver and Wise over the control of the ZOA in 1945, Slomovitz actively favored Silver and convinced the Detroit branch of the ZOA to cast its vote for Silver. When Silver regained control of the ZOA, Slomovitz was recognized for his actions.

Slomovitz used the *Jewish News* as a platform to disseminate his Zionist views. Zionism was a repeated theme on the editorial page and in the Purely Commentary columns. Even when a member of his board of directors, in order to avoid controversy, asked him to change the words “Jewish national home” to “Jewish homeland” in a draft editorial, Slomovitz refused.⁴⁸ He urged readers not only to donate to the Zionist cause, but also to join a Zionist organization, since the vitality of the movement could not be taken for granted. He pleaded for unity among the Zionist ranks to help gain advantage for the European Jewish victims when the war ended. . . .

The *Jewish News* and *Chronicle* also differed over an embryonic political movement named *Ichud* [“Union”] that wanted to create a bi-national state with equal representation for Arabs and Jews. Among other things, the *Ichud* movement wanted to change a clause in the charter of the Jewish National Fund that required all land bought by the Jewish National Fund to be used by Jews only. *Ichud*’s platform was anathema to most mainstream Zionists. The ZOA and related groups called for Judah Magnes, the head of *Ichud*, to resign from his Hebrew University post.⁴⁹ Slomovitz also blasted *Ichud*, called the members of the group appeasers and escapist, and labeled Magnes’s proposals as “defeatist.” The *Chronicle*, however, noted that relations between Arabs and Jews would require careful handling and that the *Ichud* proposals should be fully and freely discussed so decisions were

⁴⁷ Melvin Urofsky, “Zionism, An American Experience,” in *The American Jewish Experience*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1986), 213.

⁴⁸ Abe Srere to Philip Slomovitz, April 20, 1943, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 126, Abe Srere folder, Reuther Archives.

⁴⁹ “Dr. Magnes Pleads for Union of Jews, Arabs in Palestine,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), June 19, 1942; “New Palestine Jewish Party Asks Unification of All Semitic Countries,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), September 4, 1942.



made deliberately and soundly. As with his critical columns dealing with anti-Semites, Slomovitz represented more of the mainstream in this debate, while the *Chronicle* championed freedom of speech and minority rights.

Advocating for a bi-national state may have been disagreeable to many mainstream Zionists. But, advocating against any state was even worse. As the situation [intensified] for European Jews, many American Jews who were formerly opposed to a Zionist state began to see its desperate need as a haven for refugees. By 1937 the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the main organization of rabbis in the American Reform Judaism movement, had reversed its position and embraced Zionism, though many of its members disagreed with the reversal.

In 1942, when the Central Conference endorsed a separate Jewish army to join the Allied Forces, a group of dissident Reform rabbis broke away from the Central Conference and formed the American Council for Judaism (ACJ). Their platform was “non-Zionist,” a position embracing support for Jewish emigration to Palestine as a haven for refugees, but not advocating a sovereign Jewish state or a separate Jewish army. Eighty-five rabbis agreed to be the organization’s founding members, including Dr. Leo M. Franklin, by then the Rabbi Emeritus at Temple Beth El. Franklin had a long record of supporting liberal causes and civil rights, and was probably the most respected rabbi in Detroit, but he had been consistently non-Zionist during his decades at the Beth El pulpit.

The ACJ generated great controversy in the American Jewish community, including in Detroit. In an editorial, Slomovitz wrote:

A group of rabbis have decided to convene a conference of dissenters from the majority opinion of the Central Conference of American Rabbis on the subject of a Jewish Army in Palestine. In effect such a conference is proof of the deplorable disunity which continues to split the ranks of American Jewry. It is a regrettable example of failure on the part of our people to get together in time of crisis. The question of a Jewish Army in Palestine has been debated in many quarters. The need for such a force has been recognized as a precautionary measure in the defense of the Middle East by British and American statesmen. Outstanding American leaders have pleaded for such a military force. The large majority of the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as well as the Conservative and Orthodox groups, have approved of the proposal. To create dissension at this time by calling a protest conference against the action of the majority is hardly consonant with the dire needs of the hour on the world democratic front.⁵⁰

Despite his harsh words about the Council, the Sermonette of the Week immediately adjacent to the editorial that blasted the ACJ was written by

⁵⁰ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 1, 1942.



Leo M. Franklin. Perhaps this was mere coincidence, or perhaps this was Slomovitz's subtle way of showing that disagreements in the community could be handled in a civil manner without malice. . . .

As was the case with anti-Semites and the Ichud movement, the *Chronicle* took a more nuanced view, emphasizing freedom of expression. The editors observed that the non-Zionist and anti-Zionist rabbis should realize that a majority of Jews supported one form of Zionism or another: it was unrealistic to consider America the "promised land" for all Jews, given restrictive immigration laws. The editorial went on to reason that, regardless of whether the Jewish mission's purpose was to "spread tolerance, social justice and righteousness" among all people or to create a national homeland, "the grim fact still remains that, mission or no mission, millions face the pressing problem of survival." Disagreeing with the non-Zionists' position, the editorial concluded, many "honest, loyal Jews" agreed with the dissidents, and the rabbis in the minority were not "traitors." The fact that the rabbis in the majority did not mount a spirited defense of their fellow rabbis against the worst charges made against them was "depressing."⁵¹ The difference between non-Zionists and Zionists "is a reasonable difference," stated a *Chronicle* editorial a month later. "It is our hope that future discussions of these vexing problems will be on a tolerant and friendly plane." Vexing problems or not, the *Chronicle* had hit at least one truth directly on the head: While American Jews argued internally as to the relative merits of anti-Zionism, non-Zionism, and the many varieties of Zionism, Hitler's "final solution" was destroying the European Jewish community; the surviving refugees would need some place to go. . . .⁵²

World War II and the Holocaust

While there is debate as to when and how much Americans knew about the fate of European Jews, it is clear from the first few months of *Jewish News* issues that readers would have known of the atrocities in Europe. Despite certain faults and a lack of complete information, during 1942 the *Jewish News* provided Detroit Jews with the best coverage of the scope of the tragedy befalling European Jews and met Federation's goals of educating the population and increasing contributions to various agencies assisting European Jewry.

The first real coverage [of the European crisis in the *Jewish News*] was in the paper's third issue on April 10, 1942. The top headline was

⁵¹ Editorial, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, July 24, 1942.

⁵² Editorial, *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, August 8, 1942. Despite the *Chronicle's* disagreement with the dissident group's platform, the *Chronicle* editors solicited the AJC to submit articles and opinion pieces to the *Chronicle* and printed them in 1943; in 1944 the *Chronicle* called the AJC's White Paper "a program for unity in American Jewry." Rabbi Elmer Berger, Executive Director of ACJ, to Rabbi Leo M. Franklin, September 27, 1943, Leo M. Franklin Collection, Part I, Box 6, Folder 12, Franklin Archives; Berger to Franklin, January 17, 1944, Leo M. Franklin Collection, Part I, Box 6, Folder 12, Franklin Archives.



about *Social Justice*, but the smaller headline underneath stated that hundreds of Dutch Jews had died in slave labor camps. . . . The actual article about Dutch Jews was on page three and was surrounded by stories about the history of United Hebrew Schools, articles on Abba Hillel Silver and the Jewish Community Council, and very small pieces from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) and the Independent Jewish Press Service (JPS) about Jews being removed from trains in Bulgaria. . . .⁵³

Almost all articles relating to the European tragedy in the first few months of the *Jewish News* were one or two paragraphs of two or three sentences each, scattered through the newspaper with small headlines, like “Slovak Hospital Ousts Jews and Deports Them” or “Bratislava Jews Hide to Escape Deportation.” The articles were of the size and placement of “Local Mom Wins First Prize in Pie Contest at State Fair” types of stories. In other words, without a larger context, they would not have sounded serious alarm bells. That said, the European crisis did make the top headline in the April 24, 1942 issue, in connection with a story about Polish Jews sending a frantic appeal for food and the Red Cross being prepared to help. The actual story was several paragraphs long and spoke to the *gravitas* of the situation. By May 1942, many front-page headlines were about the European crisis, but there were few substantive stories and the story length could be two or three sentences, even when the headline screamed, “Nazis Slaughter 13,000 Jews in Lwow; Report 1,500 More Die in Radom of Starvation.” The actual story on Lwow was extremely brief, as follows:

KUIBYSHEV (JTA)—Approximately 13,000 Jews have been executed by the Nazis in Lwow since the capital of Eastern Galicia was occupied by the German army, it is reported in advises from Lwow published this week in Pravda, official organ of the Communist Party. Pravda also discloses that the prize of 200,000 rubles, highest Soviet award, given last week to the Jewish professor Jacob Parnas of the Lwow University, was given to him for his discovery of a blood substitute which was successfully used on wounded Russian soldiers in place of blood transfusions.⁵⁴

. . . For several months, Slomovitz aggregated various JTA bulletins about the situation in Europe in a feature entitled “World-Wide News at a Glance,” although other stories relating to the crisis were scattered throughout the paper. The feature ran on page two of each edition, and started as a two-column-wide [report] covering about three-quarters of

⁵³ See, e.g., Lookstein, *Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?*, 96-102.

⁵⁴ “13,000 Jews Have Been Put to Death in Lwow by Nazi Army of Occupation,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), May 1, 1942.



a page. Initially Slomovitz used a smaller font for the feature to squeeze in more news and separated the various bulletins by country, rather than headline. Even in this hard-to-read format, a subscriber who read the feature thoroughly and regularly would know that the situation in Europe was no ordinary pogrom or temporary period of anti-Semitism. A sample of the substance of the bulletins, never more than a few sentences each, demonstrated the horror facing Europe's Jews: 800,000 to 1.25 million Jews faced mass expulsion from Hungary; Polish Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto were hiding the dead to retain ration cards; Hungarian troops in Yugoslavia tortured and killed one hundred thousand Serbians and Jews; more than ten thousand Jews were killed in a mass execution; more than thirty thousand transported Rumanian Jews have died; hundreds of Jews die as a result of being used as guinea pigs for poison gas experiments; and on and on. By July the feature had expanded to all five columns and two-thirds of page two; Slomovitz eventually added headlines and made the [information] easier to read, although he discontinued the feature in October 1942. . . .⁵⁵

The most significant articles of this period were published in the July 3, 1942, edition of the *Jewish News*. The top headline, two rows long, was "Jewish Heroism Vital Aid on Russian Front." Beneath that headline, in smaller type, was a somewhat innocuous headline—"Reprisals Planned Against Nazis by United States for Massacres of Jews." Below the reprisals story on page two was another headline: "Nazis Massacre 700,000 Jews in Poland." The story relayed that the dead equaled one-third of the total Jewish population in Poland and that trucks containing poison gas were used. An article directly beneath that story reported that three hundred thousand more had been killed in Lithuania. The two stories combined were two paragraphs long and provided little detail.

Although these two paragraphs reported the deaths of over one million Jews, there was no other mention of these atrocities in the paper—no editorial, commentary, or any type of special feature, although there was a short editorial the following week urging Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill to condemn the atrocities. . . .⁵⁶

The amount of coverage given the crisis in Europe, and the significance afforded it, varied from week to week. . . . Slomovitz wrote a number of editorials and Purely Commentary columns that touched on the European tragedy in one fashion or another. After reviewing burial figures in Warsaw, Slomovitz concluded in May 1942 that the worst was happening: "for a time we thought Polish Jews were somehow carrying on,

⁵⁵ World-Wide News at a Glance, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of May 1, 1942; May 8, 1942; May 22, 1942; June 12, 1942; and June 26, 1942.

⁵⁶ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 3, 1942.



even as slave laborers, but that is not so.” In a later editorial he seemed to have recognized the uniqueness of the event: “There is nothing in all human records to compare to such tragedy.” Writing about the Warsaw Ghetto, he contended that the tragedy befalling the Jews required an effort “exceeding by far any relief campaign that has been sponsored in the past.” Another editorial suggested that he subscribed to the theory that the best way to stop the atrocities was to win the war quickly: only complete defeat would stop the “Nazi Beasts. . . .”⁵⁷

Despite his early prescience about the singular nature of the massacres, later editorials suggest that Slomovitz did not fully comprehend the gravity of the events. In June 1942 he called the Warsaw Ghetto the worst of all time, but observed that the Jews there were building gardens and not allowing the Nazis to stop them from elevating themselves. He noted that social scientists had found that the Ghetto had equalized classes and democratized Jewish life, and that Jews were holding up under the strain. In August he wrote that, while it was true that the lot of Polish Jewry was intolerable and it took a great deal of courage to go on living, the Polish Jews would carry on in “order that they may live to celebrate the victory of decency over brutality.” Even after Slomovitz had reported that one-third of Polish Jews had already been murdered, the true meaning of the events was not comprehensible. In November he wrote that he was confident that the “tragedy of the Jewish people will be mitigated in the course of time,” and one week later opined that, although it was becoming apparent that the Nazis were effectively carrying out their threat to reduce the Jewish population, after the war European Jewish communities would be rebuilt. As he put it, “there is certain to be recompense for the suffering now suffered by millions of our kinsmen. . . .”⁵⁸

The *Jewish News* also carried a number of stories about European efforts to save some Jews. Slomovitz wrote editorials complimenting the Danes and the Dutch for standing up to the Nazis. He also was complimentary of the Pope’s efforts to protect Jews. In August 1942 he reprinted an editorial from the *Detroit Free Press* about the Pope’s declaration opposing Vichy treatment of Jews, and in September 1942 he related that reliable sources indicated the Pope would recall his nuncio from Berlin, unless there was an end to the mass murder of Jews. He concluded the editorial by stating that the Church stance was a “significant factor” in fighting the Nazis.⁵⁹

While Slomovitz aggressively used his editorial power to raise critical funds, combat anti-Semitism, and advocate his Zionist agenda, he seemed more passive when it came to action that could help save European Jews. His columns publicizing the war effort supported his belief that the fastest

⁵⁷ Editorials, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of April 24, 1942; May 1, 1942; and July 10, 1942.

⁵⁸ Editorials, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of June 5, 1942; August 28, 1942; November 13, 1942; and November 20, 1942.

⁵⁹ Editorials, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of May 29, 1942; August 7, 1942; August 14, 1942; and September 4, 1942.



way to end the European tragedy was to defeat the Axis, but there was little written advocating protest, urging a change in United States policy, or otherwise trying to “stir the masses” to some form of action. . . .⁶⁰

The *Jewish News* did report on the few protests that were occurring, but not with great vigor. When the Rabbinical Council of America and American Jewish Congress issued a joint call to all rabbis to memorialize the Jewish victims on the traditional day of mourning called *Tisha b'Av*, Slomovitz buried the announcement in the middle of World-Wide News. He did, however, also include an editorial publicizing the event and noted that since it was reasonable to assume the United States government disapproved of the murders, “to protest against the atrocities is in the main an expression of our people’s sorrow and resentment” over the Nazi atrocities. . . .⁶¹

Historians have considered the lack of protests against the Holocaust and the reasons for it. One view is that Jewish organizations wanted to be viewed as “serious, sober” American citizens, to avoid disloyalty charges by anti-Semites. Having noisy rallies and public protests would work against that. Some historians blame the divided national leadership for lack of a coordinated effort. The singularity of the events also played a large part: “The Holocaust was a novum, unassimilable by the mind, unexpressable in any vocabulary.” Another scholar has addressed why the impending Holocaust did not take precedence over all else in the press, particularly after the stories about the one million dead came out. This historian has suggested that, among other reasons, the crime was too big. The press could not digest the enormity of what it had learned; even the Jewish press could not “absorb and disseminate the true horror of the crime.” This seems true in the Detroit English-language Jewish press, at least during 1942. With historical perspective, it is hard to imagine Slomovitz, truly a man dedicated to his profession and his people, optimistically writing about growing gardens in the Warsaw Ghetto or relegating news of mass murders (including a three-sentence story on page 13 with the headline “2,000,000 Jews Destroyed By Nazis, British Paper Says”) to small back-page articles. But in the period immediately after America’s entry into the war, the truth of the Holocaust seemed impossible. . . .⁶²

Both the *Jewish News* and the *Chronicle* published stories of Jewish heroism in the war, but the stories appeared more regularly in the *Jewish News*. Jews comprised approximately 8 percent of those in the United States military during the war, about twice their proportion in the

⁶⁰ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), December 18, 1942.

⁶¹ World Wide News at a Glance, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 17, 1942; Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 17, 1942.

⁶² Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 215; Henry L. Feingold, “Crisis and Response: American Jewish Leadership During the Roosevelt Years,” *Modern Judaism* 8, no. 2 (May 1988): 104; Marvin Kalb, introduction to *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Moses Shapiro (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 2003), 5; *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), November 6, 1942.



general population. Between nine thousand and ten thousand Jewish Detroiters served during the war. Stories about Jewish heroism [achieved] several strategic Federation goals—they bolstered morale, built a sense of community and pride, demonstrated patriotism and loyalty, and fought anti-Semitic accusations and stereotypes. Headlines such as “Jewish Ace Bags Five Jap Planes”; “Blitzkrieg Broken by Soviet Jewish General”; and “Jewish Heroes Speed Axis Rout in Africa” appeared frequently. Articles like this were not limited to overseas efforts: “Albert Kahn Cited by AIA as Number One War Plant Designer” and “Irving Berlin Donates \$500,000 to Army Emergency Relief Fund—a Record in Philanthropy” showed patriotic civic action by Jews domestically as well.⁶³

Slomovitz did not limit his articles to heroic acts. He also included, as a weekly feature, the names of Detroit Jews who had entered military service and news about those in service as it became available. . . . In addition, Slomovitz included articles about local Jews or Jewish organizations helping the war effort. Numerous articles reported such varied activities as the Detroit Jewish War Veterans raising money to buy army planes, the Jewish Community Center holding air raid warden classes, and the Twelfth Street neighborhood organizing a scrap metal drive. . . .⁶⁴

Factionalism in Detroit’s Jewish Community

The Jewish community in Detroit in the 1940s could not realistically be homogenized into one uniform group of people. Outside of being Jewish, various groups within the community had little in common with each other. But Slomovitz generally would not print articles about dissension within the community, advocating for private resolution of disagreements instead. . . .⁶⁵ In a *Jewish News* editorial in July 1942, Slomovitz declared that conditions were “too tragic” to allow dissension to “destroy our inner amity.” He warned, “the disunity we can afford in time of peace becomes destructive in time of war.”⁶⁶

Slomovitz alluded to the division between German Jews and Eastern European Jews in Detroit in a Purely Commentary honoring Fred Butzel. In the column Slomovitz reminisced about great Jewish American leader Louis Marshall, who had passed away in the 1920s and, in Slomovitz’s mind, had not been replaced. Marshall had great influence among Jews,

⁶³ *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), issues of May 15, 1942; April 3, 1942; June 19, 1942; August 21, 1942; and November 20, 1942.

⁶⁴ “Army Plane Fund Nears Quota Here,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 10, 1942; “Air Raid Warden Class at Center,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 31, 1942; “Folk in 12th Street Area Hunt Scrap To Dump on Hitler,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 31, 1942.

⁶⁵ Alan Hitsky, former Associate Editor of the *Detroit Jewish News*, in discussion with the author, January 28, 2016.

⁶⁶ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), July 31, 1942.



wrote Slomovitz, because he “loved the masses and did not hesitate to mingle with them.” . . .⁶⁷

In Detroit the German/Eastern European tensions between Jews may have spawned the creation of the Jewish Community Council (JCC), although there are differing explanations. Federation had been created and operated by the established German-Jewish elite, most of whom were members of Temple Beth El. The agency focused on fundraising and social service; it did not offer unifying political leadership. Many parts of the Jewish community were unhappy with Federation for its perceived elitism and exclusivity. One view is that the JCC was organized by a group anxious to democratize Federation and give an organized voice to Jewish groups ignored by it. Those close to Federation, however, say that its leaders created the JCC to “broaden its base of representation.”⁶⁸

Slomovitz believed that the purpose of the JCC was to coordinate Jewish community efforts, promote cultural work, and defend the Jewish position, all goals that aligned with his worldview of Judaism. The JCC served as the umbrella coordinating agency for more than 160 community organizations. Although some perceived the JCC to be the “rebel” organization (as opposed to the established Federation), the JCC executive committee included much of Federation’s leadership, including Henry Wineman, Isidore Sobeloff, Abe Srere, and Slomovitz himself. Fred Butzel, who had the reputation of reaching out to all parts of the Jewish community, was named president for life. While Eastern European Jewish organizations also may have been represented in the JCC, the established Jewish leadership in Detroit clearly had a place at the table, if not the head chair. . . .⁶⁹

Conclusion

By December 1942 the *New York Times* and other publications reported that rumors of Hitler’s “final solution,” the extermination of all Jews in Europe, were true. The tenor of English-language Jewish reporting about the war and the destruction of European Jewry changed. In Detroit the period from the March 1942 founding of the *Jewish News* until that December was a transitional period: two major fundraising campaigns and a push to buy war bonds, increases in anti-Semitism, a deepening horror about the fate of European Jews, adapting to a new lifestyle in light

⁶⁷ Hitsky, discussion with author, January 28, 2016; Biography of Leon Fram attached to letter from Fram to Slomovitz, November 13, 1945, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 45, Rabbi Leon Fram folder, Reuther Archives; Slomovitz to Butzel, March 13, 1940, Simons Archives, Federation Records, Box 535, File 1, Reuther Archives.

⁶⁸ Joshua D. Krut, “Safe But Not Secure: Detroit Responses to Anti-Semitism During the Crisis Years, 1937-1948,” *Michigan Jewish History* 36 (Winter 1995-96): 14; Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance*, 132.

⁶⁹ Editorial, *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 17, 1942.



of America's entry into the war, and dealing with ongoing internal dissension and conflict.

The founding of the *Jewish News* at this transitional time was a fortuitous event for Philip Slomovitz, Detroit's Federation, and ultimately, the Detroit Jewish community. The newspaper added cohesion and a strong communal voice, supported by the community's established leadership. . . . Far from being passive and unresponsive, Detroit Jews were very active and engaged during this transitional period. . . . More than 22,000 participated in the annual campaign, and the money allocated from it to the United Jewish Appeal went directly to help European victims. Jewish Detroiters also held clothing drives and other activities to help Polish Jews. Detroit Jews were fully invested in the war effort, participating in the war chest, buying war bonds, serving in leadership roles in war-related volunteer agencies like the United Service Organization (USO) and the Red Cross, collecting scrap metal, and serving in the military. One hundred eighty of them would lose their lives in the war. For the majority of Jews who believed that the quickest way to end the murder and victimization of European Jews was to win, the war effort took on an extra layer of significance. Detroit Jewish leadership found a communal voice in Philip Slomovitz and the *Jewish News* and used it as a voice of cohesion and unity and to further their agenda, educate readers, and promote community events. . . .

The newspaper also led the fight against anti-Semitism and was a leading advocate for Zionism, a cause that was initially divisive. But as the war dragged on and the murder of European Jews received more press attention, Zionism became a cause that most mainstream Jews supported. The *Jewish News* certainly served as a champion of Federation's annual campaign, the war chest, and the sale of war bonds, and Slomovitz devoted a good portion of the newspaper to ensure the success of those drives. He used the paper and his editorials to garner support for patriotic causes, as well as Jewish causes, intending to inspire readers to become active in the community. . . .

In the early months of publication, Slomovitz sometimes failed to abide by the credo and platform published in his first issue. His pledge to serve as a "clearinghouse" for the "various shades of opinion among us" and to "approach Jewish issues without partisan coloration" went unfulfilled when it came to issues for which he had passionate beliefs, most notably Zionism and treatment of alleged anti-Semites. His editorials and articles on Ichud and the American Council for Judaism, and his unequivocal view of those publishing items critical of Jews in general, suggest he was unwilling to allow the *Jewish News* to fully present all sides of these complicated issues. He did not carry much news or write editorials about the various socialist and leftist Jewish organizations in the community. He did not seem particularly interested in issues that had no Jewish angle. Furthermore, despite the vituperative tone of the *Chronicle* attacks on the *Jewish News* over the paper's relationship with Federation,



there was a grain of truth to the claims. Slomovitz was beholden to Federation and its leadership. Between his business and close personal relationships with Federation leaders and the JCC, it is hard to imagine the *Jewish News* reporting anything significantly unfavorable about Federation or its agencies. On the other hand, the *Chronicle* did not publish any articles critical of Federation or its agencies during 1942 either, outside of certain articles in November implying that the *Chronicle* was now the only independent English-language Jewish publication in Detroit.

