



chicago jewish historical society

FORMERLY SOCIETY NEWS  
volume 18, no. 4, Winter 1994

# CHICAGO JEWISH History

## Hal Fox:

*Colorful "Mad One" Makes a Name for Himself in Fashion, Music and, above all, Flamboyance*



Hal Fox today

By Carolyn Eastwood

Whether you knew Hal Fox as the creator of the zoot suit, leader of the Jimmy Dale band, or as a little boy selling socks on Maxwell Street, you're not likely to forget him. As a fashion designer, musician, and all-around colorful character, Fox remains an unforgettable former West Side figure. Television and radio host, Dave Garroway, called him "the mad one" for his boundless energy and enthusiasm for life -- traits still in evidence today.

Fox was born at the corner of Roosevelt and Ashland in 1910 to a family that migrated from Russia and had been in yardgoods for two generations. By 1915 he was well on his way to a commercial career, as he said, "I sold and hawked five pairs of socks in bundles (all with holes in them) on the corner of Union and Maxwell and was a puller for my pa and his brother who sold woolens to tailors." He also sold shoes -- sometimes consisting of two lefts, or two rights, "...but people bought them anyway." In those days every store on Maxwell Street had pushcarts in front of it and "pullers" drawing people into the stores.

*continued on page 4*

## Society Remembers Elsie Orlinsky; Announces New Fund

We trust that most of our members are aware by now of the terrible circumstances surrounding the death of our long-time board member Elsie Orlinsky. Killed when she offered what resistance she could to a man hijacking her car, she has gained in death the publicity for her good works that was due her while she was

*continued on page 3*

### Inside:

- Ambijan: How Well-meaning Chicagoans were Duped by Stalin's USSR
- Oral History of Phil Lind, Jewish Musician from a Musical Family
- Can You Identify Faces in our Photo of a Farewell Party in the HIAS Crowd?

# President's Column

Most of what we do here at the Society lets us look back on our history in this city, critiquing and celebrating the things our community has accomplished in the last 150 years. The brutal murder of our friend and long-time board member Elsie Orlinsky, however, raises painful questions about our future.



**Walter Roth**

In the wake of her being carjacked in broad daylight at 55th and Lake Park Avenue in the Hyde Park area, an African-American male suspect was arrested. The suspect has a criminal record and is reportedly a drug addict. As much as I want to resist doing so, I see him in many of the young men I pass on the streets and sidewalks of Chicago.

Several days after Elsie's murder, I had occasion for a few moments to imagine myself in her situation. Early in the evening I stopped at a gas station at Lawrence and Marine Drive on the North Side of Chicago. After I pre-paid the cashier, I walked back to my car to fill the gas tank. As I was doing this, a young African-American man, well dressed and kempt, approached to ask if he could help me.

It is always disturbing to have a stranger approach you in the evening in an unfamiliar place and, while it pains me to admit it, it is even more disturbing to have him be a young black man. Because he was well dressed and initially unthreatening, however, I felt only a little fear. I replied that I did not need any help.

Rather than turn from me as I had hoped he would, he kept walking alongside me and asked for money so

that he could take a train back to Milwaukee. Something in the way he asked me, some kind of aggressiveness that I do not encounter in the day time in the places I know, made me even more uncomfortable. I thought directly, for the first time, of Elsie and the way she had been attacked.

I had to fight the impulse to yell right then, to call out to the cashier. I thought about running and I thought about giving him my wallet. Instead, I managed to master my fear and talk to him.

I asked him for his name, and he told me. I asked him where he went to school and he told me Milwaukee. I asked him what he was doing in Chicago and he said that a friend had stranded him here. Then he began to talk to me.

He told me that he was a black man. He said he could rob me of my wallet and there was nothing I could do about it. I said that if he did he would go to jail. He replied that it didn't matter to him if he did, that black people are always discriminated against and that all he wanted from me was one dollar since he already had the other \$8 he would need to get home. I told him his loitering would get him in trouble; he again asked me for a dollar.

I decided to give him the dollar and, at last, he left me alone. I watched as he ran up to another car that had just pulled into the station. I went to the cashier and asked him to call the police, then I drove off to visit my mother who lives in the Self-Help Home nearby.

My gas station incident might well have been forgettable had it not come in the wake of Elsie's murder. What made it frightening for me -- and what makes it stay with me -- is the way it

shows the effort it will cost us to continue making our city work as a city. When a young man can be so savage as to perpetrate a brutal attack on a woman sixty years older than he -- a woman we in the Society know to have been feisty and full of life but who must have appeared to him as an easy victim -- he attacks the fabric of our entire community. When a well dressed black youth can tell me with impunity that he has nothing to lose by being arrested, then he confirms that fabric has been torn.

As a historian, I am careful to keep from falling into nostalgia. I do not look back to a time when the entire city of Chicago was safe for everyone because I know no such time ever existed. We are barely two generations away from a time when Jews were attacked for being Jews in a foreign neighborhood. Much of the work of our Society has chronicled the way Jews managed to become part of the full life of Chicago; the rise of Chicago's Jews is an accomplishment that gives me pride not only in Jews, but in Chicago as well.

In order for Chicago to continue functioning as a community where all of us are reasonably safe, we are going to have to work for an effective city, one that offers equitable services to all and that does whatever a city can do to foster the hopes and dreams of its young and poor. I am saddened today by the stark reminder of how much work such an effort requires. Elsie spent more energy and more years than most people do contributing to the welfare of this city; what she did and what we do has not yet been enough. We will need even more patience and more courage merely to keep the city the place it has been, the place Elsie helped make it to be.

May she rest in peace; may her family know some comfort; and may we all somehow find meaning about this bewildering world from her death.

□

# Society Remembers

*continued from page one*

alive.

We have all been haunted by seeing her familiar and friendly face pictured alongside newspaper articles or television reports of the crime. It is a comfort to learn the breadth of her activism -- in addition to her work with the Society she taught bed-ridden children at LaRabida Hospital, served on the Citizens Committee for Theater on the Lake, worked in various ways to support the Hyde Park Art Fair, and raised funds for Misericordia -- but it is a small comfort beside the work she might still have accomplished.

