



chicago jewish historical society

# CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

*A sweet Passover to our members and friends.*

*"The Seder nights... tie me with the centuries before me." —Ludwig Frank*

## Co-President's Column: The Education of a Budding Jewish Activist

I didn't expect my university experience to make me into a Jewish activist.

Northwestern University (NU) was not known for a conspicuous Jewish student community or a culture of activism. When I entered in the late 1960s, along with about 15 of my Jewish classmates from Chicago's Mather High School, Jews were welcome, but I was aware that there had been a Jewish quota at NU into the early 1960s. (It officially ended in 1964.) My Jewish identity was secure, and I didn't expect NU to diminish or enhance it. As an avid student with plans to become a clinical psychologist, I chose NU for its academic excellence and strong psychology department.



Northwestern University's Hillel building, circa 1950s

courtesy of Henry Hube, Hedrich Blessing Photographers, from the collection of the Northwestern University Archives

As an avid student with plans to become a clinical psychologist, I chose NU for its academic excellence and strong psychology department.

The 60s in America were astir with turbulence and change: the Civil Rights Movement, ethnic consciousness, new lifestyles, feminism, the Viet Nam War. For many Jews, there were also concerns about Israel—in the years after the Six-Day War—and the persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union and in Arab countries. As a proud young Jew, I was aware of these important issues, but not to the point of deep personal involvement. As it turned out, through my Jewish identity and connection to Hillel, I intensified my Jewish commitments and was spurred to join with others into action.

Some of my NU Jewish experiences are vivid memories. To further stimulate my recollections, as I prepared this column, I reached out to old college friends, the family of my Hillel rabbi, and the current NU Hillel Executive Director, Michael Simon. I also read vintage articles in the *Northwestern Daily*, graciously provided by NU McCormick Library archivist Kevin Leonard. My reflections are enlivened by these sources.

My first reasons for going to Hillel were social and gustatory – to meet other Jews and to eat freshly cooked kosher dinners. (No other kosher food was available on campus.) Every night, I joined a small but lively group of about 20 students at the NU Hillel. My closest friendships were formed from this group, including CJHS member Judy Fine Dach, my senior suite mate and friend to this day; Byron Kohl, now Rabbi Baruch Frydman-Kohl; Linda Sussman Slutzky; Allan Zipkin z"l; and Harry "Hesh" Sendzischew.

continued on following page

## CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

continued from previous page

The distinctive Hillel building, located then at 1740 Judson Avenue (since demolished and replaced by houses), was itself an attraction. It boasted an open central area with rooms around the perimeter and a landscaped exterior that overlooked Lake Michigan. The building was designed (1948–1952) by the prominent Chicago-born architect Max Abramovitz, known for designing and planning college and religious buildings and major public projects, including the Hillel at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Avery Fisher Hall, Rockefeller Center, and the United Nations complex.

Of greater importance, Hillel was an attraction because of its dynamic director, Rabbi Boris (Baruch Avraham) Rackovsky. An Orthodox rabbi, he had just come to NU the prior year after serving in Melbourne, Australia, for five years as that country's first Hillel director. Rabbi Rackovsky took a personal interest in each student and encouraged us to express our Jewish identity in ways that had meaning and impact.

In the late 60s, many idealistic, progressive-minded young Jews had become alienated by some Movement figures, who condemned Israel and appeared to devalue Jews. With the strong support of Rabbi Rackovsky, the Jewish Student Movement (JSM) was established as an alternative that affirmed Jewish values. The founders included Byron Kohl, who later led Beth Tzedec Congregation in Toronto; Jeffrey Mallow, an astrophysics grad student, who became a Yiddishist, leader of Chicago YIVO, and professor at Loyola University Chicago; and Jack Nusan Porter, a sociology grad student, who went on to become a Boston University social sciences professor and a human rights activist.

The new JSM's mission statement was announced in the *Daily Northwestern* ("Northwestern Jews promise 'action'," Feb. 7, 1969): Jewish re-education, working for humane causes, supporting Israel, building the American Jewish community, and combining efforts with other groups with similar goals. JSM met every Tuesday evening at Hillel.



Rabbi Boris Rackovsky  
courtesy of the Rackovsky family

Over my next two years at NU, JSM played a major role, along with other Jewish student groups, including the cross-campus group Students for Israel, in advocating for Jewish causes at NU and in the larger Jewish community and for broader social causes. Here are some JSM initiatives in 1969–1970:

**April 1969** Three-day event celebrating Israel's 21st birthday

**May 1969** "Lounge-in" at the Chancellor's office to protest academic calendar dates that conflicted with the observance of Jewish holidays

**November 1969** Letter to the Jewish Federation and Welfare Boards, at the national meeting in Boston, demanding process and policy changes to broaden decision-making and increase funding for Jewish education

**November 1969** Petition calling for the release of Israelis held by Syria after a plane hijacking

**November 1969** Participation in the Viet Nam Moratorium and March on Washington

**January 1970** Speech at a major dinner event of the Jewish Federation of Chicago to demand more support for Jewish education

**May 1970** Protest of Soviet oppression of Jews, at the site of a local exhibit on the Soviet Union

**March 1970** Participation with other Jewish groups in a downtown Chicago protest against French President George Pompidou and France's decision to sell arms to Libya

**Summer 1970** "The Radical Jewish Summer School." At Hillel, free courses on the contemporary American Jew, history of Jewish activism, methods of organizing in the Jewish community, Hebrew language, and Yiddish literature. A weekly coffeehouse cosponsored with the Bernard Horwich JCC.

My most memorable and exciting experiences during this period took place in the summer of 1969. I had the privilege of assisting Rabbi Rackovsky on an academic project on the history of the Talmudic era. Later that summer, Byron Kohl and I represented NU Hillel at the annual Hillel Leadership Institute at Camp B'nai B'rith in Starlight, Pennsylvania. The Institute brought together teachers, thinkers, and leaders who inspired the hundreds of student delegates from campuses throughout North America.



## 2022 Officers and Board of Directors

Dr. Rachelle Gold  
Jerold Levin  
*Co-Presidents*  
Janet Iltis  
*Secretary*  
Sidney Amdur  
*Treasurer*  
Patti Ray  
*Membership Chair*

Leah Joy Axelrod  
Eric Benjaminson  
Dr. Irving Cutler  
Herbert Eiseman  
Elise Ginsparg  
Jacob M. Kaplan  
Joy Kingsolver  
Mark Mandle  
Dr. Edward H. Mazur  
Matthew Nickerson  
Joan Pomaranc  
Rabbi Moshe Simkovich  
Alissa Tanzar Zeffren

### Past Presidents

Muriel Rogers z"l  
*Founding President*  
Walter Roth z"l  
Dr. Adele Hast z"l  
Rachel Heimovics Braun  
Norman D. Schwartz z"l  
Dr. Edward H. Mazur

### Chicago Jewish History

is published quarterly by the CJHS  
at 610 S. Michigan Ave., Room 803,  
Chicago, IL 60605.  
Phone (312) 663-5634  
[info@chicagojewishhistory.org](mailto:info@chicagojewishhistory.org).  
Single copies \$8

*Editor/Designer* Robert Nagler Miller

Submissions: Request guidelines at  
[info@chicagojewishhistory.org](mailto:info@chicagojewishhistory.org)

Rabbi Rackovsky left NU Hillel in 1971. In the following years, I knew little about his life except that he had moved to Israel in 1972, and that he had passed away (18 years ago at age 75). Fortunately, I was recently able to communicate with his daughter Shira Schlesinger, a resident of Israel, who filled me in. The Rackovsky family lived in Tzfat in their first years in Israel. Rabbi Rackovsky worked as the director of foreign students at Bar Ilan University, while his wife Ruth was Bar Ilan's head librarian. The Rackovskys later settled in Jerusalem, where Ruth lives. After moving to Israel, Rabbi Rackovsky spent some years in Cape Town, South Africa, as the rabbi of the Green and Seapoint Synagogue.

In my senior year at NU, the new Hillel rabbi was Rabbi Marc Gellman, affiliated with the Reform movement. By then I was less active in Hillel, except for kosher dining, and more focused on planning for graduate school. Rabbi Gellman went on to become a prominent teacher, writer, television show creator (of "God Squad," with Monsignor Tom Hartman); and pulpit rabbi. (He is Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth Torah in Melville, New York.)



NU Jewish student buttons. The top-most was designed by Gold.

NU students can experience Israel through internships and Birthright trips, coordinated through Hillel. The university has a renowned Jewish studies department, The Renee and Lester Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, and sponsors study abroad programs at Hebrew University and Ben Gurion University.

Contemporary Hillel has hosted major events. In 2014, Hillel celebrated the 80th anniversary of the founding of NU Hillel and the 50th anniversary of the end of the Jewish quota. In response to the societal rise in antisemitism and the re-emergence of campus political activism, Hillel has partnered with academic departments, including the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, to organize seminars and conferences. In January 2021, it held the three-day conference "Zionism, Antisemitism, and Social Justice." Simon says that he tries to foster a unified Jewish community in which Jewish students feel safe and to promote positive relationships with all elements of NU's diverse community.

Looking back, I can credit my years at NU with reinforcing my involvement in Jewish life. And more. Through my Jewish activities, I transformed from being an observer and learner to a doer and advocate, ready for an eventual leadership role in the Jewish community.