Philip Slomovitz repaid his investors quickly and became sole owner of the *Jewish News*. He would eventually buy the *Chronicle* in 1951 and shut it down. When Abe Srere [Federation president during much of World War II] heard that Slomovitz was buying the *Chronicle*, he congratulated him and added, somewhat ironically, “one good Anglo-Jewish newspaper was enough.”⁷⁰ Immediately after ending the *Chronicle*, Slomovitz changed the masthead of the *Jewish News* to read “Michigan’s Only English-Jewish Newspaper.”

Slomovitz would go on to experience a lifetime of accolades and success. The Jewish Information Bureau called him a “leading voice in American Jewish Journalism and one bright light on the American Jewish press scene.”⁷¹ The *Jewish News* became a true unifying force in the Detroit Jewish community—no matter where Detroit Jews fell on the political, socio-economic, educational, or religious scale, they would turn to the *Jewish News* each Friday.⁷² In the end, Slomovitz succeeded in what he set out to do in 1942: to mold Jewish public opinion, strengthen the Jewish community, and advance the morale and courage of American Jews.

⁷⁰ Srere to Slomovitz, July 10, 1951, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 70, *Jewish News* folder, Reuther Archives.

⁷¹ Martin J. Warmbrand, Secretary of The Jewish Information Bureau, Inc., to Slomovitz, November 3, 1971, Simons Archives, Philip Slomovitz Papers, Box 120, Letters to Slomovitz folder 5, Reuther Archives.

⁷² Sidney Bolkosky, “Evolution,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), March 27, 1992.



FEATURE ARTICLE

Healing the Soul of a City: Carl Levin's Early Career in Detroit¹

Samuel Kole

Winner of JHSM's 2021-inaugural Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum Award for outstanding original scholarship in the field of Michigan's Jewish history, supported by the Cohn/Prentis Family Foundation Michigan Jewish Writers' Fund

By virtue of his résumé, the story of US Senator Carl Levin seems straightforward and apparent. The career statesman—Michigan's longest-serving senator and America's longest-serving Jewish senator—represented the Wolverine State in the US Senate from 1979 to 2015. For many years he chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee (2001-2003 and 2007-2015) and the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (2001-2002, 2007-2015). While in office he was known for championing Michigan's automotive industry and its Great Lakes.

Before these well-known chapters of his life, Levin worked as an attorney and community leader in Detroit.² His activism in local legal circles and dedication to social action (most palpable during his service on the Michigan Civil Rights Commission) proved to be key steppingstones to his first run for elected office in 1969. He served on the Detroit City Council from 1970 to 1977 where he focused on one of Detroit's most entrenched problems: housing discrimination.

Understanding how Carl Levin saw himself as an attorney and politician in Detroit, how he shared that identity with the public, and how

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¹ This article is adapted from Kole's senior undergraduate thesis at the University of Michigan, "A History of a City, A History of a Man: An Analysis of the Life and Career of Carl Levin in Detroit," April 12, 2020. Additional information on Senator Carl Levin can be found in his recently published memoir, *Getting to the Heart of the Matter: My 36 Years in the Senate* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021).

² From 1824 to 1974, the nine-member legislative body of Detroit (now City Council) was the Common Council. For consistency and clarity, I refer to it unilaterally as the City Council. While Levin was on it, both he and the press used the two names interchangeably.



supporters and the press perceived it are essential to understanding his professional success, liberal politics, and political achievements. As this article makes clear, Levin's position as a Jewish advocate of civil rights—a product of his experiences growing up in Jewish Detroit—allowed him to reap widespread support and carry out his progressive agenda.



Figure 1: Carl Levin's Jewish identity and legal experience advocating for civil rights enabled him to obtain broad-based support to carry out his progressive agenda while serving on the Detroit City Council from 1970 to 1977. (JHSM collections.)

2055 West Boston Boulevard

If you want to know what kind of Jew a man is, ask him where he lives; for no simple factor indicates as much of the character of the Jew. . . . It is an index not only to his economic status, but also to his religion and his outlook on life and the stage in the assimilative process that he has reached.

— Louis Wirth³

2055 West Boston Boulevard, Detroit, Michigan. Third house on the right, just about a half-century ago. Before the international-style-skyscrapers, glistening riverfront, bustling downtown district, and abandoned automotive factories of Detroit today. 2055 West Boston Boulevard was as much an indicator of a physical location as a destination in time: a time of

³ Louis Wirth, "The Ghetto," in *On Cities and Social Life*, ed. Albert J. Reiss, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 94. Quoted in Deborah Dash Moore, "At Home in America?: Revisiting the Second Generation," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25, no. 2/3 (2006): 156-68, www.jstor.org/stable/27501693.



tremendous change in the urban landscape of Detroit and its Jewish neighborhoods. A time of Henry Ford's assembly line, Albert Kahn's newly built monuments to God and art, and intimate urban neighborhoods. This is where and when the story of Carl Milton Levin begins. Born June 28, 1934, Levin arrived as the city climbed to its economic and industrial apex.

The Boston-Edison neighborhood Levin called home housed some of Detroit's most influential, wealthy, and well-known residents. Levin recalled that it "was not a predominately Jewish neighborhood, but most of the kids in my school—[nearby Central High School]—were Jewish. I remember the [Jewish] community was very close."⁴ Adjacent to Boston Edison was the 12th Street neighborhood—where Levin's schoolmates lived. The enclave was defined by its Jewish character and concentration of Jewish institutions and families. Growing up in a predominantly non-Jewish neighborhood, adjacent to a vibrant and active Jewish community, and attending a community public school informed Levin's early Jewish identity.

Jewish Identity, Jewish Politics

During what historian Arthur Goren has described as the "Golden Decade" (1945-1955), "being Jewish in America meant fighting for open housing and fair employment practices, for social welfare programs and pro-union legislation—in short, the New Deal, the Fair Deal and their successors."⁵ These experiences informed Levin's own sense of self: "We were proud Jews, but I wouldn't say that we spent an awful lot of time in synagogue, because we didn't."⁶ Instead of religious observance, Levin located his Jewish identity within causes promoting social justice and the mainstream of the Democratic party. Following World War II and the Holocaust, such liberalism offered Jewish youth an optimistic vision of America that could be achieved and negotiated through the New Deal and Fair Deal's domestic programs.

Devoted to advancing social justice, the Levin family was involved in and supported both the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit (now Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit) and the Democratic party, among other organizations. Specifically, Levin remembers his family's religious orientation as "a progressive tradition of Judaism, of social conscience, of

⁴ Avalon International Breads, "Turning Rust into Steel," *Detroit Kneaded Us* (2014), <https://www.detroitlover.net/senator-carl-levin>.

⁵ Arthur Goren, "The Golden Decade," in *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 186-204.

⁶ Senator Carl Levin oral history interview, Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives (March 14, 2016): 6, <https://jewishdetroit.org/oral-history/oral-history-main/the-albert-and-pauline-dubin-oral-history-archives/senator-carl-levin/> (hereafter cited as 2016 Levin Interview).



caring about the underdog, caring about people who were poor.”⁷ Levin’s parents, Saul and Bess (Levinson) Levin, were both born in the United States, college-educated, and active in Detroit’s Jewish community—so much so that Levin remembered that “we called ourselves Hadassah orphans, because when we got home in the afternoon, our mother was usually not there. She was a few blocks away . . . working at Hadassah.”⁸ Levin’s experiences growing up in a Jewish milieu and a politically connected family solidified the progressive values he would bring to the Detroit City Council and subsequently the US Senate.

How is it that Levin’s central political beliefs were so firmly rooted in his Jewish faith, despite apparent indifference to its practice? Levin’s cousin, the Honorable Avern Cohn, offered a convincing answer: “Liberal party policies substituted for the observance of religious tradition, from which Jews believed their liberal values derived.”⁹ For Levin, political activism and participation formed a part of his understanding of himself as a Jewish American. It was not his faith that defined his actions, but his actions that defined his faith. As Levin noted:

It’s not a coincidence . . . that [older brother and former US Representative] Sandy [Levin] was down in Mississippi supporting voting rights . . . or that I became the attorney for the Michigan Civil Rights Commission taking on [racist Dearborn Mayor Orville] Hubbard, taking on housing discrimination. . . . It wasn’t by chance our parents understood what it was like to be an underdog. Our grandparents understood . . . what it was like to be poor, to be kicked around, to be discriminated against.¹⁰

It was precisely because the Levins had experienced these inequalities that Carl Levin devoted his career to fighting discrimination and injustice.

In the mid-twentieth century, American city streets were the venue where Jews could practice their faith and exercise their consciences by performing acts of social justice and engaging in progressive politics. This was particularly true in the months and years after the long, hot summer of 1967, when social unrest gripped the nation. Detroit’s July 23, 1967, uprising—rooted particularly in Black residents’ exclusion from access

⁷ 2016 Levin Interview, 10-11.

⁸ “L’Dor V’Dor: The Levin Brothers Reflect on Family and History,” interview by Kate Levin Markel and Andy Levin, Jewish Historical Society of Michigan Annual Meeting, Gem Theatre, Detroit, MI, May 28, 2015, <https://youtu.be/0dxFznj-1qQ>.

⁹ Avern Cohn, “A Century of Local Jews in Politics: 1850s to 1950s,” *Michigan Jewish History* 39 (September 1999): 2–12.

¹⁰ “L’Dor V’Dor: The Levin Brothers Reflect on Family and History.”



to quality housing—and its fallout were devastating. 7,231 people were arrested, 2,509 stores were burned or looted, 1,189 people were injured, 43 people died (33 of whom were Black), and state and federal troops intervened.¹¹ Historian Thomas Sugrue has argued, “No day figures more prominently in the history of modern Detroit.”¹²

The fallout forced a fundamental reorientation within American political and civil life, including in Detroit. Mayor Jerome Cavanagh and his administration locked horns with members of City Council, resulting in a stalemate and an ineffective city government. After two years of wrangling, in 1969 Cavanagh announced he would not seek reelection. Detroiters quickly turned to a crop of new leaders to heal the city and its divisions, including left-leaning Jews who felt empowered to criticize publicly the token gestures of government policy that failed to catalyze meaningful change.¹³ Among them was Carl Levin, a young attorney inspired in part by the uprising to run for Detroit City Council. It was his first political race. The *Detroit Free Press* described him as one “of whom it is sometimes said: ‘He was born to serve.’”¹⁴

In 1969 eighteen candidates ran for nine seats on the Detroit City Council in a nonpartisan, city-wide election. Politicians and city leaders alike saw an opportunity to overhaul what had long been an ineffective legislative body at the hands of strong mayoral leadership. In response, three incumbent councilmembers chose not to run for reelection. Democratic party leaders encouraged and supported Levin’s entry into the race: “A number of people had urged me to run as someone who could get support from both the black and white communities. Also because of my work in poverty law, they thought I could be part of the healing of Detroit.”¹⁵

Carl Levin announced his candidacy, identifying himself as a white, Jewish, liberal attorney, uniquely qualified to reach across the color line and help unify the divided city:

I am a candidate because we must have stronger leadership from our Common Council in a time of urban crisis [W]e need

¹¹ Bill McGraw, “Detroit ’67: By the Numbers,” *Detroit Free Press*, July 23, 2017, <https://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/detroit/2017/07/23/detroit-67-numbers/493523001/>.

¹² Joel Stone and Thomas J. Sugrue, *Detroit 1967: Origins, Impacts, Legacies* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2017), ix.

¹³ Lila Corwin Berman, *Metropolitan Jews: Politics, Race, and Religion in Postwar Detroit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 193–94.

¹⁴ Judd Arnett, “A Quality Council with Dr. Ravitz,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 31, 1969, no. 180 edition.

¹⁵ Jackie Headapohl, “A Half-Century Later: Understanding the 1967 Riot | The Jewish News,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 20, 2016, <https://thejewishnews.com/2016/04/20/half-century-later-understanding-1967-riot/>.



new faces, new minds, and new hearts on our Council to solve our problems, . . . We can solve those problems through a transfusion of fresh energy and renewed spirit. . . In short, I am running because I am optimistic about the future of Detroit.¹⁶

Despite being a political newcomer, Levin drew on a lifetime of political training at home, at school, and as a lifelong resident of Detroit. In campaign flyers, newspaper ads, and campaign communications, he highlighted his family's Democratic party political bona fides and his degrees from Central High School, Swarthmore College, and Harvard Law School. He merged his political persona with his personal life, inviting constituents to get to know his wife, Barbara Halpern, and their three children, Kate Laura, and Erica. He even publicized his home address (20044 Renfrew Road), in the integrated Green Acres neighborhood, within city limits, but blocks from the neighboring city of Ferndale. Levin's vision of a more dynamic and optimistic city government resonated with enough voters to capture a third-place finish and a seat on the council.

Politically, the Levin family had been an institution in the Michigan Democratic Party for decades by the time Carl Levin ran for Detroit

LEVIN LEADERSHIP to common council

BALLOT NO. 17 ☒

Detroit Free Press August 31, 1969
 "CARL LEVIN is the most impressive of all the candidates."

The Detroit News September 3, 1969
 "CARL LEVIN has shown himself to be hard working, imaginative, articulate, and knowledgeable of urban affairs."

Civic Searchlight
 CARL LEVIN is "preferred and well qualified."

Carl Levin has been given highest rating by:

- Detroit Free Press
- Michigan Chronicle
- Civic Searchlight
- Urban Alliance
- UAW
- AFL-CIO
- Women's Bar Association
- Women's State Republican organization
- All Democratic District Organizations
- 12th District Republican Organization
- TULC/ADPCA
- NDCM

Carl Levin will bring leadership.

- Practicing Lawyer for 10 years
- Chief Deputy Defender-Defender's Office
- Special Assistant Attorney General
- Treasurer—Pastor's Community Association
- Lifetime Detroit Resident
- Married—3 children
- Instructor—University of Detroit Law School
- Board Chairman, Mich. Civil Rights Commission (1964-1966)
- Co-Chairman—Detroit Lawyers' Committee JFK for President (1960)
- Graduate, Central High School, Detroit
- Graduate, Harvard Law School
- President, Detroit 1st Cong. District

Figure 2: This campaign flyer from Carl Levin's first political race in 1969 for a seat on the Detroit City Council highlighted his Detroit roots and legal training. (Carl Levin, "Levin Leadership to Common Council," August 31, 1969, Box 33, Carl M. Levin Papers 1938-2015. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI.)

¹⁶ Carl Levin, "Attorney Carl Levin Files for Detroit Common Council," July 2, 1969, Box 35, Carl M. Levin Papers 1938-2015, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI (hereafter cited as Carl M. Levin Papers).



City Council in 1969. He benefited from having a “big ‘name’ in Michigan Democratic Party Circles.”¹⁷ During the 1960s both Carl Levin and his older brother Sander Levin rose to the highest echelons of the party. Carl Levin served as the Coordinator of the Detroit Lawyers’ Committee, JFK for President, in 1960 and as a precinct delegate in Michigan’s 1st congressional district in 1968. Sander Levin was a Democratic state senator from 1965 through 1970, including serving as the Michigan Senate Minority Leader from 1969 to 1970. As the Michigan Democratic Party’s Chairman, Sander Levin also led the party through the historic 1968 Democratic presidential primary. In short, Carl Levin entered the 1969 council race, and every race thereafter, with a tremendous name-recognition advantage. The Levin brothers would go on to exemplify the total integration of the Jewish community into Michigan politics, each earning hundreds of thousands of votes from non-Jewish voters in their respective political campaigns of the 1970s.

However well qualified Carl Levin may have been, degrees, experience, and accolades alone cannot account for his overwhelming electoral success. At the turn of the decade, Detroiters were desperate for new directions and new faces in their city government. Levin’s Jewish identity proved to

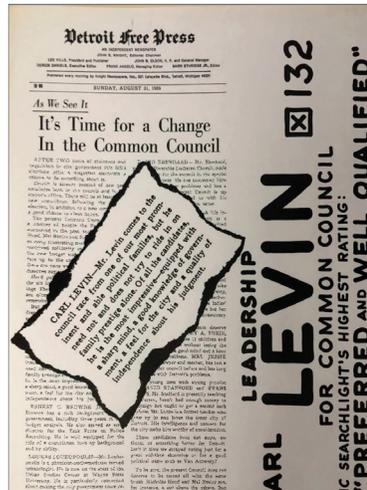


Figure 3: Carl Levin’s progressive agenda helped him secure numerous endorsements during his 1969 run for Detroit City Council, including one from the Detroit Free Press, shown here in a campaign ad. (Carl Levin, “Carl Levin for Common Council,” August 31, 1969, Box 33, Carl M. Levin Papers 1938–2015. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI.)

¹⁷ Clark Hallas, “Carl Levin Enters Race for City Council,” *The Detroit News*, July 3, 1969, no. 315 edition, NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current.



be a political asset—and he knew it. As he later reflected, “Being Jewish was a big plus when I ran for City Council.”¹⁸ It allowed him to claim “diverse ethnic, racial, religious, economic and geographical support” less than two years after the most consequential and destructive urban uprising in modern American history.

While Carl Levin ran as a progressive Democrat, he emphasized his “independent” mind, in turn securing endorsements from an array of newspapers, organizations, unions, and city leaders. The *Detroit News*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Michigan Chronicle*, the Urban Alliance, UAW, AFL-CIO, and Democratic and select Republican organizations all threw their support behind him, as did some of the city’s best-known Black and white leaders, including Myron Wahls, John Feikens, Rev. Hubert G. Locke, Rev. A. A. Banks, and Martha Wylie.¹⁹ The breadth of these endorsements illustrates Levin’s ability to build diverse coalitions of support.

Proving Grounds

Professionally, Carl Levin had long been active in the local civil rights movement and its legal circles. He had co-founded the Michigan chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1959.²⁰ He had served as the Chairman of the ACLU Lawyers Committee on Panel Cases in 1963.²¹ He had taught civil rights law at the University of Detroit Law School (now University of Detroit Mercy School of Law). He had chaired the Detroit Bar Association’s Civil Rights Committee. Most significantly, he had worked as special assistant attorney general and first general counsel of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission from 1964 through 1967. Together, these experiences would position him as an authority on civil rights law and give him “sensitivity to the problems of race and poverty” and credibility in relating to and earning the support of voters of color.²² They also undergirded his commitment to ending housing discrimination in Detroit.

Of all Carl Levin’s civil rights training, none prepared him for his tenure on City Council better than the Commission. As its first general counsel, Levin established the Commission’s jurisdiction to prohibit public officials from “using their office for discriminatory purposes” through its

¹⁸ Headapohl, “A Half-Century Later: Understanding the 1967 Riot.”

¹⁹ Hallas, “Carl Levin Enters Race for City Council.”

²⁰ Kary L. Moss, “50 Years and Counting,” *Civil Liberties Newsletter* (American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan) (Summer 2009): 1, <https://aclumich.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ACLUsummer2009newsletter.pdf>.

²¹ “Civil Liberties Union Meetings to Hear Ellman, Levin, Pfeffer,” *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), April 26, 1963, Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews>.

²² Carl Levin, “Civic Searchlight, Inc. Information for Committee on Candidates,” July 26, 1969, Box 35, Carl M. Levin Papers.



first case against Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard.²³ The Commission issued a cease and desist order against Hubbard, an avowed segregationist, to end his practice of posting displays in Dearborn's city hall of racist newspaper articles.

The case reflected Levin's other priority on the Commission: ending housing discrimination. In this period, the Commission established its authority and jurisdiction to prevent such infringements. Levin's most significant case, *Beech Grove Investment Company v. Civil Rights Commission*, challenged Pulte Homes—then the largest builder of homes in the state—before the Michigan Supreme Court. The 1964 case concerned Freeman M. Moore, an African American man, who had responded to a newspaper advertisement for homes under construction in North Georgetown Green, a new Pulte subdivision in Oakland County. After speaking with a salesperson and consulting with his wife, Moore put down a \$1,000 deposit. In return Pulte sent Moore a signed deposit agreement.

All seemed straightforward. But soon, the founder of the company, William J. Pulte, invalidated the agreement, telling the Moores, “[I]t wouldn't be advantageous to the subdivision from our business standpoint.” He returned the Moores' deposit by mail, without ever inquiring into their financial ability to buy one of his homes. He would later testify, “I told Mr. Moore that he had a cross in life and it was the color of his skin.”²⁴ After reviewing the case, the Commission issued a cease and desist order against Pulte, finding that Pulte's actions had violated Moore's rights under the Michigan Constitution and Michigan Public Accommodation Act of 1931.

The Michigan Supreme Court ultimately heard the case and ruled in Moore's favor, concluding that “there is a civil right to private housing both at common law and under the 1963 Michigan Constitution where, as in this case, that housing has been publicly offered for sale by one who is in the business of selling housing to the public.”²⁵ In doing so, the Court held that the civil rights provisions of the 1963 Michigan Constitution applied to private property, and it empowered the Commission to enforce them. Through the case, Levin and his colleagues laid the foundation by

²³ “LDor VDor: The Levin Brothers Reflect on Family and History.”

²⁴ *Beech Grove Investment Co. v. Civil Rights Commission of the State of Michigan*, 380 Mich. 405, 416 (1968), available in Justia Law, <https://law.justia.com/cases/michigan/supreme-court/1968/380-mich-405-2.html>. [Note: The Anti-Defamation League, Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan Catholic Conference, Michigan Council of Churches, and NAACP all supported Moore's case and filed amicus curiae briefs before the court.]

²⁵ *Beech Grove Investment Co.*, 380 Mich. at 436.



which Michiganders who experienced private-property discrimination could seek protection from and justice through the law.

After his time on the Commission, Carl Levin went on to establish the Legal Aid and Defender Association of Detroit in 1968, which provided representation for indigent persons. Levin served as the Association's Chief Appellate Defender from 1968 through 1969.²⁶ In the Association's first year alone, Levin and his team worked on thousands of cases following the 1967 Detroit uprising.

Of the many cases Levin handled at the Association, Charles Lee Clark's suit for wrongful prosecution and imprisonment stands out. Clark, an African American man, had been tried and wrongfully convicted of murder in 1937. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment, having served 30 years at the Michigan State Prison in Jackson by the time Carl Levin came upon the case. Through researching case transcripts, Levin found that police officers had misled the sole eyewitness before she selected Clark from a lineup. Levin solicited an affidavit from her, ultimately securing Clark a retrial and dismissal of all charges.²⁷ Clark was set free days later, receiving some compensation for his 30 years of wrongful imprisonment. At the time, the *Detroit Jewish News* praised Levin: He "has enhanced a family record with his labors in defense of Charles Clark."²⁸ Carl Levin's position as a Jewish advocate of civil rights would continue following his election to the Detroit City Council.

On the Issues

Following his third-place finish, on January 6, 1970, Carl Levin took his seat on the city council of America's fifth-largest city. The issues facing the council were daunting: social unrest, dilapidated homes, poorly resourced schools, poorly managed government, record-breaking crime,

²⁶ Glenna McWhirter, "The Defenders Help the Poor Get Fair Trials," *Detroit Free Press*, August 18, 1968, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. [While serving his sentence, Clark had been offered parole. He had refused it because of his innocence. Accepting parole would have left a "mark" on his record. Instead, he maintained, "By going [back] to court, I proved I was innocent." See "Senator Seeks Money for Man Held in Prison 30 Years by Mistake," *Jet*, September 23, 1971.]

²⁷ "Charles Lee Clark - National Registry of Exonerations Pre 1989," <https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/casedetailpre1989.aspx?caseid=55>. In 1985 Senator Carl Levin recounted how his experience representing Clark and others during his time at the Association informed his views as a US Senator on the death penalty. See: Senate Comm. on the Judiciary, A Bill to Establish Constitutional Procedures for the Imposition of the Sentence of Death, and for Other Purposes, 99th Cong. (September 24, 1985).

