



chicago jewish historical society

# CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

*“If all life moves inevitably towards its end, then we must, during our own, colour it with colours of love and hope” — Marc Chagall*

## The Jews of Illinois Valley: A Granddaughter’s Journey into Her Family’s Past

By Dana Steingold

Over winter break last year, I went to breakfast with my Zayde. It was a classic bagels-and-lox kind of place. I told Zayde about the classes I'd be taking this semester. I told him about one of my classes, Jewish Studies 495, and was excited to tell him about Jewish communities in Central Illinois. Turns out, my Zayde knew way more about these communities than I knew. He told me about a small town in the Illinois Valley area called DePue, Illinois, where his family had lived for two generations upon coming to the United States. My mind was made up. The focus of my project would become the forgotten Jewish community of DePue.

Despite my Google searches and browsing of the Central Illinois Jewish Communities Archives, located at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where I am an undergraduate, no traces of a Jewish community existing in the Illinois Valley area were readily available. Zayde and I decided we would take a day trip down to the area and see what history we could uncover.



The author’s Zayde, or grandfather, Neal London, with his mother, Eva Feldman London

My first thought was to cold call the town, via the phone number on its website. I was greeted by a friendly voice at the DePue Clerk's office. When I informed the woman of my project and asked about a Jewish community that used to reside in DePue, I was met with a sharp, “There aren't any Jews here. Never have been.” I felt silly asking such a stupid question. Later, I called the Bureau County Clerk's office in Princeton, Illinois. I did not tell them the full extent of my project—just that it was simply a family history report. I was told there were no known records of any synagogues, kosher restaurants, or Jewish life in the area.

It's like the little Jewish community in DePue had vanished without a trace. Only the vague childhood memories of my Zayde remained.

Now, I don't like to say this very often, but my father had a good idea (eye roll). He told me to reach out to the closest synagogue to DePue, saying that maybe they would have something that could be helpful. After numerous emails and phone calls, I heard back from Scott Shore, the president of Temple B'nai Moshe in La Salle, Illinois. After finding signs of Jewish life in this area, I had to know more.

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

**D**o you remember the corner drugstore with a soda fountain, baseball cards, candy, and sundry items that attracted customers of all ages? How many of these stores were Jewish businesses?

Thanks to a recent encounter, which was followed by reminiscences of bygone community establishments, I came to understand how the pharmacist and drugstore owner became popular career choices for a generation of Jewish men coming of age from the 1930s through the 1950s. In the pages of *CJH*, we have highlighted the importance of Jewish Chicagoans in a wide range of economic, professional, and societal roles, but I believe the pharmacy profession has yet to be covered. This column is an introduction to the subject.

On June 9, I attended the annual brunch of the Great Vest Side Club. (You can read about the Club in my column in the Summer, 2019 *CJH*.) In addition to serving as a fundraiser for the Club's charitable mission, the event is a sort of reunion for people with personal or, as in my case, family roots in the West Side. I look forward to the event as an opportunity to learn more Chicago Jewish history to share with *CJH* readers.

My tablemates were Bradley and Sheldon Miller, retired pharmacists and pharmacy owners, and I queried them about their backgrounds. They grew up on the West Side at 16th and Koven. They attended Mason Elementary School and Austin and Farragut High Schools. My main informant was Bradley, the youngest of three brothers, who span seven years in age. (The middle brother, Marshall, is deceased.) I was intrigued to learn that all three became pharmacists, for reasons that made sense for Jewish men of the era. Pharmacy was a respected scientific and helping profession. The educational requirements at the time were not onerous – a four-year course consisting of one year of college and a three-year professional program. (In 1960, a five-year B.S. was instituted, and since 1984, a Doctor of Pharmacy Degree is required.) The profession enabled Jewish men, through ownership of a store, to be independent businessmen and entrepreneurs and make a good living. Unlike medicine and related professions at that time, pharmacy did not create educational and employment barriers for Jews. Bradley estimated that half of his pharmacy class of 90 students were Jewish (and all but two were male).

Each of the Miller brothers attended Chicago's University of Illinois School of Pharmacy, which, since 1954, has been called the University of Illinois College of Pharmacy. Its predecessor, the Chicago College of Pharmacy, was founded in 1859; in 1896, the College became part of the University of Illinois.

Sheldon, the oldest, had been interested in becoming a dentist, like an uncle, but in the late 1940s, the dental schools had restrictive access, so Sheldon chose pharmacy. He became the owner of "Miller Pharmacy" on Devon and Seeley. He closed it to become a partner in a pharmacy at Touhy and Clark. Middle brother Marshall was not an independent owner; he worked for a chain.

Bradley got his start as a future business owner by working every day after high school as a soda jerk at D & W Deli at 16th & Koven. When it was time to go to college, his mother said, "If pharmacy school is good enough for your brothers, it's good for you," so he followed in his brothers' path. Bradley owned a pharmacy on Milwaukee Avenue on the Northwest side. He was bought out by Osco. He then worked as a manager at an Osco in Wilmette before ending his career as a "floater" at an Osco in Evanston. He commented on the demographic changes in the pharmacy profession, which is now more female and ethnically diverse. Bradley related a mentorship experience, at the Evanston store, of which he is particularly proud. He encouraged an early-career colleague, an Orthodox Jewish woman, to assert her right to not work on Shabbat. She spoke up, and has advanced professionally to a manager position.

Much has changed in the world of pharmacy and drugstores. A 2023 report of a survey by McKinsey found that retail chains dominate the market. As of 2021, they represent one-third of all stores and prescriptions dispensed, but there are changes in other directions as well. Currently, pharmacies and drugstores are experiencing a period of contraction following a wave of corporate takeovers from 2010 to 2020. The report supports a role for independent pharmacies, despite ongoing challenges. The number of independent pharmacies decreased by 40 percent between 1980 and 2000, but have leveled off since 2000. Independents survive by collaborating, cultivating customer relationships, and filling niche markets.