As one way of responding to her murder and honoring her memory, the Society Board would like to announce the creation of the Elsie Orlinsky Fund. Through it, the Orlinsky family and Society Board will sponsor an annual meeting with awards available to college and high school students presenting papers on Chicago Jewish history. The Society will announce details of the award soon.

In addition, we continue to mourn her. With that in mind, we reprint a brief excerpt from the eulogy written on her behalf by Elliot Gertel, Rabbi of Congregation Rodfei Zedek and Society board member:

We gather this morning to pay tribute to a beloved mother, grandmother, and sister, and a cherished friend, neighbor and teacher, Elsie Rubin Orlinsky. Our congregation and our beloved community of Hyde Park, as well as the entire city of Chicago, are in shock and grief and are indignant over the random and extremely brazen act of violence against a long-time South Sider who was targeted because she was over sixty and walked with a cane...

... The last example of Elsie's

dedication I will give was her remarkable dedication to her Jewish heritage, which was precious to her. Because girls were not encouraged to attend Hebrew School when she was growing up, she insisted on getting a tutor and learning Hebrew. Later she took Hebrew courses that were offered at Marshall High. She was an active member of Am Echod in Chatham and then of Congregation Rodfei Zedek, where she was a cherished member...

She is deeply missed by the congregation. She had been involved in our braille and large type program, and was just beginning to find ways to become active again as she began to emerge from her mourning for [her husband] Harold.

She was also dedicated to working for the State of Israel. For many years she ran the toy booth at the Bazaar for Pioneer Women, seeking out unusual toys all year round. Her grandchildren enjoyed seeing the toys that she would find, and, of course, she would buy novelties for family and friends ranging from the very useful to the exotic. She and Harold visited Israel through trips sponsored by the congregation.

Elsie believed that Judaism still has unique teachings for the world which only a vital synagogue and Jewish people can provide. She would hold the family seders at her home on Passover, inheriting that sacred task from her parents. The family cherished a matzoh cover that she made for her parents-in-law in 1938, the year of her marriage to Harold.

She had a profound sense of history and a deep admiration for

Jewish history, especially in her beloved Chicago. She was therefore a founding board member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and an archivist at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies. I recall fondly driving to board meetings of the Historical Society with her and Burt Robin, and being fascinated from the clippings she would bring of unusual people and events that might make for interesting programs.

It was Elsie's interest in history and worthy projects that kept her so youthful. Those of us who knew her did not know the "elderly" woman that some of the press have spoken about. She looked young and *was* young in spirit...

Those interested in contributing to the Elsie Orlinsky Fund can do so by writing to the Society Office at 618 S. Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60605.

---

## Society Welcomes Its Newest Members

The Society is pleased to welcome our new members. We accomplish what we are able to do through the generosity of our members, a generosity that is as much a matter of time and energy as it is financial.

We are pleased to welcome the following:

<i>JUF News</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Edward</i>
<i>Deborah Cardon</i>	<i>Levin</i>
<i>Marlene Greenberg</i>	<i>Helen Sclair</i>
<i>Susan Goodman</i>	<i>Dr. Irving Skolwick</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. William</i>	<i>Julius Smith</i>
<i>Holland</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. William</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. F.A.</i>	<i>Weingard</i>
<i>Norden</i>	

We look forward to the contributions they will make (and have made already) and we take the opportunity to thank all of our membership, both new and old. □

# Hal Fox

*continued from page one*

As Fox tells it, his enterprising days began at a young age when his mother was about to discard an old broken lamp with beads when he persuaded her to give it to him. After retrieving the beads he sold them, 20 beads for a penny, to children in the neighborhood to play marbles -- a bargain, for real marbles cost a penny for only two or three. Other early jobs included selling Cough Gum outside the Central Park Theater, "banding" cigars in a West Side cigar factory, delivering fish to the north side, and selling food and candy on excursion trains.

Fox admits he never liked school and didn't do well, but he did like music and had taken violin lessons when he was young so he was able to pick up occasional playing jobs. One gig in a trio was in the Oasis Restaurant during the 1933 World's Fair, down the street from the Sally Rand fan dance performance. Part way through the season the proprietor decided he'd move some tables back and give the customers room to dance. For this he needed a dance band with the sound of horns, not violins, so he gave Hal two weeks notice. When Fox told a musician friend this unhappy news the friend offered to teach him the trumpet in two weeks -- an unlikely proposition, but somehow, between "faking" it and being very impressive on extremely high notes, Fox managed to pull it off and kept his job all summer.

The World's Fair job led to a job offer in New York, so with his young wife and baby Fox set off for New York. After paying bus fare and \$4.00 room rent he had \$7.50 left in his pocket, but by the time he arrived the job had evaporated so Fox took what he could find -- as a counterman in a restaurant on Times Square. This was a busy place serving 28,000 hot dogs a day. It was hard work, but it meant Fox made a lot of contacts because it was in the entertainment district. He became an informal link between managers looking for

players and musicians looking for work. He joined a band himself where he played evenings and weekends and somehow, among all of these jobs, Fox found time to design suits and uniforms for his musician friends and fellow employees from sample bolts sent from Chicago by his father.

In 1938 Fox was called back to Chicago where he and his brother, Aaron, were faced with saving the failing Fox Brothers wholesale woolen business. Fox was conscientious enough, but selling yardgoods just didn't turn him on. What he was really interested in was, first of all, music, and

second, designing clothes. So he found a way to combine both and Fox Brothers took on new life as Fox Brothers' Tailors.

It came about this way: Fox had had some experience designing suits in New

---

*When he first began designing the one-piece box jacket, other tailors said it couldn't be done, you must have a seam in order to make it fit. But typically, Fox did it anyway, and took off from there.*

---

York -- in fact, he had his own unusual ideas about openings, buttons for decorations, and cuffs, from the time he was five years old. What he didn't know was tailoring because he had never followed through with that step of the operation, so they hired tailors and people to do the sewing. When woolens were rationed due to the war, the Fox Brothers allotment was substantial because of their large pre-war wholesale volume of yardgoods.