²⁸ Philip Slomovitz, "Notable Family Tradition Followed by Carl Levin," *Jewish News* (Detroit, MI), August 23, 1968, Detroit Jewish News Digital Archives, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, <https://digital.bentley.umich.edu/djnews/djn.1968.08.23.001/2>.



racial division, and the beginnings of deindustrialization.²⁹ “Rookie” Levin wasted no time getting to work for his constituents, “promising them a Tough Council.”³⁰

He was true to his word. He promoted neoliberal legislation that resulted in increased private-sector investment and spurred the erection of Michigan’s tallest building (the Renaissance Center). He advocated for increased state and federal funding for infrastructure and highway construction. He supported resolutions protecting and conserving historic structures. He sponsored resolutions advocating environmental protections of the Great Lakes and Detroit River. He made real strides in eliminating waste and mismanagement within city government.³¹

He also continued his career-long fight against discrimination. He supported developing a Citizen’s Trial Board for the Detroit Police Department. He urged hiring more Black officers, requiring better police training, creating code-enforcement officers on scooters, organizing unarmed citizen patrols, adding “youth officers,” and regulating police behavior “so as to ensure equal treatment for all.”³²

He exposed the “unconscionable” insurance industry’s racially and economically coded practices, including redlining, higher rates, and worse coverage, that made it impossible for African Americans to insure their homes at reasonable rates—or obtain insurance at all—“as well as [the industry’s] outright refusal to sell any insurance in certain areas of the city.”³³ Levin and Judge George Edwards then assembled a legal team to investigate the state’s largest firms. The resulting hearings before the Michigan Department of Commerce-Insurance Bureau (now Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services) played a foundational role in the passage of the state’s 1979 “Essential Insurance Act,” which reformed the industry’s methods for determining insurance rates.

HUD: Hell upon Detroit

In the 1970s, suburban Jewish Detroiters “emerged as key proponents of liberal housing policies, civil rights protections, . . . and nascent environmentalism.” But they did so generally through suburban-based private philanthropy and volunteerism.³⁴ By contrast, Carl Levin lived in the city.

²⁹ US Bureau of the Census, “Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1970, Table 20,” <https://www2.census.gov/library/working-papers/1998/demo/pop-twps0027/tab20.txt>.

³⁰ Mark Beltaire, “He Promises a Tough Council,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 27, 1970, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³¹ Levin for Senate Committee, “Carl Levin’s work on the Detroit City Council 1970-1977 a sampling,” n.d., Box 21, Carl Levin’s work on the Detroit City Council folder, Carl M. Levin Papers.

³² “Carl Levin’s Work on the Detroit City Council,” Carl M. Levin Papers.

³³ “The Impact of Redlining Spreading Urban Decay,” *The Detroit News*, July 21, 1976, Box 4, Carl M. Levin Papers

³⁴ Berman, *Metropolitan Jews*, 212.



His advocacy took the form of direct action and political engagement inside city hall. After all, integrated housing, school busing, and clean air and water were not abstract: Levin had a personal stake in the outcome of his work on the city council. On housing issues, Levin's urban liberalism and social consciousness appeared most visible.

For example, he proposed consolidating the City Planning and City Housing Commissions to remove "roadblocks" to the construction of low-income housing. He appointed a housing czar, so that supporters were "speaking with one voice on the importance of the [housing] problems" in Detroit.³⁵ He provided incentives and "red carpet treatment" to developers willing to build low-income housing and encouraged private-sector developers to use Sections 235 and 236 of the Fair Housing Act of 1968. These key sections provided guarantees and assurances by the federal government to private lenders who offered mortgages for low- and middle-income families to purchase or rent housing. Levin also sought to obtain increased funding from the state and federal governments for construction of low-income housing.

But his biggest, longest, and most career-defining battle was with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Over the course of his eight years on the city council, Levin fought HUD's discriminatory lending practices. The Federal Housing Authority (FHA), a mortgage insurer sponsored by HUD, used the longstanding tactic of "redlining" to segregate the city. Certain neighborhoods were deemed "uncreditworthy" because they were comprised of people of color, less desirable housing stock, and higher crime rates. These designations then gave the FHA license to deny mortgages to buyers in those neighborhoods. This corruption signaled HUD's mismanagement and support of residential discrimination.

In 1971 press reports hinted that a "mortgage ban sought by the FHA on 'dead' streets" was imminent.³⁶ The ban would take effect in areas of the city where 60 percent or more of the homes were boarded up. Officials at HUD's Detroit office denied the allegations, but conceded that such policies were under consideration by President Richard Nixon's administration. At the time, Carl Levin claimed the ban was "the most destructive single act I can think of for Detroit." He called for a mobilization against the

³⁵ Carl Levin, Letter from US Representatives Charles Diggs and John Conyers requesting Levin's signature in support of their Citizen Trial Board, July 29, 1969, Box 35, Carl M. Levin Papers. Levin mailed back the letter with his support, but noted deficiencies in the proposal that he wished to be "in touch" to discuss.

³⁶ Don Ball, "Mortgage Ban Sought by FHA on 'Dead' Streets," *The Detroit News*, April 19, 1971, NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current.



policy: “We should exert all the political influence this city can muster to stop any off-limits action by the FHA. . . . We have to take this to every possible individual and organization who might have any influence on [national HUD secretary] Mr. [George] Romney.”³⁷

Levin then compiled a 150-page report documenting how HUD’s discriminatory policies had materially contributed to the decay of Detroit’s neighborhoods. To substantiate his claims, he produced copies of three anonymous Detroiters’ FHA mortgage rejections, which all noted the applications’ “ineligibility,” due to the homes’ locations in “deteriorating” blocks or neighborhoods.³⁸ Unsatisfied with the explanation from both Romney and William Whitbeck, director of HUD’s Detroit office, Levin joined Detroit City Council President Mel Ravitz in urging Nixon and the US Congress to instruct HUD not to “redline” neighborhoods in Detroit. The city council resolution passed unanimously.

After his promotion to City Council President in 1973, Levin passed a city inspection ordinance requiring HUD to either rehabilitate its blighted homes or demolish them. Despite the victory, HUD stalled its compliance, suspending numerous demolition contractors and stopping those already at work. By the time HUD finally complied, it was forced to demolish over 10,000 homes that had become blighted under its care, costing American taxpayers \$180 million. Levin concluded that the actions of HUD in Detroit “represent[] government at its worst.”³⁹

Levin’s repeated calls during this period for a congressional investigation into HUD finally materialized in 1975 when the House Manpower and Housing Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations held a hearing on the matter. There, along with members of Michigan’s congressional delegation, Levin testified to the ways in which HUD had contributed to Detroit’s housing problems. In 1975 HUD owned more homes in Detroit than it did in New York and Chicago (then America’s two most populous cities) combined. US Representative William M. Brodhead from Michigan concluded during his testimony before the subcommittee that HUD’s presence in Detroit was akin to that of “an occupying army.”⁴⁰

³⁷ David L. Good, “HUD Accused of Starting ‘Dead Street’ Program,” *The Detroit News*, April 29, 1971, NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current.

³⁸ Carl Levin, “Homeowners’ Insurance in Detroit: A Study of Redlining Practices and Discriminatory Rates,” July 19, 1976, Box 21, Carl M. Levin Papers.

³⁹ *Mortgage Servicing and HUD Property Management: Hearings Before the Manpower and Housing Subcomm. of the H. Comm. on Government Operations*, 94th Cong., 537–84 (1975).

⁴⁰ *Mortgage Servicing and HUD Property Management Hearings*, 543 (statement of William M. Brodhead, Representative in Congress from the state of Michigan).



When called to testify, Carl Levin chose to focus on a single issue: blight. After HUD had acquired houses and failed to maintain them, they began to deteriorate beyond repair. These now-blighted homes not only drove down the property values of adjacent structures. They also contributed to the decay of Detroit's neighborhoods and a spike in crime: the abandoned homes were prime sites for robbers, drug dealers, and arsonists. Putting his legal training to good use, Levin argued that HUD had abdicated its duty. Instead of demolishing these now-blighted homes, it sold them "as is" with significant structural and mechanical difficulties—either to desperate, low-income buyers without other options or to unscrupulous speculators and investors who had no intention of restoring or residing in them.

HUD's ineptitude in Detroit soon garnered national media attention. In 1976 CBS documented Detroit's devastated neighborhoods in an episode of *60 Minutes*. Journalist Mike Wallace interviewed Carl Levin on the porch of a blighted home. Levin quipped that HUD stood for "Hell Upon Detroit." He continued: "HUD permitted the speculators, the illegal and bad guys to take advantage of them because their own people took money to overlook defects in houses." HUD would then sell the homes to low-income Detroiters who believed they were habitable. Since the occupants had no equity in the homes, "they just simply walked away when the big cracks showed up."⁴¹ These now vacant homes would then sit abandoned until they fell apart.

Levin refused to allow HUD's mismanagement to inflict further "Hell Upon Detroit." He actively engaged with the Detroit HUD office, passing city ordinances to ensure that HUD inspected homes it sold and alerting the media to HUD's negligence. The *Detroit Free Press* remarked that Levin "was the first Detroit official with the courage to confront some of the disastrous federal housing policies of the 1960's; the changing pattern of HUD's response to urban problems has been a direct result of his concern."⁴² Levin's determination to root out HUD's mismanagement and discriminatory housing policies was borne out of his experiences as a civil rights attorney fighting housing discrimination in Detroit and his upbringing as a Jewish Detroiters during the "Golden Decade" of the New Deal and Fair Deal.

The Election of 1973

In 1973 Coleman A. Young won the mayoral race in Detroit, defeating former Police Commissioner John F. Nichols. In doing so, Young became the first Black mayor of Detroit. Young's historic campaign advocated for greater Black representation in city government; orchestrated the end of STRESS (Stop the Robberies, Enjoy Safe Streets)— an undercover special task force

⁴¹ *60 Minutes*, "1976: Mike Wallace on Detroit Corruption," *CBSNews.com* transcript, 1 (April 8, 1976), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/1976-mike-wallace-on-detroit-corruption/2/>.

⁴² "Detroit Will Miss Levin," *Detroit Free Press*, January 25, 1977, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.



of the Detroit Police Department that unjustly targeted Black communities in Detroit; and championed economic revitalization in the city. Nonetheless, it was one of the most polarized elections in the city's history.⁴³

The city council election of 1973 was similarly polarized, with two incumbent candidates competing for the council presidency. Levin, the “curly haired” white Jewish attorney, defeated fellow Black councilmember Nicholas Hood. Levin earned 279,711 votes to Hood’s 262,163, winning by a margin of nearly 17,000 votes—similar to Coleman Young’s margin. However, unlike the mayoral race, where 92 percent of Black voters supported the Black candidate, Levin won with a diverse coalition of voters. He drew more support from heavily white districts than he had in 1969, while maintaining strong support from the African American community. Once again, Levin’s Jewish identity and progressive politics spanned the racial divide.

Shortly after winning, Levin reiterated his belief that “the city needs bridges between white and black.” He assured the press that, regardless of race, “everybody [in Detroit] has essentially common problems in city life: Deterioration, fear of crime, actual crime. . . . In the long run, this commonality will unite us.”⁴⁴ The only incumbent white liberal to run for reelection, Levin contended that, “[a]t this particular moment, in this city, we need everyone who can lend a hand to the real, short-run drive of trying to hold the people together.”⁴⁵



Figures 4 and 5: Running on a platform highlighting his accomplishments as a councilmember, Carl Levin earned support from both Black and white voters in his successful 1973 bid to become Detroit City Council President. (Carl Levin, “Levin . . . Your Action Councilman.” 1973, Box 35, Carl M. Levin Papers 1938–2015. Courtesy of Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI.)

⁴³ For more on STRESS, see Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit?: Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017); Matthew D. Lassiter and Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, “The Creation of STRESS,” *Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era* (University of Michigan Carceral State Project, 2021), accessed May 10, 2021, <https://policing.umhistorylabs.lsa.umich.edu/s/detroitunderfire/page/creation-of-stress>.

⁴⁴ Jim Neubacher, “Council President Levin Resists Role of ‘White Hope,’” *Detroit Free Press*, November 12, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁵ Neubacher, “Council President Levin Resists Role of ‘White Hope.’”



Although the *Detroit Free Press* insisted the 1973 election votes broke down “almost exclusively on racial grounds,” the city’s voters paint a more complicated picture: Across racial lines, they chose a white, Jewish progressive politician. Levin felt encouraged by the election’s outcome, declaring, “[T]he council has a special opportunity to unite the city because we reflect the entire community racially, geographically, economically, and ethnically.”⁴⁶ The Detroit City Council now had four Black members and five white liberal-leaning members. All nine had an interest in taking up Mayor Young’s agenda.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Forged in the cauldron of post-1967 Detroit, Carl Levin’s brand of leadership was predicated on a liberal urban agenda rooted in advocacy for Black Detroiters. He felt a special call to take up this work: “There have always been very strong connections between the Jewish and black communities The Jewish community has always strongly supported civil rights.”⁴⁸

Indeed, Levin’s Jewish identity was central to his early career in Detroit. Informed by the experiences and politics of his parents and the Jewish community more broadly, Levin utilized his legal education and skills to focus on civil rights law and social action, becoming general counsel to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. There, he tried consequential cases and fought housing discrimination. His experience on the Commission also allowed him to garner diverse, grassroots support for his campaigns and his progressive agenda on Detroit City Council, including taking on HUD and redlining in Detroit.

When reflecting on his career in local government, Levin recalled, “I saw the city gradually lose population and have greater and greater problems, mainly in neighborhoods that were being destroyed by vacant buildings. And then vacant land. And then I still, despite those problems, said, ‘Our city will someday come back.’ I was always optimistic that someday this city would come back.”⁴⁹ Levin recognized that public office was the most effective medium through which he could leverage his positions of social, political, cultural, and educational privilege to effect meaningful improvements in the quality of life for Detroiters of every stripe.

Editor’s note: We are deeply saddened to learn of the July 29, 2021 passing of Senator Carl Levin (z”l), just as this article went to press. Levin championed our mission in innumerable ways. May his memory be for a blessing.

⁴⁶ Stephen Cain, “Levin Vows an Effort to Unite City,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 8, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁷ “The City Election. Liberals Post Gains,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 8, 1973, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ Headapohl, “A Half-Century Later: Understanding the 1967 Riot.”

⁴⁹ 2016 Levin Interview, 12.



 BOOK REVIEW

The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution. By LILA CORWIN BERMAN.
Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey, 2020.
280 pages. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Noam Pianko, PhD

Jackson School of International Studies, University of Washington

My father is a tax attorney. I remember growing up and wondering how he could spend so many hours working through arcane tax codes with strange names like 401(a) plans. As a result, I always understood my own journey toward Jewish history as a way of studying ideas and communities, rather than developing tax-advantaged strategies for individuals and corporations. After reading Lila Corwin Berman's *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution*, I realize that my father's world of tax law and my own interest in American Jewish history are actually far more closely intertwined than I ever could have imagined.

Like other pathbreaking works of scholarship, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex* introduces an innovative lens for rethinking fundamental historical questions. By bringing a political economy lens to American Jewish history, Corwin Berman reframes the historiography of the relationship between the American state and Jewish communities. Corwin Berman demonstrates that American law, specifically the exemptions developed to allow the private accumulation of charitable giving for future public good, played a pivotal role in shaping the organizational and political contours of the American Jewish community.

Beginning her narrative in the early twentieth century, Corwin Berman traces the changing approach that Jewish organizations took toward communal philanthropy. The pressing economic needs of the early twentieth century, combined with a public distrust for the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, created a philanthropic culture that emphasized the importance of spending charitable dollars for immediate needs rather than stockpiling reserves. Indeed, Corwin Berman demonstrates, there was a deep concern about stockpiling wealth and even organizational rules severely restricting the size of endowments.¹

¹ Lila Corwin Berman, *The American Jewish Philanthropic Complex: The History of a Multibillion-Dollar Institution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 14-29.



This approach began to change slowly in the 1920s and 1930s. Corwin Berman documents the historical forces and actors that catalyzed a greater willingness to allow, and eventually encourage, large capital investments for future use. Wealthy communal leaders, such as Jacob Schiff and Felix Warburg, pushed communities in this direction by offering large donations with a clear expectation—organizations would need to revise their guidelines and cultural assumptions to accept these large capital investments as endowment funds for future use.²

The shift from distributing philanthropic dollars toward accumulating philanthropic capital accelerated in the post-World War II era as American Jews gained wealth and property. As Corwin Berman argues, the traumatic events of the Holocaust contributed to a cultural shift toward collective funds to ensure the future with the growth opportunities provided by invested capital.³ In one of the most fascinating sections of this excellent monograph, Corwin Berman reveals the centrality of a heretofore little known American Jewish lawyer, Norman Sugarman. Sugarman actively campaigned Congress to establish wider latitude in the tax benefits afforded to charitable capital of public foundations.⁴ At the same time, he advised Jewish communal organizations on how to maximize the changing tax codes to increase philanthropic capital. Figures like Sugarman illuminate the intertwined relationship between US legal-financial policies and the structure of Jewish communal organizations.

This phenomenon provides a far more nuanced opportunity to analyze what Corwin Berman calls “depoliticized politics.”⁵ The tax code developed in the 1960s in ways that restricted tax-exempt donations from supporting “political” agendas. In order to benefit from their tax-exempt status to accumulate capital, American Jewish institutions defined themselves as non-political. However, the very limited definition of “political” in the tax codes ultimately provided great latitude for organizations to support a variety of political activities. Philanthropic organizations could thus benefit from tax exemptions to build large charitable funds that could be applied to a broad range of potential political applications while maintaining the façade of communal consensus and non-political activities.

This study has important implications for thinking about the question of American Jewish exceptionalism. American Jewish exceptionalism, long the dominant narrative within the field, chronicles American Jewish

² Corwin Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 31-51.

³ Corwin Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 55.

⁴ Corwin Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 70-83.

⁵ Corwin Berman, *American Jewish Philanthropic Complex*, 88.



history as a unique and distinct model of modern Jewish integration into the nation-state. Over the last decade scholars have begun to raise important questions about American exceptionalism—especially through studies of anti-Semitism shaped by the racialization of Jewish identity in the American Eugenics movement and populist politics.⁶ In ways similar in both quality and quantity, American Jews faced challenges to full integration that paralleled many of the factors hindering European Jewish acculturation.

However, the neutral role of the state toward Jewish communities remains a factor seen as distinguishing the American and European Jewish experiences of Emancipation. The nature of free and voluntary associations in the United States, the historiographical narrative suggests, removed the state's coercive power to dictate or even shape the communal associations. Clearly the taxation structure is quite different from explicit legal restrictions and government-controlled community institutions. Nevertheless, through regulatory practices, the government did create mechanisms to engage indirectly with Jews as a collective group. Moreover, Jewish communal organizations needed the state to support their endeavors, which increasingly relied upon regulatory mechanisms.

Corwin Berman's analysis provides a new lens to think about the question of the relationship between the American state and American Jews as a collective group. Tax laws that provide public funds for certain types of organizations create powerful incentives for shaping communal structures and power relationships. The advantages provided for the accumulation of philanthropic capital in certain types of private structures encourage the centralization of communal power and authority.

This thoroughly researched study leaves us asking very important questions facing contemporary American and Jewish politics. From the perspective of American Jewish history, emergence of the Jewish philanthropic complex could help explain the consolidation of American Jewish institutions in the last third of the twentieth century. In addition, the incentives to “depoliticize” Jewish communal politics for the sake of fitting into regular frameworks offer a new backdrop to consider the emergence of an emphasis on unity and collectivity in this same period.

⁶ Tony Michels, “Is America ‘Different’?: A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (September 2010): 201-24. David Sorkin, “Is American Jewry Exceptional? Comparing Jewish Emancipation in Europe and America,” *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (September 2010): 175-200; Richard Frankel, “One Crisis Behind?: Rethinking Antisemitic Exceptionalism in the United States and Germany,” *American Jewish History* 97, no. 3 (July 2013): 235-58.



From the perspective of contemporary American Jewish communal life, this monograph raises important questions about equity and democracy within Jewish communities. Corwin Berman points out that the state's vision of encouraging a capitalist approach to private philanthropy existed in tension with democratic ideas of allocating state resources by elected government officials. One can see a parallel process in the American Jewish community as well. As a relatively small number of philanthropists gain a disproportionate voice in setting the communal agenda, should Jewish communal organizations take a more intentional role in acknowledging the public source of some of those funds? Is there a more equitable way of distributing philanthropic dollars, bolstered by government support, that could democratize the process of determining communal priorities? To address these questions, we might want to advocate that more aspiring historians and Jewish communal leaders take additional time to learn about tax policy during their professional training.

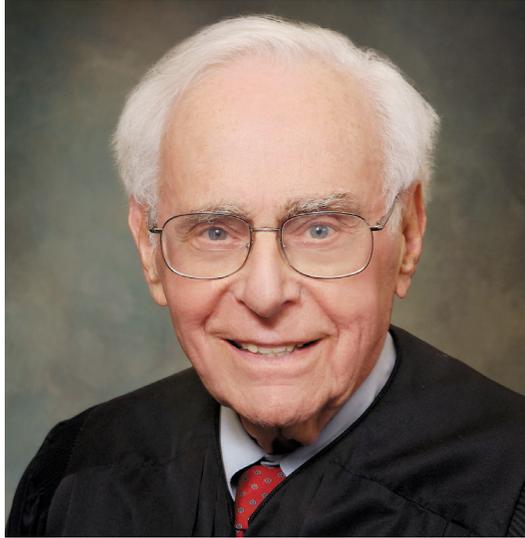


INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Reflections on Anti-Semitism and Discrimination: An Interview with Judge Avern Cohn

*Interviewed by Levi Smith, JD, and
Barbara Madgy Cohn, JHSM Vice President*

September 13, 2020



(Courtesy of Judge Avern Cohn.)

Judge Avern Cohn was born in Detroit on July 23, 1924, to Irwin I. and Sadie Levin Cohn. He enrolled at the University of Michigan in 1942, but left school the following year to serve in the army. The army sent him to an engineering program at John Tarleton Agricultural College, a small school in Texas, and then redirected him to pre-med classes. Cohn was discharged from the army in 1946 and decided against pursuing medicine. He enrolled in the University of Michigan Law School, receiving his JD in 1949.

Cohn practiced law with his father at the Law Offices of Irwin I. Cohn from 1949 to 1961 and then at Honigman Miller Schwartz and Cohn (now Honigman LLP) from 1961 to 1979. During this time he served on the Michigan Civil Rights Commission from 1972 through 1975 and on the Detroit Board of Police Commissioners from 1975 through 1979.

Cohn was appointed as a United States District Court Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan by President Jimmy Carter effective September 26, 1979. He retired from the federal bench in December 2019, at age 95.



LEVI SMITH:

Thank you, Judge Cohn, for agreeing to meet with us and answer our questions concerning anti-Semitism and discrimination in Detroit historically. I wanted to first start off with when and where you were born.

AVERN COHN:

I was born in Detroit on July 23, 1924. . . . I grew up in the “Golden Ghetto.”

LEVI SMITH:

What do you mean by the term “Ghetto”?

AVERN COHN:

It means a concentration of Jews. The population was majority Jewish. Ghetto comes from the Italian [dialect form *ghèto* and came to mean] a Jewish section. They didn’t have it as well defined here, but I like to think that I grew up in neighborhoods where there was ready access to a Kosher butcher.

LEVI SMITH:

So would you say that Jews voluntarily wanted to live among other Jews so they would be close to the Kosher butcher and synagogues?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, the Kosher butcher and the synagogue.

LEVI SMITH:

So it was a voluntary thing as opposed to “we can’t live on the East side or further west?”

AVERN COHN:

If you are an observant Jew, you don’t ride on Friday night or Saturday or the high holidays. So you have to live in proximity to a synagogue. That is just essential. It’s changed now significantly . . . because [many] Jews now drive. When I was young, . . . we walked . . . on the High Holidays . . . a mile and a half, two miles, from Fullerton and Petoskey to Shaarey Zedek. But my grandparents, they lived within three blocks. . . .

BARBARA COHN:

Did your father go to synagogue every week?

AVERN COHN:

My father grew up very Jewish. . . . He always observed Kashrut laws. Never ate ham, bacon, or pork. Never. I don’t think he ever ate non-Kosher meat. . . .



LEVI SMITH:
How about Coney Islands?

AVERN COHN:
I don't remember, but I know in 1936, my grandparents died, [my father's] mother and father, within three months of each other. So my father said Kaddish for fifteen months every morning and every night. Went to Florida twice. He'd get off the train, go looking in the phone book for a Jewish name and insist that they organize a minyan for that night and the next morning. Then get back on the train to the next town. He never missed. And his younger brother was a doctor. He missed once. So having observed that ritual, after the time was done, my father still prayed every morning with tefillin.

BARBARA COHN:
Were you raised in a Kosher home?

AVERN COHN:
Well, we had only Kosher meats. I can remember once as a kid, my father came in and saw something in the ice box that he knew wasn't Kosher meat, and all hell broke loose. Oy, he was in a rage.

LEVI SMITH:
Tell me why your grandfather changed his name at Ellis Island.