**RADICAL JEWISH SUMMER SCHOOL**

This summer the Jewish Student Movement at Northwestern University will conduct a radical summer school. The emphasis will be on the history of Jewish activism, its theoretical foundations, and methods of organizing in the present Jewish community. Other areas of study will be Conversational Hebrew and Yiddish Literature. All courses will be taught by experts in the fields under consideration, at Hillel. A coffee house sponsored jointly with the Bernard Horwich JCC will be open at Hillel on Thursday evenings, 7 - 11 p.m. Other social functions are planned for Sunday afternoons. Any changes in the programmed activities will come from the participants.

**The courses are:**

**THE AMERICAN JEW: WHERE HE'S AT AND WHY**  
Mon. - Wed. 8:30 p.m.  
8 weeks, beg. July 6

**JEWISH POLITICAL ACTIVISM**  
Mon. - Wed. 8:30 p.m.  
8 weeks, beg. July 6

**ALTERNATE JEWISH LIFE-STYLES**  
Tues. 8:10 p.m.  
8 weeks, beg. July 7

**CONVERSATIONAL HEBREW**  
All Levels of Ability  
Mon. - Tues. - Wed. 6:30-7:45 p.m.  
8 weeks, beg. July 6

**YIDDISH LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION**  
Thurs. 6:30-7:00 p.m.  
8 weeks, beg. July 9

**ALL COURSES FREE OF CHARGE**

Registration may be completed by calling Hillel. For further information (or registration) contact Rabbi Rackovsky, Hillel Foundation, 1740 Judson Ave., Evanston, IL 60201, DA 8-0650.



## Bernie, Rita, and WFMT: The Jewish Beginnings of a Venerable Chicago Radio Station

By Robert Sideman

“Is anyone really listening to us?”

It was 9:45 p.m., WFMT was two weeks old, and Rita Jacobs was tired, nervous, and perhaps a bit discouraged. But she got right to the point. “We need money,” she told startled listeners, “until we get a few sponsors. Will anyone help us?”

The phone began to ring—Sacramento 2-6272—and kept ringing well past midnight. Pledges rolled in. Ten dollars. Five. Two. One. Three months and several appeals later, 1,500 listeners had contributed \$11,000. WFMT lived, and formed a bond with listeners that has lasted to the present day.

FM radio was invented in 1933, but it would be some years before it gained attention. One of the first to recognize the promise of FM, with its high-fidelity, static-free signal, was Zenith Radio Corporation, headed by Eugene F. McDonald. Zenith pioneered the manufacture and marketing of radios that included the FM band, and it was Zenith that launched Chicago’s first FM station in 1940. This was WEFM, named for the boss, and WFMT’s next-door neighbor on the dial for many years. Yet early growth was slow. By the end of World War II, the number of FM stations in Chicago had increased only to four.

After the war, however, came an explosion of interest in the young medium. Both established broadcasters and entrepreneurs drawn to a new field rushed to get FM licenses, not always certain just what to do with them. And there were risks. In the early days, three separate attempts at stations featuring classical music and cultural fare went on the air—and all three failed.

One of those attracted to FM was Bernard Jacobs, a product of Chicago’s West Side. Bernie was born in 1918 and grew up in the Austin neighborhood. He was one of three children of Harry Jacobs, owner of Castle Baking Company, a wholesale firm that supplied hearth breads to restaurants and delis. Bernie was said to run home from school at noon to catch the “Symphony Hour” on WAAF radio; he was also known to have taken violin lessons. But it was engineering that most attracted him. After high school, Bernie received a diploma from the RCA Institute, a school devoted to broadcast engineering. Later, he served in the Signal Corps in World War II, developing an even deeper interest in broadcasting. It was this Bernie—unflappable and somewhat unknowable, a tinkerer

who couldn’t pass a hardware store without buying something, anything, even when he had no money—who became a consummate engineer, developing a lifelong determination to make WFMT the highest-fidelity radio station in the country.

In 1948, Bernie and several family members launched a new FM station, WOAK.

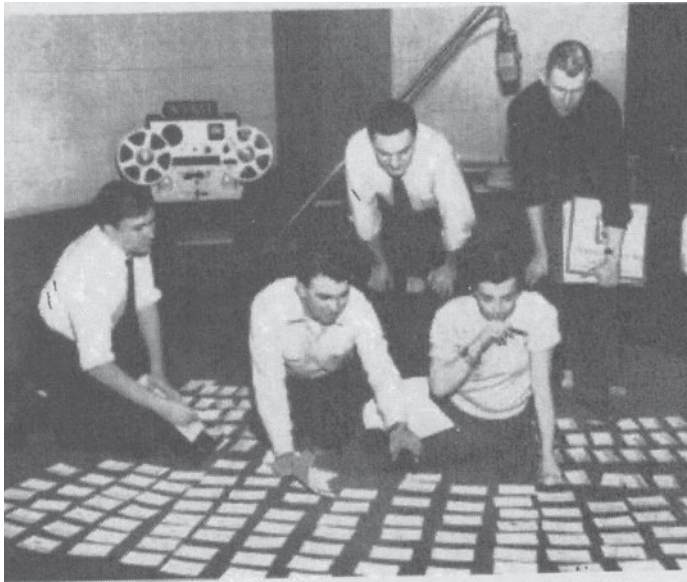
While initially intended for the Carleton Hotel in Oak Park, the station’s home was actually the Guyon Hotel at Washington and Pulaski on Chicago’s West Side. Bernie was president and general manager, but his relatives held controlling interest. WOAK followed other stations at the time by featuring headline news, recorded commercials, and a mixture of every sort of music. But there were glimmers: For WOAK’s first anniversary in 1949 (there would be only two more), the day’s schedule included a complete performance of “Carmen” from La Scala Milan, a presentation of Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar” by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater, symphonies by Beethoven and Brahms, and vocal selections from Enrico Caruso. During another of Bernie’s forays into all-classical programming, Robert Lefley, a columnist for the Daily Northwestern, praised WOAK as “The FM Oasis in a Musical Sahara.”

But mainly WOAK ambled along, Bernie unable to convince his family to listen to him. Around that time, he sat for an interview with Rita Smith, a young reporter for a neighborhood newspaper. One interview led to another, and the two were married in 1950. Rita Smith, born in 1927, was also a native of the West Side, having grown up in the Lawndale neighborhood. Her parents were Ruth Kaplan Smith and Bernard Smith, an electrical engineer who died when Rita was 10. After graduating from Roosevelt College (now Roosevelt University), Rita held a succession of jobs, mainly in communications, until becoming a reporter.

Bernie became increasingly unhappy with WOAK’s operation—and, in 1951, he left. It wasn’t long before the station began to suffer and minds began to



courtesy of “The First 35 Years of WFMT”



Program Planning at WFMT, c. 1953. Left to right: Arthur Weber, Norman Pellegrini, Bernie Jacobs, Rita Jacobs, and Mike Nichols. Each card represents a separate recording.

*courtesy of High Fidelity magazine, May–June 1953.*

change. Putting up all the resources they had—“we hocked everything that was hockable,” said Rita—she and Bernie purchased controlling interest. On December 13, 1951, they went on the air, just the two of them, from the same studios as before and on the same frequency, 105.9 at the time, but with a new identity, WFMT.

“In the days before sponsors, we lived on an idea, hope, and the encouragement of listeners,” recalled Bernie. He described his early roles as “engineer, business manager, advertising manager, janitor, and lifter of all heavy objects.” Rita, meanwhile, described herself as program director, disc jockey, announcer, script writer, producer, and, as she liked to tell everyone, “scrubwoman.” “The work was grueling,” said Bernie. “When the first sponsor came along, we splurged on a luxury—a twenty-one dollar safety belt for my tower climbing.”

Bernie and Rita Jacobs turned marketing wisdom on its head. Instead of meeting a need, they set out to create a need. They felt that if they aimed high, offering intelligent programming and personal warmth, an audience would find them. As they saw it, they were simply applying the Golden Rule to radio broadcasting: “We’re trying to do the things we would enjoy if we were the listeners and somebody else were operating the station.”

With those ideals came strict standards. They would program a wide variety of symphonic, chamber, and operatic music, blues and folk music, spoken word programs, and world news, but no selection could be

played only in part, interrupted for commercials, or cut off because of time. No selection would be replayed for at least three months unless there was strong listener demand. Newscasts would include news of the cultural world and, like commercials, would be restrained in language and read only by announcers. Sponsors could purchase blocks of time or an entire day, although they had no way to know how many commercials would be available to them.

Sponsors became important not only to those at the station, but to listeners, too. In the early days, four University of Illinois medical students, without being asked, canvassed bookstores, merchants of modern furniture, and theater groups and came up with two sponsors for the station. And when Stop & Shop, a purveyor of fine foods, advertised a special blend of coffee—Tuesday was Stop & Shop Day at WFMT—the store was flooded with orders, many accompanied by notes thanking Stop & Shop for supporting the station.

One of WFMT’s first two employees was Mike Nichols, then a 20-year-old student at the University of Chicago. Nichols, who went on to great renown as a theater and film director, started as a part-time announcer, but his portfolio grew. He found himself intensely interested in programming, and before long he became assistant to Program Director Norman Pellegrini, the other initial employee. Their jobs entailed contacting, and negotiating with, performers, record companies, and other radio outlets, keeping up with reviews, and listening to countless recordings with the ear of a critic. At one point, Rita mused that Nichols—“erudite on everything”—seemed to have one foot in the theater and the other in programming. Nichols joined a group led by Rita that met regularly to finalize each program guide. They were boisterous sessions with many a spirited debate.