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### Chicago Jewish History

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

I am aware of a longtime independent Jewish-founded and Jewish-owned drug store, Rosens Morseview Pharmacy, a stalwart on Devon Avenue in West Ridge. The original store, Rosen Drugs, at 1400 S. Kedzie in North Lawndale, was established in 1936 by Abe Rosen, a graduate of the University of Illinois School of Pharmacy. Abe's pharmacist-son Maurice brought the store to the North Side in 1955. In a 1985 interview with the *Chicago Tribune* ("Old-Time Drugstore Just a Soda Fountain Memory," 1/10/85, updated 8/9/21), Maurice reflected, "A lot has changed, that's for sure...but our motto is 'Where Service is a Family Tradition,' and that hasn't changed. The corner drugstore is going just fine." However, the store did not stay in the family. That year, the store was sold to the current owner and renamed Rosens Morseview Pharmacy. I hope to interview the owner to find out the store's strategies for survival 39 years later.



Rosen Drugs, Douglas Boulevard at Kedzie, CAPP\_0001\_0001\_014, Chicago Area Pharmacy Photograph Collection, Special Collections & University Archives, University of Illinois Chicago Library.

Readers, I need your help! I want to learn more about Jewish pharmacists and pharmacies, past and present. If you have personal memories or know people who were in the business, please contact me at [info@chicagojewishhistory.com](mailto:info@chicagojewishhistory.com).

## Introducing Joel L. Rubin, New CJHS Board Member

The CJHS is delighted to welcome to its Board of Directors longtime social work leader Joel L. Rubin, MSW, LSW, ACSW, CAE. Rubin, who has served as the Executive Director of the Illinois Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers for approximately 25 years, brings a wealth of nonprofit management and fundraising experience to the Board. In addition, he has been active in Chicago's Jewish community for many decades, having worked at the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, as well as at the American Jewish Congress, where he was its Midwest Director from 1995 to 1999.



A graduate of the Wexner Heritage Fellow Leadership Program, Rubin is also an adjunct professor at Loyola University Chicago School of Social Work. He graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where he received his bachelor's degree in comparative politics, and earned his MSW from the Jane Addams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois in Chicago. He spent most of the 1980s living in Israel, where he completed the last year of his bachelor's degree at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and subsequently worked for five years.

He serves on the State of Illinois's Behavioral Healthcare Workforce Advisory Committee, the board of the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership, and the City of Chicago's Council on Mental Health Equity, and the Network for Social Work Management.

A longtime member of Skokie Valley Agudath Jacob Synagogue, Rubin lives in Skokie with his wife, Tamara. They have three children and two grandchildren.

## My Son, the Policeman: More Tales from the *Shomrim* Society

**C**JH Editor Robert Nagler Miller continues the series in which he interviews local Jewish law enforcement officers—members of the Shomrim Society of Illinois—about their experiences in a profession not known to attract a large number of Jews. Founded in 1959, the Shomrim is a professional organization for Jewish first responders, including police, sheriffs, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, and paramedics. The Illinois chapter is part of the National Conference of Shomrim Societies. In this issue, Nagler Miller speaks to Bruce Rottner, who was a high-ranking member of the Chicago Police Department.

### What Jewish values led you to your career?

I think how we value life, how we value helping others, and how we persevere, even when faced with adversities. I believe the values we were raised with emphasized family and hard work. Although my family was financially comfortable, I always had a job as early as 11 or 12 years old. While I recognize that hard work is not strictly a Jewish value, it was in our home, but in a positive way. My parents were both raised as Reform Jews, as I was. I was never bar mitzvahed, as my father felt that bar mitzvahs were mostly excuses for families to hold ostentatious parties. He also said most boys did not continue their religious education after their bar mitzvahs, so he felt it was hypocritical. I agree to a point, although both of my own daughters were bat mitzvahed, since my wife was raised a Conservative Jew.

I knew from my first day on the job that I was different and police work was not a traditional Jewish role. The only other Jewish person I knew who went into law enforcement at that time was Elliot Cohen, who joined the Cook County Sheriff's Department. That would change after my first Shomrim meeting in 1972. (*Editor's Note: Elliot Cohen's q-and-a appeared in the Spring 2024 issue of CJH.*)

### How did Jewish values inform your career?

I believe some of the values such as social justice, helping those in need, being charitable, caring for strangers, and being unique, all Jewish values, contributed to enhancing my career in a good way. As I was raised in a liberal Jewish home, these values were also reflective of the period I grew up in. It was an extremely interesting time to go into law enforcement, especially on the heels of the turbulent '60s. It was only after I was on the job for three or four years that I realized how slowly change came to not only the Chicago Police Department, but also to law enforcement agencies throughout the country.

I am in no way implying that all police officers at that time were racist or antisemitic; they simply reflected the values they were raised with. When I joined CPD, most of my fellow officers were white, many had been in Vietnam, and most came from working-class backgrounds. For me, this meant that while I had an educational advantage over most of them, they had the street smarts that I did not possess. It took me some years to develop that, but thanks to several good partners and mentors, I did.

I believe the values of being charitable and caring for strangers were impactful on my career. Many times, we would take money from our own pocket to give to homeless individuals or buy food for a poor family or toys for abandoned children. I should note, however, that many of my non-Jewish colleagues did the same.

As for the uniqueness of being a Jew in a non-Jewish profession, I never hid the fact that I was Jewish, as a number of Jewish officers before my time did. There were times I felt like a square peg trying to fit into a round hole, only because there were so few of us at that time. I would do things like volunteer to work Christmas so an officer who celebrated could be home with their family. I think the reality is that back then, non-Jewish officers didn't care as much about what your religion was as long as you were a good guy they could depend on. I was always proud of my religion and, as I said, never hid the fact that I was Jewish, but very frankly, the subject never really came up until later in my career when I was assigned to smaller units.

### Why did you join Shomrim, and what does being a Jewish law enforcement officer mean to you?

I believe Elliot Cohen made me aware of the Shomrim's existence. I still remember going to my first Shomrim meeting in 1972, when I was still in the police academy. I went with Elliot. The meeting was held at the Pickle Barrel restaurant at Howard Street and Western Avenue, right on the border of suburban Evanston.