AVERN COHN:
I found this out, I think after he died.

BARBARA COHN:
When was your name changed?

AVERN COHN:
When my grandfather landed here.

BARBARA COHN:
They were "Leh-vi-ta-neski"?

AVERN COHN:
"Wits-a-neski."

LEVI SMITH:
Certainly, Cohn is not anglicizing it.

AVERN COHN:
No. We always heard that when they came through immigration, the immigration officer had trouble with his name. So he changed it to Cohn.



LEVI SMITH:

You looked Jewish, so you'd be Cohn. I've heard Jews in the twenties and thirties changed their names because of employment discrimination. We see the ads that say "Christians only."

AVERN COHN:

Yes, if you wanted to work in a bank, and your name was Grossberg, you changed it to Grant. . . . When I was in high school, [Jews] went to Central [in Detroit]. Most of them. On the High Holidays, they closed the school. A few of our friends went to Highland Park because it wasn't as Jewish. They gave all different reasons. But basically, it was because it wasn't an all-Jewish school.

LEVI SMITH:

[In] the neighborhoods [where] you grew up, did you have gentile friends?

AVERN COHN:

No. When I was very young in elementary school, my closest friend was gentile because he lived down the block. But as I went to high school, all my friends were Jewish.

LEVI SMITH:

This friend down the block, did you play in his house? Did he play in your house?

AVERN COHN:

Yes. I once ate a piece of candy during Pesach and told my father about it. He was crying because it was chametz [leavened food forbidden during Passover].

LEVI SMITH:

You spent some summers at Pine Lake in West Bloomfield [in suburban Detroit]?

AVERN COHN:

Yes.

LEVI SMITH:

Was that a unique lake where people would sell properties to Jews?

AVERN COHN:

My father's uncle had a summer home on Pine Lake in the Interlaken subdivision in 1912. . . . There were maybe four or five Jewish families that lived in Interlaken. When I grew up, this was before the war, there was a



Kosher butcher shop in Keego Harbor in the summer because it was close to Cass Lake. Cass Lake had a Jewish colony in the summer.

LEVI SMITH:

Did your family talk about anti-Semitism or lesser degrees of anti-Jewish feelings in the community?

AVERN COHN:

Yes. I grew up [during the time of] Father Coughlin. . . . Coughlin did not start out [saying overtly anti-Semitic things until he had been in the pulpit for a few years]. . . . But we were very conscious of anti-Semitism.

LEVI SMITH:

Sherwin Wine [founding rabbi of the Society for Humanistic Judaism] said that that church was built with anti-Semitic dollars.

AVERN COHN:

Oh, I don't know.

LEVI SMITH:

Did your family used to listen to Father Coughlin on the radio?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, everybody did.

LEVI SMITH:

Were you scared to hear what he was saying?

AVERN COHN:

I personally wasn't scared. I was irritated. As a matter of fact, it may or may not be true: In the thirties, the Jewish Welfare Federation [of Detroit] organized the Jewish Community Council, so Federation could have a neutral voice. The Council could take on the anti-Semites.

LEVI SMITH:

Do you know what they did, if anything, regarding Father Coughlin?

AVERN COHN:

No. Within Reform Judaism, there was an effort to silence him.

LEVI SMITH:

What about Henry Ford? Do you have memories of discussions about him growing up?



AVERN COHN:

Yes, I have memories that Ford was anti-Semitic, and some people did not buy Ford automobiles.

LEVI SMITH:

That was common until when?

AVERN COHN:

Until Henry Ford, the second, came along.

LEVI SMITH:

So, after the war?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, the Ford family is still getting beaten up.

LEVI SMITH:

Right, right. Before the war, did your family hear from people and Jews in Europe who wanted to be sponsored to come to this country?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, as a matter of fact, there used to be a Jewish hour, Sunday morning on the radio. I can remember my father coming home once with a picture of a little boy. He said he'd agreed to bring the little boy to our house from Austria or Czechoslovakia. It never happened. . . . A cousin who came here in the twenties had connections back home. Then the Holocaust came, and all that ended. . . .

LEVI SMITH:

Tell me about your experience in the army.

AVERN COHN:

I got along well. I was in a training unit [in Texas]. [Another Michigan Jew,] Billy Oberfelder, and I . . . went through thirteen weeks of training together in the same unit. We had a sergeant who didn't like Billy because he received too much mail, and he may have called him "Jew Boy" or something like that. But I remember that the first sergeant of our company, we saw him chew off this sergeant. He said, "None of that." So there was some consciousness in the unit that Jewish boys were slightly different. [Not only] in that training, [but] all the way through the army. I had to have non-Jewish friends since there weren't that many [Jews]. When I went into basic training, you weren't allowed a pass on weekends for the first month. But two weeks into training was Pesach. And they took the Jewish boys out so they could go to Seders in Fort Worth, which was the closest town. Some of the non-Jewish boys were upset because we got out.



LEVI SMITH:

When I was in the army, some of the non-Jewish boys became Jewish for Passover. Did you have that?

AVERN COHN:

[Laughter] No, but it happens in prisons today because observant Jews get a different class of meals. They suddenly become very observant.

LEVI SMITH:

Have you had cases like that as a judge?

AVERN COHN:

I didn't, but I saw a colleague of mine had one in January where Jews and Muslims were getting a different class of food that contained no meat, and they sued the prison here. The judge said, no, the prison couldn't do that. They have to find a way to give them Kosher meat. So that still exists.

LEVI SMITH:

You went to agricultural college [while in the army]?

AVERN COHN:

No. That was the name of it, but it was a junior college, and it had the name, John Tarleton Agricultural College. It was a small college in Texas—part of a special army program called the army specialized training program. . . . At the beginning of the war, in '43, the army accepted the idea that this war could last a very long time. And unless they trained engineers and doctors and dentists, there wouldn't be any, so they had a training program.

LEVI SMITH:

Did you feel bad that you weren't in a combat unit where you could fight back against Hitler?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, but I wouldn't drop out. Then I'd have to fund my courses. When I got to pre-med, I wanted to get out of it. My father said, "Are you crazy?" I replied, "I don't want it. The war is on, and I want to participate." He said, "Listen, I wasn't even in the army in World War I, and no one ever said a word to me. Stick with it." And I did.

LEVI SMITH:

You were following orders?

AVERN COHN:

Yes.



LEVI SMITH:

Did you see anti-Semitism in the army in terms of promotions?

AVERN COHN:

I was never in a situation in my years in the army where it was possible to get promoted.

LEVI SMITH:

Did you hear from your friends about Jews not getting equal promotions?

AVERN COHN:

No.

LEVI SMITH:

Or not getting honorable discharges because they were Jewish?

AVERN COHN:

I personally did not experience it, but it was because of what units I was stationed in.

LEVI SMITH:

I understand. But did you hear from your friends any resentment?

AVERN COHN:

No.

LEVI SMITH:

In 1948, Israel had the War of Independence. Did you think of fighting in that war as a volunteer?

AVERN COHN:

No, but I remember going to celebrations, and I knew men, acquaintances, that went over there.

BARBARA COHN:

To celebrate or to fight?

AVERN COHN:

To fight.

LEVI SMITH:

Prior to this interview, we talked about restrictive covenants prohibiting Jews from buying real estate in certain areas. Was that part of your thought process as an adult when you were purchasing homes for your family and



where you wanted to live? You had a car, so you didn't need to walk to the Kosher butcher or walk to the synagogue.

AVERN COHN:

I was aware there were such neighborhoods. You have to remember that lots of land as it was subdivided in the deed of the subdivision, excluded Jews, Blacks, Italians. But in the fifties when these covenants were held unconstitutional, all that disappeared.

LEVI SMITH:

Except in Grosse Pointe.

AVERN COHN:

Yes, Grosse Pointe [to Detroit's east] had the point system.

LEVI SMITH:

Can you explain that?

AVERN COHN:

Yes. It was discovered that the brokers in Grosse Pointe selling houses had an unwritten agreement that would profile prospective owners. Each one received so many points. [If they didn't get enough points,] brokers would not show them homes. [Certain groups, such as Jews, had to receive more points than other groups to be eligible to see homes.] It was called the point system.

AVERN COHN:

And it became known around 1950 or '51. The [Michigan] Corporations and Securities Commissioner, who regulated real estate brokers, Lawrence (Larry) Gubow, held it invalid. . . And he promulgated a regulation against the use of the point system. The brokers went to court and challenged his authority. [The Michigan Supreme Court eventually held the regulation was beyond Gubow's authority. The point system was upheld until it was ended in the 1960s.]

LEVI SMITH:

I spoke to an old-time real estate broker in Grosse Pointe. And I asked him about the point system. He said, "Well, we didn't want the Purple Gang, we didn't want the rum runners coming here to buy property. So that's why it got started."

AVERN COHN:

Well, I'll give you an example of [that] attitude. When [William W.] Cook, who donated the money for the [University of Michigan] Law



School in Ann Arbor, told the dean that he was ready to give him all this money, [Cook] had one qualification: “No Jews or Italians, no Southern Europeans.”

LEVI SMITH:

To be admitted to the law school?

AVERN COHN:

No—living in the dormitory. And I remember the dean, after he retired, telling us that he said to [Cook], “I can’t do that.” So he avoided that restriction, but [Cook] wrote several articles about Southern Europeans polluting the law. He was an anti-Semite, but no one asked. There were articles and a biography about Cook. The librarian [Margaret A. Leary, a former law library director and librarian at the University of Michigan Law School,] who wrote the biography, told me she had a tough time dealing with that part of his history.

LEVI SMITH:

Today they take your name off of buildings if you are anti-Semitic.

AVERN COHN:

Yes, he was one of those.

LEVI SMITH:

Do you remember if there were quotas in universities allowing only a certain number of Jews to be admitted?

AVERN COHN:

I heard that, but I never experienced it. I gave a speech once about the Academy and lawyers. I ran across some minutes from the University of Michigan for one of their presidents dealing with a disciplinary problem. They referred to the fact that the student being disciplined was Jewish. Whether they had a quota there, I don’t know. In 1934, Arthur Miller, the playwright, [who was Jewish,] enrolled and spent four years at Michigan as an undergrad and won a number of literary awards. There were a significant number of Jews from the East coming to Michigan because tuition was very cheap. . . . So I don’t think they had a quota in Ann Arbor because they had a significant number of New York City Jews coming there.

LEVI SMITH:

That was a code word: “We don’t want New Yorkers.” . . . What about anti-Semitism in large Detroit law firms over the years?



AVERN COHN:

I didn't experience it because I went right to work for my father [Irwin I. Cohn]. But at that time there was a Jewish boy in one of the non-Jewish firms. Most of them didn't have Jews. They didn't have women. They didn't have Blacks.

LEVI SMITH:

When did that change?

AVERN COHN:

In the 1970s. . . . It was in banking too.

BARBARA COHN:

When did you start practicing law? What year?

AVERN COHN:

1949, 1950.

BARBARA COHN:

And you joined your father?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, my father had a law office. Four or five men worked for him. . . . It was called Law Offices of Irwin I. Cohn, and it . . . started in the late twenties.

LEVI SMITH:

When was the Honigman law firm started?

AVERN COHN:

[Jason] Honigman [and Honigman co-founder Milton J. ("Jack") Miller] worked for another office early [on]. They broke away in the early thirties.

LEVI SMITH:

I presume they worked for a Jewish law firm.

AVERN COHN:

No. Sort of mixed. There were a couple of Jews in it. . . . I know there were no Blacks. Jason Honigman co-owned in the sixties (I think) the First National Building [in Detroit where the Honigman law firm started and is still located today]. They rented space to the first Black law firm. . . . Honigman always took pride in that fact.



LEVI SMITH:

Well, that was significant.

AVERN COHN:

And he got credit for it. I can remember the first Black secretary at Honigman. It was in the seventies. At the time I was a member of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission. I'm sitting there one day with my own secretary. I had just dictated an hour's worth of dictation to her, and she says, "You know, Mr. Cohn, this place is starting to smell like Africa."

LEVI SMITH:

She said that?

AVERN COHN:

To me. I looked at her, and I said, "You know, Ann, if you don't like it here, you can always leave. As a matter of fact, you're going to leave. As a matter of fact, you're fired." Just like that. I walked into the office manager and said, "I just fired my secretary." . . .

LEVI SMITH:

Were you active in civil rights?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, I was active in the American Civil Liberties Union. . . .

LEVI SMITH:

Shifting topics, why was Sinai Hospital established?

AVERN COHN:

Because Jewish doctors had trouble getting staff privileges and wanted their own hospital. There had been a move for a Jewish hospital in Detroit in the thirties. I don't remember the name, but there was an organization to promote a Jewish hospital. They wanted to give opportunities to choose doctors. My father was secretary of the Jewish Hospital Association in the thirties or forties. [Sufficient funds were finally raised] to build the hospital. [Ground was broken on January 14, 1951, and the hospital opened in 1953.]

AVERN COHN:

My father did all the law work for the hospital for free. So when I started to practice law, I started to do work for Sinai—never malpractice work. One day one of the vice presidents says, "Avern, you know you can get



paid for what you're doing. Because we get reimbursement." So I started to charge Sinai for my work. I took it with me, so when I got to Honigman, I had Sinai as a client. From that relationship came a couple of other things. The healthcare section [at Honigman] with Sinai blossomed, and I was the one who seeded it. . . .

LEVI SMITH:

What about the Purple Gang? Do you remember anything about that?

AVERN COHN:

No. The only thing I remember was when they had the 12th Street Massacre. They killed someone at Boesky's [deli] on 12th street. [Editor's note: Gangster Harry Millman was murdered at Boesky's on November 24, 1937.] I remember hearing about it on the radio. My father grew up with them. He went one way, and they went another.

LEVI SMITH:

Did he know people in the Purple Gang?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, and I heard rumblings of it. . . . There was an older man who I was very close to. And he was very close to my father. He was on the fringes of it.

LEVI SMITH:

Turning to discrimination in public accommodations, when you were growing up, did you hear about discrimination against Jews in hotels?

AVERN COHN:

No.

LEVI SMITH:

Resorts?

AVERN COHN:

No.

BARBARA COHN:

Restaurants?

AVERN COHN:

No.



LEVI SMITH:

Yacht clubs?

AVERN COHN:

Yes. Oh, that's a big story. I started to sail a bit, and a couple of fellows who had much more interest decided to organize a boat club. [Editor's note: A group of Jewish Detroiters, including Avern Cohn, founded the Island Boat Club on May 7, 1952, after their religion barred them from joining other boating clubs in Detroit. It was located on the Detroit River. By 1954, the club had borrowed enough money to lease its permanent site near Nine Mile and Jefferson on Lake St. Clair. Its name was changed to the Great Lakes Yacht Club, and construction began on its clubhouse.]

LEVI SMITH:

I presume you started your own yacht club because you couldn't get into an existing yacht club?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, these fellows wanted to race, be competitive, and they couldn't get into a yacht club.

LEVI SMITH:

Because they were Jewish?

AVERN COHN:

Yes, they felt that way. They had trouble. So they wanted to have their own yacht club. They leased—we leased because I was doing the legal work—a dock [on the Detroit River]. The end of the second year, we moved to [the club's current location on Lake St. Clair] off of Nine Mile Road and Jefferson. And we changed the name to the Great Lakes Yacht Club. Then we built a clubhouse.

There were races every Saturday on the Detroit River. There were different classes of boats. They were run by the Detroit River Yachting Association, DRYA. We couldn't get into the DRYA.

LEVI SMITH:

Why not?

AVERN COHN:

There were two schools of thought. One, because we were a Jewish yacht club. The other, because we were not organized enough to sponsor a regatta on Saturday, but anyhow, we couldn't get in. There was a feeling of anti-Semitism.



I was about fourth in the pecking order to become commodore [president] of the Great Lakes Yacht Club. I got elected commodore by the board. I got in my car, and one of the other fellows came up and said, “You know, Avern, you are going to be commodore for only a year and then everybody’s going to forget you. But if it’s the year that we become a member of the DRYA, no one will ever forget you.”

So I decided we were going to make a full-court press. I was going to be invited into the DRYA. A fellow that worked for my dad, managed some real estate for him, was a big shot at Bayview [Yacht Club in Detroit]. And I got ahold of him and said, “You have to see that we get into the DRYA.” We also got ahold of the yachting editor of the *Detroit Times*. He started pushing. And a couple of the fellows that owned big boats at Bayview. So we had a sort of full-court press. I contacted US Senator Pat McNamara and told him the situation. He put me in touch with the commander of the Coast Guard at Belle Isle which had jurisdiction over the river and regattas. By the end of the summer we were invited to become members of the DRYA. About ten years later, one of our members became commodore of the DRYA. Once we got in, we blossomed because we had sailors who could compete—good sailors.

Earlier when we first bought a boat, before the club, I wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* about the Detroit Power Squadron, [a boating educational organization founded in 1916]: “How does one become a member of the Power Squadron? We were told they wouldn’t let us in because we are Jewish. . . .”

I got a call from a fairly prominent lawyer in Detroit. He would like to talk to me: “I saw your letter in the *New York Times*. You don’t want to become a member of the Power Squadron in Detroit. Why don’t you join in a place like Wyandotte?” I said, “Why can’t we join in Detroit?” And he replied, “You’re Jewish. You don’t want to be around people who don’t like you.” He said this to me openly. So I thanked him. [It was similar at] the Detroit Athletic Club. . . .

LEVI SMITH:

When were you appointed a federal judge, and did your religion play a role in your appointment?

AVERN COHN:

When openings on the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan came in ’78, ’79, there were no Jews on the bench [in that court]. [Donald] Riegle was senator, Jimmy Carter was president. Outside of labor, a good portion of the money Riegle got came through



Jews. There were five positions. One of them was to go to a Jewish lawyer, and I wanted to be that one. And it turned out he appointed two who were Jewish. There was a fellow up in Flint who wanted to be a federal judge [Stewart Newblatt], and Riegle came from Flint. Newblatt was up in Flint, and I became the Jewish judge [in Detroit].

LEVI SMITH:

What was the vote in the Senate on your appointment?

AVERN COHN:

It went through. My only problem was that I was asked, "Why do you belong to a golf club that doesn't admit women?" That was Franklin Hills. So I said to the senator, "I know, and I am fighting like a dog to get them as members." . . .

LEVI SMITH:

Why did you want to be a federal judge?

AVERN COHN:

Did you ever want to get the brass ring? It's the brass ring.

LEVI SMITH:

Did you aspire to be on the federal Court of Appeals or the US Supreme Court?

AVERN COHN:

No. I never aspired to be on them.

LEVI SMITH:

You liked the trial court?

AVERN COHN:

Well, by the time I got there, I was close to 60. I was 56. No, I was never interested. That's an entirely different life.

BARBARA COHN:

When you were a judge, did you have any cases involving anti-Semitism?

AVERN COHN:

No. . . .

LEVI SMITH:

What about the '67 uprising in Detroit? How were you affected?



AVERN COHN:

Most of the destruction—the property losses—were suffered by Blacks, a goodly number, and Jewish businessmen who had their businesses [in the area]. The bar association organized lawyers to represent all [those] who were taken into Detroit’s Recorder’s Court and charged with destruction of property. Four or five lawyers from Honigman went over there, and I went over there for a day.

LEVI SMITH:

As volunteers?

AVERN COHN:

As volunteers, yes. But you’ve got to remember also that I was active in the ACLU at that time.

LEVI SMITH:

You were on the police commission in Detroit in the seventies?

AVERN COHN:

Yes.

LEVI SMITH:

Who appointed you to that?

AVERN COHN:

Mayor Coleman Young.

LEVI SMITH:

And did you deal with police brutality there?

AVERN COHN:

Sure.

LEVI SMITH:

What did you learn from that that’s relevant to what’s going on in the country today?

AVERN COHN:

I think Blacks have always been treated differently by the police, and there’s always been an element of frustration. And I think that this [George] Floyd thing exposed . . . was to sort of lance the boil. *Time Magazine* recently had a profile of [protesters] on the left, and they’re all younger Blacks feeling frustration. They have always been hostile to, always been concerned about the police, and the use of excessive force. . . .



LEVI SMITH:

I think one change is, in the last few years with the iPhone, people taking movies of what goes on, as opposed to “he said, she said.”

AVERN COHN:

I don't think we've come to grips yet with how electronic communication has changed the environment. It used to be before the internet, if the police choked somebody in Minneapolis, you read about it in the back pages of the newspaper, if it appeared at all. But, in Detroit, I don't think there's been an outlet yet for their frustration.

I have 24-hour help because I can't take care of all my personal needs on my own. So I have a fellow by the name of Curtiss. He handles me from eight in the morning until four in the afternoon, every day. He helps me dress, helps me take a shower, helps me use the bathroom. I need all that assistance. I have a running relationship with CVS at Maple and Telegraph. About six weeks or two months ago, he was in there. He's a man in his fifties, never went beyond high school. He goes to the pharmacist to get a prescription. The pharmacist says it will be about a half hour. So he's wandering through the store, and the manager comes up and asks him to open his coat. He asks what this is about, and the manager says, “You took some candy or something.” He didn't, but he knew he had gone into his coat to get his glasses. He picked up the prescription. He came home. He hasn't been in that store since. And if I had insisted he continue to use that pharmacy, he would have quit. He was insulted. All I did was try out another pharmacy. I didn't try to talk him out of it or anything. I just listened to him. And I went to a different pharmacy.

[The interview continued with Cohn's work as a judge.]

AVERN COHN:

I wrote a short paper that said there are judges who are Jewish and there are Jewish judges. And there's a difference.

LEVI SMITH:

What's the difference?

AVERN COHN:

Jewish judges have more compassion, . . . more sympathy for the underdog. [Former US Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, who served from 1916 to 1939,] is alleged to have said, “You have to look out for the other fellow.” I have managed to achieve some modicum of success, and all the way around, I've been Jewish. I wear it on my shoulder. As a younger



lawyer, even now that I'm retired, when I stood up and got some kind of award, I was always conscious of the fact that I'm Jewish. Am I more sensitive? I don't know, but I do know that if you read the literature, there's a difference between a judge who is Jewish and a Jewish judge.

LEVI SMITH:

I think the word is *rachmones*.

AVERN COHN:

Yes, I know. Your identity as a Jew just sticks with you. Are you familiar with [Benjamin] Disraeli [prime minister of the United Kingdom, 1874-1880]?

LEVI SMITH:

Sure.

AVERN COHN:

In the early nineteenth century, his father converted to being Episcopalian or something. And so Disraeli went along with him. As Disraeli rose in English society, he was an Episcopalian, but he fought it as he matured. You couldn't become a member of Parliament unless you took the oath on the New Testament. And he fought against that. One day in a debate in the Parliament, someone attacked his Jewishness. And he says, "Look, when your ancestors were in the forest painting themselves blue and doing incantation, mine were writing the Bible." . . . So, he kept his Jewishness. It is an issue even today. There are many situations where they'll characterize somebody as "he was Jewish." You don't lose that identity. . . .



INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Grand Rapids Remembers the Holocaust: A New Website

Robert Franciosi, PhD, Grand Valley State University

Origins

For several years students in a seminar I offer at Grand Valley State University in western Michigan have contributed to the History Unfolded project of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), a major crowd-sourcing initiative which draws upon the efforts of citizen historians. In order to chart “what was possible for Americans to have known about the Holocaust as it was happening and how Americans responded,” volunteers choose from 41 events from 1933 to 1945, search microfilms of their local newspapers, copy relevant articles as PDFs, and then upload them to a national database. By researching the *Grand Rapids Press* and the *Grand Rapids Herald*, my students have contributed to this growing digital clip file. As of March 15, 2021, it contains 35,213 entries, with 699 from Michigan—124 of those from Grand Rapids.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, my students had begun to examine events outside the war years, to trace how the Grand Rapids community responded from 1945 onwards to a growing comprehension of what had been perpetrated. Although my best-laid plans were frustrated by the mid-semester chaos, the students’ initial efforts showed much promise.

In the wake of that shutdown, I joined an informal Zoom group from the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids to discuss ways of honoring survivors who had settled in the area and to foster Holocaust education within the community. The discipline of Holocaust history presents many challenges, but two seem especially daunting: to sift through mountains of primary sources—documents, books, video testimonies, photographs, films, artifacts—as well as an ever-growing scholarly literature; and to engage in these sources with the overwhelming nature of mass death while not forgetting the significances of individual lives.