Now customers were needed, and making band uniforms became a force in the business. Fox describes the beginning, "It was a Wednesday when Erv Brabeck (later president of MCI) walked in and said he was managing a band that was opening at the Oriental Theater with Bojangles Robinson on Friday, and they needed 18 uniforms. Could we make them?" Fox said he'd let him know, and then contacted all the people in the Fox Brothers shop. They agreed to work all night if necessary. Fox says, "To make a long story short, we did have the suits ready. They were just beautiful. They were all a one-piece box jacket and it was the start of our uniform business for all different bands, and through the bands we did work for entertainers from all over the world."

Among the regular patrons of Fox Brothers were Woody Herman and Stan Kenton, Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie "Bird" Parker, Duke Ellington, Liberace, and Mel Torme. In the 40's there were more than 600 signed pictures, letters, and telegrams on the shop's wall of fame. Some of these can still be seen at Fox Brothers Tailors on Roosevelt. Entertainers and band leaders buying uniforms weren't the only ones by any means, because there were "rabbis, politicians, underworld figures, ministers, and priests." As Fox said, "It didn't take very long and we were the busiest in the whole business. Volume, volume, volume. I believed in volume because I like a lot of excitement and when you have a store full of kids -- sometimes 30 or 40 or even 50 at a time -- all yelling and hollering and having a good time, it's a lot of fun.

"Volume" implies mass production, but that wasn't the case at Fox Brothers because every suit was made individually for the customer. Fox measured each customer, of course, but then he conferred with each one on an individual basis about fabric, cut, accessories, trim -- but the switch was -- every suit cost just \$18 (with two pairs of pants), no matter what the size of the customer.

That was relatively democratic, but the most democratic part was that it was first come, first served, no matter how famous or important, old or young, black or white, the customer was. They all waited their turn, sometimes outside the shop on the curb. As Hal said, "There would be some politicians who would try to throw their weight around, or some rich cat with his chauffeur and Cadillac waiting out front, but they had to wait their turn."

In 1948 Leroy Holland wrote, "Hal Fox, blond, hearty and hefty, carries on two telephone conversations, measures a 16-piece band for uniforms, supplies a fill-in tenor sax man for a newly-arrived band, while a customer tells him whether rain will knock him out of his regular



*Photos and sketch courtesy of Hal Fox*

#### **Hal Fox Measuring Rabbi Morris Gutstein for a Kosher Suit**

Wednesday-off fishing trip."

One of Fox's first designs, almost immediately a success, was the zoot suit, defined by *Webster's 9th Collegiate Dictionary* as, "Coined by Harold C. Fox: a flashy suit of extreme cut typically consisting of a thigh-length jacket with wide padded shoulders and peg pants with narrow cuffs." When he first began designing the one-piece box jacket, other tailors said it couldn't be done, you must have a seam in order to make it fit. But typically, Fox did it anyway, and took off from there with details and accessories, including a floor length chain. For the name, he was inspired by kids of the neighborhood who used lots of rhyming slang -- he just kept rhyming "suit" until he reached the end of the alphabet.

While all this was going on, Hal Fox, under the name of Jimmy Dale, was leading a top jazz band of the 40's. He had been playing with a little



*Photo taken by Caltoa Photo*

**"Part of Jimmy Dale Band at Apollo Theater, Harlem, NY, 1943. (Me Jumpin! Who sez white men can't jump!)"**

local band, the Jimmy Dale Band, just for fun when he came back to Chicago. When the leader was drafted Fox took over the band. From that time the tailoring business and jazz world combined for the debut of the new "Jimmy Dale and his 13 Swing Mad Musicians." Under his leadership they hired the West Side Union Hall and sent out invitations to all the Fox customers, and they were off to a great start. They played in local ballrooms, neighborhood weddings, on Sunday afternoons in Hull House. Jimmy Dale became so well known that he appeared often in the "Mary Worth" cartoon strip.

Most of the bookings were near Chicago, but the Jimmy Dale band did tour with Nat King Cole, Louis Armstrong, Bill "Bo Jangles" Robinson, and Billie Holiday, among others, and played in such places as the New York Savoy Ballroom and the Apollo Theater. Hal had a good library of music scores because he had always been interested in musicians and talked to them about music when they came to the shop for uniforms. As he said, "They were all struggling and none of them were financially well fixed. So I made deals with them --

if I admired their music, I would say, hey, I'll make a couple of suits for you and I want some of your music. So I had some of the best music of the time."

The Jimmy Dale band slogan was "The World's greatest mixed band." Joe Segal wrote in the *Roosevelt University Torch*, "Jimmy fronts the band with unbounded glee and energy, and is to be complimented for his determined policy of resisting all offers for better jobs when those jobs meant playing with a strictly white band." The first test came when he hired a black vocalist, Leon Ketchum.

The band had a gig in Oak Park at the Melody Mill, and at intermission Fox received a call to see the manager who told him, "You know we don't allow any niggers in our ballroom so I would appreciate it if you would have your vocalist leave." Fox told him, "He's part of the band and will sing until this engagement is over. If he leaves, we all leave." The manager finally capitulated, but threatened to blackball Fox at all the white dances in Chicago. Obviously many people didn't agree with that manager because in 1947 the Jimmy Dale

band, along with Stan Kenton, played an interracial dance at the Pershing Ballroom with over 4000 paid admissions.

Later the band was completely integrated and on the road they were sometimes picketed by the KKK; they also found they were barred from many restaurants so they would stop at White Castles, Fox would collect \$1.00 from each person, and bring out bags of hamburgers -- *masses* of those little \$.05 hamburgers for the busload of musicians. Fox said, "The thing was that I figured that all should eat or none of us should eat." He maintained that musicians don't look at things from a racial angle, and at that time (1947) he stated, "I don't consider a man as a Negro, Jew or Italian, or a member of his particular race. I consider him as a member of the human race striving for existence in a mixed up world."