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They had a separate room for the meeting, and there must have been 25 to 30 members there. I recall there were several sergeants present, along with Lieutenant Harry Smith, a bigger-than-life individual both in personality and size. Elliot and I were introduced, and it was simply a great feeling, a feeling that exists to this day. Knowing there were others who shared the same religion, the same belief, and the same career path I had chosen was extremely comforting to me, as I was basically in the “land of the unknown” in the police academy. There were really some true characters at the meeting, some of whom became lifelong friends and mentors. Within a few years, both Elliot and I were made trustees on our Board of Directors, and in subsequent years, I held almost every elected office. I served three times as President in three different decades. I then served a First Vice President for a number of years to mentor our new Presidents, and I currently serve as Treasurer/Financial Secretary. Over the 51 years we’ve been married, my wife knows that my other true love besides her, my daughters, our grandson, and my son-in-law is the Shomrim Society.

### **Did you experience any antisemitism among colleagues or in the line of duty?**

When you grow up surrounded by other Jewish people, it takes a while to realize this is not a Jewish world. By the time I entered the police academy, I was much more attuned to other people’s prejudices (including my own). I cannot really say that I faced any overt antisemitism over my 39-year career. I worked in a small office for a few years with two other officers and a sergeant. One of the officers was a very close friend; the other was brought into the office by the then-commander. I learned through my friend that this other officer once said to her, “You know, the Jews are a cancer on our society.” I never confronted him about it, as I always felt it was better to keep your friends close but your enemies closer.

As I mentioned before, in a large police department like Chicago, people are basically accepted for the kind of person they are. I realize that today, this may conjure up the “Blue Wall of Silence” that has become synonymous with police covering up police wrongdoing, but even during my tenure, a good cop was a good cop and a bad cop was a bad cop. Was I aware that people may have not liked me because I am Jewish? Sure. But overt antisemitism? Not really.

### **What have been some of the most meaningful experiences as a law enforcement officer?**

In the early ‘80s, my wife came home from a suburban shopping mall and told me about a crime prevention puppet show she and our daughters watched. It was organized by the Schaumburg Police Department to inform young children about “stranger danger.” I contacted the Schaumburg PD and found out where they got the puppets, the stage, and the rest. We obtained funding for this program from a local insurance company, and two months later, we had our own 24th Police District Crime Prevention puppet show. The puppets, which featured “Officer Ollie,” were manufactured by the same people who produced the Muppets puppets. Over the next several years, we had thousands of kids from kindergarten to fourth grade see the show. A lot of our fellow officers laughed at us, calling us the “Puppet Police,” and I understood it. They didn’t consider it “real police work.” In my mind, though, we will never really know how many lives we may have saved through this program. It was just a different kind of police work. We received the Superintendent’s Award of Merit and drove down to Springfield, where we were presented with a Senate Resolution commending our work.

It was also very meaningful to have worked in the community I grew up in, West Rogers Park, for 23 of my 39 years on the job—as a patrol officer, sergeant, and commander. I knew every part of the community and watched the demographic changes over the years. While the largely Jewish community vacated the area I lived in, the Orthodox community began to grow in the western portion of West Rogers Park. Today, the largest population of Orthodox Jews in the Chicago area live on the west end of the community.

When we started Community Policing (the “Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy” or CAPS) in the early ‘90s, it was virtually impossible to get the Orthodox community involved. We kept on chipping away, though, and when I finally became commander in 2005, we established a community policing beat strictly for the Orthodox community. One of the other things I did upon taking command was to establish a “Shabbos Car.” I had a police officer in a marked police car sit at the corner of Touhy and Sacramento, where several

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## More Tales from the *Shomrim* Society

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Orthodox shuls were, from 8 a.m. to noon. The car then went to Devon and Troy, where Congregation Bnei Ruven was located, and stayed there from 12:30 to 4 p.m. Because observant Jews will not use telephones on Shabbos, they were able to walk up to the squad car and report any issues. I know the commander after me continued the practice; I'm not certain if it exists today.

Finally, I believe the pride my wife of 51 years and my two daughters feel about my career is probably the most meaningful part of this to me. My wife was raised in a North Shore suburb and really was never exposed to the police. When we were seriously dating, my late father-in-law, a corporate executive said, "He's going to be a WHAT?" when she told him what I was going to be. Later in life, my father-in-law enjoyed the stories I would tell him about arresting bad guys and some of the other nuances of the job.

**Describe your Jewish background (Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, secular, traditional, in a Jewish neighborhood, in a neighborhood with few Jews, etc.). Were your parents or grandparents' immigrants, and did they speak Yiddish?**

I was raised in a Reform household. We belonged to a Reform synagogue, Temple Beth-El, which was located at the time at Touhy and Albany. My sister and I attended Sunday school each week for six or seven years.

While my neighborhood was about 80 percent Jewish, my block, on our side of the street—the 6200 block of Rockwell—was a bit more mixed, with Irish and Polish neighbors. We all got along well; I can't recall feeling any anti-Semitism.

My maternal grandparents were from Russia; I don't recall them speaking any Yiddish. My paternal grandmother from Germany. She did speak Yiddish, but she passed away when I was very young. My father would use some Yiddish expressions, but I never really picked up on Yiddish.

**When you look at your career in law enforcement, what stands out to you?**

Police departments are semi-military. Like the military, you form close relationships with other officers, primarily because it's a dangerous business and our lives depended on each other. The unknown can be a very real and scary thing. When two people sit together in a squad car for eight hours, for days, weeks, and months (sometimes years), you either bond with them or look for another partner. I was truly blessed in my career to have some truly great partners. It is those relationships that I will remember the most. All of them have retired by now; some of them have passed away. With some of them, I am fortunate to still have a friendship. These relationships last a lifetime. While, thank G-d, not too many police officers were killed in the line of duty when I was working a beat car, the threat was always there. We never discussed it, but it hung over our heads like a huge cloud. You could forget about the fact that I was a Jew, or he was Black, or Irish or Polish or Latino. We were all blue, and there for each other. After work, we did not hug or pat each other on the back. We mostly went our own way, whether home to our families or to a local bar. But at work, we were truly a "Band of Brothers." That brotherhood and now, sisterhood, will always stand out to me.