Almost as an afterthought during the meeting, I suggested that a website could detail how the Jewish community of Grand Rapids confronted the Holocaust and its memory, as well as highlight the stories of local survivors. From that passing comment, an exciting project has emerged. By drawing upon such rich local resources as the Peg & Mort Finkelstein Historical Archives, housed at Temple Emanuel in Grand Rapids, and the Grand Rapids Public Library, we plan to illustrate how the area’s Jewish community faced the catastrophe and its aftermath. By incorporating the stories of survivors who made their homes here, we will both honor their memories and preserve those accounts for future generations. And much



like the History Unfolded initiative, this website will call upon local citizen historians to share materials, conduct research, and write copy for the site.

A Window on the Past

When some members of our Zoom group mentioned a 1971 ceremony, which commemorated the Holocaust and dedicated a stained-glass window in its memory at Congregation Ahavas Israel, a local synagogue, I immediately sought information in the *Grand Rapids Press's* online archive, finding in just a few minutes a story about the event, which I later supplemented with information from the Gen and Jack Finkelstein Archives at Ahavas Israel.



Figure 1: Congregation Ahavas Israel in Grand Rapids, Michigan, dedicated this stained-glass window on April 25, 1971, in memory of the six million European Jews murdered during the Holocaust. (Courtesy of author.)

Designed by the firm of Albert Wood and Five Sons, the marble-framed window is set between the two doors to the main sanctuary and presents a powerful mixture of image and text. Although no longer present, a typed card once explained the window's particular features:



Dominating the design is an endless pattern of doomed humanity, conceived as an abstract unbroken chain representing all those who perished in the Holocaust. The powerful black interconnecting forms suggest strength and unity against a symbolic background which combines areas of flame and of the light beyond, with portions of the darkened heavens and patches of the blue of day.

A press release about the dedication also noted that words inscribed within the design are from Chaim Bialik's famous poem "In the City of Slaughter," written in response to the notorious Kishinev pogrom of 1903:

Only a lost people can lament so:
Smoke and ashes—that is its soul,
And its heart a desert wilderness,
Without an ounce of anger or revenge.

Where is the fist that shall smite?
Where is the thunderbolt to revenge?
To shake the world and rend the sky?
To overthrow My seat, My throne?

Published the day before the April 25, 1971, dedication, the *Grand Rapids Press* article included a photograph of the window, but of far greater interest to me was the listing of seven survivors slated to participate in a candle-lighting ceremony: David Mandel, Henry Pestka, Abe Radich, Fred Sarne, Joseph Stevens, Konrad Veit, and Clara Zaidenworm. All appear in a photograph in the Finkelstein archives at Ahavas Israel.

Fifty years after the dedication of that window, our group decided that the stories of these seven community members, their journeys from Europe to America, from the shattered ruins of an old world to the possibilities of a new one, should serve as the foundation for our website. Because most of the survivors who built new lives in the Grand Rapids community have passed from our midst, a primary goal of this website is to be a dynamic resource, a living depository of their stories. But how to present those accounts in a fresh and meaningful way?

Mapping the Past

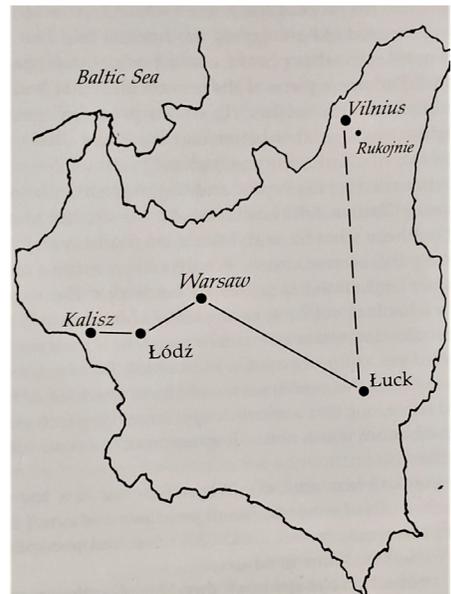
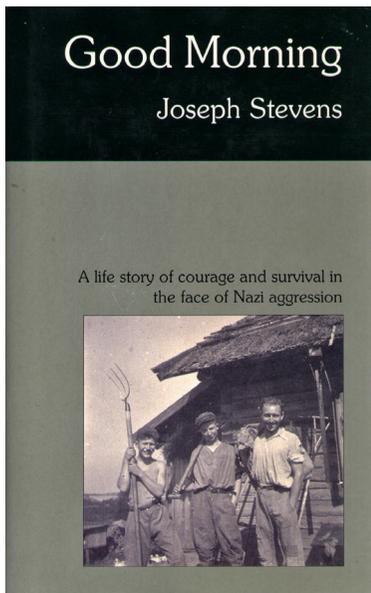
The USHMM used to address the challenge of confronting mass murder and the fate of individual victims by distributing "passports" to visitors who toured its permanent exhibition. These documents allowed each guest to trace a single person's fate during the stages of the Holocaust, personalizing and making manageable an otherwise overwhelming museum narrative. Using chronology to tell the story of Joseph Stevens, one of the survivors in that 1971 photograph, seemed self-evident, yet this "passport" approach opened for me another dimension.

Twenty years ago, while editing his memoir, *Good Morning*, I wanted to give readers a visual sense of Stevens's many escapes during the war. Beginning with Adolf Hitler's 1938 march into Vienna, the memoir traces



Stevens's journey across central Europe and through the worst years of Nazi rule. Concealing his Jewish identity, Stevens not only lived among Lithuanian and Polish Catholics, whose hatred for the Germans almost equaled their disdain for Jews, but also served as a partisan fighter. Besides including photographs from the period, the book provided a rudimentary map of Poland and Lithuania, with lines tracing Stevens's movements—lines I recall drawing with the assistance of a large printer's ruler.

The map now seems a relic from ages past. Yet despite its simplicity, its visual rendering of Joseph Stevens's journeys indicates just how important locality is to Holocaust stories. Last year I attempted to convey this idea to my students by assigning them ArcGIS StoryMaps projects. The ArcGIS StoryMaps platform can be a particularly effective tool for helping students engage the Holocaust as a continent-wide (even global) event because it allows users to create multi-layered maps that combine images, text, video, and web links, emphasizing a "sense of place" and illustrating "spatial relationships." The final product can be shared not only with classmates, but also with users across the internet.



*Figure 2 (left) and Figure 3 (right): The Holocaust survivors' project in Grand Rapids, Michigan, hopes to share the stories of local survivors, including Joseph Stevens, on a dedicated website. Project developers plan to make use of the ArcGIS StoryMaps platform to update visual depictions of survivors' journeys such as this map (Figure 3) of Stevens's movements during the war, which appeared in his memoir (Figure 2), *Good Morning*, ed. Robert Franciosi (Allendale, MI: Grand Valley State University, 2001). StoryMaps will permit the creation of multi-layered maps that combine images, text, video, and web links to provide viewers with a deeper understanding of survivors' experiences. (Photos courtesy of author, with permission from Grand Valley State University and the family of Joseph Stevens.)*



For their ArcGIS StoryMaps projects, my students analyzed three diaries from the period: two by survivors and a third by a perpetrator. Using as a guide a model map built around Anne Frank's diary, they then confronted the cultural and spatial differences between Frank's Amsterdam and the Warsaw of Mary Berg or the Prague of Helga Weiss—or the Münster of SS Doctor Johann Kremer—as well as each author's relative freedom of movement during the war years. Helga Weiss, for example, charted her secular life in Prague, followed by her confinements in Theresienstadt, Auschwitz, Flossenbürg, and Mauthausen, the concentration camp from which she was liberated in May 1945, and finally, her return to Prague after the war.

Scholars of the Holocaust, in fact, have recently been exploring spatial dimensions beyond simple maps. Employing geographic information systems (GIS) technology, they have deepened our understanding, as the editors of *Geographies of the Holocaust* note, of “the spaces and places that people created, occupied, passed through, and endured—the material landscapes that were essential to the implementation of the Holocaust and inseparable from people's experience of it.”

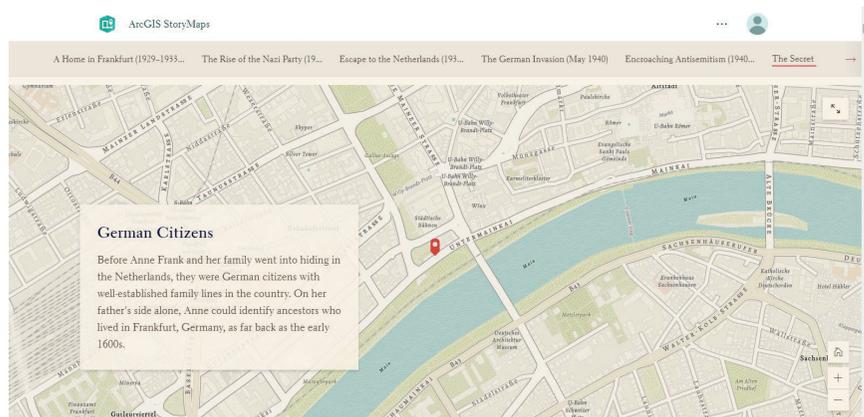


Figure 4: A sample page from an interactive map built around Anne Frank's diary using the ArcGIS StoryMaps platform. (Courtesy of Julia Bouwkamp: storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fd7fd326273d465082bd5512d051b785.)

Although the StoryMaps we intend to create for Holocaust survivors who settled in Grand Rapids cannot approach the geographical sophistication of cutting-edge scholarship, they can nevertheless open our eyes to the complex spatial dimensions of those particular stories. This point was reinforced for me as soon as I began working on a new map for the Joseph Stevens story.

Late in his memoir, Stevens recounts returning to Kalisz, the home in western Poland he had left as the war began in 1939. He hoped to



find surviving members of his family, or at least news of their fate, but was greeted at their apartment by a half-drunk man who slammed the door in his face. “I can still hear the loud boom it made,” he wrote five decades later.

I knew that Kalisz had to be the starting point for any StoryMap devoted to Joseph Stevens. In describing his return, however, he explained that the central street on which the family had lived, Piłsudski, after the great Polish leader, had been changed to Stalin. My search for a Piłsudski in Kalisz yielded only a highway on the outskirts of town. After the fall of communism, a great many Polish streets had been purged of their Stalin-era names, but there was no consistent practice across the country. Indeed, citizens of Warsaw continue to argue whether cleansing such associations is worth the inconvenience of changing decades-old street names.

Fortunately for me, I knew that Stevens and his older son, Jack, had returned to Kalisz in 2004, a visit which appears in a WGVU film, *Defying Hitler*. An e-mail exchange with Jack Stevens soon yielded the new address: Śródmiejska 6, a name indicating its place as the “city center.”

Using ArcGIS software, I not only can point viewers to the very building where Stevens and his family once had lived, but also can embed pre- and post-war photographs, link to a USHMM article on Jewish life in Kalisz during the inter-war period, or even share video clips from that 2004 return. The possibilities are both extensive and exciting.

“There is no Jewish community in Kalisz today,” the USHMM article on Jewish life in the town concludes, but there once was. Remembering it and all the other places from which survivors began their never-expected journeys to Grand Rapids, then, is where our project must begin.

The Second Generation

Without the help of survivors’ children such as Jack Stevens, without the memories and records he preserves, something as simple—and essential—as an old address could easily be lost. Constructing our website, then, also depends upon assistance from those of the second generation. A recent article in the *Florida Times-Union* detailed efforts in Jacksonville by the children of Holocaust survivors to preserve their parents’ stories. One member of the group explained that her father spent the last ten years of his life speaking at local schools, where he shared both his testimony and its contemporary lessons. “I feel like I’m walking into some very large shoes,” she said in reference to her own efforts. “More than ever, I am ready to tell this story, so it won’t be forgotten.”

Although getting aged survivors to share their stories remains an urgent task, recording the experiences of their children, most of whom



are now eligible for Social Security, also seems pressing, and we expect it will be part of our project, as well. The group in Jacksonville cannot finally tell their parents' stories; but they can articulate what it meant to grow up in the presence of the storytellers, and how it affected their own adult lives and values. Psychologist Aaron Hass, himself a child of survivors, writes that his parents' agony "did not end with their liberation at the close of World War II," and their "legacy of pain and changed personalities" profoundly affected "a generation that never saw an SS storm trooper." Drawing on my literary training, I think of words from William Faulkner that, though written about the South, also speak to the unique experiences of these Holocaust inheritors, indeed of all of us facing this history: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

Robert Franciosi , PhD, is a professor of English and Honors at Grand Valley State University. His work on the Holocaust includes *Elie Wiesel: Conversations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2002), the memoir *Good Morning* (Allendale, MI: Grand Valley State University, 2001), by Grand Rapids Holocaust survivor Joseph Stevens, and articles on such writers as John Hersey, Anne Frank, and Art Spiegelman. Besides teaching courses on the Holocaust, he has conducted workshops at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, Michigan, escorted student groups to sites in Germany and Poland, and participated in study seminars in Eastern Europe, Israel, and at the Holocaust Research Institute at Royal Holloway, University of London.

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INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Shmoozing in G-d's Country

Carol Ellstein, PhD

On a gorgeous summer day a few years ago, as I was loading groceries into my car, a nearby stranger asked, "D'you live here?"

"I do," I replied.

"D'ya love it?"

"Yep," I smiled.

"How long?"

"'bout 15 years."

"From where?"

"East Lansing" (glancing at his plates) "and metro Detroit before that."

He smiled. "Sterling Heights. We come up north every summer and never wanna leave." He called it his annual trip to G-d's Country.

The memory of a hand-made Upper Peninsula welcome sign proclaiming that G-d is a local call suddenly entered my mind. I told him I understood.

Our Jewish G-d's Country roughly covers the northern third of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, the entire Upper Peninsula, and an adjoining part of Ontario, Canada. The region is heavily forested, home to abundant wildlife, prone to long harsh winters and short spectacular summers, and sparsely populated. Three Great Lakes provide the fresh-water foundation for thousands of inland lakes, rivers, streams, and connecting waterways.

Six tiny Jewish communities with minuscule congregations exist in the Great Lakes ports of Traverse City, Petoskey, Alpena, Sault Ste. Marie, Marquette, and Hancock. Together the congregations support about 260 member households. A guesstimated 200 unaffiliated Jews live here too, but they choose to stay aloof or unknown.

Michigan's Soo-area Jews cross the International Bridge to reach the congregation in their Canadian namesake. The nearest congregation for everyone else is in Michigan, but getting there can be a shlep. The ride between the two farthest communities (Traverse City and Hancock) takes almost seven hours across two bridges. A winter trek is not recommended.

My house is nestled in a small Lower Peninsula lake community. Lakes Michigan (Petoskey) and Huron (Cheyboygan) are scenic 40-minute drives from my door. So is the Mackinac Bridge. My soul can't imagine living anywhere else, except on the shore of a different lake. Eventually, some life change may require me to leave, but for now it's almost perfect; after more than twenty years of northern exposure, my spiritual cup still runneth over.





A spectacular sunset seen from the author's backyard in her northern Michigan lake community, circa March 2, 2021. (Courtesy of author.)

Some of us are born here. Others come to connect with jobs or families, to enjoy the north's four-season ambience, to live a simpler life, to rekindle happy childhood memories, or to satisfy some other need. The decision to remain often hinges on one's ability to balance the constant tension between a deep love for the northern spirit and a resigned tolerance for the unexpected gut punches, innocent or not, that sometimes land on us.

We northern Jews are almost equally represented by birth and conversion. Many have Christian spouses or partners who may or may not convert with time. Most of our children retain their Jewish identity after leaving home, but few return to reclaim their childhood. Our Jewish souls, which might be dormant at arrival, often revive with community and congregational exposure. Hardy folks by nature, northern Jews, regardless of age, tend to bloom where planted.

Every northern Jew I know speaks of a connection between the region's natural beauty and individual spirituality. One friend said it well: "Our own spirit draws us to the north, but the spirit of the north keeps us here."



We all seem to find spiritual sustenance in nature and communal sustenance in each other. The combination is optimally suited for our personal values, and works especially well after children and adults alike learn that the welcoming ambience of G-d's Country is not always shared by its Christian majority. Joining in an outdoor adventure with local or regional Jewish friends can be the perfect balm for weary souls that spend too much time in Christian worlds (excluding, of course, the precious hours we spend with interfaith loved ones).

Our most common hassles involve schedule change requests for work and school events that coincide with High Holidays and other festivals. We typically soldier on, but the often-confused reactions, grudging adjustments, and occasional penalties can scorch our hearts.

Attached to that is the need for constant vigilance with schools. As one friend noted, even a simple lapse in attention ensures that "they are back to hosting the Christmas pageant and singing hymns."

Another friend remembered the time he placed a five-foot menorah and candles in front of a holiday tree that appeared in the lobby of his children's middle school. He had simply felt that he needed to do something.

A high-schooler once told a would-be bully to check his facts before spewing Jewish hate. By the end of high school, most of our children will have learned to do the same.

Then there's the all-too-common experience of being told that we're the first Jew someone has met, sometimes followed by questions about our relationship with Jesus.

Being Jewish here means that everyone in the household, regardless of religion or age, becomes a local expert on everything Jewish, regardless of what we know, believe, or practice. One friend concluded, "Overall, the imagery of 'the only Jew in the room' does encapsulate it."

That image extends to stores. Jewish items, including greeting cards, are scarce, and the random discovery of one can be enough to make our day. Some of us purchase whatever we find, whether we need it or not. In addition to supporting the local economy, the sale is a tangible reminder of our presence; plus, we have no assurance that the item will remain.

A positive exception is Meijer, which is located in most, but not all, communities. My local store usually stocks not-for-Passover Manischewitz matzah, borscht, and/or gefilte fish; Shabbat and yahrzeit candles; Israeli brands of nonpareil and almond confections; Kedem grape juice; and other goodies. It's always a welcome sight.

Passover items might arrive in bulk if someone makes a shopping pilgrimage to a grocery store hundreds of miles away. Other options are to make the trip ourselves, order online, or simply manage with whatever we have from previous years. If all else fails, Meijer's not-for-Passover food items are typically available until they run out.



The search for Hanukkah candles often requires reconnaissance at multiple stores, as sales staff may not know what they are, and purchasers may forget to order them from one year to the next. Occasionally, someone might either ask a local store to stock a limited supply, or procure several boxes from somewhere else to share with the congregation. Otherwise, we're on our own.

Fortunately, everyday kindnesses, widespread social acceptance and respect, close interfaith friendships, and that fabulous outdoor spirit far outweigh the local neglect, common ignorance, and sporadic ill intent that infect northern Jewish life. I can't emphasize this enough.

We appreciate random accommodations at meetings and events (e.g., a vegetarian substitute for a pork dish) that validate our culture and nourish our souls. We also appreciate support for our religious beliefs, even when they're not well understood.

After the Tree of Life synagogue murders in Pittsburgh on October 27, 2018, members of all six congregations received spontaneous outpourings of concern from shocked locals and outraged clergy who wanted us to know that we are not alone. Their support has never wavered. Neither has our gratitude.

Our simchas are typically attended by more non-Jews than Jews. Indoor events occur everywhere, including local colleges. Outdoor celebrations use every imaginable backdrop, including shorelines, summer camps, and yachts. Within our vast playground, the ideal place for the right price can always be found.

The six congregations all function as both the local Jewish center and their members' safe haven. Ritual observances and burial needs fueled their establishment, but evolving religious and interfaith influences have gradually transformed their character. These days, everyone with Jewish interests is welcome, regardless of the religious pedigrees they bring.

Unfortunately, the dual values of *Halacha* (Jewish law) and *Kavanah* (intention) that guide us are insufficient to ensure our communities' survival. Across the region, a few abandoned cemeteries and recycled buildings with Star of David adornments remind us that northern Jewish viability requires more than open hearts, helping hands, loving spirits, and observant souls.

In 2012 our congregations became connected after fifteen women found a way to combat our communities' inherent isolation. The resulting umbrella-like entity—L'Dor v'Dor Northern Michigan Consortium, today known as L'Dor v'Dor Upper Great Lakes Jewish Consortium (www.ldvd.net)—bridges our physical distance through a grant-supported menu of weekend retreats, regional block-booking events, an interactive virtual religious education initiative, and, now, Zoom activities. A spirit-filled family reunion occurs whenever we're together.



Thanks to the steadfast generosity of the Jewish Women's Foundation of Metropolitan Detroit and the Ravitz Foundation, our grassroots consortium is brimming with possibilities for growth. We are profoundly grateful to our benefactors and other Detroit friends for their support.

We northern Jews are sustained by deep spiritual connections with nature and water, fulfilling Jewish and interfaith kinships, unlimited opportunities to repair our world, and endless hope. For us, it's more than enough.

Carol Ellstein, a Detroit-born psychologist, lives with her husband, Joe Wildberg, in Michigan's Tip of the Mitt. She is a past president and board member of Temple B'nai Israel of Petoskey and a co-founder and Leadership Team member of the L'Dor v'Dor Upper Great Lakes Jewish Consortium.

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 NOTABLE JEWISH MICHIGANDERS IN HISTORY

MWWMD Biography—Golda Malka Ginsburg Mayer Krolik: Historic Human Rights Champion, Journalist, and Activist

Jeannie Weiner



Figure 1: In 1977 Golda Ginsburg Krolik received the prestigious Fred M. Butzel Memorial Award from the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit (now the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit) for her “distinguished community service.” Pictured with Krolik are then-Federation President Martin E. Citrin (z”l) (left) and former Butzel Award recipient Erwin S. Simon (z”l) (right). (Courtesy of Leonard N. Simons Jewish Community Archives, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit, Max M. Fisher Building, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan.)

Placing Golda Malka Ginsburg Mayer Krolik (1892-1984) into a particular area of achievement is impossible. She was a champion of human rights, a journalist, an editor, a social worker, an activist, an organizer, and the 1977 winner of Jewish Detroit’s most prestigious award, the Fred M. Butzel Memorial Award for Distinguished Community Service.

Krolik was the daughter of Ida and Bernard Ginsburg. Bernard Ginsburg was born in Columbus, Indiana, to Polish-immigrant parents. After moving from Indiana to Detroit, Bernard Ginsburg and his father opened a scrap metal business that ultimately was very successful.

Ida (Goldman) Ginsburg was one of the early activists for women’s suffrage and labor rights. Although Golda Ginsburg Krolik was only nine



years old when her mother died, she would have known that her mother had helped establish, and was the first president of, the Jewish Women's Club of Temple Beth El. Ida Ginsburg founded the club in 1891 at a time when a "woman's place was in the home." Yet this social club was established to "elevate mental, moral and social status, and to foster cultivating influences." The club's membership spent time debating important issues of the day. The Women's Club became the Detroit section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), today known as NCJW Michigan, a state-wide organization.

Golda Ginsburg Krolik, born in Detroit, lived with her family at 236 Adelaide Street, in one of the early homes built by famed Jewish architect Albert Kahn. A distinguishing feature of the house was the use of caryatides (nude female figures) to support the roof over the front door. These Greek-style statues, carved of oak, were embarrassing to the teenaged Krolik. The Tudor-style house still stands today and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 2 (upper) and Figure 3 (lower): Golda Ginsburg Krolik grew up in this house at 236 Adelaide Street in Detroit (Figure 2). The home's distinct carved caryatides (nude female figures) support the roof over the front door (Figure 3), but were embarrassing to the teenaged Krolik. The house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1991. (JHSM collections.)



Most of Krolik's neighbors on Adelaide Street were affluent as well as diverse. Krolik attributed this diversity in ethnicity, religious practice, and race as contributing factors to her future tolerance and acceptance of all people: "I took it for granted," she explained, that people of different races and religions were her friends and schoolmates.

Krolik's older brother, Avery Jacob Ginsburg, was born nearly blind, requiring special forms of education. He eventually became totally independent. Having a sibling with a disability also expanded Krolik's understanding of the needs of diverse populations.

After Ida Ginsburg died, her young sisters came to live with the Ginsburg family on Adelaide Street. Krolik enjoyed having these young female teachers in her home, as they amplified her studies. Bernard Ginsburg believed in public education, and Krolik "adored every single minute of being in school"—except her German class.

Even at a young age, Krolik showed signs of being a trailblazer. In the early years of the automobile, Krolik's father bought a car, giving up his horse and buggy. But it was Krolik, at ages fourteen and fifteen, who drove the auto—no license or regulation required.

Krolik attended the University of Michigan, recalling that there were eight Jewish female students on campus during her time there. Students did not have major areas of study in those years, instead taking classes that interested them. Krolik was the first woman to work on the staff of the school's newspaper, the *Michigan Daily*, where she became editor.