To value a person for character, personality and skill rather than sex, color, or ethnic group was a working philosophy of Fox Brothers Tailors as well. The shop is still in business, now at 556 Roosevelt, and there you'll find Morris Milton, designer, who has worked for Fox Brothers for 50 years. He actually began at the age of sixteen, doing errands around the shop but later became a designer working along with Hal who says they "thought alike." Morris is so fond of designing suits he says he would "work for free." Leo Zayed has worked there in all aspects of the trade for 27 years. Another mainstay is Fran Kenney, the secretary for 29 years. Fox notes, "She pretty well runs the place and she's very capable."

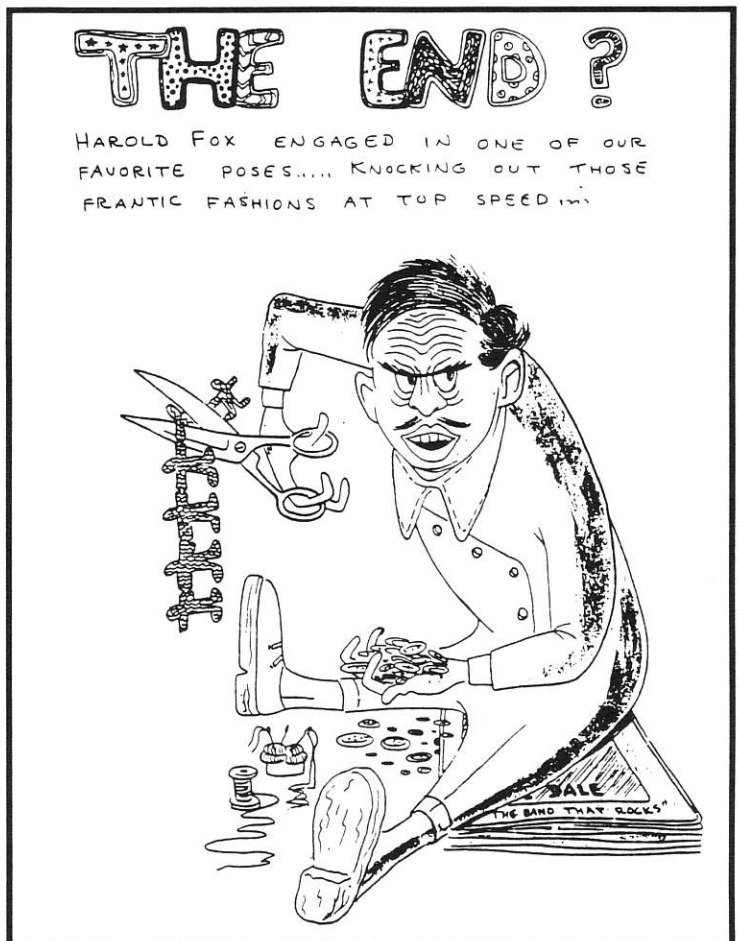
Another member of the staff from the '50s until he died four years ago was Earl "Quack" Palmer, best known for his cartoons. Fox said Quack would do cartoons all day long. "He could take a board that we rolled fabrics on and draw a cartoon of some customer who was picking out some material and carry it over to them. Most of the time they'd want to take these cartoons home with them."

Fox retired from Fox Brothers in 1954 and he and his wife moved to Florida, but part of the agreement was that he would continue to come to Chicago in the summer and help out. So until 1970 he filled in for vacationing staff. Current pictures of Fox show his style as flamboyant as ever and indicate that he still has a personal interest in

clothes. The Henry Ford Museum in Detroit has taken historic note of Fox's contributions to clothing design, and a zoot suit was included in the "The Well-suited Man" exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society.

Fox hasn't abandoned music either; for over 30 years he has played for dances four times a week (now cut to two times). He is a volunteer at the local humane society so sometimes his taped descriptions of the old days are accompanied by dogs barking. Fox finds time to be a *minyanaire* on a regular basis, visit with his three daughters, son, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and write poetry. His voluminous letters, frequently punctuated with "Wow!" are an indication that the "mad one" hasn't lost his zest for life. □

*Dr. Carolyn Eastwood is in the Sociology Department of Roosevelt University and won the Society's Minsky Award in 1993 for her paper, Chicago's Jewish Street Peddlers.*



"Quack" Palmer's Cartoon of the "mad" Hal Fox

---

# *Ambijan:*

## Autonomous Jewish Region of USSR Won Chicagoan Jacob Grossberg's Support, But it Proved Too Good to be True

By Walter Roth

Zionism had its rivals. At the same time as settlers in then-Palestine and supporters in America and Europe were working to create a Jewish state in Palestine, other leaders imagined different Jewish futures. Some called for ways of developing political autonomy within existing governments, proposing, among other things, settling Jews as farmers in thinly populated areas of the United States.

Others called for creating Jewish settlements in places other than the Middle East. There was talk of a Jewish state in present-day

Uganda and talk of one somewhere in South America. But it was in Russia, in Stalin's Soviet Union, that such talk actually led to the formation of a nominal Jewish state, the only country in the world where Yiddish was to be the official language. And a Chicago attorney named Jacob Grossberg played a tragic role in the story.

### *An alternative to Birobidjan*

Birobidjan, a vast inhospitable area in Eastern Siberia, was not the first autonomous Jewish region that Soviet leaders contemplated. Jews had long been concentrated in the fertile Crimean area, although they faced serious religious persecution there. In 1926, a group of American Jews met in Philadelphia to form ICOR (an acronym derived from Gesellschaft tzu Helfen der Yiddisher Koloizatzie in Soviethn Ferband (Jewish Colonization in the Soviet Union)); under its auspices they hoped to raise funds to help in the

formation of Jewish collectives in the Crimea.

Chicagoan Julius Rosenwald proved to be the biggest backer of ICOR, ultimately contributing \$2,500,000 of the \$15,000,000 the group would raise. To do so, Rosenwald and other ICOR supporters broke with world Zionist leaders who insisted the project was a distraction from the more pressing work of settling Jews in Palestine. While Rosenwald opposed the principles of the Soviet government, he felt it was nevertheless essential to take a chance on the good faith of the Soviet leaders.

Dr. Stephen Wise, on behalf of the Zionist leadership, opposed placing any funds in the hands of Soviet officials. He insisted that the Soviet government would never keep its word to the Jewish settlers and that sooner or later the Jews would be moved away from the land.