The other thing that stands out to me is that I was able to achieve success in my career when so many others were just as deserving. I tested to make sergeant and lieutenant, was appointed a captain, and then appointed a district commander and finally, a deputy chief in command of four police districts. When you are appointed to ranks, especially command ranks in the CPD, you need mentors. They are the ones who recommend you for promotion to the command ranks. Some may call them your "clout." I always followed my fathers' advice. He said to me, "The harder you work, the luckier you get." I always worked hard, whether in an operational or administrative position, was very detail-oriented and always shared credit with my co-workers and later subordinates in projects I completed. I am proud of what I achieved, and proud that this Jewish kid from West Rogers Park was able to achieve success in a non-traditional Jewish role. I always say—and this was borrowed from Confucius—"If you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life." I never did work a day in my entire career.

## The Jews of Illinois Valley

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Prior to my trip out west with Zayde, I was able to interview Phillip Dobosky, a former Jewish resident of DePue, Illinois. Later that week, Zayde and I took a trip to DePue. We visited the home of my Zayde's grandparents, where my great-great-grandparents had worked and lived in. We toured the semi-active Temple B'nai Moshe in neighboring La Salle. We visited the Country Clerk's office to see what information we could find. And, most importantly, we stopped to eat lunch at the Coal Miners Café in Mark, Illinois, for an authentic experience. A few weeks after our trip, I received an email from Steve Barr informing me of his connection to the Jewish community in the Spring Valley area of Bureau County. Thanks to all these sources, I have been able to piece together a forgotten part of Jewish American history.

The first generation of Jewish settlers to reside in the DePue area came from a small town called Anikst, Lithuania. The experience of these settlers was similar to that of many immigrants in the early 20th century. They immigrated through Ellis Island and looked for opportunity. Many immigrants worked as peddlers and laborers. Many were attracted to DePue for job opportunities, such as working in the coal mines and manufacturing bootleg liquor to be sold in Chicago.

The first thing the Jewish community in the Illinois Valley area did before anything else was purchase a plot of land to be used as a cemetery. That cemetery still stands today and is called the Ottawa Jewish Cemetery. Second, the community established a butcher shop to ensure kosher meat was accessible. Lasty, the community founded an Orthodox shul, Sha'arei Tzedek, which still stands today.



Temple B'nai Moshe of La Salle, Illinois

This first generation of Jews maintained their old-world traditions, as seen in the shtetl aesthetic of Sha'arei Tzedek. This is around the time my great-great-grandparents, Ida and Israel Feldman, moved to DePue. Israel sold and traded coal until he was able to purchase the property on Lot 9. Interestingly, he had purchased the property from the Marks Nathan Jewish Orphanage of Chicago. Despite my efforts, I have not found the exact connection between the history of the orphanage and why its name is listed in documents in a county miles and miles from the orphanage. Some things will forever remain a mystery. The house was divided into three sections: The front was a general store Ida ran, the middle was a shoe store Israel ran, and the back was the living quarters. Israel made a type of shoe called Red Goose Shoes, which were a popular style of the time.

After World War II, the economy in the Illinois Valley area, especially DePue, had shifted from reliance on the coal mines to the establishment of zinc factories. The zinc factory at the time in DePue was called New Jersey Zinc. As the small Jewish community had begun to span generations in DePue, many Jews began to transition from manual labor to opening family-run businesses. Factory owners in DePue sent cattle cars down to Mexico to bring back laborers.



Sha'arei Tzedek congregation of the Illinois Valley

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## The Jews of Illinois Valley

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Eventually, the opportunities that DePue offered the Jewish community ebbed, and the community began to dissolve. As a result of intermarriage, a lack of Jewish suitors, assimilation, and diminished hopes for economic advancement, the Jewish community in the Illinois Valley began to disappear. "We had to get away to succeed," Steve Barr explained to me during his interview.

The turning point in the community was in the 1950s, with the closing of Sha'arei Tzedek. The members of the community found it hard to be Jewish without being surrounded by other Jews. Some moved to more populated areas, some married outside of the Jewish community, and many of the older members of the area who had immigrated to DePue had died.

Soon after, Temple B'nai Moshe's rabbi stopped coming in to lead services. That was nearly the end. In 1973, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati began running a traveling student rabbi program. Student rabbis would take turns coming down to Temple B'nai Moshe to ensure the community would have a rabbi for Shabbat every weekend. The rabbi would drive in on Friday, lead services Friday night, and then teach Hebrew school to the children on Saturday morning and adult classes on Saturday evening. Thanks to this program, the Jewish community held together a while longer. About 10 or 15 years ago, the program ceased operations. Since then, the building is only used on High Holidays.



The author's great-great-grandparents, Israel and Ida Feldman, cobbling shoes and attending to sewing duties, respectively.



Steinberg's furniture store in Peru, Illinois

The only traces of the former thriving community are two Jewish-owned businesses that have endured for generations: Steinberg's furniture store in Peru, Illinois, and Buckman's scrap metal in La Salle.

Everyone felt they had to get away to succeed, taking the experiences of living in a small town and history of the community with them. Investigating the history of the area, putting the pieces together, and uncovering a lost story have been extremely rewarding. The history I uncovered is not only the story of my ancestors and how I became who I am today, but it is also the story of the Jewish people as a nation. Am Yisrael Chai.

**About the Author:** Dana Steingold is the Dr. Irving Cutler Chicago Jewish History Fellowship intern for the 2024 summer at CJHS. The fellowship was funded by the family of longtime CJHS Board member and Society founder Dr. Irving Cutler, who died last year. An undergraduate at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where she is majoring in political science and minoring in Jewish studies, Steingold is an alumna of the Solomon Schechter Day School and Adlai E. Stevenson High School. She attended Camp Nageela Midwest and was president of Northshore NCSY. Steingold was raised in the suburb of Buffalo Grove, the subject of a fall 2024 article she is writing for *Chicago Jewish History*.