Following her graduation in 1917, Krolik began working as a society editor at the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* (later the *Detroit Jewish News*). Afterward, she worked as publicity director for the Detroit Community Fund, and she was employed by the United Jewish Charities. Krolik also had a lifelong interest in health care. She volunteered at two of Detroit's free medical clinics, the Hannah Schloss Clinic and the North End Clinic. Later she served as president of the Shapero School of Nursing at Sinai Hospital (now DMC Sinai-Grace Hospital).

Krolik's volunteering began very early in life. When she was nine or ten years old, she and her sisters volunteered to "play with the babies" at the day nursery at the Hannah Schloss Memorial Building. (The forerunner of today's Jewish Community Center, it housed a number of activities, including a day nursery and the medical clinic noted above.) The nursery was furnished, supplied, and named in memory of Krolik's mother.

Krolik also was an early human rights champion. When she was in her forties, as the Nazis threatened Europe, Krolik helped 21 relatives flee Germany and settle in the United States. Appropriately, she later became president of the Resettlement Service.

In 1943, following a terrible and infamous race riot in Detroit, she was the first woman appointed to the Inter-Racial Committee (later the Detroit Commission on Community Relations). She served on it for 24 years, responding to protests of discrimination in the field of nursing and



raising funds to assist African American students. She received the Freedom Medal from the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as it was known at the time).

In an oral interview, Krolik recalled a 1946 meeting held in her home on Chicago Boulevard in Detroit where she lived for many years as an adult. The event was expected to draw around 40 people to discuss women having their own “division” of the Jewish Welfare Federation of Detroit (now the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit). This separate division would allow a woman to give a gift in her own name—a revolutionary idea at the time. Moments before the gathering, Krolik realized that there were many dozens of women arriving—substantially more than expected. Every possible chair in the house was utilized: women sat on the radiators. Krolik recalled that this was one of the first meetings of Federation’s Women’s Division (now Women’s Philanthropy). The speaker was Marguerite Kozenn, future wife of renowned composer and classical pianist Julius Chajes. Kozenn told the story of having to leave Europe with Julius Chajes, who was brought to Detroit to be the musical director of the Jewish Community Center in 1940. The meeting, held just after World War II ended, was emotional and inspirational.

Detroit was one of the first cities to establish a separate Women’s Division of Federation. The Women’s Division reflected the need for equality. Women had been in charge of their lives and families during the war when their husbands were away fighting. The creation of a separate division also was a reaction to the loss of so many Jews in the Holocaust. There was a sense that each Jew needed to be counted.

Krolik’s first marriage was to Leopold David Mayer (1885-1932). They had three children: David, John, and Judy. After Mayer died, she married Julian Krolik (1886-1956). She lived to the age of 92, dying in 1984.

Golda Krolik’s extensive years of service as a professional and volunteer, beginning in the early 1900s and continuing for decades, were remarkable. Krolik was a notable Detroit woman who made an enormous difference in the welfare of her community and in the community at large. Understanding the democratic need for equality and justice, she served as a humanitarian, organizer, writer, and leader.

Golda Krolik is just one of Michigan’s remarkable Jewish women who have helped build and shape the state’s communities. Since 2013 JHSM has sought to collect, preserve, and share the stories and achievements of such women through its Michigan Women Who Made a Difference Project. To explore and support this undertaking, please visit JHSM’s MWWMD online gallery at <https://www.michjewishhistory.org/mwwmd>.

Jeannie Weiner is a local freelance writer and a lifelong community activist and volunteer. She is a past president of the Jewish Community Relations Council and current vice president of JHSM. In 2021 Weiner received Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit’s prestigious William Davidson Lifetime Achievement Award for her “lifetime of service to the Jewish community of Detroit and the Jewish people.”



 NOTABLE JEWISH MICHIGANDERS IN HISTORY

Ezekiel Solomons: Reexamining Michigan's First Jewish Resident after 260 Years

Catherine Cangany, PhD, JHSM Executive Director

This fall marks the 260th anniversary of the arrival of Michigan's first Jewish resident, Ezekiel Solomons, who settled in Michilimackinac in September 1761. Family recollection puts Solomons' birth circa 1735 in Berlin. Historian Sheldon J. Godfrey has speculated that Solomons might have been born in what is now the Czech Republic, "one of the many Bohemian Jews who were expelled by the [Habsburg] Empress Maria Theresa" from 1745 to 1748. Of Ezekiel Solomons' birth family, nothing is known, except he had a sister named Esther, who married English merchant Moses Hart. Solomons' last name was patronymic, the final "s" meaning "son of." He included the suffix when he wrote his own name, although his wife and acquaintances generally did not, a practice of omission that has continued.¹

Business Successes and Failures

During the Seven Years' War (1756–1763) between France and Britain and their colonies and Native allies, Ezekiel Solomons was based out of Albany in British New York, part of a Jewish fur-trading group that comprised Gershon Levy, Kaufman (Chapman) Abraham, Benjamin Lyons, and Lucius Levy Solomons, who may have been a cousin. When French Montreal capitulated to the British in 1760, Ezekiel Solomons, followed by other firm members, immediately relocated there, enticed by the novel economic opportunity. He secured a fur-trading license and established one of the first Great Lakes fur-trading consortiums under British rule: Gershon Levy & Company. Despite Solomons' centrality to the venture, the com-

Catherine Cangany, PhD, is executive director of JHSM. She received her doctorate in early American history from the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Frontier Seaport: Detroit's Transformation into an Atlantic Entrepot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). Prior to joining JHSM, she was a tenured associate professor of history at the University of Notre Dame.

¹ Solomons' Berlin birthplace comes from A. C. Osborne, "The Migration of Voyageurs from Drummond Island to Penetanguishene in 1828" (Toronto, 1901), <http://my.tbaytel.net/bmartin/drummond.htm>. Bill Gladstone, "Fur trader's family reunion," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, July 20, 2003, <https://www.jta.org/2003/07/20/lifestyle/fur-traders-family-reunion>. Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew: 1492-1776* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1970), 2:385. For an example of how Ezekiel Solomons referred to himself, see the April 12, 1779, oath he and six others made in Jacob Rader Marcus, ed., *American Jewry: Documents: Eighteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1959), 111-12.



pany was fronted by a British subject to avoid the trade restrictions levied on foreign-born residents who had not been naturalized. It would go on to establish outposts at Niagara, Michilimackinac, Detroit, and Thunder Bay, with supply lines stretching to England, the thirteen colonies, the Caribbean, and even the Pacific Ocean. It was so successful, Gershon Levy & Company provisioned the British army and conducted “almost one-half of the British fur trade on the Great Lakes”—until it collapsed in 1763.²

Despite the company’s success, not everyone was happy about the changeover to British control. Particularly angry were local Native peoples, long accustomed to France’s more generous trade deals and less coercive form of colonialism. Inspired by Odawa leader Pontiac’s siege of Fort Detroit in spring 1763, on June 2 that year, a group of Ojibwe men arrived outside Fort Michilimackinac and staged a game of *baaga’adowe* (a Native ballgame now known as lacrosse) to lure the British inhabitants outside the fort’s pickets without their weapons. Entranced by the game, the spectators realized too late its true purpose. The Ojibwe athletes consciously spared the French Canadians, but killed most of the British.³

Ezekiel Solomons had not left the fort to watch the game. As the cheers turned to shrieks and screams, he hid in a garret opposite his house. Although “a very unlikely representative of the British,” he understood what he symbolized: an outsider profiting at French and Native expense. As the hours crawled by, he watched through the chinks in the garret walls as French and Native men looted his home and store. At some point, his hiding place was discovered. A party of Ojibwes took him and three British men prisoner, stripped them of most of their clothes, and forced them to paddle a canoe in chilly fog toward Lake Michigan. Eighteen miles west of the fort, the canoe was intercepted by a band of Odawas, angry that the attack had occurred without their input. The canoe returned to Michilimackinac. The prisoners, including Solomons, were confined in the fort until mid-July, when they were transported to Montreal by Odawa guards and ransomed back to the British.⁴

² By 1764 there were also references to Levy, Solomons, & Co. and Ezekiel Solomons & Co. See Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 3:1510n12. Sheldon J. Godfrey and Judith C. Godfrey, *Search out the Land: The Jews and the Growth of Equality in British Colonial America, 1740-1867* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1995), xvi, 83, 88, 90. Eldon P. Gundry, *The Zaccheus Patterson Descendants: Together with Those of the Following Related Families of George Gundry, Selden Bennett, Platt Johnson, Martin Van Sickle, Ezekiel Solomon, and Benson Hunt* (Flint: Artcraft Press, 1957), 221.

³ The Ojibwe, Odawa, and Bodéwadmi (Potawatomi) tribes together form a longstanding political, military, and economic alliance called the Council of Three Fires that dates back to 796 CE at Michilimackinac. All three tribes are also part of the Anishinaabe linguistic and cultural group. Keith R. Widder, *Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow: Michilimackinac and the Anglo-Indian War of 1763* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 141-49.

⁴ Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 83-85. Ezekiel Solomons statement to Daniel Disney, August 14, 1763, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (Lansing: Robert Smith Publishing Co., 1897), 27:227.



Returning to Michilimackinac in 1765, Solomons was utterly ruined. The consortium had lost a staggering £18,000 worth of goods. The partners were unable to repay their creditors in New York and Montreal. Most went their separate ways. Ezekiel Solomons and Gershon Levy remained in partnership and tried to rebuild. Together, they purchased a two-room house inside the fort and set up shop. By 1767 the company exported the second-largest shipment of beaver pelts from Michilimackinac to Montreal. But this haul did little to offset the old debt. The following year, consortium members unsuccessfully petitioned the governor of Canada for bankruptcy protection. When that failed, Ezekiel Solomons, like the other partners, spent many years attempting to repay what the company owed.⁵

By the 1770s Solomons was back on his feet, sending canoes north of Lake Superior and participating with other merchants to open Michilimackinac's general store in 1779. By the early 1780s, he had attracted the notice of his chief competitor, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which reluctantly labeled him the "master of all the Trading Houses in this part of the Country." One exasperated official tried to downplay Solomons' threat to the HBC monopoly, dismissing him as an "Illiterate Jew." The charge was ridiculously untrue. Although Solomons may not have read English fluently, he certainly spoke it well enough to do business and give testimony. Given his life experience, he was undoubtedly a polyglot. He owned books written in Hebrew, Spanish, and English. He also read French.⁶

Like most eighteenth-century traders and merchants of means, Ezekiel Solomons also trafficked in human beings. Just four days after the Ojibwes' attack on Fort Michilimackinac in June 1763, Solomons sold an enslaved Native person to Captain George Etherington, the commanding officer of Michilimackinac, for £50—while Solomons and Etherington themselves were in captivity. Thirteen years later in Montreal, Solomons sold for 140 Spanish *piastres* an approximately twenty-year-old Black woman named Jurushy, a variant of Jerusha, the Biblical queen mentioned in Melachim II.

⁵ Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 90. The loss was calculated in "New York currency," a devalued local pound generally worth about two-thirds of a pound sterling. For a transcription of the unsuccessful petition, see Jacob Rader Marcus, "The Jews of New York, New England, and Canada, 1649-1794," in *Early American Jewry* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1951), 1:232-34.

⁶ "Articles Relative to the Establishment of a General Store at Michilimackinac," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections*, vol. 10, 2nd ed. (Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1908), 305-7. Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 115. For an idea of what languages Solomons could read, see the catalog notes for volume 5 of "Important Judaica: A Six-Volume Set of the Sephardic Liturgy with English Translation, Translated by Alexander Alexander, London: 1771-1776," <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2017/important-judaica-n09687/lot.147.html>. For Solomons' ability to speak and read French, see the French-language depositions he presided over in 1803 in Lawrence M. Lande, *Canadian Historical Documents and Manuscripts* (Montreal: private printing, 1977-1982), entry B844.



Cap^t. George Etherington comm^d Officer. at Michilimackinac
 To Ezekiel Solomon and Co
 4/63
 6 Lms, To a Panis Slave, furnished, for his Maj^{ty}s Service
 by your order. _____ Solomon

Figure 1: On June 6, 1763, while in captivity during the siege of Michilimackinac, Ezekiel Solomons sold a Native man to Captain George Etherington, the fort's commanding officer, for £50 New York currency, a devalued local pound generally worth about two-thirds of a British pound sterling. Panis (Pawnee) (4th line, 5th word from left) was a local French term, also used by anglophones, for an enslaved Native man. (Courtesy of William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.)

Je represent et acceptant d'avoir une Negresse
 Nomme Jurushy agee d'environ Vingt ans
 elle appartenant et qui'il Certifie estre
 Esclave, La dite Negresse ainsi Vendue pour
 et Moyennant le prix et somme d'ant
 quarante piastres d'Espagne quelle detra

Figure 2: While in Montreal on April 16, 1776, Ezekiel Solomons sold for 140 Spanish piastres an approximately twenty-year-old enslaved Black woman named Jurushy. A variant of Jerusha, Jurushy is derived from the Hebrew verb ירש (yarash), to inherit or take possession of. Jurushy's name connoted her status as an object to be owned.

Sousigne lian Mille Sept Cens Soixante
 Seize le Seize Avril a pres Midi
 et ont Seigne apres lecture fait deux
 Mots brayes sont Mals Ezekiel Solomons

Figure 3: The fur trader signed his name to Jurushy's contract of sale: Ezekiel Solomons. Note the final "s." (Figures 2 and 3 courtesy of the Archives nationales du Québec, Montréal.)



It was not uncommon for slaveholders to bestow regal or powerful names on vulnerable and exploited chattel slaves. Given Jurushy's age, Solomons may not have named her. But as a Hebrew speaker and reader, he would have known her name's etymology. Derived from the verb *ירש* (*yarash*), to inherit or take possession of, Jurushy's name connoted her status as an object to be owned.⁷

Ties to Shearith Israel

When Ezekiel Solomons and his business partners worked out of Albany, they were within fairly easy reach of North America's first synagogue: New York City's Congregation Shearith Israel, founded in 1654, although a building was not erected until 1730. (Solomons spent the high holidays of 1804 there, where he made three contributions before dying soon after.) Known as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Shearith Israel has adhered from its founding to the Western Sephardic minhag, although Ashkenazim have always numbered among its members.⁸

After French Montreal's fall to the British in 1760, the city gained its first Jewish residents. Too few in number for a cantor, rabbi, hazan, synagogue, or cemetery, Montreal's earliest Jews made due with a minyan and voluntary leadership. For the high holidays, those able voyaged down the Hudson River to Shearith Israel. But this arrangement was short-lived. During the American Revolution, as the British army was poised to capture New York City and many residents prepared to flee, Shearith Israel's members voted in 1776 to dissolve the congregation. With nowhere to go and New York's future uncertain, Montreal's Jewish community raised funds for its own synagogue building—its own Congregation Shearith Israel. At least one scholar has speculated that the Montreal Shearith Israel was meant to house New York's congregants in exile. Among those most visible in raising money for Montreal's Shearith Israel was Ezekiel Solomons. He helped secure enough funds to complete the building in

⁷ George Etherington, June 20, 1765 warrant, Thomas Gage Warrants, 12:24, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. "Le 16 avril 1776 Vente de Negresse par M. Ezech Solomon à M. de la Bruere," Archives nationales du Québec, Montréal. Widder, *Beyond Pontiac's Shadow*, 154. "Recent Acquisitions," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 3, no. 2 (January 1951): 44. Ezekiel Solomons deed for the sale of a slave, April 16, 1776, call number SC-11717, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 3:1503. Solomons also worked with free Blacks, engaging fur trader John Darlington in April 1777 to travel from Montreal to northern Ontario to trade for goods or furs for the sum of 600 *livres*. See Frank Mackey, *Done with Slavery: The Black Fact in Montreal* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 197.

⁸ Israel Joel, Abraham Isaacs, and Jonas N. Phillips, "Items Relating to Congregation Shearith Israel, New York," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 27 (1920), "The Lyons Collection, Volume II": 84. Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 184. For information on Shearith Israel's minhag, see <https://shearithisrael.org/content/minhag>.



1778 and purchase a *Sefer Torah* (handwritten Torah scroll) from the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation in London.⁹

Like New York before it, Montreal's congregation served a sparse population spread over hundreds of square miles. Jewish fur traders, including Ezekiel Solomons and his partners, practiced an unusual form of seasonal transhumance, arriving in Michigan as soon after the spring thaw as possible and leaving in late summer to be at Shearith Israel (whether New York or Montreal) in time for the high holidays. At best, Solomons resided in Michigan for a third of each year.

Family Life

For most of his trading career, Solomons lived in Montreal. As Sheldon J. Godfrey has calculated, when the synagogue was constructed, Shearith Israel boasted about twenty (male) members. Of those, more than 25 percent had married outside the faith. Some members—even those active in the synagogue—baptized their children. All of the above applied to Ezekiel Solomons. In Montreal on July 23, 1769, he married Catholic resident Marie Elizabeth Louise Dubois (also called Okimabinesikwe). She has been identified variously as French-Canadian and, by virtue of her Anishinaabe name, Native. It may be truer to say she was *métis* (both).¹⁰

Dubois' heritage was a significant asset to Solomons' line of work. Marrying into French, Native, and/or Catholic kin networks provided cultural and linguistic outsiders like Solomons instant access to New World power structures. It was a common practice among fur traders and merchants. Louise Dubois and Ezekiel Solomons' interfaith marriage began with a religious compromise: their union was officiated by Anglican priest David Chabrand Delisle, then the only Protestant clergyman in town, and so early in Christ Church's existence, it did not yet have a church building. Given Dubois' non-Jewish status, at least five of the couple's children (Samuel, Joseph, Ezekiel, Jr., Guillaume, and Elizabeth), all born in Montreal, were also baptized at Christ Church.¹¹

⁹ Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 114, 116. Marcus, *American Jewry*, 106-7. Jay M. Eidelman, "Kissing Cousins: The Early History of Congregations Shearith Israel of New York City and Montreal," in *Not Written in Stone: Jews, Constitutions, and Constitutionalism in Canada*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar, Michael Brown, and Ira Robinson (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2003), 71-83.

¹⁰ An exception to Ezekiel Solomons' usual annual cycle, he spent the winter of 1766-67 at Lake Nipigon, north of Lake Superior. See Widder, *Beyond Pontiac's Shadow*, 112. Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 115. Gundry, *Zaccheus Patterson Descendants*, 221. Émilie Pigeon, "Réseaux sociaux catholiques et construction identitaire dans le Pays d'en haut: l'exemple du fort Michilimackinac (1741-1821)," *Francophonies d'Amérique* 40-41 (fall 2015/spring 2016): 100.

¹¹ The July 23, 1769, marriage record of Ezekiel Solomons and Elizabeth Dubois is accessible in the Quebec, Canada Vital and Church Records (Drouin Collection), 1621-1968, slide 7. Gundry, *Zaccheus Patterson Descendants*, 221, 224-26. Ezekiel Solomons does not seem to have signed the baptismal registries. Widder, *Beyond Pontiac's Shadow*, 132.



Despite her ties to Montreal's Anglican church, Louise Dubois remained committed to Catholicism and particularly to Catholic baptism, perhaps because her own children had been baptized Anglican. After moving permanently to Mackinac Island with the family in 1791, she became a "super-godmother" for Ste. Anne's Catholic Church, promising in writing at various times, from 1794 to 1813, to oversee the Catholic education of twenty different catechumens, including five of her own grandchildren. For each baptism, she signed her name "L. D. Solomon," "D. B. Solomon," "D. Solomon," or "Dubois Solomon," suggesting she retained something of a separate identity from her husband, a rarity in that time and place. Even more unusually, she also conducted occasional fur-trading business for her husband, identifying herself as "Louise Dubois, wife of Ezekiel Solomon." In these instances, she may have been invoking the French legal custom of being a *procuratrice*, a "power of attorney that allowed her to operate on her husband's behalf as his equal." In short, ecclesiastical and commercial records are a testament to Louise Dubois' education and high standing in the community.¹²

Living a Jewish Life

Despite his High-Church family, Ezekiel Solomons was a lifelong active synagogue member and a "professing Jew." He helped write Montreal's Shearith Israel's bylaws. In 1778 he was elected *hatan Torah*, reading the final portion of the Torah that October. He served on the congregation's three-member board in 1779. He was jailed briefly in 1775 for punching a Frenchman who made an antisemitic remark, knocking him to the ground.¹³

In Michilimackinac, without synagogues, rabbis, cemeteries, or even a minyan, being observant was more difficult. Archaeological digs at Solomons' home with Gershon Levy have turned up no Judaica, suggesting only that he left none behind when he moved to Mackinac Island in 1791. It is unlikely he would have had a mezuzah on his seasonal Michigan home. It is also unlikely Solomons was able to keep Kosher, regardless of how closely he might have followed dietary law. Analysis of the faunal remains recovered at the Solomons-Levy residence indicates someone in the household ate pork and other *treylfe*. Although it may have been consumed by a non-Jewish laborer residing there, statistical analysis indicates the percentage of unpermitted foods was significantly higher at the Solomons-Levy residence than at other houses in the fort

¹² Karen L. Marrero, *Detroit's Hidden Channels: The Power of French-Indigenous Families in the Eighteenth Century* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 40. French civil law remained in use in Michigan until the territory revoked it in 1810. "Super-marraine" (super-godmother) is Émilie Pigeon's term. See Pigeon, "Réseaux sociaux catholiques," 97, 100, 102-3. Widder, *Beyond Pontiac's Shadow*, 132.

¹³ Widder, *Beyond Pontiac's Shadow*, 132. Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 105-6, 115-16.



in the same period. Moreover, egg-laying chickens constituted only a “small” part of the faunal remains recovered at the house.¹⁴

Regardless of his ritual observance at Michilimackinac, in Montreal Ezekiel Solomons’ religious position and philanthropic tendencies seem to have given him unusual latitude. When his young son (probably Joseph, born in 1774) died in the fall of 1778, Solomons wished him to be buried in Shearith Israel’s cemetery, “according to the rules and customs of Jews.” Baptized, uncircumcised, and born of a Catholic mother, Solomons’ son was not a candidate for interment. And yet, Solomons succeeded in convincing the congregation of “several circumstances favorable” to himself, ultimately securing permission for the boy’s burial. Despite the victory, the board also unanimously ruled that “no man or boy whomsoever shall be, after sixty days from this date, be buried in the burying place of this congregation unless circumcised.” Notably, with so many of its members in interfaith marriages, the board said nothing about baptism or non-Jewish mothers.¹⁵

After the close of the American Revolution, with the United States’ victory over Britain confirmed, New York’s Shearith Israel was reestablished. No longer under intense pressure to serve New York’s displaced Jews, Montreal’s Shearith Israel, in turn, reverted to a minyan. Ezekiel Solomons’ life changed too. In 1781—this time with his wife and children—he moved permanently to what would become northern Michigan, painstakingly packing up the Michilimackinac residence and settling in the new and more defensible British fort on nearby Mackinac Island. In time, sons Guillaume, Samuel, and Ezekiel, Jr., at least two of whom would take Native wives, would all join their father in the fur-trading business. Sometime shortly after his 1804 high-holiday contributions to New York’s Shearith Israel, Ezekiel Solomons died. He is believed to be buried in the cemetery at Montreal’s Shearith Israel. Louise Dubois died sometime after June 23, 1813, when a witness reported she was bedridden and “dependent upon friends to bring in her food.” Her burial place is unknown.¹⁶

¹⁴ Michigan’s Jewish fur traders are often referred to colloquially as “egg men,” for their practice of eating chicken eggs in the absence of Kosher meat. There is no evidence in the historical record for this claim. Marcus, *Colonial American Jew*, 2:676, 936–40, 996–98. Kathlyn Guttman, “Invisible Residents: Archaeological Evidence and the Question of Indigenous Presence at House C of British Fort Michilimackinac, 1765–1781” (master’s thesis, Cornell University, May 2019), esp. 38–40, 47.

¹⁵ Quoted in Widder, *Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow*, 132, and Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 25n19. See also Gundry, *Zaccheus Patterson Descendants*, 224.

¹⁶ Godfrey and Godfrey, *Search out the Land*, 117, 184–85. Pigeon, “Réseaux sociaux catholiques,” 101. Gundry, *Zaccheus Patterson Descendants*, 223–32. Solomons’ death year is often given as 1808, based on the timing of a claim his widow, Louise Dubois, and children made to the Treasury Department, seeking ownership of Solomons’ property. Solomons himself disappears from the historical record after his 1804 tzedakah contributions.