---

*But it was in Russia, in Stalin's Soviet Union, that such talk actually led to the formation of a nominal Jewish state, the only country in the world where Yiddish was to be the official language.*

---

In any event, the ICOR funds were eventually passed on to the Soviet Union. Officials there sent back glowing reports of Jews settling in the

Crimea and using the American donations to purchase farm equipment. There were no real practical ways for the ICOR supporters to determine the truth of these reports and, within a couple of years, the Soviets turned their attention to the even more ambitious-sounding project of settling Birobidjan. ICOR simply faded away.

### *Founding of Ambijan*

Jacob Grossberg was a prominent Chicago attorney in the early part of this century. He was a leader in numerous civic and Jewish communal activities and, in 1916, a founder of the original American Jewish Congress. Grossberg, always an independent spirit, had his differences with the leaders of the American Jewish Congress and the Zionist Organization of America even as he continued to be active in his political and legal career.

In February, 1936 Grossberg convened a meeting at his home of leading Chicago Jews to



## Chicago Biro-Bidjan Delegation Committee

2702 WEST DIVISION STREET

Telephone Humboldt 4639

CHICAGO, ILL.

**To All Jewish Landsmanshaftn, Benefit Societies, Unions, Frat  
Congregations, Clubs, Ladies Auxiliaries, Cultural Societies, and**

Dear Friends:

**Copy of the Letterhead for Chicago Ambijan. The letter is addressed, "To All Jewish Landsmanshaftn, Benefit Societies, Unions, Fraternal Orders, Congregations, Clubs, Ladies Auxiliaries, Cultural Societies and Others:"**

discuss forming a Chicago chapter of Ambijan, a group founded in New York for the purpose of supporting Jewish settlement in Birobidjan. Among the people reported to have been present at that first meeting were Mr. and Mrs. Henry Koenig, Nicholas J. Pritzker, Julius Schaffner, S.B. Komaiko and Charles Komaiko, Jr.

With the group largely ignorant of the inhospitable conditions of Birobidjan, the opportunity must have sounded appealing. For two years already, the Soviet Government had recognized Birobidjan as an Autonomous Region for Jewish settlement. Its official language was already Yiddish and Soviet officials held out promises that it would one day become a full-fledged Republic and the Jewish cultural center of the Soviet Union. Zionists were dreaming still of a state that must surely have felt more than twelve years away; here was a Jewish state that already existed, one that was waiting only for financial support from world Jewry.

### *Collision with the Zionists*

The Chicago Ambijan Committee organized by Grossberg immediately ran into the same sort of Zionist opposition ICOR had a decade earlier. In reply to an invitation to attend a fund raising dinner, Judge J.M. Braude, a Chicago Zionist, replied that he would not attend and that help for the Jews in Palestine was of greater importance. H.L. Meites, the Chicago author of *A History of the Jews of Chicago* and a Zionist activist, wrote in *The*

*Chicago Jewish Chronicle* in February, 1936 that he thought Jacob Grossberg had, "...completely retired from communal activity of Jewish interest" and questioned the wisdom of his work on behalf of Ambijan.

Grossberg replied to this criticism that, "We are confronted with a situation even worse than the one which originally called into being the

Jewish Congress. With the inhuman persecutions from which Jews are suffering in Central Europe, all existing places of asylum, including Palestine, are wholly inadequate. Birobidjan not only constitutes a very substantial addition to these places, but holds out hope of being ultimately of the greatest capacity."

### *A Grandson's report*

Grossberg's grandson, Edmund Grossberg of Glencoe, Illinois, has recently written a biography of his grandfather. In it he records the elder Grossberg's efforts:

As vice-presidents he had Isadore Isenberg, Harry Koenig, Doris Grossberg, and Dr. Helen Katz; recording secretary, Mrs. Alfred Hamburger; financial secretary, Dr. Morris Lychenheim; and treasurer, Harry Zarkin. He also had help from his old friend Nicholas J. Pritzker, who co-chaired some of the fund raising affairs.

His first effort was to have a dinner in June of 1936 to raise money and elect a delegation to visit Birobidjan. He scheduled it for the Standard Club but soon ran into an obstacle in the form of the club manager, a Mr. Murphy. The manager kept dragging his feet so [Grossberg] shifted the meeting to the Hotel Sherman. He fired off a letter of complaint about discourteous treatment to Edward Felsenthal, and received an apology and explanation from the president, A.G.

Ballenger.

He also exchanged correspondence with Samuel A. Goldsmith, executive director of the Jewish Welfare Board, predecessor of the United Jewish Appeal about including the Ambijan ... in the distribution of funds raised by the Chicago Jewish community for charitable purposes. He didn't have much luck on this approval.

In November [Grossberg] organized a dinner at which Lord Marley was the featured speaker. As the result of these efforts, a fairly substantial amount of money was raised and forwarded to the New York headquarters. The immediate objective was to resettle 1,000 Polish Jews in Birobidjan as the first contingent.

The fundraising success and the quick move to action speak to the respect Grossberg commanded. He had brought the issue before the Chicago public and managed, in a matter of months, to make it possible for those first 1,000 Jews to begin settling Birobidjan. It must have seemed that they were on the brink of managing a massive resettlement that would save thousands of Jewish lives.

#### *Hopes turn sour*

With that, however, things slowed down at once. Deciding to wait for response from the New York Ambijan headquarters before he encouraged the Chicago branch to proceed with further fund raising efforts, Grossberg began a stream of one-sided correspondence. He wrote letter after letter and received evasive responses or none at all.

Weeks turned into months and months into more than two years before Grossberg finally acknowledged to himself and Chicago Ambijan that their efforts had been in vain. In November, 1938, he sent a telegram to the New York headquarters demanding the return of all monies sent from Chicago. He asserted, in the same telegram, that the Ambijan committee had failed to move a single person from Eastern Europe to Birobidjan.

Although it took relentless effort, Grossberg eventually did manage to recover the money from the New York office. Embarrassed at the failure of

his and the committee's efforts, he consulted with the major donors and gave the funds to the American Organization for Rehabilitation through Training (ORT).