Perhaps because he worked the late shift, Nichols took over from Rita a program on Saturday nights that was originally a live presentation of folk music. The format was changed into one entirely of recordings, with Nichols retaining folk music but adding two new elements close to his own heart: comedy, and snatches from the theater. In the meantime, Nichols was taking active roles in theater groups in Hyde Park and frequently traveling to New York, in each case leaving Rita with announcing duties.

How did Rita and Bernie themselves view the station and its mission? Two glimpses are revealing. In the first issue of their program guide, issued in March 1952 (and the earliest ancestor of today’s *Chicago*

*continued on following page*

## Bernie, Rita, and WFMT

continued from previous page

*Magazine*), they described WFMT as “Chicago’s Third Programme.” This was a reference to the BBC Third Programme, a national radio service begun in 1946. The Third Programme featured classical music, lectures, plays, and readings, as it became an important cultural force in Britain. And in 1953, Playwrights Theater Club opened in Old Town, an early attempt at a resident theater company for Chicago. In its two years, the group mounted 25 productions, from Shakespeare to Chekhov to Brecht, some of them new to Chicago. At the time it opened, Rita commented that she and Bernie hoped Playwrights would become “the WFMT of the Theater in Chicago”—local talent bringing the best of cultural offerings to the city. Loyalty may have been on her mind as well, since Mike Nichols, while working at the station, was among those behind Playwrights.



Studs Terkel interviewing Ravi Shankar, 1969

courtesy of Chicago History Museum, ICHI-102971; Raeburn Flerlage, photographer

WFMT was unusual even among its peers. The first two stations to share its programming were WNYC New York and KPFA Berkeley. Yet the former was operated by a city government, the latter by a foundation. In Chicago, WFMT’s neighbor, WEFM, which also broadcast classical music, was backed by a leading corporation. Bernie and Rita, on the other hand, were strictly on their own, with no deep pockets, investors, or benefactors. If the station were to succeed, it would be up to Rita to encourage listener support and to Bernie to bring in sponsors. And they did so skillfully: By August 1952, only nine months on the air, Bernie could announce—in *Time* magazine, no less—that the station was operating in the black.

To hear Rita tell it, in the early days, life in the Jacobs household was anything but dull: “Let it be said that we love big dogs, fresh air, warm early American houses, Vienna hot dogs (with gobs of relish), days away from everybody, and mystery stories. Israeli folk songs, Mahalia Jackson, Mahler’s ‘Das Lied’ and Schubert drive us out of our minds.”

In an era of political intolerance and blacklisting, Studs Terkel found a safe harbor at WFMT. At the outset Bernie assured him, “Your program is all yours. You can read short stories, interview anyone you want, play records”—a template for the next 45 years.

It began one day when Terkel, at home and none too happy about that during blacklisting, tuned the FM dial to discover, in one account, “Carmina Burana,” in another, Woody Guthrie, or maybe it was a reading of “The Canterbury Tales.” Intrigued, Terkel called the station, and Rita answered. They talked, and Terkel said he would like to work there. Rita said fine, “except for one thing: We have no money.” Terkel replied, “I haven’t any either, so we’re even.” And so he began on Christmas Day 1952, hosting one hour on Sunday mornings without pay. Later, it was Bernie who suggested that the Studs Terkel program be expanded from one day a week to five.

While Terkel pursued new careers, such as film actor and playwright, and continued to turn out books, his home was at WFMT, presenting Chicago listeners with an array of programs every week. If Bernie and Rita could be called eclectic in their tastes—highlights of one early day at WFMT included works of Haydn, Rachmaninoff, and Bach, songs by Bessie Smith, and folk music of Romania—Studs Terkel carried on in that eclectic tradition long after. There might be music from Isaac Stern one day, Billie Holiday the next, birthday programs for Robert Burns, Abraham Lincoln, and Mozart—conductor Josef Krips to Studs: “Beethoven sometimes reached heaven, but Mozart? Mozart came from heaven ...”—along with commemorations of Christmas, Yom Kippur, and the train ride to the 1963 March on Washington. For many years, the station’s program guide listed staff by name and position. Studs Terkel’s was “Free Spirit.”



Rita shared with Studs Terkel a talent for creating composites of words and music that she called “montage/documentaries.” The best known of Rita’s works was *Rozhinkes mit Mandlen*, (*Raisins with Almonds*), a celebration of the Jewish experience. Yiddish, cantorial, and Hasidic music was blended with voices as diverse as those of David Ben-Gurion, Mel Brooks, and Gertrude Stein. It was narrated by Rita in a voice once described as “rich, low, and sensuous, Barbara Stanwyck in a mellow mood.” The program, which went on to win national awards, is available online.

Loyalty to WFMT and its standards runs deep. When Dee Nahigian learned that the station was beginning to permit recorded commercials, he cancelled the sponsorship of H.C. Nahigian & Sons, his family’s venerable carpet and rug firm. He refused to return until the station restored its announcer-only policy. And when the Nahigians fielded an occasional call from an irate listener, asking how they could possibly sponsor Studs Terkel after what he’d just said, they replied that they didn’t always agree with him either, but that free expression was far more important than agreement. One of Studs’ first sponsors, the Nahigians were with him every Monday for his entire tenure at WFMT.

Bernie and Rita continued to operate the station until their divorce in 1966. Bernie, by then in declining health, carried on until he sold the station to WGN in 1968. He was represented in the sale by attorney Newton Minow. When the sale met with heated opposition from listeners, Minow went back to work, this time contributing his time and expertise as a public service.

Minow was then Chairman of the Board of WTTW, and it was through his efforts, and in the face of competition, that in 1970, WFMT was transferred to WTTW. This gave the station a compatible partner, one that would respect the distinctive character of WFMT first given it by Rita and Bernie. The Federal Communications Commission, which Minow once headed, approved the transfer by waiving several of its own rules, explaining that it did so on account of WFMT’s “unique and valuable fine arts programming.”

Increasingly infirm, Bernie died in 1975. He was remembered recently by Newton Minow as “a dedicated broadcaster with high standards.” Rita remarried and became known as Rita Jacobs Willens. She continued to work on radio productions from her home while visiting the station from time to time and reminding staff members, in true entrepreneurial fashion, of the way things ought to be. Rita died in 1990.

Today’s WFMT carries on in Rita and Bernie’s spirit. Selections are never interrupted, and the station’s announcing style, described in the early days as “exceedingly quiet, urbane, and friendly,” remains so. WFMT sends programming today across the country and beyond, surely among Chicago’s finest exports. Studs Terkel’s recorded interviews can still be heard. Pete Seeger still plays Bach and Beethoven on the banjo. “Leyenda,” the haunting guitar piece chosen by Bernie and Rita for use when there were a few extra minutes, plays that role today. The station continues to observe its own founding on the air every December 13. And for almost 70 years now, it would not be Saturday night in Chicago without “Oh yeah, that’s the Midnight Special ... that’s the Midnight Special ...”

Copyright 2021 Robert A. Sideman

Thanks to Newton Minow, and to those at WFMT, past and present: Sandra Cordova Micek, Julie Dillon, Kerry Frumkin, Louise Frank, Allison Holmes, Robert Lefley. Also thanks to Dee Nahigian.

Other sources: Rita Jacobs papers, courtesy WFMT; “Chicago’s WFMT,” *Time*, August 11, 1952; “Chicago’s Third Programme” by Ernest Callenbach, *The Quarterly of Film Radio and Television*, Spring 1953; “WFMT, Chicago’s Ivory Tower Station” by Anton Remenih, *High Fidelity*, May/June 1953; “FCC Affirms Almost \$1 Million Transfer,” *Broadcasting*, February 16, 1970; “WFMT co-founder Bernard Jacobs,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, November 2, 1975; “The Little Station That Grew” by Eric Zorn, *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, July 4, 1985; “Rita Jacobs Willens, co-founded WFMT” by James Warren, *Chicago Tribune*, June 11, 1990; Studs Terkel, *Touch and Go*, 2007. Thanks to Ginger Frere of Information Diggers, and to Danny Burdett of the Glencoe Public Library.

---

## CJHS Program Recap: A Visit to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library

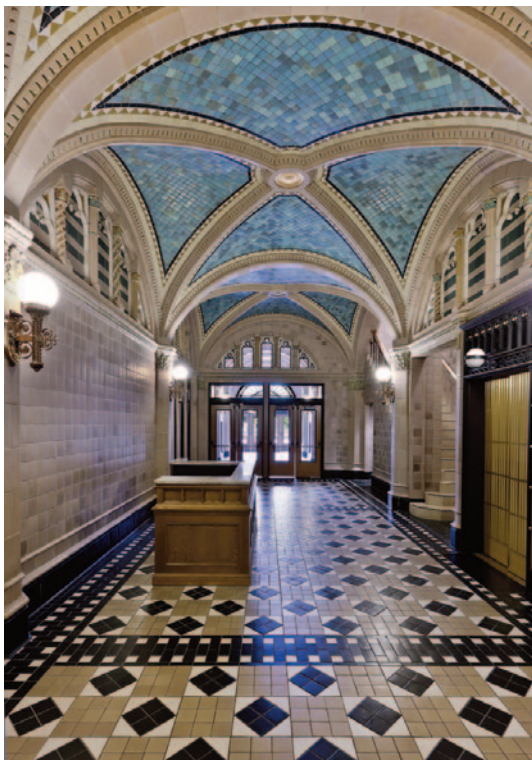
By Dr. Rachelle Gold

On March 23, CJHS members were treated to a customized tour of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library (PMML), located in the historic Monroe Building at 104 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago. The building was designed by architect Martin Roche of the famed Chicago Holabird and Roche firm in 1912. It was purchased in 2006 and subsequently restored to its original Romanesque majesty by retired Colonel Jennifer Pritzker. The museum tour was led by CJHS member Leah Cohen, PMML's Oral History and Reference Manager.