Ezekiel Solomons' Descendants

Periodically, descendants of Ezekiel Solomons gather at Fort Michilimackinac to honor their ancestor. In 2003 more than 60 convened, with one attendee estimating there may have been more than one thousand descendants alive at the time. The journalist covering the reunion was struck by the group's racial and geographic diversity:

The gathering included a few Catholic clergy and nuns, as well as some people with French Canadian ancestry and members of the Métis, Ojibwa and other native groups. Descendants of several area lighthouse keepers were also in attendance. Many came from towns in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ontario, while a few traveled from more distant cities like Toronto, Vancouver and Miami.¹⁷

Also in attendance, by special invitation, were historians Sheldon J. Godfrey and Judith C. Godfrey, whose 1995 book, *Search out the Land*, continues to be the go-to resource for information on Ezekiel Solomons—including for his descendants. As the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* journalist present for the gathering noted, “The Godfreys carried the additional distinction of being the only Jews at the reunion.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Gladstone, “Fur trader’s family reunion,” <https://www.jta.org/2003/07/20/lifestyle/fur-traders-family-reunion>.

¹⁸ Gladstone, “Fur trader’s family reunion.”



YOUTH HISTORY EDUCATION

Educator Materials: Ezekiel Solomons Primary Source, Discussion Questions, and Lesson Plans

Primary Source

Read the preceding biography of Ezekiel Solomons. Then, examine this July 25, 1778, "Subscription of Residents at Michilimackinac."¹

SUBSCRIPTION OF RESIDENTS AT MICHILLIMACKINAC

AT MICHILIMACKINACK, this 25th July, 1778.

The Subscription of the Merchants, Inhabitants & Traders at Michilimackinac, whereof the collection shall be for the maintenance of the Missionary who shall be sent to the said Post:

M. Oskin, during the time his family shall be at Michilimackinac for each year.....	300
Etienne Campion	50
Ampte	200
Marchessaux	24
Jean Villat	100 francs.

The Doctor of Michilimackinac undertakes to furnish the necessary attention & remedies, gratis.

D. Mitchell.

John Macnamara	100
Laurent Ducharme	18
fr. Pepiss	6
proulle Crepe	18
Alexis Campion	12
Robert Ariez, during the time he shall be at Michilimackinac per annum	12
Deuruner	24
Benjamin Lyon	50
Jean Marie Cousolle	24
Mattw Lessey	30
Frans Clerc	12
D. Ducharme	24
frougeville, + his mark, Ducharme witness.....	12

¹ "Subscription of Residents at Michilimackinac," July 25, 1778, *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections (MPHC)*, vol. 10, 2nd ed. (Lansing: Wynkoop Hallenbeck Crawford Company, 1908), 288-90.



SUBSCRIPTION OF RESIDENTS

Alexis Reaume	25
Ignace Petit	20
Ducheneau, + his mark, signed by Al. Reaume, witness.	6
C. Harche	25
Arers Auge	12
his sister	25
Sh. Biron	50
Jas. Hamelin	50
Charles Sanginet	50
D. L. Bomdasafles	20
P. Anton Tabeau	24
Laurent Bertrand	25
J. Reaume	24
Amable Augé	24
J. Chevallier, + his mark, Jean Arillat witness.....	24
Jean Bte Guisé	24
Blondall	20
Louis desenchel, + his mark, Jean villat, witness....	24
Parltemis Ozon	30
Joseph foutigny	12
fr. Marchand	12
Nr. Chenney	12
Jean Baptiste Sigmiez, called La Rose, + his mark, John oreillat, witness	12
Guillon, 12 francs in money.	
Alessis amalair, in money	24
Joseph haliberté, his + mark, Jean oreillat, witness....	12
P. Nurtebise	12
Louis Douvelle, + his mark.....	
Charles Gingras, + his mark	12
J. O. P. L. ferort, + his mark, hurtebise, witness.....	12
Jean Baptiste Datien	francs 6
Jan Batiste Geno, his + mark, Guillon, witness.....	12
Laurent Durocher promises to pay	25
Josif Noy, his + mark, Guillon, witness.....	15
B. Augt. Chaboillez	48
L. Baby	24
C. Catin	24
P. Chaboillez	24
The mark of francs +	



SUBSCRIPTIONS—MISCELLANEOUS

Le partegin,	24
Ch. Janginet, witness	
<i>prêve le ceure</i>	24
Bte Tabeau for ten years	30
Christian Burgy	in money 50
Chr. dbr. Juss	in money 20
Rode	in money 12
Bt. Le fourbre	in money 12
Antoine soumaude	12
Joseph Howard, twenty-four livres.....	24
Charles Morison	livres 12
Henry Bostwick	24
G. Cotté	60
William Grant while he shall be trading at Michilimackinac	50
Ezekiel Solomon	50
J. B. Guillon	100

Amounting altogether to 2398 annually
without counting many other absent who would subscribe and give necessary presents.

Background

This 1778 petition, drawn up by 71 “merchants, inhabitants, & traders,” asked the British governor of Canada (of which Michilimackinac was then a part) to send a Catholic missionary to the fort. Unless they signified otherwise, the signers pledged annual contributions toward the missionary’s salary and living expenses, noted in the right column. The money pledged is listed in *livres* and *francs*, two old French currencies used here interchangeably. The *livre* and the *franc* were comparable in value to a British pound and an American dollar. In the time and place of the petition, 50 *livres* would have bought about 25 bags of corn, or 83 boy’s shirts, or 40 pairs of leggings, or 125 pounds of gunpowder. It was a considerable sum of money.²

By 1778 Michilimackinac had been without a Catholic priest for more than a decade. The fort had been established by the French in 1715. It had been Catholic from its founding. It remained Catholic even after the fort (like the rest of Canada and the Great Lakes) fell into British hands in 1760. Despite the turnover, the French-Canadian population largely remained. Twenty years later, in 1780, the British would move the fort to

²Buying power tabulated from Keith R. Widder, *Beyond Pontiac’s Shadow: Michilimackinac and the Anglo-Indian War of 1763* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2013), sidebar 1 on 129.



nearby and more defensible Mackinac Island. Although the island and the mainland both would technically become American soil at the end of the American Revolution in 1783, the British would not evacuate until 1796. Even in this second turnover, the French-Canadian population remained.

Vocabulary

primary source: an original document, recording, artwork, artifact, or other material created at the time in question. Historians use primary sources as evidence for understanding the past

subscription: a pledge of money for a particular purpose

Michilimackinac (MISH-uh-luh-MACK-in-naw): an eighteenth-century fort and important center of trade at the tip of Michigan's lower peninsula, just north of present-day Mackinaw City

gratis: free

per annum: per year

métis: mixed race (French and Native)

Discussion Questions

Identification Questions

1. What kind of primary source is this?
2. When was it made?
3. What topic does the source concern? What did the subscribers want?
4. Who is the source's intended audience? How do you know?

Comprehension Questions

1. Of the 71 subscribers, how many have French-sounding names?
2. How many men are included on this list? How many women?
3. How many subscribers signed their own names? How many were unable to sign and made "marks" instead?
4. If there were 71 subscribers and 2,398 *livres* pledged per year, what was the average donation?

Analysis and Evaluation Questions

1. Based on the subscribers' names, did Michilimackinac have a larger French-Canadian or British population in 1778? How might that demographic explain this source and its historical context?
2. What do the number of "signers" versus "markers" reveal about Michilimackinac's literacy rates, at least among this group?
3. Women, whether French, Native, métis, or British, lived on Michilimackinac. With one exception (Augé's sister), why are there no women listed in the subscription?
4. Even though Michilimackinac had been a British fort for 18 years in 1778, why might the money have been pledged in French currencies instead of English?



5. What do the pledge amounts reveal about the subscribers, their livelihoods, and their socio-economic levels?
6. The average donation was about 34 *livres*. Yet, Ezekiel Solomons pledged 50 *livres*, and his fellow Jewish trader, Benjamin Lyon(s), pledged another 50 *livres*. Together, they promised more than 4 percent of the Catholic priest's annual "maintenance." Why did they pledge at all, and why did they pledge so much?
7. "G. Cotté" is probably fellow merchant and fur trader Gabriel Côté, the French-Canadian man Ezekiel Solomons accused of stealing his goods during the 1763 attack on Fort Michilimackinac: "I, Ezekiel Solomon[s] . . . declare that on the 2d day of June a Frenchman, Mons[ieur] Cote, entered my House several Times and carried from thence several Parcels of Goods, my Property."³ What do you suppose their relationship was like fifteen years later?

Lesson Plan Ideas

1. Imagine you are Ezekiel Solomons. You have been approached by your local merchant friends about pledging funds to this project. You feel uncertain about it. Make a pro/con list to help you decide what to do. What did you determine and why?
2. Research what might have happened if a subscriber changed his mind several years down the road and stopped paying his annual pledge amount. Determine if anyone could be held responsible for not continuing to make the payments.
3. Brainstorm one-time and per annum monetary pledges you might make today. Explain your choices. Then, assume the role of an organization or group to which one of your pledges would be made and write a petition to potential subscribers. A good petition includes a compelling plea for support; the proposed project's purpose, steps, and costs; the amount of money to be raised in a certain time frame; and the project's anticipated outcome.
4. Relate the 1778 petition to today's crowdfunding platforms such as GoFundMe. Make a list of similarities and differences.
5. Visit Colonial Michilimackinac, in person or online at <https://www.mackinacparks.com/ezekiel-solomon-at-michilimackinac/> and <https://www.mackinacparks.com/parks-and-attractions/colonial-michilimackinac/> to see the Solomons-Levy residence, including the original hearth, cellar, and wall remains.

³ Ezekiel Solomons' August 14, 1763, deposition in *MPHC* (Lansing: Robert Smith Publishing Co., 1897), 27:667. Learn more about Gabriel Côté in his entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/cotte_gabriel_4E.html.



2022 APPLEBAUM AWARD

Call for Submissions



Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum, circa 1948. (JHSM collections.)

JHSM invites article submissions to *Michigan Jewish History* for consideration for the 2022 **Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum Award**. The award honors outstanding original scholarship in the field of Michigan's Jewish history, broadly defined.

Purpose and Process: This annual award is named for Rabbi Emanuel Applebaum (1922-2001), a JHSM founding member and *Michigan Jewish History*'s first editor, serving from 1960 to 1963. All entries are reviewed and judged by *MJH* editors, the *MJH* advisory committee, and external referees. The winner receives publication in *MJH*, a cash prize of \$2,000, \$150 worth of JHSM books, special recognition at JHSM's fall awards ceremony, and a complimentary JHSM annual membership. Finalists also may be invited to publish in *MJH*.

Eligibility: Graduate and advanced undergraduate students, faculty members, public historians, and independent scholars are encouraged to submit manuscripts for the Applebaum Award on any topic appropriate to the aims of *MJH*. Double-spaced manuscripts should not exceed 10,000 words, excluding notes, tables, and figures. Chicago-style notes should not exceed 5,000 words.

Submission: Please email a Word version of the complete manuscript to Tracy Weissman, *MJH* managing editor: tweissman@jhsmichigan.org. **Please write "Applebaum Award" in your email's subject line.** Submissions received by close of business on **November 1, 2021**, will be considered for the 2022 award cycle.

About: *Michigan Jewish History*, a peer-reviewed academic journal, is published annually by JHSM. The most successful submissions will be accessible to JHSM's entire readership, including scholars and the interested general public.



CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Editor's Message

Joy Gaines-Friedler, MFA

It's been a challenging year. We moved out of isolation in limited capacities with the launching of vaccines to protect against COVID-19. But throughout these difficult times, Jewish participation in public life, as always, has been work, even the most difficult work, that one delights in because it creates and restores community, integrity, and contributes to the commitment to *Tikkun Olam*—repairing the world.

The contributors to this year's Creative Expressions offer a wide range of literary responses to current and past conditions. As the curator and editor of this section, I was awed by the submissions. I am impressed by the brave work and the optimism, despite the weight of emotion these essays and poems carry.

In her essay "Grandmother's Warning," Holocaust museum volunteer Linda Laderman draws upon the teachings of her grandmother when asked to answer difficult questions. In her poem "Chaplain," Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler reflects on the experience of ministering during COVID-19. In "Meeting Diet Eman," Esther Posner recounts the unlikely series of events that led her to meet World War II Dutch resistance fighter Diet Eman and arrange for Diet to teach her history to the younger generation in the Detroit area. Zieva Dauber Konvisser's poem "Voices" focuses on the emotional impact of trauma. In Beverly Kent Goldenberg's memoir "Daddy" and in Sharon Lask Munson's poem "Pearl Harbor," daughters honor the military sacrifices of their fathers during World War II. The section concludes with "The Last Responder," in which Sarah Birnbach provides a glimpse into the most difficult and loving work I can imagine—performing the ritual of *Tahara*, the purification and preparation of the body for interment.

These pieces share the recognition that, although none of it is easy, contributing to the community brings with it a vow to do even more. These pieces allow us to see the history of public participation through a Jewish lens. I'm left with great optimism: to honor the sacrifices of others is to participate in the healing of the world.

As always, we invite readers to submit personal essays, short stories, memoirs, or poems for our Creative Expressions section. If interested, please email us at twissman@jhs-michigan.org or call us at (248) 915-1844.



 CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Grandmother's Warning

Linda Laderman

“**W**hen can I come on one of your tours at the Holocaust Center?” my then ten-year-old granddaughter Annie asked after she heard me talk to her older brother about what I do as a docent there. “I hope soon,” I said, evading a direct answer because Annie is the girl who cries at movies even when there’s a happy ending. I didn’t think she was emotionally ready to hear the story of the Holocaust.

Annie reminds me of a young visitor, a girl, who once asked me where Anne Frank is buried. I was lost for words then, too. I knew the likely answer, but, as a mother and grandmother, I hesitated. “I’m not quite sure,” I hedged, as I looked at the freckle-faced questioner. Wearing a Girl Scout uniform with double rows of badges, she couldn’t have been older than eleven. She looked back and smiled. Should I have spared her from the reality? I am still not sure of the correct answer.

Before COVID-19 put a stop to in-person visits at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, Michigan, my docent colleagues and I were giving several tours a week to groups of school kids, college students, and adults of all ages and backgrounds.

Becoming a docent was never part of my plan. Yet, I realize now that the seeds were planted early by my grandmother, Esther Civins Wittenberg, who was born in Lithuania.

One day, while watching the news on our new black and white RCA television, my grandmother, whom I called Nanny, said to me, “Don’t ever think *it* can’t happen here.” I was eight, too young to fully grasp what she meant, but I had a child’s instinct to understand that her words were something I should remember.

Nanny was born in 1886, just as a fresh wave of pogroms tore through Lithuania’s Jewish communities. As a young woman, she and her husband sought religious freedom in America. While she loved her adopted country, she never forgot where she came from, and she never failed to remind me that the liberties she found in the United States were not to be taken for granted.

In many respects her America was like my America — imperfect but buoyed by its underlying ideals of freedom, equality, and dignity. Esther Civins Wittenberg believed in the promise of those ideals. After all, in the midst of the Great Depression, one son made it through medical school. Another became a successful politician in the Midwest when Jews were rarely elected to public office. And, in 1935, her youngest, my mother, married an attorney—arguably not an achievement in 2021 when half of all law students are women, but that was 1935.



By the time World War I began, Nanny was a young mother with three children under the age of ten. She and her husband had established a successful produce business in Ohio. But with the onset of the Depression, they lost everything. Still, they started over. Then came the Second World War and the reality that money they had sent to help get their endangered family out of Eastern Europe either arrived too late, or not at all.

While growing up in Toledo, Ohio, and throughout my life, I would recall my grandmother's words whenever I was confronted with anti-Semitism. *Don't think it can't happen here.* Sometimes I would feel compelled to act, but other times I would look away.

Toledo was not the county seat of tolerance. Graves were routinely vandalized in the area's two Jewish cemeteries. I remember how my stomach ached when I was sent home from Hebrew school because swastikas and other Nazi slogans had been spray-painted on our synagogue's windows. As an eleven-year-old, I was confused. What had we done? Was this the *it* that had fueled my grandmother's veiled warning?

When I was thirty years old, shopping for my son, I discovered a costume kiosk at my local mall selling Hitler masks for Halloween. It was 1983. "We have to do something. I am going to call every media outlet in town to see this," I yelled over the phone to the city's sole Orthodox rabbi. "If we go to the media, it will only draw more attention to the issue," he answered. "How had our silence ever served us?" I asked him. I vehemently objected. They removed them.

My Judaism provoked other incidents of prejudice and reaction. There was the time a college friend told me I wasn't welcome to join their spring break trip. It wasn't her choice, she said. One of the mothers of another girl forbade her daughter to go if I went. I didn't want to spoil it for the rest of the group. I stayed home.

In 1991, on an assignment to interview tennis great, Billie Jean King, I mentioned that the club where we were about to attend a sponsor's lunch had historically barred Jews from joining. I am still ashamed that I backed down when King indicated that if that was the case she would leave. "I don't think they do that anymore," I murmured. My moral compass was broken.

But it was when my then-teenage son, the only child of a Jewish mother and Catholic father, was taunted by members of his hockey team for his heritage that I felt most betrayed. Who were these kids I'd adored? Until then I saw them as my son's talented teammates. Now I saw them as anti-Semites. How could they use the ethnic slur, kike? Did they even know what it meant? I should not have been happy when my son jumped on top of the kid who started the war of words, but I was.



Still, weren't we lucky? A two-day suspension for fighting on the hockey bus wasn't a death sentence for my child. Unlike our European Jewish brothers and sisters who lost their lives because they were Jews, we didn't have to run. We wouldn't be murdered. We were born here. We were Americans! My grandmother's warning tucked away, I told myself that these kids just didn't understand how much pain their words created.

When I moved to the Detroit area in the spring of 2011, I was excited to find a robust Jewish community that included Jewish adult education, more than a dozen synagogues, and most importantly to me, the Holocaust Memorial Center.

On my first visit to the Center, I sat alone on the long granite bench in front of the black stone wall inscribed with the names of the Nazi-occupied European countries, and the number of Jews murdered from each of those nations. I walked closer and stood where I could see my reflection in the smooth stone. I set my gaze on Lithuania, my grandmother's birthplace, where 130,000 Jews were murdered. I fixated on the *what ifs*. What if, like the six million victims of the Shoah, she couldn't have left?

It was as if Nanny was reminding me to take nothing for granted. I knew that I wanted to be a part of the Holocaust Memorial Center where I would be able to do more than randomly holler at someone or something. I wanted to learn to tell the story of the Holocaust in the best way I could.

A new docent class was beginning in a few months. Yet, after going on a few public tours, I doubted my ability to share the story of the Holocaust with visitors. I was not a Holocaust scholar or a survivor. I didn't consider myself a storyteller like the other docents I'd heard. Oh, they were so good. Suddenly I was just that scared Hebrew-school kid whose stomach hurt. But this time I knew why, and that I had to do something about it.

I was accepted into the next docent class and paired with a mentor, Donna Sklar, of blessed memory. She taught me how to tell a story. Halfway through the training I told her that I was sure I could not do this. She smiled and told me that my lack of confidence was "right on time." Did I want the phone number of her other successful mentees who had also panicked halfway through? she asked, reminding me that her docents-in-training always passed.

It wasn't an option to ruin Donna's perfect record.

Over the next few years, I spoke to groups about vigilance, the fragility of democracy, and why, when we talk about the horrors of the Holocaust, we proclaim, "Never again." More often than not, I felt compelled to



explain that “never again” has become an aspirational phrase in a world where genocide based on race, religion, and ethnicity continue to exist.

This past winter, as the US Capitol was breached by those who didn't believe in the veracity of the election results, I again thought of Nanny's warning. It is happening here with a fueled ferocity that I thought I'd never see. I'm tempted to throw my hands up and say there's nothing I can do. But when I think of the faces of the people whom I've met on my tours, I know that's not an option. Because if I don't want it to happen here, I have to do everything I can to try and make a difference.

Note: The views expressed here are the author's and not those of the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus or its docent community.

Linda Laderman is a Detroit-area freelance writer who earned her degree in journalism from what is now the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. She earned a master's degree in liberal studies and a juris doctor degree from The University of Toledo. Currently, she is a docent at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus, where she is a member of the Docent Advisory Committee. She also volunteers her time for the Wayne County Conviction Integrity Unit. She looks forward to a time when she can take her granddaughter Annie and her grandson Anthony on a tour of the Holocaust Memorial Center.



 CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Chaplain

Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler

Through the cobalt of winter
 a day is rising. Masked and badged,
 I move toward the steps
 that spill from the hospital doors.

But first, notice
 how a finger of sunlight
 raps a sliver on panes of windows
 where children sleep by soft beep
 of machines and parents knit their brows
 in concern.

Breath almost visible, I stand
 in the beginning day as
 bicycles tick past and commuters
 murmur on muted cell phones.

Here by the path I recognize
 a familiar rock.
 It is Jacob's pillow.
 I want to lay myself down
 before dawn stands
 and shouts the birds awake.

This place on the hill, this ladder,
 this palace of broken bodies,
 this portal where souls break
 free to heaven. While others
 like stardust, spiral down
 into arms of new mothers.

Let me lay down here
 just this once. Let me
 find G-d in this place
 and know it.

Clutching coffee cups,
 interns in white coats revolve
 through morning doors,
 ride the elevators up and down.

I wrestle. I wrestle every day
 with the *why*
 and limp into
 another day breaking.

Sara O'Donnell Adler received rabbinic ordination from the Jewish Theological Seminary and is a board-certified healthcare chaplain. In 2008 she became the first rabbi hired by the University of Michigan Health System to serve on its team of chaplains. She considers it a sacred honor to provide spiritual care and to listen to stories shared by patients and families. Rabbi Adler is a board member of Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains. Her poetry has appeared in several publications including: *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*, *The Broadkill Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, and *The Bear River Review*.



CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Meeting Diet Eman

Esther Posner

When the kids were young, we used to take them each spring to Holland, Michigan. The town's annual Tulip Time Festival is a big attraction: we visited the tulip fields, the windmill, and the Dutch village, and we watched the wooden shoe (klompen) dance performances. We stopped going many years ago. But then, in 2015, on a lovely spring day, my husband, Erwin, and I got in the car and once again drove to Holland, about three hours from our home.

We visited the tourist sites, and before heading home, we stopped at the Holland Museum. The second floor featured Dutch cultural contributions. I lingered at the large wooden wardrobes, landscape paintings, Delft pottery. A seaside painting drew me in, and I looked at the name of the artist. It read, "(something) ten Cate."

"Erwin," I asked, "Why do I know that name?"

We got in the car to drive home. Ten minutes later I remembered: "Ten Cate" was the name on my father's false ID! After the German occupation of the Netherlands in 1940, Jews, including my family, were issued identity cards stamped with a prominent "J." When we were subsequently hidden from the Nazis, the Resistance workers exchanged our cards for cards with Dutch names and Dutch towns of origin.

The following year, May 10, 2016, Erwin and I again went to Holland. This time the Holland Museum was our first stop. I huffed and puffed up to the second floor. A docent in Dutch costume came over and asked if there was anything she could help me with. I told her that I was looking for the "ten Cate" painting. She didn't understand my Dutch pronunciation and said they had moved things around. I soon found it myself. I stood before the painting feeling weepy. The docent found me again, and I told her my story in a few sentences.

"I was born in the Netherlands. Because we were Jewish, we had to hide during the Second World War. 'Ten Cate' was the name on my father's false ID."

"Then you must know Diet 'Deet' Eman. She lives in Grand Rapids."

I had never heard of her, but after we returned home, I did some research. Berendina Roelofina Hendrika (Diet) Eman was well known in western Michigan for being one of the "Righteous Among the Nations"—an honor bestowed by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, on non-Jews who had risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. I ordered her book, *Things We Couldn't Say*, from Amazon.¹

¹ Diet Eman, *Things We Couldn't Say*, in collaboration with James Schaap (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999).



Diet Eman, a twenty-year-old devout Dutch Reformed Christian, was living in Holland when the Germans invaded in May 1940. She was part of the Resistance from the beginning, starting with mimeographing and distributing the BBC news, and later, finding hiding places for Jews who were being deported to concentration camps. Her book gives a full description of her activities and the people with whom she worked. I had to meet her. We had lost contact many years ago with the families who had saved us, and I wanted to honor this woman in their place.

Finding Diet was difficult. I contacted her publisher. I contacted the local Dutch Reformed churches, and, as a last resort, I contacted the Grand Rapids Chabad rabbi. “We know Diet,” Rabbi Goldstein said, and he put me in touch with a contact person named Sheryl Siegel.