As Edmund Grossberg puts it in his manuscript:

The story of Birobidjan is another historical footnote on the efforts to prevent the Holocaust by getting the Jews of Europe out of harm's way. [Grossberg], like other thinking and caring people of the time, tried to do something and failed. In their worst nightmares nobody foresaw the full extent of what was about to occur.

#### *Postscript*

Today, Birobidjan is still the Jewish Autonomous Republic but only a few thousand Jews live there. As for the Chicago Ambijan Committee, it appears to have had a revival during World War II with a new group of Chicago Jews raising money on behalf of the Jews of Birobidjan.

As late as 1948, *The Chicago Sentinel* in its *100 Years of Chicago Jewry* published an article by S. Jessmar in which the author states that over 30,000 Jewish war orphans had been settled in Birobidjan after World War II and that over 115,000 Jews were then living there. Jessmar concludes in the article that Birobidjan offered to Jewish survivors, "a Jewish environment and the hope of a richer life for themselves and their children."

Such a conclusion could be possible, of course, only by being blind to Stalin's post-World War II anti-Semitic policies, many of which were antagonistic to the very idea of a Jewish identity, let alone a Jewish state.

In a few years the Chicago Ambijan Committee was gone, as were most of the Jews who actually had settled in Birobidjan. With them went not only a failed dream for a Jewish state in Europe but also the work and honest efforts of Jacob Grossberg and a number of others whose good intentions blinded them to the insurmountable obstacles of their project. □

---

*Walter Roth is the President of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society.*



## Society Looks to Identify Individuals in Photograph of Party for Maurice Wantamaker

Society Board member Sid Sorkin has uncovered a copy of a photograph

and is seeking to identify any of the individuals in it.

The picture was taken in 1948. Maurice Wantamaker (top row, right) was then preparing to leave Chicago for Los Angeles and the photograph may have been taken on the occasion of a farewell party for him.

Wantamaker, whose son is the late Sam Wanamaker, was an officer in

the Nickolaever Untersteitzung Verein and an active participant with the Chicago office of HIAS. When he moved to Los Angeles, he joined the Allied Victory Club.

We would appreciate it if anyone with information on other individuals in the picture would contact the Society office at 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60605, (312) 663-5634. □

## Information Request: Spertus Museum Seeks World War II Artifacts

In anticipation of an exhibition on the Jewish experience during World War II to be held in the coming year, Olga Weiss, Curator of the Spertus Museum, is seeking artifacts that demonstrate what it was like either to serve in the United States Armed Forces or to remain stateside, following the war from afar.

She is particularly seeking objects of a personal nature that were used by military personnel.

People with material that might be appropriate should contact Olga Weiss at (312) 322-1732. □

## Photographs of Kosher Butchers Identified

In response to an inquiry in the last issue of *Chicago Jewish History* for help identifying individuals in a photograph of members of the Chicago Kosher Butchers Union, Al Witman has provided identification for all seven men.

The photograph appeared as part of an information request from the

most recent issue of *Chicago Jewish History*.

The men are (from left to right), back row: Nathan Felsinfeld, a Mr. Kovinsky, Morris Lipman, and Max Simkin; front row: Joseph Bittenfeld, "Langer" Bogoslawsky or Brasofsky, and David Trabish.

We are grateful for Mr. Witman's assistance.

The work we do at the Society is made possible when we bring together the expertise and memories of our diverse membership. We invite all of you to come forward with questions and assistance whenever you can. □

## Barbara Schreier Addresses Quarterly Meeting on *Becoming American Women*

On Sunday afternoon, December 11 over seventy people gathered at the Chicago Historical Society for the quarterly meeting of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. The program focused on the exhibition *Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience* and featured a slide lecture by Barbara Schreier, curator of the exhibition and Deputy Director of the Chicago Historical Society.

Schreier, an expert in textiles and clothing, told Society members and their guests about her five year experience curating the exhibition which grew out of her reading of *Bread Givers* by Anzia Yezierska, a semi-fictional account of a young immigrant's struggle to become an American. Reading about the young woman's struggle encouraged Schreier to begin her own quest, searching for the ways in which female Jewish immigrants used their garments to realize what it meant to be American.

Schreier began her search by sending letters and speaking publicly about her project. She spoke to "an awful lot of Hadassah groups." She sent inquiries to all the Jewish newspapers in this country. And she visited many homes where she found "instant grandparents." They shared their stories of what it meant to come to this county and what it meant to be Jewish here, as well as their tea. By the end of the search, Schreier had collected over 500 artifacts and many more stories.

Schreier's slide lecture focused on some of the objects to be found in the exhibition. She spoke of the immigrants' desire not to be tagged as "greenhorns" and how they used their clothes to "fit in". But this was not

easy. Once they arrived in the new country, the immigrants had to learn a new clothing vocabulary filled with undergarments and accessories, at the same time as they tried to learn a new language. Golda Meir commented that "It was like going to the moon."

Schreier shared the story of an immigrant named Fannie who never had a pair of shoes. When she arrived in America, Fannie saw shoes with buttons and pointed toes. The young girl asked herself, "Fannie, why did you come to a country where the people have only one toe and it's pointed?"

The immigrants tried to fit in from toe to head. And though the young girls were criticized (especially by their mothers) for their flamboyant hats, the girls were dressing to be noticed.

The working girls' uniform was the shirtwaist, a plain white shirt which could be purchased for 25 cents. The immigrants wore their shirtwaist to work and then dressed it up for dates and dances by attaching bits of lace to the collar. Schreier had difficulty procuring a shirtwaist for the exhibition because often they were worn to shreds or their owners did not think work clothes were important



Photo by Paula Chaiken

Barbara Schreier at the Chicago Historical

enough to save.

Society Board member Sue Weiler, who helped arrange the talk, said she was pleased with the afternoon. "It was a very good turnout and Barbara Schreier made it very interesting," she said. "People came because they wanted to see the exhibition and they were attracted by Barbara Schreier's reputation."

Following Schreier's lecture, visitors had the opportunity to view the exhibition first-hand.