Cohen guided the CJHS group through the expansive "Drawn to Combat: Bill Mauldin & the Art of War" exhibit. Mauldin's brilliant and influential career as an editorial cartoonist and social commentator spanned approximately five decades: from the 1940s through the mid 1990s. During that time, he won two Pulitzer Prizes for his work. The well-designed installation included hundreds of his drawings, 5,000 of which are held at the museum, along with clear and helpful accompanying text that explained Mauldin's work on display.



The facade of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library  
courtesy of TAWANI Enterprises



The foyer of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library

courtesy of TAWANI Enterprises

Cohen took the CJHS group to private areas of the two-floor museum and library, including the studio for recording oral histories, which is named after Tuskegee Airman, Coleman Holt. The Tuskegee Airmen was a group of primarily Black military pilots and others who served during World War II. The PMML's elegant library, with thousands of volumes on the shelves, is part of a larger collection of more than 72,000 books among 120,000-plus titles, which include DVDs, musical scores, maps, and other materials. The tour group had an opportunity to peruse an assortment of books on Jewish subjects that Cohen had hand-picked.

A major highlight of the tour was a visit to the museum's rare book room. After passing rows of full shelves, CJHS members gathered in a small reading area to view a grouping of magnificent printed volumes selected by Cohen, including an incunabulum—a Latin-language book on the Punic Wars dating back to the 1400s—and an autographed four-volume autobiography of David Ben Gurion.

The CJHS thanks member Leah Cohen for sharing her expertise and for preparing and conducting a fascinating tour of PMML, a Chicago treasure, which is currently expanding to include an archive and research center and park in Somers, Wisconsin, called the Pritzker Archival and Memorial Park Center.

Go to the CJHS's website, [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org), to listen to Zoom recordings of other recent CJHS-sponsored programs, including a history of the ADL; Chicagoan Stephen Durchslag reflecting on his Haggadah collection, the largest in the world; and Southern Jewish author and photographer Andrew Feiler talking about his new book on the Rosenwald Schools.



## The Jews of Summer: A New Exhibit in Berrien County, Michigan

In the early and middle part of the 20th century, thousands of Jewish Chicagoans, fleeing the dog days of the city's summer, escaped to a tiny portion of southwest Michigan bordering Indiana. They created for themselves a vibrant and joyous community. Their experiences in Berrien County, Michigan—particularly in Union Pier—are now part of an upcoming exhibit, "Resorts of Yesteryear," at the Region of Three Oaks Museum, which runs from April 29 to October 30.

Many Jewish Chicagoans took up residence at a number of resort hotels; others purchased modest summer homes.

"I have very vivid, fond memories of spending my summers with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in this area," said CJHS member Dr. Arnold Friedlander, whose Chicago family owned property in Union Pier in the 1950s and 60s.



Chicago physician Dr. Louis Gordon founded the Gordon Beach Inn in Union Pier, Michigan  
courtesy of The Region of Three Oaks Museum

The exhibit will put the spotlight on two Jewish resorts, the Gordon Beach Inn and Karonsky's Hotel, and the narrative of Jewish Chicagoans who frequented the area will be told through photos, artifacts, and articles. Gordon's Beach Inn, still a functioning hotel that is now a landmark on the State of Michigan historic site register, was developed in Union Pier in the 1920s by Dr. Louis Gordon, a Chicago physician. Karonsky's Hotel, now the Inn at Union Pier, was once known as *Scheine Vista*, or *Beautiful View*. Other resorts featured in the exhibit include Golfmore Resort and Lakeside Inn.

The exhibit, to which a number of Chicago Jewish Historical Society members contributed vital information, will be available for viewing Fridays through Sundays, 12 to 5 p.m. Eastern time. The Region of Three Oaks Museum is located at 5 Featherbone Avenue, Three Oaks, Michigan. For more information, call 269-336-9688.



The mezuzah from Karonsky's Hotel in Union Pier, Michigan  
courtesy of The Region of Three Oaks Museum

## Have an Eggroll, Mr. Goldstone\*

Among many Jewish Americans, there is an old joke about the most appropriate way to observe Christmas. One variation goes something like this:

"How did you spend the holiday?"

"We had dinner at the local Chinese restaurant."

The subject of America's Jews and their relationship to Chinese food dates back many generations. It is also an interest of NYU doctoral student, Shiyong Lu, who recently contacted the CJHS about her academic work.

Readers, if you have any interesting, humorous, and/or memorable vignettes about your and your families' time well spent in Chinese restaurants in and around Chicago, please share them with CJH Editor Robert Nagler Miller at robertnaglermiller@gmail.com. With your permission, he will also share them with Ms. Lu, whose research focuses on the interactions between Jewish and Chinese Americans.



\*In homage to, and in loving memory of, Jules Styne and Stephen Sondheim, composer and lyricist, respectively, of *Gypsy*

## An Interesting Artifact from 1946

By Rachel Heimovics Braun

In the months following the end of World War II, as soldiers were formally separated from the U.S. military, lists of those identified as Jewish and from the Chicago area were sent to the recently opened Chicago Federation of Reform Synagogues (CFRS). Rabbi Phineas Smoller, the CFRS's newly installed first director, sent his 14 constituent congregations these mimeographed, alphabetical lists for purposes of outreach, especially to those men and women who indicated that they were congregationally unaffiliated. Rabbi Smoller (1903–1952) was himself a retired Army chaplain, having served as Acting Chaplain at Camp Crowder in Missouri.

I had been collecting Chicago Jewish memorabilia since the 1960s and somewhere, sometime, perhaps at a Chicago synagogue closing, I acquired an incomplete file of these lists. Each list has a “series” number and, occasionally, a sub-series designated by a letter. Most lists are dated. The file, covering the Seventh Series (dated 2–7–1946) through the Fourteenth Series (dated 6–26–1946), includes nearly 5,000 names. In addition, there is a three-page undated “onion skin” carbon-copy titled “North Side Armed Service Separation Lists.”

Each series provides a list of names and addresses, sometimes the ranks and a congregational affiliation. Some of the series list only “affiliated” or “unaffiliated.” Others, especially the very large Twelfth Series, show both categories. All the ranks are for enlisted men and women and non-commissioned officers, ranging from Private First Class to Technical Sergeant 5. There are no Navy or Coast Guard ranks, and no officers of any branch are in any of the lists.

The file holds one more item: a “directory” of all the recipients of the lists from Rabbi Smoller. This directory includes the names and contact information for the congregational rabbis, presidents, and secretaries, as well as chairmen of the membership committees, religious school committees, choir committees, and presidents of the brotherhoods and sisterhoods, with presidents of youth groups forthcoming. Here, in a frozen moment, are the locations of the Reform congregations, along with the identities of people working directly with them. The 14 recipient congregations were: Beth El on Palmer Street, Chicago Sinai Congregation on Hyde Park Boulevard, Emanuel Congregation on Buckingham Place, Kehilath Anshe Ma’arav (KAM) on 50th Street, South Shore Temple on Jeffery Avenue, Temple Beth Israel on Bernard Street, Temple B’nai Jehoshua on Ashland Avenue, Temple Isaiah Israel on Hyde Park Boulevard, Temple Judea on Independence Boulevard, Temple Mizpah on Morse Avenue, Temple Sholom on Lake Shore Drive, Washington Boulevard Temple on Karlov Avenue, North Shore Congregation Israel on Vernon Avenue in Glencoe, and the newly founded Temple Menorah (location unspecified).

When Rabbi Smoller sent out the lists, he added a cover letter. Here is a typical message on CFRS letterhead, dated March 13, 1946. The underscores and all capitals appear in the original.

“To: Rabbis, Presidents, Temple, Secretaries, and chairmen of Membership Committees; also to Presidents of Brotherhoods, Sisterhoods and Youth Groups—

“Dear Friend:

“Enclosed are additional lists of names of people recently separated from the armed services.

“Check the lists marked “Affiliated” for names of people in your congregation, and reintegrate them into your congregation.

“Please go through the list marked “Unaffiliated” and invite as many of these ex-service people as possible to participate in your congregational activities. By all means try to induce them to join your congregation. Choose those that live closest to the location of your Temple.