Diet was living in a Samaritas senior living residence and did not have a private phone. She also had difficulty hearing phone conversations, so Sheryl generously went over to Diet’s residence and arranged for us to visit.

In August 2016 Erwin and I drove to Grand Rapids and met Diet face to face. I had brought lunch for all three of us. Diet was delighted with the orange plastic tablecloth on which we ate. Afterward I carefully wiped it clean so she could reuse it for her next Dutch Ladies Group meeting. The House of Orange (Royal Dutch family) would have been proud!

I briefly shared my story with Diet; she talked about her life after the war. She became a nurse and worked for Shell Oil in Venezuela, before moving to Michigan. I had originally planned to ask her to come to Southfield to speak to students at Akiva Hebrew Day School (now Farber Hebrew Day School), and also at Young Israel of Southfield. But she was 95 years old and probably too frail, so I did not broach the subject.



Figure 1: Diet Eman (right) and the author (left) during a visit in Grand Rapids, Michigan, circa 2016. (All photos courtesy of author.)



At the end of our visit, Diet told me about her trips to the Dominican Republic, where she read Bible stories to children. She complained about the poor education they receive. When I asked her when she had last been there, her answer surprised me. “Two months ago.” On the drive home, I decided if she can travel to the Dominican Republic, she can travel to Southfield!

So I again contacted Sheryl, and on September 29, 2016, Sheryl brought Diet to speak to students at Akiva. Afterward we came back to my house, where Diet took a nap on the couch. Later that day she spoke at Young Israel of Southfield, but not before we went out to eat. Her stamina amazed me. I had invited Diet to stay overnight at a hotel or at my house, if she preferred, but she insisted she wanted to sleep in her own bed. Sheryl and Diet drove back to Grand Rapids. The next day Sheryl reported that Diet told story after story on the drive home. I wish we had recorded it.

I visited Diet twice more.

In May 2018 Erwin and I were in Jerusalem for our grandson Jonathan’s bar mitzvah. We visited Yad Vashem, and I asked to visit Diet Eman’s tree, recalling that Yad Vashem honored each of the Righteous Among the Nations with a medal, a plaque, and the planting of a tree. We learned that Yad Vashem had long ago run out of room for tree planting and now engraved each honoree’s name on the Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous. There are more than one hundred walls now, with hundreds of names on each.



Figure 2 (left) and Figure 3 (right): In 1998 Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, honored Diet Eman as a Righteous Among the Nations for her efforts to hide Dutch Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Diet Eman’s name appears on Yad Vashem’s Wall of Honor in the Garden of the Righteous (Figure 2). A close-up of her name is shown in Figure 3 (tenth entry).



On that hot afternoon in Jerusalem, it took us about an hour to find Diet's name. I took pictures with the intention of showing them to her. When we got home, Erwin had the photos enlarged, and I put them in an envelope on the kitchen counter, waiting for the next trip to Grand Rapids. At some point I had tried to arrange an interview with Diet for the USC Shoah Foundation, which collects and preserves the stories of Holocaust survivors, but it fell through. I was told her health was deteriorating. Then on Thursday morning, September 5, 2019, I said to Erwin, "Let's visit Diet and bring her the pictures." We arrived two days too late. Diet had died on Tuesday, September 3, 2019. She had been in hospice care for months.

May her memory be for a blessing.

To learn more about Diet Eman's life, visit:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/11/obituaries/diet-eman-dies.html>.

Esther Marianne Rose Posner was born in Amsterdam, Netherlands, the child of German Jewish refugees. After Germany invaded in 1940, the family went into hiding. All seven families who hid her have been honored by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Israel, with the medal of the Righteous Among the Nations. Posner graduated from Brooklyn College with a BS in mathematics. She earned an MBA from Oakland University and is a retired certified financial planner who specialized in working with single women. She is active in her Orthodox community and in Holocaust survivor organizations. Esther and Erwin Posner have three sons and eleven grandchildren.



 CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Voices

Zieva Dauber Konvisser

I listen to the father
 who watched his son step onto the bus
 just before it blew up.

Give voice to the daughter
 who held her mother's hand
 as she was led to the gas chamber.

I write the story of an innocent mother,
 her daughter ripped from her arms,
 arrested, tried, falsely convicted, incarcerated.

I sit with a mentee,
 grapple with his question how
 to truly welcome home wartime veterans.

I drive a colleague along the route
 of a human trafficking victim, hidden
 just five miles from an unknowing and loving family.

I hold the hand of a friend
 needing an empathic listener
 through cancer treatments and doctor visits.

I look into their eyes, not at them—
 make them feel visible,
 know they are heard—

others, like me, who know they need help
 but may not know what to ask, or how.
 I listen to heal, find meaning, purpose.

I carry their stories of pain and grief,
 celebrate their moments of hope and joy.
 Memories live in me too, nurture my soul.

Zieva Dauber Konvisser, PhD, is an adjunct assistant professor of criminal justice at Wayne State University and a fellow of the Institute for Social Innovation at Fielding Graduate University. Her research focuses on the human impact of traumatic events, including terrorism, genocide, and wrongful conviction, and the possibility of positive change after trauma. She is the author of *Living Beyond Terrorism: Israeli Stories of Hope and Healing* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2014) and is the Oral Historian at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, Michigan. She serves on the boards of METIV: The Israel Psychotrauma Center, Strength to Strength, and Proving Innocence, and is a member of the Innocence Network Research Review Committee.



CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Daddy

Beverly Kent Goldenberg

Daddy was a private first class in the American army during World War II. Drafted in 1943, he went through basic training at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and then shipped out to Europe. Daddy, already a lawyer, had wanted to enlist. Due to his professional education, he would have automatically become an officer, but Mother did not want him to leave. She begged, "Please, please stay home with me and Carol" (their infant daughter, my older sister). Not having enlisted, he was put into the general pool from which the selective service drafted eligible young men.

Daddy was posted to Alsace-Lorraine, the territory between France and Germany. "I crawled on my belly from foxhole to foxhole," he told me. While making his way to the next foxhole, he and his unit were surrounded by enemy fire. Daddy was shot. Bullets entered his right shoulder and arm, then his head. Severely wounded, he lay on the ground, bleeding, unable to move.

"I have no idea how long I was there. But, I do remember that bullets kept flying, men fell beside me, screams of pain echoed all around in the air. Maybe I had even lost consciousness," Daddy recalled. "I then felt someone next to me, leaning over me. Dressed in dark robes, his hands above my body, something was swinging in his hands. I heard mumbled words as he touched my head and chest."

Miraculously, Daddy did not die on the battlefield. He survived! Badly wounded, he was transported back to the United States, to a VA hospital in Battle Creek, Michigan, our home state. The top of Daddy's head had been blown off. Skilled surgeons inserted a metal plate and screwed it inside his head. They harvested skin to pull and cover the plate. Additionally, surgical repairs were made to his hand and arm. After many, many months of rehabilitation, relearning to speak, ambulate, and use his hand and arm, Daddy returned home. He appeared normal. He still spoke like a brilliant attorney, but now, more slowly. Tasks were completed with scrunched fingers.

"My life is gravy, all extras. I survived the war," Daddy often said. Thankfully, his post-war life was not just gravy, but as sweet as Sander's Hot Fudge, his favorite delicacy. My father was blessed to return to normal living. The only visible remnants of his injuries were his catnaps and crooked hand.

In 1948 I was added to the family. Daddy called me his post-war bonus. At that time Daddy also began a legal career in public service. He joined the Wayne County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, later rising to the position of Chief of the Homicide Division. Daddy's job had bonuses for me. On Saturdays, *Daddy Days*, I often accompanied my father to work. I loved going to work with him, especially helping the switchboard operator connect the telephone cords. Another of my benefits was that we had the best Thanksgiving Parade seats in Detroit since the parade passed right in front of his building.



Active in the Democratic Party, Daddy became a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. Our family accompanied him to the convention that selected John F. Kennedy as the Democratic presidential candidate, providing me with an opportunity to meet my hero in person. While at the convention in California, Daddy received a phone call. His professional dream of becoming a judge was actualized. Governor John B. Swainson appointed him judge of the Common Pleas Court.

From Daddy's judicial experiences, I learned "there are always two sides to every story. It's important to listen to both."

Daddy was also active in our synagogue. As a recipient of honor from Israel Bonds, he helped cultivate my knowledge, interest, and passion for the State of Israel.

My father was thankful for each year of his life. As a way of expressing gratitude and appreciation for his survival, he gave *us* gifts on each of *his* birthdays, a tradition I continue in his honor.

Whenever Daddy looked back and talked about his military service, he always thanked the priest who gave him last rites on the battlefield, and "the nice Jewish boy, Jesus." "They gave me the prayers and power so I could survive. I was fighting the Nazis for my people."

In tribute to and in loving memory of my father, Judge George D. Kent.



Figure 1 (left) and Figure 2 (right): After being severely wounded on the battlefield during World War II, George D. Kent went on to become a judge of the Common Pleas Court (Figure 1). In Figure 2, George D. Kent (center) is congratulated by (left to right) Michigan Governor John B. Swainson; daughter Carol; wife, Jennie Levin Kent; and daughter Beverly, following his judicial swearing-in ceremony on July 24, 1962. (Courtesy of author.)

Beverly Kent Goldenberg was born and raised in Detroit. She earned a BA in psychology and a master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan. She worked at Jewish Family Service and Hillel Day School of Metro Detroit for over 30 years, creating social skills programs that were modeled statewide. Beverly and her Israeli husband, Michael, raised their two sons, Etai, a urologist, and Oren, a filmmaker, in Huntington Woods, Michigan, where Beverly and Mickey still reside today. Beverly is *savta* to three, soon to be four, grandchildren—Leo, Ami, Estee, and . . .—and to a grand-dog, Sparrow.



CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

Pearl Harbor

Sharon Lask Munson

Dad's first new car
was purchased from a dealership
near Grand River
on a bitterly cold Saturday,
December 6, 1941.

It was an economical, stripped down,
two-door, green Plymouth sedan.

During the years of World War II
Dad would stop at bus lines, streetcar tracks,
any corner a serviceman waited
with a thumb extended.

He'd pick up sailors, marines,
war-weary soldiers home on leave,

use his prized gas rations
for those fighting,
drive them to a mother's arms,
back to barracks, or to a local USO,

contributing in the only way he knew
for owning one of the last cars sold in Detroit
until the men came home.

Sharon Lask Munson grew up in the Linwood/Dexter area of Detroit. A graduate of Wayne State University, she is a retired teacher, poet, old movie enthusiast, and lover of road trips. Lask Munson left Detroit to teach overseas for five years, then drove to Alaska where she taught, married, and lived until her retirement. She and her husband currently live in Eugene, Oregon.



CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS

The Last Responder

Sarah Birnbach

People are often surprised—shocked, even—when I tell them what I do. I transform one of the unholy objects—a corpse—into one of the holiest by preparing the body, a vessel for its soul, to face G-d. I look death square on as I touch, clean, and dress the deceased. This hallowed work is done with no expectation of thanks or reward.

I lead the *Chevra Kadisha* (Holy Fellowship) in my synagogue—the group of women who prepare the deceased female for burial according to Jewish custom. Our job is to midwife her soul from this world to the next. Serving in the *Chevra Kadisha* is an act of *chesed shel emet*—true loving kindness.

One of the most time-sensitive Jewish rituals, occurring within hours after death, is the *Tahara*, the purification and preparation of the body for interment. Because traditional Jews do not embalm, deceased are typically buried 24-48 hours after death. When I get the call, either from my rabbi or from one of our local funeral homes, that a female congregant has died, I organize a minimum of four women to fulfill this sacred act. The calls I make are “Can-you-drop-everything?” requests, often made with just a few hours’ notice, with little time to arrange child care or rearrange appointments. Our *Chevra Kadisha* members have canceled classes and given up theater tickets to perform this ritual. They are a team of angels—spiritual beings possessing extraordinary compassion, reverence, and commitment.

People often ask me, “Doesn’t it make you sad? Don’t you cry?”

The truth is, I don’t cry. I am awed. “I feel privileged to care for this woman in her final hours on this earth,” I tell them.

I have been fortunate. I have not been called to care for a young child or a murder victim or someone whose body has been abused, as women in other congregations have. I imagine I would cry in those circumstances.

When a midwife brings a baby into the world, she helps the child emerge from a safe, dark coziness into a brightly lit, unknown environment, entering clean and pure. When a woman dies, she experiences a similar transition—from a familiar world to an unknown world—from one realm of existence to another. We ready her to enter the next world with the same reverence and gentleness that was shown to her when she first entered this life.

As I cross into the *Tahara* room, I enter into an intimate relationship with a woman who is transitioning from this world to the next. I am in liminal space; I feel its holiness.

Before entering the room, we assign roles and tasks. Once inside, we work primarily in silence, speaking only to recite the prayers and blessings or to confer about an unusual circumstance. We never pass anything across the woman’s body, as we believe that her soul lingers just above her, nor do we stand at her head, since we believe G-d’s presence hovers there. We touch her as a mother would caress an infant who also was unable to care for herself.



Death looks nothing like the cosmeticized version we see on television or in the movies. But this rite of passage brings beauty to a previously beautiful woman.

First we recite a prayer asking G-d to give us the courage and strength to cleanse her, dress her in the customary shrouds, and prepare her for burial. After we wash our hands and don gloves and aprons, we recite the *Mechilah*, a prayer asking forgiveness for anything inappropriate we might accidentally do. The implication: her spirit is present and aware. We ask G-d, on behalf of the deceased, for compassion and mercy. We pray that her soul will come to rest with the righteous in *Gan Eden* (Paradise).

Next we approach the metal table on which she lies in a zippered bag. We remove her and undress and examine her. Some bodies—often those coming from nursing homes—are meticulously clean. Others, who may have died at home, need more cleansing. In situations where rigor mortis has set in, we have to be even more delicate to avoid breaking bones.

Before we can begin the Tahara, we lovingly clean and clip her nails, wash and comb her hair, and then bathe her from head to toe with warm water and soft cloths. When I do this, I experience the same tenderness that I feel when brushing the hair of my granddaughters. We recite “Shir Hashirim” from the Song of Songs, reminding us that she was a beautiful human being, created in G-d’s image.

Then we start the actual purification by pouring warm water over her, in a continuous flow from head to foot, all the time repeating “She is pure,” and reciting blessings from Ezekiel and Jeremiah. This replicates the sanctity of the mikveh, the Jewish ritual bath.

We gently dry her using fresh towels and dress her in the time-honored Jewish burial garments—white, hand-sewn, linen garments designed to emulate the clothes of the High Priests. They have no pockets, buttons, snaps, or other fasteners. According to Leviticus 16:4, the High Priests attained closeness to G-d in the linen tunic. We dress her similarly so she will also attain closeness to G-d. These burial garments are the same for all traditional Jews, reflecting our belief in our fundamental equality in the eyes of G-d.

We dress her in a particular order, ensuring her dignity. We cover her head and face first, acknowledging that we are the last people who will see her face. We put on the collarless undershirt and tie it at the neck, followed by the pants which are sewn shut at the feet, and then the collared top shirt, also tied at the neck. Then we tie the sash around her waist making three loops in the shape of the Hebrew letter “shin,” representing one of the names of G-d—Shaddai—translated as “Almighty.”

We gently lift her and place her into the *aron* (casket), reciting the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) that is used at the most sacred times in our lives:

May the Lord bless you and keep you
 May the Lord shine upon you and be gracious unto you
 May the Lord show you kindness and grant you peace.



Traditional Jews are buried in plain pine boxes held together with wooden pegs rather than metal screws or nails—wood that naturally decomposes so the body can return to the earth. Selecting the simplest casket reflects Judaism’s tenet in the equality of all in death.

Before closing the lid on the coffin, we put clay pottery shards on her eyelids and lips, symbolizing penitence for any possible sins her eyes or mouth may have committed. If she wore a *tallit* (prayer shawl) during her life, we cut one of its four fringes and place it in the sash around her waist, showing she is no longer responsible for wearing the tallit. After draping the prayer shawl around her shoulders, we wrap her body in a burial sheet, as we would swaddle a baby in a blanket. We sprinkle sand from Israel on her eyes and in the casket so the first thing she will “see” in the world to come will be the soil of our holy land.

Once the casket is closed, it is not reopened. Chevra Kadisha members again recite the Mechilah, this time praying for forgiveness for any accidental act that did not show respect or that might have offended her, or caused her humiliation. We assure her that we have treated her with the utmost *kavanah*—intention and focus of purpose.

Before leaving, I lean over the coffin and, in a whisper, bid her farewell using her Hebrew name, “Good bye, Roisa bat Nuchem. You are ready to go on now. May G-d protect you.”

When we exit the building, we wash our hands from a pitcher that is left outside. We take time to express any concerns, emotions, or other responses to the experience we have just shared. These can be particularly poignant when we have known the deceased. I ensure that everyone is ready to reintegrate to daily life and, if not, provide any needed support. We take a moment of silence for private meditation and reflection. I have been blessed with a fellowship of resilient and strong spiritual beings.

Each time I exit the Tahara room, I am overwhelmed with the sanctity of each human being and the fragility of life. Performing this act of kindness for the dead reminds me to show the same compassion to the living. When I midwife a soul, giving respect and dignity to a divine being, I feel G-d’s spark kindled in my spirit and His warmth enfold me.

I am a last responder.

Sarah Birnbach’s post-retirement “encore career” as a writer and author coalesces with time feeding the hungry, supporting the homeless, writing a weekly newsletter about racial injustice and combatting racism, volunteering in the Israeli Army, and leading her synagogue’s *Chevra Kadisha*. Birnbach has won numerous writing awards, and her articles have appeared in *Talking Writing*, <https://talkingwriting.com>; *The Bookwoman*, <https://wnba-books.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2017-WNBA-Writing-Contest-Anthology-5th-Annual.pdf>; and the *Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance Journal*, www.jofa.org. Her just-completed memoir, *A Daughter’s Final Gift*, follows her eleven-month journey reciting Kaddish twice daily in synagogues across America to honor her father’s soul.



 IN MEMORIAM

Rita Cohn Haddow

1926–2020



(Courtesy of Kogan/Haddow family.)

Rita Cohn Haddow, a pillar of the Detroit Jewish community, passed away on March 13, 2020, leaving a long legacy of philanthropy and service, at age 93. Rita was an inspirational leader, a devoted wife and mother, and an indefatigable supporter of the many causes she held dear.

Rita was a third-generation Detroiter, her grandparents having immigrated to Detroit in the early 1880s. Her parents were Irwin and Sadie Cohn, iconic leaders and philanthropists in the greater Detroit community. She was also the younger sister of the esteemed longtime federal jurist, the Honorable Avern Cohn. As a child she grew up in what was termed the Detroit “Shtetl,” attending Winterhalter Elementary, Durfee Junior High, and Central High School.

Following high school graduation in 1944, Rita attended the University of Wisconsin and Wayne State University, where she studied drama and became a lifetime devotee of theater and the arts. She acted in college and during her adult life, appearing in local scripted television dramas (such as



Divorce Court and *Juvenile Court*), as well as in many community theater productions at the Jewish Community Center on Meyers and Curtis in Detroit. One of her JCC highlights was sharing the stage with her elder son, Seth Kogan, in the production of Henrik Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*.

In 1948 Rita married Jay M. Kogan, settling in northwest Detroit. Together they had four children. Rita's decision to stay at home to raise her family was a defining, but easy, choice, though many of her acting colleagues, particularly from Wayne, did go on to have illustrious national careers.

As members of both Congregation Shaarey Zedek and Temple Beth El, Rita and Jay made it their mission to immerse their family in Jewish tradition and culture. Indeed, their daughters, Lauren and Amy, were confirmed, and their sons, Seth and Mark, became bar mitzvahs, carrying on this legacy with their own families. Rita and Jay enjoyed dancing, travel, and family celebrations and, when their marriage ended in divorce, they maintained their friendship.

A petite force of nature, Rita was a talented raconteuse and public speaker who could captivate audiences of all sizes. Everyone who encountered her extolled her sense of humor, kindness, compassion, laughter, and love. Her greatest gift was allowing whomever she was with at the time, whether a family member, friend, or new acquaintance, to feel like the most important person in the room. Even in her last years, as her body began to fail, she remained bright, engaged, and interested in the world around her. As the saying goes, to Rita there were no strangers, only friends she had not yet met.

In December 1969 Rita took her three youngest children to Spain and Morocco on a life-changing vacation. There they met John Haddow, an insurance industry executive from New York City. Over the next year, Rita made many trips to Manhattan under the guise of "shopping for a dining table." The table went unpurchased but, when John was offered a transfer to Detroit, Rita gained far more than furniture, marrying him in the beautiful backyard of her brother's home in June 1971. John's sons, Jeff and Jack, were added to the family, as well.

While John was not raised in the Jewish faith, he converted, fully and enthusiastically embracing Judaism. Together Rita and John continued to serve the Detroit Jewish community. They were active members at Temple Israel, where they became part of one of the first adult b'nai mitzvah classes. John also served on the Temple Israel Board of Trustees, and the couple became an indispensable fixture at charitable events.

Rita always remained proud of her Detroit roots. She was a strong believer in thinking globally and giving back (mostly) locally—"Tikkun Olam" begins at home. Even in later years as John and Rita became Florida "snowbirds," they maintained their commitment to the Greater Detroit



community. John, prior to his death in 2006, and Rita were longtime JHSM members. They attended programs and provided financial support as members of JHSM's A. Alfred Taubman Heritage Council. Rita also was a member of Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), a board member of the JCC (with a particular interest in the JET Theatre), a board member of JARC, a docent at the Detroit Zoological Society, and an active participant and contributor to the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. In addition she contributed significantly to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation and said she would give anything to help find a cure for the disease that afflicted her grandson Josh and other children.

In 2019 Rita was honored as a recipient of Jewish Senior Life's "Eight over Eighty" Tikkun Olam Award. In a video created for the ceremony (<https://youtu.be/68BjqYMoFmQ>), she expressed her enthusiasm for serving the community that had given her so many opportunities.

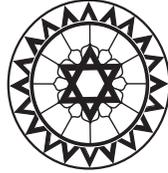
The only thing that surpassed her dedication to her community was her devotion to her family. Rita's sons and daughters remember their mother as "a constant champion and cheerleader who loved her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren completely, passionately, and unconditionally." Given her passion for the arts, Rita treated her children to Shakespearean sonnets and lines for her next play performance. Bedtimes were filled with songs she had learned or even created. Many of these songs have since been passed down through the family. She and John treated each child and grandchild to his or her own trip, instilling in the next generations a love of travel and an appreciation for different cultures.

Each child and grandchild also became a collector, though possibly not to the voluminous extent Rita did. On a trip to Africa Rita fell in love with the rhinoceroses and began a collection of figurines—some large, some small, some even curated. Each of her progeny and many of her friends now proudly display one, two, or even more of the collection, which eventually reached almost 1,000 pieces. Nothing gave Rita greater pleasure than giving a piece from this or one of her many other collections to someone who admired it.

According to her children, "Mom taught us how to laugh, how to cry, how the forgiveness of others opens your heart. She taught us to treat everyone with dignity and respect, regardless of the color of their skin, country of origin, gender, love preference, or profession."

Rita Haddow is survived by her children, Lauren (Marvin) Daitch, Amy (Steve) Coyer, Dr. Seth (Vicki) Kogan, Mark (Betsy) Kogan, Jeffrey (Miyako Yoshinaga) Haddow, and John "Jack" (Nina) Haddow; brother, Honorable Avern (Lois Pincus) Cohn; grandchildren, Rebecca (Ari Grief) Liss, Joshua (Dr. Claudine) Liss, Karen Daitch, Joshua (Erica) Daitch, Emily Kogan, Michael Kogan, Alexander Kogan, Benjamin Kogan, Eli Kogan, Barrett Haddow, and Jordyn Haddow; and great-grandchildren Liza Liss, Lev Liss, Spencer Daitch, and Ayla Daitch.





JHSM
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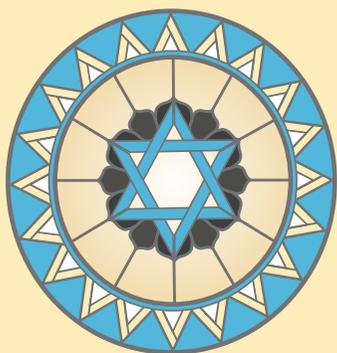
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