*Becoming American Women: Clothing and the Jewish Immigrant Experience* travels from Chicago to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York City and then to the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia and the Skirball Museum in Los Angeles. A catalogue of the exhibition, written by Schreier, is available at the book store of the Chicago Historical Society.

--Paula Chaiken

## Chicago Alderman Burton Natarus to Address Next Program

Burton Natarus, alderman of Chicago's 42nd Ward, will address the next quarterly meeting of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society on February 5 at Temple Sholom.

Natarus, a veteran of Chicago politics known for his creative and

often controversial proposals within City Council, will speak on Jews in Chicago politics.

The talk begins at 2 p.m. with a social hour at 1 p.m.

Temple Sholom is located at 3480 N. Lake Shore Drive and is easily accessible by public transportation.

As usual, the program is open to members and their guests at no charge. □

*Oral History Excerpt:*

## Phil Lind Recounts His Days Growing up in the Cantorate and Show Business

*Phil Lind has been in music almost since the day he was born. Son of a famous cantor and brother to two of the best known cantors of his generation, he himself has made his most distinguished mark in secular music, although he is intimately familiar with Jewish liturgical music.*

*Lind spoke with Society members Norman Schwartz and Elsie Orlinsky at his home on June 7, 1978.*

**Lind:** We were born on the East Side of New York. That isn't generally known and it doesn't do your Chicago Jewish Historical Society any good, but it does when you take into consideration the fact that Chicago is home. Here's where you gain popularity and from here sprung the Lind Brothers around the world. Chicago was introduced to us by my brother Dale. When Dale was 10 years of age, he was brought from New York City as the youngest boy Cantor in the world and appeared all over the West Side. He was singing my Dad's music and the choirs in those days lacked the Jewish music that was sung in New York and composed by men like Zaidel Robner -- who was well-known among the Jewish followers in liturgical music -- and by my dad, so that when my brother brought my dad's music plus his own tremendous ability it was readily accepted in Chicago. So much so that no matter where he travelled around the world, he sort of came back to Chicago.

When Dad decided to leave New York, we were all quite young (it was right around my Bar Mitzvah time). When we decided to do that, we came to Chicago and we were readily accepted. Dad's liturgical music was instilled in us and we were six years, five years of age and if we were not already singing in choir -- in his choir -- then we were considered black sheep of the family. And it meant so much to us to gain Dad and Mother's favor that we learned the music at an early age -- both my brother Murray, my brother Dale and myself had the cantorial ability, the training, the background, to grace the pulpit before we even reached the age of 13.

So, when we came here as full cantors, actually, and we came to the northwest side of Chicago and...

I don't know, Norman, whether you remember the Galitzianer Schul, do you? It was on California and Hirsch. It was a magnificent structure. I don't know whether it's still there or not but it was a type of synagogue that the main auditorium held 2200 seats, exclusive of the

women's balcony.

**Schwartz:** It was separated Orthodox then.

**Lind:** Definitely. Conservatism was just becoming known. It wasn't too popular.

**Schwartz:** When would this be?

**Lind:** It would be in the year '33. It was the year of the Jewish Day -- remember Jewish Day at the World's Fair. [Note to our readers: *Chicago Jewish History* ran an article on the event by Walter Roth in our Spring, 1992 issue.]

**Schwartz:** Yes.

**Lind:** Well, my dad was chosen to participate with my brothers and myself as a quartet in Jewish Day, which was a big thrill for us. If you remember, Soldier Field was turned over to ah... Jewish history, just like the Jewish Historical Society. And a tremendous pageant was created. Leo Kopp controlled the music at the time. And it was the type of pageant that a Hollywood production could not do any better with the men carrying the Sefer Torahs down the main drag of Soldier Field. And then we were featured as the artists, which was a great thrill for us -- and the acceptance was so tremendous that even as youngsters we decided that Chicago was the greatest place for us. And we grew up here.

We grew up singing with Dad, first, for many years. And this is after touring all over the United States in practically every synagogue that you can think of in every city that had a Jewish population. My father and my brothers and I, as a quartet, appeared as Cantor Lind and Sons. And then we grew up and Dad tried very hard to compose and arrange *his* style for our modern music. But, try as he may and as hard as he did, we found the world was now ready for a different type of music ... from the liturgical music.

**Schwartz:** Where did your father get his training as a cantor?

**Lind:** Dad came from Austria, which is simply Galicia, and he sang with the cantors of old -- with the Zaidel Robner I mentioned -- and got his training from them.

Actually, he was self-taught. Despite that fact, today his music is in the library of Israel with all liturgical music. On many of the late Richard Tucker's records you will find my father's music. Jan Peerce's entire liturgical program is my dad's music.

**Schwartz:** What was your father's first name. I don't think you mentioned it.

**Lind:** Joshua. Joshua Lind. We now have a grandson, Joshua, who at present still can't sing. And we resent it.

My brothers and I, after due deliberation, decided to form a trio and that's when we left Dad. We had a famous little gag that we used to pull: we told dad that he had worked hard all his life for us, putting food on the table,

teaching us how to sing, making a living for all of us. Now we are going to form a trio and he can go out and work for himself. That was a gag we had going.

But we did form a trio and we did do our own arranging for a while. We went into the American field of music and found that as we grew we needed more men. Ray Charles, who later became Perry Como's arranger, was our arranger.

But you might be interested to know that the music Dad arranged for us in the American field -- away from the liturgy -- was such that it demanded the greatest respect no matter where we went, no matter what we sang. It couldn't be performed everywhere, only in the auditoriums of the world, big theaters where the attention was rapt, where we could give what was in our hearts and hear the heartbeats of the people. His music was so greatly accepted.

**Schwartz:** Well, for example, we did "Eli, Eli." That's his arrangement and we did a record of it that was most successful. Things like "My Yiddishe Mama" that he arranged for us. We had a lot of Israeli melodies that he would do. Despite the fact that we were known as an *American* trio and when we made pictures, [some people] even doubted the fact that we were Jewish, at times. We would insert one or two of those numbers and they would invariably tear the house down.