**Editor's Note:** The Zayde of whom Dana Steingold lovingly writes in her current article is the late Neal London, who died this past April. We are grateful to Mr. London for inspiring his granddaughter in her quest for more information about the Jews of Central Illinois. May his memory be for a blessing. Editor Robert Nagler Miller also wishes to recognize longtime CJHS member Sybil Mervis, a leader in the Central Illinois Jewish community, who apprised him of Ms. Steingold's important work.

## CJHS Member Michael Soffer to Discuss New Book on Local Nazi

Local educator Michael Soffer, who helped the CJHS develop a Chicago Jewish history curriculum that can be used in middle and high schools, will be talking this November about his new book, *Our Nazi: An American Suburb's Encounter with Evil* (University of Chicago Press). The book is based on a series of articles Soffer wrote in 2021 for *CJH* about a former Nazi, Reinhold Kulle, hiding in plain sight as a janitor at Oak Park & River Forest High School (OPRF). Soffer, now on the faculty of Lake Forest High School, until recently taught at OPRF.

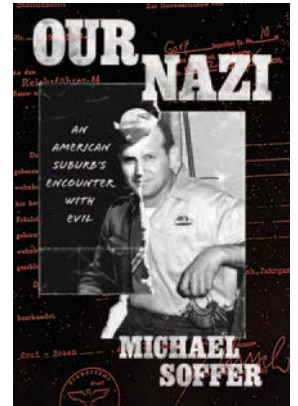


Image by Leah Graber Photography

Soffer's presentation, organized by CJHS, will take place on Wednesday, November 13, 6 p.m., at the bookstore Bookends & Beginnings, 1620 Orrington Avenue, in Evanston. CJHS Board member Joel Rubin will be in conversation with him. Stay tuned for details about the event, along with more information about the book—including a q-and-a with Soffer—in the fall book issue of *CJH*.

In an email last fall to *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller, CJHS President Dr. Rachelle Gold, and CJHS Interim Vice President Rabbi Moshe Simkovich, Soffer, a CJHS member, wrote:

"Almost two years ago, the Chicago Jewish Historical Society's journal published a two-part piece on the Kulle story, which reflected my initial research and thoughts on the case. Tonight...I cannot help but reflect on my deep gratitude to you all for being the first place to give this important history its light. The book's acknowledgments mentions CJHS, and each of you by name, and I hope I get the chance to thank you each individually as well."



## New Member Bonus/ Gift Membership Opportunity

New members who join after midyear receive membership through the next year — up to six months extra. Take advantage of this opportunity! Encourage your friends to join, and give a gift membership that will last until the end of 2025. Membership begins at \$40. For details and ways to pay, click the "membership" tab on our website: [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org).

## Welcome New Members

Peter Alter  
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## Research Inquiry

CJHS member Mark Mandle is conducting research into Jewish-owned businesses south of 79th Street on Chicago's South Side, particularly in the Hegewisch and South Deering neighborhoods. Those who can provide information should contact him at [mmandle18@gmail.com](mailto:mmandle18@gmail.com).

## The Bochurs of Summer

By Ray Asher

Well, perhaps "Summer" is not so accurate, particularly in Chicago. But it's hard enough to understand "Bochurs of Summer." Everybody would be confused if this story were titled "The Bochurs of Winter/Spring."

"*The Boys of Summer*" was written in 1972 by Roger Kahn. Kahn wrote about the lives of the 1952 Brooklyn Dodgers. In 1984, Don Henley penned a song by the same name, although the song has little to do with baseball.

What is a bochur? The word is generally used to describe a boy studying in a yeshiva, a Jewish school where future rabbis learn and earn their stripes. And I don't mean pinstripes.

Does baseball go hand in hand with religion? Some think so. Some think baseball is religion. In fact, in his [younger days] Facebook profile, my oldest son's answer to what religion he followed was "Cubs." Rabbi James Gordon, author of "Pray Ball," might give you an entirely different answer.

Dan Coyle, a great writer who had his work "Hard Ball, Life in the Projects (Cabrini Green)," massacred by moviemakers, might have a different answer altogether. But I have no hope of Keanu Reeves playing me in a movie. I look like a middle-aged Don Zimmer. Well, maybe not so middle anymore.

Little League—or, should I say, the Calumet City (Illinois) Civic League?—was where I played baseball as a youth. If anybody thought twice about telling opposing players to stop heckling me because I was Jewish, I did not know it. I can't remember any other any other Jewish ball players in Civic League Baseball. In fact, when I played for the Indians (perhaps I was 10 years old), my head coach's son, one of my teammates, was among the hecklers.

Baseball was my first love. I started playing tennis at the age of 12. I picked up tennis quickly, and to my surprise/joy/chagrin, was a much better tennis player than baseball player. I gave up baseball at that time, as I prepared for my bar mitzvah. Eventually, I became the number-one tennis player at my high school—there was limited competition in the white-collar world of tennis in the blue-collar community of Calumet City—and I was recruited by several small colleges to play.

If somebody ever told me that I would one day coach a high school team, I would have most certainly thought that I would be coaching a tennis team. Never in a million years did I think I would coach a varsity high school baseball team. And I certainly never contemplated that I would be coaching a team where the student athletes wore tzitzit.

How could I be the head coach of a high school baseball team? I didn't even play high school baseball. Well, I'm sure some of my ball players said the exact same thing.

After toiling for years in Skokie Youth Baseball, I became an assistant coach at Ida Crown Jewish Academy (ICJA). The head coach was Jeremy Newman, who had played college ball. I wanted to coach high school ball, hoping that my boys would join the team one day. I was coaching Little League and high school at this time. The dual curriculum of secular and Jewish studies at ICJA was rigorous. The kids were in school from approximately 7:45 a.m. to 5:40 p.m. A long day, to be sure. Not a lot of time to spend on extracurricular activities like baseball.