### Rabbi Smoller of Chicago Appointed Director of Western Regional Office Of Union of American Hebrew Congregations

NEW YORK, N.Y. — The appointment of Rabbi Phineas Smoller of Chicago as Director of the Western Regional Office of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, with headquarters in Los Angeles, was announced by Dr. Maurice N. Eisenstath of New York, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Rabbi Smoller has for the past five years been



RABBI PHINEAS SMOLLER

Director of the Chicago Federation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Previously, following his ordination at the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati in 1930, he held pulpits in Springfield, Ohio, 1930-35, and Joplin, Missouri, 1935-44. During the war, he served as acting-chaplain at Camp Crowder, Mo.

Rabbi Smoller, who will assume his new duties in Los Angeles on September 1st, will relinquish his position in Chicago today (July 22). Rabbi Smoller, a native of Milwaukee, Wis., is

a graduate of the John Hopkins University, Baltimore. He has been active in civic and philanthropic activities in the communities in which he has held posts. He is also treasurer of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the largest and oldest rabbinical organization in the United States, and a member of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College, his alma-mater. A classmate of the late Dr. Joshua Loth Liebman, he was an intimate friend of the author of “Peace of Mind,” and delivered the official eulogy for Dr. Liebman at the annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

In Joplin, he served as President of the Joplin Council of Social Agencies, as a member of the Board of Governors of the Jewish Students Foundation of the University of Missouri, and as Public Representative and Panel Chairman of the Disputes Division of the War Labor Board.

At the time of the commemoration of his five years of service as Director of the Chicago Federation of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the officers of the Federation, of which Max Robert Schreyer is President, presented him with a testimonial citation as “a devoted servant to Reform Judaism, selfless and sacrificial beyond the requirements of his office, who has given five years of creative service in Chicago helping to guide our efforts on to the path of cooperative endeavor for the sake of Judaism, and of the Jewish people.”

### A 1949 news clipping about Rabbi Phineas Smoller, the first director of the Chicago Federation of Reform Synagogues

“Our office is trying to be helpful to you by obtaining the names of people recently separated from the armed services and furnishing you with the lists.

“We have already written a personal letter, as per copy enclosed, to each person on the “Unaffiliated” lists. YOU MUST FOLLOW THROUGH IF OUR JOB IS TO BE EFFECTIVE.

“Cordially yours,

“Rabbi Phineas Smoller,  
Director”

The personal letter to the unaffiliated veteran that Rabbi Smoller enclosed reads as follows:

“Your name has been referred to us by the Chaplain of the center from which you have been separated from the Armed Services. We are happy to have the information that you are a civilian again. On behalf of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations I am pleased to extend best wishes to you for your future success and happiness.

“We are enclosing for your information a leaflet which lists the names of Chicago’s Reform Rabbis. If there is anything that our civilian rabbis can do for you please contact the one of your choice and meet with him at a time that will be mutually convenient. He will be delighted to welcome you into his congregational circle. Our office will be glad to help service your religious needs through our temples and we will be happy to arrange for your introduction to the rabbis and congregations listed in the leaflet.

“Sincerely yours,

“Rabbi Phineas Smoller,  
Director”

**Some Details about the People**

The lists show a total of 4,835 men and women, with 3,718 (or 77 percent) unaffiliated and 1,117 (or 23 percent) affiliated. The Twelfth Series, the thickest by far of all the series at 47 pages, has nearly half of the all the names. The low percentage of affiliated may be misleading, because my file is incomplete and because the emphasis was on reaching out to the unaffiliated. Some affiliated lists may have been discarded.

Although the vast majority resided in Chicago or its suburbs, some veterans lived in more distant places, indicating their out-of-town affiliations. These include veterans from Bloomington, Belleville, Belvedere, Champaign, Galesburg, Kankakee, Peoria, Rock Island, and Springfield, among others. From the lists, I learned of a town called Cherry, in Bureau County, Illinois!

Several hundred different congregations are named, including variant names for what is likely the same congregation. Most of the congregations were not Reform. Most appear to be Conservative or Orthodox. Besides actual synagogues, some listed as their affiliation places like Marks Nathan Home, the Jewish People’s Institute, the Jewish Community Center of Hyde Park, the Oak Park Community Center, and the Joliet Jewish Federation. Several listed “Hyde Park Liberal” as their affiliation, although this “liberal” congregation is not among the Reform recipients of the lists.

A fascinating aspect of these lists is the identification of familiar names. Here are a few examples of names that caught my attention: Curtis C. Melnick, one-time Chicago Jewish Historical Society board member, lived at **continued on following page**

JEWISH SYNAGOGUES CERTIFICATES RECENTLY SEPARATED FROM THE ARMED SERVICES			
Section A - Affiliated			
Name	Address		Affiliation
Abramson, Pfc Samuel J.	5130 S. Lincoln Ave. (20)		First Shalom
Afs, T/S	2105 W. Division St. (20)		1300 E. Austin
Appelbaum, Pfc Fred S.	3114 W. 57th St.		Kheseltz Jacob
Appelbaum, Pfc Fred S.	3044 W. Division St.		Aurach Isaac
Asher, Pfc Morris	4430 S. Washington St. (24)		Washington Div.
Asher, Sgt. Lee	1504 S. Trumbull Ave.		Perkins Hebrew Org.
Aschard, Pfc William	811 W. Springfield (24)		Smith & Chicago Ave.
Berman, Cpl Raymond A.	1639 S. 9th Street		Beth Joseph Cong.
Birbaum, Pfc Richard D.	6819 Clyde Avenue		South Shore Temple
Borley, Cpl Richard D.	513 Cedar Place		Amos Beth Syn.
Brod, Pfc Herman	113 S. Keeler Ave. (24)		1st Romanian Cong.
Brown, Pfc Arnold	3703 Craig Avenue (49)		Shalom
Chanski, Pfc Louis W.	1153 S. Christian St. (21)		Amos Shalom
Carsen, Pfc Donald T.	6716 S. Cottage Ave.		South Shore Temple
Cling, Pfc Richard J.	1369 Hyde Park Blvd.		Shalom
Cohen, Pfc Martin W.	4882 S. Bernard St. (20)		Beth Israel
Deitch, Pfc Leonard H.	3562 Douglas Blvd.		Hebrew Israel
Dobinsky, Pfc Hyman	816 Montrose Avenue		Agudas Achaim
Dishman, Pfc Samuel	5450 Ellis Avenue		Jewish Community Center of Hyde Park
Fried, Pfc Milton	4503 S. Lincoln		Hebr. Cong. of Albany Pk.
Friedfeld, Pfc Samuel D.	2610 W. Division St.		Artisian Syn.
Goldstein, Pfc Jerome	4838 W. Division St.		Sh. Tzedik
Golberg, Pfc Philip E.	732 Bitterroot Pl. (13)		Amshat Isaac
Goligosh, Sgt. Seymour B.	4724 S. Albany Ave. (25)		Beth Jacob Feder
Golman, Cpl Melvin E.	3916 W. Congress St.		Beth Israel Amos Temple
Gonsky, Pfc Sol.	3506 W. Douglas Blvd. (23)		First Romanian Cong.
Greenburg, Pfc James	3346 W. Congress St.		First Romanian Cong.
Greenbaum, Pfc Andrew	321 Inverford Place		Temple Shalom
Greenwald, Cpl Andrew	1612 S. Hilliard Ave. (20)		Beth Jacob Cong.
Greenwald, Sgt. William	2052 W. Pierce Ave. (26)		Beth Arah
Hahn, Pfc Arthur B.	1-04 Perry Avenue		Temple Shalom
Harris, Pfc S. Eugene	3324 Wilson Avenue		Beth Arah
Hart, Sgt. Robert A.	3403 S. Woodson Ave.		Chicago Sinai Cong.
Hirshfeld, Pfc Solomon H.	21/2 J.K. Lohel 804 E. Oxford Los Angeles, California		Chicago Sinai Cong.
Holman, Cpl Paul J.	5685 Alago Avenue (40)		Amos Beth
Hoffman, Pfc Bernard V.	3310 W. Argus St.		Chicago Jews Temple
Israel, Pfc Sam	1443 E. Spaulding Ave.		Iron Hebrew Cong.
Jacobs, Pfc Herman S.	3741 E. Forest St.		Temple Emanuel
Jacobs, Pfc Irving	1317 S. Bond St. (15)		Chicago Sinai Cong.
Jacobs, Pfc Irving	3822 W. Harrison St. (24)		Temple Judea
Kahn, Cpl Milton F.	122 S. Taylor Ave. (41)		Beth Israel of Austin
Kantor, Cpl Irving	3532 S. California St.		Leah Shalom Home, Center
Kantor, Pfc Irwin A.	2854 S. Madia Blvd.		Lagan Bk. Congregation
Kaplan, Sgt. Jack B.	7943 S. Loma Ave. (48)		South Side Hebrew
Kaplan, Pfc William	1330 S. Union Ave. (20)		Beth El

A portion of the Chicago Federation of Reform Synagogues’ list of Jewish Chicago-area World War II veterans with synagogue affiliations.