At the time, ICJA was on Pratt in Rogers Park. There was no baseball field. We practiced in the gym. If the length of the gym had been 15 feet less, our pitchers would not have had enough room to



throw. With concrete walls on either end, practicing in the gym was dangerous. We did not have "soft stitch" baseballs, but real baseballs careening off concrete. Bruises were not uncommon.

Pitchers and catchers convened at 6:30 a.m. in the gym. If the temperature got up to 40 degrees Fahrenheit, we would go out to a park near the Park Plaza Retirement Center. This park had potholes like Chicago streets in February. Coach Newman told me that the Skokie Park District had declined a request to allow us to play at Laramie Park. I contacted Bob DeLeonardis at the Skokie Park District, and he could not have been more gracious. We played and practiced, without charge, during my 10-year tenure. Still, we had little time to practice.



If I remember correctly, my first year with the team, as an assistant, was the second year of the program. We had some good ball players, but we were mostly playing large public schools that might have four teams (varsity, junior varsity, etc.). The student body at ICJA certainly fluctuated, but there might be 100 young men in the entire school. So, the Ida Crown "Aces" had one varsity team only, with freshmen and seniors on the same team. How embarrassing it would be for a big public school to lose to the lowly Aces.

We played at Niles North High School in Skokie twice. We lost in the second year of our program. A couple of years later, we played again, "an exhibition game," and darkness was setting in on the unlit field. It was an official game, and we were leading by one run. The umpire called the game. Each team kept a scorebook. Niles North claimed the game was tied. We would not play Niles North again until a fall league exhibition game, and we righted the wrong with a win. After that, we were never able to schedule a game with Niles North again. Niles West did not want to play us, either.

In the second year of the program, we won two games and lost the rest. The wins came against junior varsity teams that graciously allowed us to play our entire varsity roster.

I became head coach prior to the third year of the program. Several juniors from the previous season decided not to play. I might be wrong, but I think for some of the players, if not for all of them, they did not want to play for me and lose every game. They had had a cool, young, qualified coach the first two seasons. Now the head coach was an unqualified old hack. Not cool at all.

Our first win came against a public school, Steinmetz. We never anticipated that we might win. The kids were ecstatic after the game. Expectations were so low, given the previous season and loss of Coach Newman and several very good ballplayers. On the team bus back to school, back-up first baseman Jacob Cherney yelled out, "Go, Meat." A teammate responded, "Go, Meat." I had no idea what they were doing. I later learned that they were singing a Hillshire Farms (treyf) sausage commercial verbatim. A team victory celebration was born.

Then, we beat Saint Benedict. Two in a row. Our first home victory.

Next up was Chicago Academy High School. Now, we always tried to play as many games in March as possible, since we always lost two weeks in April to Passover. Of course, March is not exactly baseball weather—unless you are in Mesa, Arizona, or West Palm Beach. It's one thing to play in 30-degree wind chill weather during the day. It is quite another to start the game at 7 p.m., a frequent necessity because of the long school day. In fact, most of our day games were when we were on the road against teams that got out at 3 p.m. Our home games were almost always at 7 p.m.

On this particular night, it was incredibly cold, and we were down nine runs early. We crept back and tied the game in the seventh inning, forcing extra innings. I am sure the homeplate umpire, Al Levi, was none too happy. In the bottom of the eighth, we managed to load the bases. I then had an idea that, quite frankly, I

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## The Bochurs of Summer

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should have thought of far earlier in the game. I summoned in my mind a pinch hitter, Eddie Gaedel. Except, of course, Eddie had not played since 1951 for Bill Veeck. But I had diminutive freshman, Solomon Lowenstein, on my bench. Sollie worked a full count before taking ball four to force the winning run across the plate. The bat never left his shoulders. Sollie did not pull a Merkle going down to first base. We got off the field at approximately 11 p.m. You can actually see much of the final inning on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3sMRP0if05k>

This season was also the inaugural season for the Jewish World Series in Columbus, Ohio. This is a wooden bat tournament hosted by Columbus Torah Academy. Ramaz, Kushner, and the Aces joined the CTA Lions. Over the years, Jewish high school teams from all over the country have participated in this wonderful tournament. The Aces have been fortunate to win four times. In that first season, however, we learned a few lessons, courtesy of veteran coaches at Ramaz and Kushner. Both teams were adept at trick plays we had never seen. I got out-coached. The following season, however, we had our revenge and "Go, Meat" could be heard throughout the ballpark.

As you might imagine, high school baseball was not exactly seen as a priority by the school's administration, some of whom were not exactly well versed in the rules of IHSA baseball. The same could be said for some of our parents. Unlike basketball, we do not have free substitution in baseball. That means not everybody plays in a meritocracy system. In basketball, our school would always have a "senior night." It was customary for the coach to start seniors at the beginning of the game, whether they were or were not benchwarmers. The coach could make substitutions immediately before the game got out of hand. We did not do a senior night in baseball, at least not in the beginning. Toward the end of my tenure, the school decided to have a senior night for baseball and scheduled senior night not against conference cellar dwellers Christ the King or Providence Saint Mel, but, rather, perennial champ Holy Trinity. I went to the ICJA athletic director and asked, "What do you want me to do? Do you want me to play to win or do you want me to start the seniors?" I was told, "Your job is to win," or something like that. That ruffled some parents' feathers. They went to the administration, and I finished my coaching career at the Catholic high school, Holy Trinity. Cause and effect? I do not know, but that was suggested to me by many.

We did have several very good ball players who could have played college baseball (Elazar Kolom, David Berger). We had a few who went on to play at Yeshiva University (Benji Blumenthal, Joel Feigenbaum).

All of our teams were very close, and there was great camaraderie. I can say, without hesitation, that even the worst-behaving bochur on those teams was a great kid, with great middos (character). We were always the most welcomed and best-behaving team in Columbus. That was attributable to our 10th man, Rabbi Shlomo Rosen.

I had the great joy of coaching both my boys in high school. That created some conflict in our home, but my wife, Elaine, was always the voice of reason, which was easy, because I am always wrong.

During the years that I coached, I had neck surgery, back surgery three times, bilateral elbow surgeries (hitting thousands of fungo fly balls), and I am dictating this while wearing a sling status post-biceps tenodesis, anterior latissimus dorsi transfer and reverse shoulder replacement. My wife asks, "Was it worth it?" Would you do it again?" She knows the answer. Actually, Elaine enjoyed it as much as I did, except when she was in the stands and heard negative comments from parents who did not know who she was. Baseball provided our family with a lifetime of memories.

The Israeli National Baseball Team played in the World Baseball Classic (WBC) last spring in Miami. I saw the team play five times and had an opportunity to interact with some of the players and their parents. For the championship game between Japan and the United States, the flags of each country participating in the tournament were spread out on the field for the national anthems. I was proud to be one of those carrying the Israeli flag.

Today, I think of the Aces called up by the IDF, particularly two of my catchers, as well as all of the ICJA alums, male and female, proudly serving in the IDF. I pray for their safety. Ida Crown Jewish Academy certainly instilled in these young adults a sense of duty and pride.

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## More “Anshe Moments”

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society continues to pay tribute to Chicago’s Anshe Emet Synagogue, which is observing its sesquicentennial. In addition to an illustrated timeline that we published in our Winter 2024 issue, we are reprinting, with permission, first-person vignettes from the congregation’s members. These accounts have been edited by Anshe Emet member Elaine Seeskin. *CJH* is grateful to the contributors for sharing their recollections and to Ms. Seeskin for ensuring that these memories, “Your Anshe Moments,” will be preserved for years to come.

### Barry Gross



*Barry Gross and his wife, Merle, are longtime Anshe Emet members. They were married in Merle’s parents’ home with Rabbi Seymour Cohen officiating and Uncle Ben Aronin assisting. Rabbi Cohen also officiated at the brit milah and pidyon ha’ben of their firstborn, Adam, and brit of their second son, Daniel. Their sons and three granddaughters attended the Anshe Emet Religious School and became b’nai mitzvah in the sanctuary. But Barry also recalls sitting in the sanctuary with sadness as they attended the funeral services for Merle’s parents and his own. Barry has served the congregation as President, Vice President, Board Member, Endowment Fund Trustee, and as a member of various committees. He is also coordinator of the congregation’s men’s Chevra Kadisha.*

“Asked to write about a ‘memorable moment’ at Anshe Emet, I signed on immediately, thinking it would be a simple task. However, I failed to grasp the vast number of Anshe Emet moments that I had experienced during my close to 60 years of membership: life cycle events, lay leadership decisions, worship services, and more. I initially dismissed the idea of considering a worship service as a memorable event, as I have participated in literally hundreds of Shabbatot at Anshe Emet. That notion changed with the events of October 7, 2023.

“I attended services on that date as it was Shemini Atzeret, a holiday on which there is a Yizkor service. Driving to Anshe Emet, I heard early reports of the massacre in Israel. There was a constant murmur throughout the service of congregants trying to glean more information from each other. All of us were experiencing confusion, fear, anxiety, and helplessness. Rabbi Siegel tried to keep us focused and current. The recitation of the *Mi Sheberach* prayer, the Prayer for the State of Israel, and Kaddish took on deeper meaning that day.

“On the following Shabbat, I felt the need to attend services. I did not attend to hear the Torah portion or the Rabbi’s sermon, or to join with the Cantor in the repetition of the Amidah. While the clergy’s role was important, I was present because I felt the need to be with my fellow congregants who were also grieving and deeply concerned over the well-being of the hostages, the State of Israel, and the Jewish People. On that Shabbat, communal gathering was more important than the religious service. Prior to that Shabbat, I perceived my community as *Klal Yisrael*, the people of Israel. I saw the Anshe Emet community as a group that worshipped, studied, and celebrated together. While we comfort each other in times of need, I never dreamed of a time when everyone would be in need. In the presence of other grieving congregants, our interdependence became apparent. While my grief and pain were not substantially eased, my ability to cope was strengthened. My recognition of the heightened importance of the Anshe Emet community made this Shabbat my most memorable moment.”

### Susan Weininger

*Susan Weininger served on the Anshe Emet Board for many years, including a term as President. Her children attended the Anshe Emet Day School. She has been an active member of a Jewish Women’s group that has led yearly services for many years and is still meeting regularly. She is Professor Emerita of Art History at Roosevelt University, where she taught for 37 years before retiring.*



“It was really difficult to think of one Anshe Emet moment—there have been so many over the years! And while this is not a moment but a series of moments, it stands out especially because of the special congregational anniversary we are celebrating this year.

“For many years, my friend Lois Hauselman, of blessed memory, and I were the “curators” of the glass cases

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## More “Anshe Moments”

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that were in the entry lobby before the recent beautification of the space was done. We had art exhibitions, student shows, presentations highlighting activities at the synagogue, and even celebrations of some of our congregants’ interesting careers and lives.

“Twenty-five years ago, we were tasked with organizing an exhibit to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the Synagogue. We combed through the archives, learning an enormous amount. We found photographs of our founders, our Rabbis, our Cantors, and congregational meeting places before the current building at Pine Grove and Grace. From these, we created a history of the synagogue in words and pictures. It was a wonderful experience in which I learned about the people whose names I had seen around the building (Malkov! Reich! Cummings!), celebrated clergy (Solomon Goldman! Ben Aronin!), as well as more about the illustrious leaders whom I actually knew (Rabbi Moses Silverman, Cantor Seymour Cohen). Along with our wonderful Anshe Emet School intern, Belina Mizrahi, who acted as our videographer, we made a video that included interviews with relatives of former clergy and synagogue leaders, longtime members, current clergy, leaders, congregants, and others. It was a great learning experience and helped us understand the rich history that underpins the great institution that we have today.