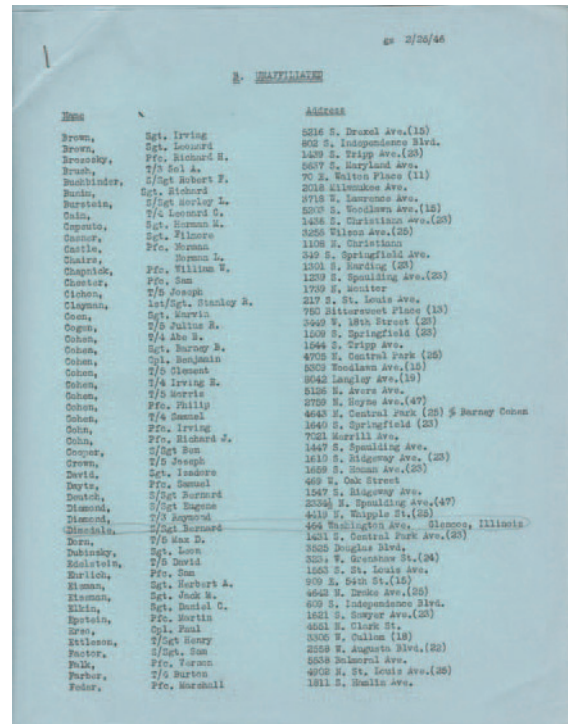
# Interesting Artifact

continued from previous page

6838 Perry Avenue and listed Oir Chodish Congregation as his affiliation; T/Sgt Arthur Axelrod, at 1933 South Homan Avenue, may have been the politician Arthur X. Elrod and the father of former Cook County Sheriff Richard Elrod, my classmate and friend at Northwestern University; Sheldon M. Harnick, of 4130 North Lawler Avenue, member of Beth Hillel V'nachalath Moshe, would become the renowned lyricist of *"Fiddler on the Roof,"* *"Fiorello!"*, and other Broadway shows. He is now 97 years old.

I was intrigued by the name of Erle Korshak, 1713 East 55th Street, member of "Sholom." Where did he fit within the Korshaks of Chicago? I discovered that Erle was already involved in the world of science fiction when he enlisted at 19. He was a founder in 1939 of the World Science Fiction Convention. "World Con" will hold its 80th convention in Chicago in September 2022. Erle became a lawyer on the West Coast. After his death at 98 last year, he was remembered by Mike Glys in an August 27, 2021 World Con website posting:

"During World War II he served in the U.S. Army, enlisting in 1942 a month after he turned 19. He later graduated from law school, as did others in Chicago's influential Korshak family. He became a successful lawyer and businessman in California and Nevada."



A portion of the Chicago Federation of Reform Synagogues' list of Jewish Chicago-area World War II veterans without synagogue affiliations.

***Though incomplete, this collection could lead to fascinating discoveries about the many men and women who served in World War II and their roles in the war effort. They could also expand our understanding of individual Jewish communities and Chicago Jewish history.***

What can be gleaned from these lists of thousands of names? For starters, thousands of Chicago area Jewish men and a surprising number of Jewish women served in World War II. Considering that these lists are incomplete and that they do not include all branches of service or officers, it is impossible to estimate the total number of Chicago Jewish veterans during this war. What we do know is that they came from all parts of the city and beyond. Some were affiliated with synagogues, but many were not. Though incomplete, this collection could lead to fascinating discoveries about the many men and women who served in World War II and their roles in the war effort. It could also be helpful to those undertaking family histories, as well as those conducting demographic analyses of where Chicago's Jews lived and moved in the 1940s. In addition, it would be interesting to learn how successful Reform congregations were in attracting these veterans to join them. All in all, these pages present a snapshot of Jewish Chicago and Illinois institutions in the mid-1940s.

Perhaps complete lists exist elsewhere. It is possible that the lists were also distributed to Conservative and Orthodox congregations. Maybe some of these lists lie hidden in an old cabinet or desk drawer somewhere. Artifacts such as these can lead to all sorts of discoveries—about individual Jewish communities—and expand our understanding of Chicago Jewish history.

## Welcome New Members

Scott and Peri Babendir  
Chicago, IL

Andrew Feiler  
Atlanta, GA

Eileen Rapoport  
Skokie, IL

Jeffrey Braude  
Glenmont, NY

Marvin Gold  
Chicago, IL

Dr. Michael Shapiro  
Lincolnwood, IL

Daniel Cohen  
Deerfield, IL

Dr. Victoria Hass  
Wilmette, IL

Christine Singer  
Chicago, IL

Erez Cohen  
Champaign, IL

Carol A. Jason  
Chevy Chase, MD

Trent Spoolstra  
Chicago, IL

Herbert Cohen  
Wheeling, IL

Sheila Kail  
Boynton Beach, FL

Melinda and Roy Strauss  
Deerfield, IL

Leah Cohen  
Skokie, IL

Rabbi Dr. Leonard and Margaret  
Matanky  
Chicago, IL

Rabbi Shlomo Tenenbaum  
Chicago, IL

Lois Davis  
Glencoe, IL

Hillel Meyers  
Chicago, IL

Steve Wolf  
Chicago, IL

Stephen Durchslag  
Chicago, IL

Joshua Norris  
Chicago, IL

Milt Zimmerman  
Evanston, IL

## CJHS members . . . YASHER KOACH!

*The Hebrew phrase means  
"More Power to You."*

CJHS Board member **Dr. Irving Cutler** was recently appointed to the Sinai Hospital advisory committee responsible for producing a history of Chicago's Lawndale neighborhood, once home to tens of thousands of Jews.

CJHS Co-President **Dr. Rachelle Gold** was interviewed about the Society by new CJHS member **Rabbi Leonard Matanky**, head of Congregation KINS and principal of the Ida Crown Jewish Academy, on his KINS podcast "Daytime Dialogues."

An op-ed piece by CJHS member **Michael Ebner**, titled "Our Family's History Reflects Ukraine's Long Struggle for Peace," was published this past March 28 in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Ebner is James D. Vail III professor of American history, emeritus, at Lake Forest College.

CJHS Student Liaison **Ezra Landman-Feigelson** was recently featured on WTTW's "Great Chicago Quiz Show," hosted by Geoffrey Baer.

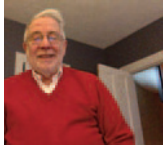
CJHS Board member **Dr. Ed Mazur** can now be heard on a *Jerusalem Post* travel podcast reflecting on Chicago's rich Jewish history and culture. To listen to it, go to:  
[www.jerusalempost.podbean.com](http://www.jerusalempost.podbean.com)  
Type in "Chicago" in the search window.

A review of "*The Odyssey of Rudolph Bloom*," by CJHS member **Richard Reeder**, was published in the February 24, 2022 edition of *Third Coast Review*.

CJHS Board member **Rabbi Moshe Simkovich** made history this fall when he taught to Ida Crown Jewish Academy students a brand-new Chicago Jewish history curriculum that had been developed for the CJHS by Society member **Michael Soffer**, a social studies teacher at Oak Park and River Forest High School. Soffer recently wrote the two-part series "The Kulle Affair: A Nazi Hiding in Plain Sight in Suburban Chicago" for *CJH*.

## How It All Began: The Genesis of Jewish Studies at UIUC

By Dr. Michael Shapiro



Although I am neither a Chicagoan nor an alumnus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), it occurred to me that readers of this publication might be interested in an account of how UIUC came to have a Jewish studies program. As one of its co-founders, I had a front-row seat and am happy to tell the story.

I suspect that the U of I trustees never established a Department of Religion because they believed that doing so would violate the separation of church and state mandated by the United States Constitution. However, students were allowed to receive university credit for taking courses taught by staff members of the religious foundations that had grown up around the campus, such as the Hillel (Jewish), the Newman (Roman Catholic), and McKinley Foundations (Presbyterian). Around 1970, the administration decided to end this arrangement. Instead, UIUC would create its own Religious Studies unit and hire faculty with appropriate academic credentials to teach college-level courses about religion.

In 1971, UIUC hired William Schoedel to create and direct UIUC's Program in Religious Studies. (It became a full-fledged Department in 2007.) Among his appointments, Schoedel hired two instructors to teach courses on the Hebrew Bible and Judaism. The Hebrew Bible slot was filled by David L. Petersen, who was succeeded within a few years by Wayne Pitard, a recent PhD from Harvard with expertise in biblical archeology. The Judaica position was filled in 1973 by Gary Porton, a student of Jacob Neusner at Brown University. Both Pitard and Porton distinguished themselves at UIUC, and they remained at the university for their entire careers. Both eventually served as directors of the Program in Religious Studies.

At roughly the same time, UIUC began offering courses in modern Hebrew in the Department of Linguistics. Peter Cole designed these courses and hired and trained the Israeli instructors who taught them. When Cole left the university, Rina Donchin oversaw the teaching of modern Hebrew. She also understood her role to include the promotion of Israeli culture on campus. Paul Bernard offered a course on the history of European Jews, Fred Gottheil introduced a course on the Israeli economy, and I initiated a course in modern Jewish secular literature. Relevant courses were also developed by Marvin Weinbaum (Political Science), Harvey Choldin and Rita Simon (Sociology), Fred Jaher (History), David Desser (Cinema Studies), and Maurice Friedberg (Slavic Languages and Literature).

This group of faculty would meet from time to time to discuss the possibility of an academic unit devoted to Jewish studies. Gottheil, the informal leader of the group, eventually handed me his baton—a single manila folder of all relevant correspondence to date. I immediately invited Porton and Pitard to participate in these discussions.

Porton's role was key. He persuaded the group that Jewish studies at a large public university should be thoroughly integrated into the academic culture of the institution. To do otherwise, he maintained, would be to reinvent the ghetto. He envisioned Jewish studies as an interdisciplinary unit, drawing its personnel from departments in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Fine Arts and offering courses designed for both Jewish and non-Jewish students.

But the group was stymied by its belief that a proper Jewish studies program would necessitate the appointment of new faculty in several key areas, and it feared that the economic climate precluded such hiring. A two-step solution to this problem was suggested by an assistant dean in the School of Humanities, Edward Sullivan, an American-Irish Catholic from Brooklyn, whom I liked to call the *sandek* (godfather) of the program. Sullivan urged us to take inventory of what courses in Jewish studies were being taught or could be taught by current UIUC faculty and to see what courses were being offered under the banner of Jewish studies at other institutions of higher learning. The results were instructive. We concluded that aside from Indiana University, which was perhaps the first American university after Brandeis and Yeshiva universities to develop a comprehensive program in Jewish studies, most other such programs were far less substantive than what UIUC was already capable of launching.



Armed with this information, Porton and I convinced the director of the School of Humanities, Nina Baym, to appoint us as co-chairs of an ad hoc committee charged with exploring the feasibility of creating a program in what we called “Jewish Culture and Society.” This slightly cryptic rubric was intended to reflect our determination to stress the study of Judaism and Jews not in isolation from, but in relation to, the surrounding cultures. Although we were only an ad hoc committee, we acted as if we were already an academic unit. We designed a minor in Jewish studies, stimulated colleagues to develop new courses in Jewish studies, and began to raise money for future use by the yet-to-be-created unit.

A word about money. The ancient rabbis used to say, “*Ayn kemakh, ayn Torah*,” which means “no flour, no Torah.” That is, without economic support from the community, there can be no serious study of Jewish texts. UIUC was not run by ancient rabbis, of course, but its development officers believed that a Jewish studies program might not only raise funds for itself, but might also help persuade Jewish donors interested in, say, medicine, business, or science, that UIUC, where Hillel started, was hospitable to the study of Jewish history and culture.

Our initial funding from the university was quite modest: We used it to buy stationery. If the French philosopher René Descartes could declare, “I think therefore I am,” then we could proclaim, “We have letterhead, therefore we exist.”

The Jewish community of Urbana–Champaign was responsive from the outset. Its local federation gave us an annual allocation for a lecture series open to the public. (Now, we not only had stationery to invite speakers, but also money to pay them.) Even before endowed lectures were established, the ad hoc committee had begun sponsoring public lectures by internationally known scholars and artists.

Individual members of the Champaign–Urbana Jewish community also stepped up. For example, Ed and Nancy Tepper gave generous annual support, while Ann Einhorn and Sheila Goldberg endowed lecture series.

Other early support came in the form of books. The UIUC Library created a line in its budget for the purchase of books in Jewish studies. A Chicago family, whose late father, Michael Fain, had run the Jewish Book Mart, a Yiddish–language bookstore in Chicago’s Loop, donated his unsold stock to the UIUC Library. The Chicago Public Library offered to donate its entire collection of Yiddish books. These volumes had been acquired at a time when many Jewish immigrants wanted to read books in their native language, but now, several generations later, the library needed space for books in Chinese, Korean, and Spanish. As the Yiddish books had been purchased with the taxes of Illinois residents, the Chicago Public Library felt that UIUC would be an appropriate home and sent a van to transport this windfall of books.

The College of Liberal Arts (LAS), led by Dean Jesse Delia, matched the private funds in important ways. LAS, of course, helped fund the salaries and benefits of all faculty teaching relevant courses, just as UIUC provided classrooms and offices and covered the cost of utilities. LAS also provided funds for an administrative assistant to help run the office. Over the years, I hired a series of grad students from Pakistan and India to fill this job, as well as a Jewish economist from Costa Rica and a Jewish would-be opera singer from Chicago, Michelle Pearlman, who became a cantorial soloist and is now a pulpit rabbi.

By the mid 1990s, the ad hoc committee had put Jewish studies on the university’s academic map. More faculty members began to develop new courses. New faculty appeared fortuitously. A scholar hired to teach Russian literature, Harriet Murav, was now turning her attention to Russian–Jewish writers. A search in American literature turned up a second appointment, Michael Rothberg, who was also specialist in Holocaust literature and went on to found the Program in Holocaust, Genocide and Memory Studies. Two more instructors appeared as if by chance: Bruce Rosenstock, who was highly qualified in Jewish philosophy, and Brett Kaplan, who was completing a dissertation on Holocaust literature.

***The Jewish Studies program at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has been on the map for almost three decades, thanks in large measure to support from Jewish individuals and families from the Chicago area.***

continued on following page

## How It All Began

continued from previous page

Jewish studies at UIUC made a quantum leap forward when the U of I Foundation assigned Natalie Handley to raise money in the greater Chicago area expressly for Jewish studies. Handley was successful beyond our wildest dreams. As a result of her efforts, Sheldon and Anita Drobny made significant donations. They provided funds for a named chair and for entry-level hires in three key areas: Jewish history, Jewish ethnography, and Yiddish language and culture. Suddenly, Jewish Culture and Society had outgrown its status as an ad hoc committee and was now designated as a Program within the College of Arts and Sciences. I became its director, acting as its CEO, while Gary Porton, its associate director, functioned as chairman of the board.

Handley's later efforts led to the endowment by Jeffery Margolis of the Tobor Family Chair in Jewish History. Eugene Avrutin was the first Tobor Professor and still holds the Chair while also serving as the Program's associate director.

Handley also encouraged us to create an Advisory Council of friends and donors, chiefly in the Chicago area. Early members of the Council included Maury and Sandy Raizes and Sidney and Eunice Lieberstein. The Council was especially effective in facilitating collaboration between the Program and Jewish institutions in the Chicago area. With the help of Council members, the Program provided speakers to synagogues and, in some years held a *kallah*, or informal study session, over dinner. The Advisory Council is currently chaired by Douglas Hoffman.

The Council and other friends helped the Program expand its activities. Lorelei Rosenthal endowed an annual lecture on the history and culture of German-speaking Jews. Annette Turow funded the Vivian Marcus lecture series. Paul Krouse underwrote an annual visit by a distinguished scholar in European Jewish history. Ron Filler established an award each semester for an outstanding student. The Karasik family and friends of Okla Elliot made generous contributions for student travel, while the Gandell and Shiner families established a graduate fellowship for dissertation completion.

In addition to help from the aforementioned individuals and families, the Jewish Federation of Chicago funded the Israel Studies Project. This idea was hatched at a lunch I had at the Standard Club with the late Michael Kotzin, then a Vice-President of the Federation. The basic idea was to promote serious academic interest in Israel, its history, and culture by arranging for Israeli scholars and artists to visit UIUC and other Illinois campuses for extended periods. At UIUC, this project took the form of visits of varying lengths—a month, a semester, or an academic year. These visitors would teach courses, deliver public lectures, and hold informal meetings on campus and throughout the community. Within a few years, UIUC

continued on page 19

## This Is No *Bubbe Meise*

By Dr. Edward Mazur

In 1964, during my senior year at the University of Illinois, I was a regular attendee at the Hillel services. I was always accompanied by the woman who would become my wife, Myrna Rochelle Hankin. A junior majoring in journalism, Myrna worked at the school newspaper, *The Daily Illini*, or *DI*, as we referred to it. Her editor was the late renowned journalist and film critic, Roger Ebert. He suggested that she go over to the Hillel facility and meet a nice Jewish boy. She did, and I was the chosen one.

Hillel offered credit courses, and both Myrna and I decided to take one together and get what we believed to be an easy "A" to bolster our grade point averages. The course, American Jewish History, was taught by

the late Rabbi H. Hirsch Cohen, the Hillel director at the time, who was mentioned in the last issue of *CJH*. He was a very demanding instructor who expected you to come to class having read the materials and prepared to discuss and debate. Myrna earned the "A" grade. Unfortunately, I received a "B." I remember Rabbi Hirsch's response when I queried him about our grades: "She might very well be a better scholar than you."



*Dr. Edward Mazur, a former President of the Board of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, went on to earn a doctorate at the University of Chicago. He taught for many years at City Colleges of Chicago and served on the faculties of many other institutions of higher learning. He and Myrna have been married for more than 56 years.*

## How Sheerit Hapleitah of Metropolitan Chicago Began

By Renee Birnberg Silberman

From the streets of Lodz, Kielce, Kovno, Warsaw, and many other Polish and Eastern and Central European cities, towns, and shtetls, thousands of Holocaust survivors moved to Chicago's West Side and then to Albany Park, West Rogers Park, and Budlong Woods. Eventually, many settled in Chicago's neighboring suburbs, predominantly Skokie. While they tried to rebuild their lives and raise their families, they had a need to join together socially and in organizational work. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, survivors started cultural groups like New Citizens Club, Ezra, Laor, and United Chicago Jews of Hungarian Descent.

The groups fostered an environment that allowed people with similar histories to get together to celebrate their lives while, at the same time, to feel comfortable lamenting the losses and tragedies they endured. Survivors and their families also participated in an annual memorial service in memory of the six million Jews murdered by Nazi Germany and their collaborators. The annual ceremony, coinciding with Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), was co-sponsored by various Jewish organizations. Recognizing that it was important to give back to the community, the groups' activities also included charity work, like fundraising for Israel Bonds and other Zionist causes.