“Finally, working with Lois for all of those years was a true gift—she was a dear friend whose talents were boundless, who had unlimited numbers of “best friends” for whom she was always available, and was consistently so funny that she brought tears to my eyes from laughing so hard. If she were here to write her own ‘moment,’ it would not only be beautifully written and serious, but would have you falling off your chair and catching your breath at its wittiness. And as the first woman President of the Board of Trustees, she paved the way for those of us who followed. Everyone who knew her feels the emptiness where she once was.”

### Debby Lewis

*Debby Lewis started coming to Anshe Emet in 1986, but her daily involvement with the congregation really began in 1999 after the death of her mom, Lil Roth. At that time, she started coming to morning minyan to say Kaddish and essentially never left. She found her ‘Jewish voice,’ and the Hazzan Sheni at the time, Cantor Shelly Kaszynski, taught her how to leyn, chant haftarah, and lead the morning service. Debby was hired as the Anshe Emet Ritual Director in 2001 and remained in that role for 15 years. She continues to tutor Bar/Bat Mitzvah students and adults and to participate in services. Debby met her husband, Gabor, at morning minyan in December 2001, and they were married in 2003. They have four grandchildren: Nellie, 9, and Leo, 7, in Berkeley, California, and Noah, 4, and Elliott, 1-1/2, in Salt Lake City. They travel often to visit the grandkids. Debby loved her life as the Ritual Director of Anshe Emet, but equally loves retirement! She is most grateful for all the meaningful and loving relationships she made as a result of years in service to others. This Anshe Moment reflects on her introduction to Anshe Emet as a newly single mother.*



“The Friday night service at B’nai Emunah Synagogue in Skokie in the 1950s and early 1960s was THE big service of the weekend. It began at 8 p.m., and the full choir would sing each week. I loved Cantor Stearns’ beautiful voice, and I loved the little petit fours at the oneg afterward.

“So, when I found myself as a newly single mom in 1984 living in Lakeview, I decided to attend the Friday night service at the nearest Conservative synagogue to my apartment. I wanted to introduce a non-Jewish friend to the amazing Friday night service that I remembered from my youth, so we went to Anshe Emet on a Friday night in August 1984. I was skeptical about the 6 p.m. start time for the service, but was even more surprised when we walked into the Malkov Chapel where there were—at most—15 people.

“Rabbi Siegel immediately walked up to us, introduced himself, and asked me if I was set for the High Holy Days. ‘How much are the tickets?’ I asked. ‘Don’t worry about that,’ he said. How could I not worry about that? As a single mom, I had no discretionary money to spend!

“After the simple Friday night service (clearly NOT the service of my childhood!), Rabbi Siegel asked me to come into the office with him. He handed me two tickets for the High Holy Days. ‘I am going to give you these two tickets with the condition that you use them,’ he said. Use them? I was thrilled to be able to attend. When I sat in Blum on Rosh Hashanah and Cantor Silverman begin to sing, I started to cry. THERE was the sound and spirit of prayer that I remembered; I knew I had ‘come home’ and found my synagogue. My subsequent involvement and life at Anshe Emet began with that simple act of hospitality and kindness by Rabbi Siegel, and I will be forever grateful to him for reaching out to me.”

**Editor’s Note:** In response to a 150-year Anshe Emet timeline featured in the Winter 2024 *CJH* issue, CJHS member Jeff Oberlander notes that another highlight in the congregation’s history was a building addition in the 1960s that included a social hall and gym, as well as the Malkov Chapel.

## Summer Program Wrap-up: Neal Samors

This past June, more than 150 members and friends of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois attended, either virtually or in person, the organizations’ joint program featuring Chicago author and history buff Neal Samors, whose latest book is “*Memories of*



*Growing Up in Chicago: Recalling Life During the 20th Century.*”

Held at Temple Beth-El in Northbrook, the Samors

presentation was an experience rich in nostalgia. Audience members listened attentively as the author talked about the genesis of his book, a compilation, Studs Terkel-style, of reminiscences of Chicagoans who hailed from virtually every quadrant of the city—and beyond.

“I loved the program as a whole, and especially some of the personal connections,” said CJHS Board member and former President Rachel Heimovics, who attended the program virtually from Florida. Heimovics said that she had links to two of the book’s contributors, civic leader and philanthropist Jo Baskin Minow and Chicago Sheriff Richard Elrod, both of blessed memory. “I dated Jo’s brother,” recalled Heimovics, and Elrod “married one of my sorority sisters” from Northwestern University.

The CJHS is working on several exciting book programs this coming fall. Keep your eyes open for more information.

## CJHS members . . .

### YASHER KOACH!

*The Hebrew phrase means  
“More Power to You.”*

A letter by CJHS President **Dr. Rachelle Gold**, in which she expressed criticism of Northwestern University leadership’s response to pro-Palestinian encampments of campus, was published in the May 14, 2024 issue of the *Chicago Tribune*. Two days later, she gave the talk “A Monumental Controversy: The George Washington, Robert Morris, Haym Salomon Monument” for the Chicago Mitzvah Campaign Senior Center.

The recorded CJHS program by member **David Marienthal**, who talked about his documentary “Live at Mister Kelly’s during a 2022 Society presentation, was screened this past spring by the School of the Art Institute as part of Jewish American Heritage Month.

CJHS member **Dr. Malka Simkovich** was just appointed the new Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Jewish Publication Society. She is the former Crown-Ryan Chair of Jewish Studies and Director of the Catholic-Jewish Studies Program at the Catholic Theological Union.

CJHS member **Alice Marcus Solovy** penned the letter “The young in public service,” which was published in the *Chicago Tribune* this past January.

CJHS Board member **Alissa Zeffren** is assuming the post of Director of NILI, Chicago Institute of Women’s Learning, which advances Torah studies for women of all Jewish backgrounds. Zeffren is also a teacher at the Ida Crown Jewish Community.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור חצבתכם



# chicago jewish historical society

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### 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-seven 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 [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org)

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**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



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