In the mid 1970s, the Zionist Organization of Chicago announced that it would no longer sponsor the annual memorial Yom HaShoah commemoration. That's when various survivor groups decided to join together as the nonprofit Sheerit Hapleitah, which, translated from Hebrew, means Surviving Remnants of the Leftover of the Destruction.

As a survivors' umbrella group that included the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece, the Midwest Chenstochover Society, and

Naamat-Hofesh Chapter, among others, Sheerit

Hapleitah of Metropolitan Chicago pledged that the annual Yom HaShoah memorial service would continue into perpetuity. Led by Sol Goldstein and Abram Szwajger at the time, Sheerit Hapleitah organized resistance to the planned Nazi march in Skokie in the late 1970s and later erected a monument to Holocaust victims on Skokie Village property outside the Skokie Public Library.

While the mission of Sheerit Hapleitah is to ensure that an annual citywide Yom HaShoah program will be held, it has also hosted many other social, educational, and public-facing programs, such as Yom Yerushalayim and Celebration of Life luncheons. Much of this is due to the leadership of the organization's President, Henry Jelen. Although the pandemic paused in-person programming, virtual Yom HaShoah programs were held with partners CJESeniorLife Holocaust Community Services and the Illinois Holocaust Museum. The Jewish United Fund, always a strong supporter of Sheerit Hapleitah's efforts, also partners to ensure that an annual Yom HaShoah program will take place.

This year's program will take place in person and virtually on Tuesday, April 26, 7 p.m., at Temple Shalom in Chicago. In addition to a traditional candle-lighting ceremony conducted

continued on following page



A Skokie monument pays tributes to those who lost their lives during the Shoah.

***From the streets of Lodz, Kielce, Kovno, Warsaw, and many other Polish and Eastern and Central European cities, towns, and shtetls, thousands of Holocaust survivors came to Chicago's West Side and then to Albany Park, West Rogers Park, and Budlong Woods.***



## Sheerit Hapleitah of Metropolitan Chicago

continued from previous page

by Sheerit Hapleitah and memorial prayers led by Cantor Pavel Roytman of Beth Hillel Bnai Emunah congregation in Wilmette, the program will include a concert, “We Are Here: Songs of the Holocaust,” which incorporates music and poetry that emerged from the Nazi-occupied camps and ghettos of Europe and the former Soviet Union, along with first-person testimonies of the pain and tragedy of everyday life and death under Nazi rule and the sense of hope and resilience Jews found within themselves.



The Skokie Holocaust monument committee from the 1980s



Sheerit Hapleitah President Henry Jelen  
The “We Are Here” project, conceived by music composer and producer Ira Antelis, as well as producers David Mendelson and Jeremy Perlin, is brought to life with emotional resonance by Cantor Roytman and his 25-piece choir. For more information about this Yom HaShoah commemoration and for tickets, visit [www.WeAreHereConcert.com](http://www.WeAreHereConcert.com).

For more information about Sheerit Hapleitah, go to [www.sheerithapleitah.com](http://www.sheerithapleitah.com).

## Corrections

*CJH* regrets the omission in its Fall 2021 book issue of the works by Society member Dr. Sandra McGee Deutsch, Professor of History Emerita at the University of Texas at El Paso and an expert in the study of Latin American fascism and antifascism, Jews, and women and gender in this region.

Dr. Deutsch is the author of “*Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900–1932: The Argentine Patriotic League*” (University of Nebraska Press, 1986; Argentine edition 2003); “*Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939*” (Stanford University Press, 1999; Argentine edition 2005); and “*Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955*” (Duke University Press, 2010; Argentine edition 2018). She also co-edited (with Kathleen M. Blee) “*Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders*” (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012) and (with Ronald H. Dolkart) “*The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present*” (Scholarly Resources, 1993; expanded Argentine edition 2001).

Jews and anti-Semitism have featured prominently in almost all her works, including her book manuscript

under review, “*Gendering Antifascism: Women’s Activism in Argentina and the World, 1918–1947.*”

*CJH* would also like to correct an editing error in the Winter 2022 Co-President’s column by Dr. Rachele Gold about the Jewish Legion. The statement regarding Jewish Legion volunteer criteria should have been amended to mean that only non-naturalized men were eligible to volunteer for the Jewish Legion.

## West Rogers Park on Our Minds

Members and friends, there’s still time to contribute to the CJHS–Jewish Neighborhood Development Council (JNDC) photograph exhibit, which will be held this coming October at the Northtown Branch of the Chicago Public Library.

CJHS and JNDS are seeking images that depict cultural, domestic, religious, organizational, and commercial lives in West Rogers Park, a Chicago neighborhood that has enjoyed a Jewish presence for more than 100 years.

If you have pictures that you would like considered for the show, please contact *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller at [robertnaglermiller@gmail.com](mailto:robertnaglermiller@gmail.com).

## How It All Began

continued from page 16

Chancellor Richard Herman worked with Kotzin and the Chicago Federation to supplement the original project of short-term visitations by establishing a faculty line for the ongoing teaching of courses in Israeli history and culture. Rachel Harris, an expert in Israeli literature and cinema, continues to hold that position.

Under the directors who followed me—Matti Bunzl, Brett Kaplan, and Dara Goldman—the Program continued to grow. Here is a sampling of its achievements: An ongoing research workshop, at which UIUC scholars and invited guests try out their work-in-progress, has achieved international renown as a forum to present cutting-edge scholarship and receive rigorous constructive criticism. The Program's faculty members regularly publish important books and scholarly articles. The Program has been able to add faculty by hosting visiting instructors for a year or two with support from the Israel Institute. Gary Porton's retirement led to the hiring of Dov Weiss, a specialist in early rabbinic texts and thought. With the help of the Mervis family of Danville, Illinois, the Program played a role in establishing an archive at UIUC for the study of small Jewish communities in Illinois. (Editor's note: The *CJH* reported on this last development in the Winter 2022 issue.)

The Program continues to find innovative ways to reach out to students, the local community, and friends in the greater Chicago area. Each year's activities are chronicled in an annual report, which is available on request ([jewishculture@illinois.edu](mailto:jewishculture@illinois.edu), 217-333-7978). As co-founder and founding director, I am happy to have had this opportunity to share the Program's history, and I am proud to report that the Program continues to flourish.

---

## Remembrance of Things Past

*CJH* reader Tamar Small recently sent the Society a photograph (circa late 1940s) of her late grandfather's business, the Lawndale Bakery, which was located in the old Jewish neighborhood on Roosevelt Road near the intersection of Lawndale Avenue.

She writes, "My grandfather was Louis Small (left foreground). Standing nearby is his brother-in-law Aaron Rosenzweig, who is decorating a wedding cake. However, I do not know the last name of the talented cake decorator, Hymie, the very thin Auschwitz survivor who stands in the back of the photo."

Small continues, "Perhaps there are people still alive who attended my parents wedding in 1948 at the former Sovereign Hotel and who witnessed my dad and his brothers laughing uproariously (as the bride cried) when my grandfather wheeled away the magnificent wedding cake that Hymie had created in order to



replace it in the bakery window....That wedding season, Hymie was busy creating the most magnificent wedding cakes ever. Brides-to-be came from all over Chicago to order a cake from the Lawndale Bakery, and my grandfather could not have been prouder. Then, one day, with regrets, Hymie turned in his resignation. He had been discovered and hired as chief pastry chef for Marshall Field's at a salary that my grandfather could not match."

---

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור הציבתם



## chicago jewish historical society

610 SOUTH MICHIGAN AVENUE • ROOM 803 • CHICAGO, IL 60605-1901 • 312-663-5634

Non-Profit Org.  
PRESORT  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Chicago, IL  
Permit No. 6590

### IN THIS ISSUE

- The Education of a Budding Jewish Activist
- The Jewish Beginnings of WFMT
- An Interesting Artifact from 1946
- The Genesis of Jewish Studies at UIUC
- The History of Sheerit Hapleitah
- A Visit to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library
- The Jews of Summer: An Exhibit in Berrien County, Michigan

#### Our History and Mission

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1977, is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the United States Bicentennial Celebration of 1976. Forty-four years later, our mission remains the discovery, collection, and

#### ABOUT THE SOCIETY

dissemination of information about the Jewish experience in the Chicago area through publications, open programs, tours, and outreach to youth and others interested in the preservation of Chicago Jewish history.

**Tribute Cards for Celebrations or Memorials** The card design features the Society's handsome logo. Pack of five cards and envelopes \$36. Individual cards can be mailed for you from our office at \$5 per card, postage included. Mail your order and check to CJHS, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659-7004. You may also order online at our website.

**Back Issues of *Chicago Jewish History*** cost \$8 apiece. To request back issues, please email the Society at [info@chicagojewishhistory.org](mailto:info@chicagojewishhistory.org)

Visit our website [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org)

Pay your membership dues online via PayPal or credit card, or use the printable membership application.

Inquiries: [info@chicagojewishhistory.org](mailto:info@chicagojewishhistory.org)

**Membership** in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations, and includes

- A subscription to our award-winning quarterly journal, *Chicago Jewish History*.
- Free admission to Society public programs. General admission is \$10 per person.
- Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year.

Life Membership \$1,000

Annual Dues

Historian 500

Scholar 250

Sponsor 100

Patron 65

Member 40

Student (with I.D.) 10



Like us on Facebook