We had one great experience. We were in Montreal and they didn't remember that we [had been] there as children with my Dad -- we didn't expect them to -- and we were now playing in nightclubs in Montreal. And it was a B'nai B'rith night and they thought we were Swedish boys -- the name Lind lent to it. We closed with "Eli, Eli" and they stood up on the table and cheered. For three *schkutzim* to sing "Eli, Eli" -- they didn't understand it. And then I told them that our father is a cantor and they wouldn't believe it.

Brother Murray said, "I wonder what we have to do to convince you that we are telling you the truth" and they would laugh, thinking we were very funny. But we had in our music bag -- we always had our piano player with us -- the arrangement of the *Chazzanla Shabbos* which sings about the cantor coming for an audition. Again, Dad arranged it as a humorous arrangement. Well, after we did that they were convinced.



**Phil Lind in 1978**

*Photo by Norman Schwartz*

But it was the Jewish-feeling music that we received the greatest success with unless we went into a place where there weren't any Jews. [Sometimes] they took us because of some of the other records we made or some of the movies we made or some of the television appearances we made. Then we would not bring forth the Jewish music as we would like to because the occasion didn't call for it. ...

[Although we made an awful lot of money] my brothers were not happy. I don't think they were ever completely happy in the field of show business. I was, and I readily admit that. They felt the calling from G-d; they felt the calling to the pulpit and my father

certainly encouraged the calling. Although I think one of this proudest moments was when he finally accepted our appearances on the American stage and he came to the Chicago Theater and he saw the audience stand up and cheer us -- and from the wings he embraced us and kissed us and cried. I think he learned to accept our music in a theater that wasn't that bad.

It wasn't -- the American stage didn't mean that we were going to burlesque music of the liturgy or forsake the synagogue. But we did do a lot of night clubs. You had to do night clubs in those days, first for recognition, second for money. And when you dealt with night clubs, invariably you dealt with hoodlums. Somehow they were connected. And it was not a pleasant thing for my brothers who don't drink, who never fooled around and who found it most distasteful to be part of that atmosphere despite the great success we enjoyed.

I'm not going to tell you that I did enjoy it, but to me, show business was a tremendous challenge. I majored in drama in school right here in Chicago and then DePaul and always felt I belonged on the stage, whether it be singing or acting and this gave me a chance to reach the top ladder of success even if it be singing or vaudeville. It was still; part of show business and that's what I loved.

But the boys eventually decided -- we were all married then and the wives did not want us to go to fulfill a contract in England that gave the agent the right to keep us away for 52 weeks -- the boys decided at that time to give up the Lind Brothers and go back to the pulpit. I said personally that they'd regret it, that knowing schul politics as well as I do, having grown up in it, I didn't think I

wanted to live and be part of that thing that could happen. But the boys were very, very, very sincere. Their whole life was wrapped up -- is wrapped up -- in their belief in G-d and they felt that the calling they had, the Yeshiva background, was theirs. ...

**Orlinsky:** When you left to go out of the Lind Brothers, none of the boys had been cantors by themselves?

**Lind:** Oh, yes [they were].

**Orlinsky:** That's what I wondered...

**Lind:** Yes. It was cantors first, performers second and then cantors again. Both my brothers. My brother Murray, in New York, was a cantor, I think, at 10-11 years of age. My brother Dale was about eight or nine when he became a cantor. At ten he tried for New York and then he travelled all over the world, of which Chicago was his biggest city because they had a Jewish agent here at that time called Mr. Hyman who brought the big Jewish cantors and helped make his name for him.

**Orlinsky:** Oh, then they travelled.

**Lind:** That's correct.

**Orlinsky:** Because I know they both have had pulpits in Chicago.

**Lind:** Oh, yes.

**Orlinsky:** And that was afterwards, though.

**Lind:** After we broke up they took pulpits. Before that we were guest cantors. We were a trio of cantors ... and we were the first trio of cantors in the United States and davened in the synagogues. And I don't know whether these names would recall to you or not, but where Rosenblatt would perform, where Hirshman would be a guest cantor. Where Pinchik would perform. We were in the same era. We would perform in the same synagogues but as a trio of cantors. The novelty of being a trio was a great thing; we needed no choir with us.

**Orlinsky:** And then, when did you leave to go out as the Lind Brothers in entertainment?

**Lind:** We found that for three men to make a living doing nothing but cantorial music in the synagogues and observing the truly Orthodox way of life was hardly enough for American wives. And we went out -- and I'm trying to think of -- I think it was the Mothers of Judea -- the first one who engaged us. And it was at the Morrison Hotel that had a beautiful place for entertainment, the Terrace Casino at the Morrison Hotel. And it was at that place that we sort of introduced American Jewish music and it was accepted greatly. And I think we got around five or six offers for dates. ...

B'nai B'rith decided to call us and then Hadassah and

then the Zionist Organization and before you knew it we became so busily engaged doing more and more American Jewish stuff that we naturally fell into it.

We started to appear on WBBM and there we had to be an American trio, naturally. And WGN. And because the money wasn't as good as it could have been, we changed the name. At WGN we were called the Three Noteworthy's and had a different arrangement of songs and at WBBM we were the Three Lind Brothers. And Ben Bernie promoted us quite a bit. Eddie Cantor helped us quite a bit. These are names that are long since gone.

But then we found that the name Lind Brothers was sufficient. When they discovered one day, one of the critics in the paper couldn't understand why the Noteworthy's were using that name. But we were using Lind Brothers for B'nai B'rith and all the other things that brought us pretty good money. And the Noteworthy's were radio on WGN where

---

*We closed with "Eli, Eli" and they stood up on the table and cheered. For three schkutzim to sing "Eli, Eli" -- they didn't understand it. And then I told them that our father is a cantor and they wouldn't believe it.*

---

we thought we commanded a different type of respect.

**Orlinsky:** And then you did a lot of bond work?

**Lind:** Yes. At the beginning, out of Florida, we met with Henry Montour who started the Bond Drive in the United States and offered our services. We believed in it. And my brothers and myself, I think, did as many bond drives as humanly, physically possible for three men in the business to take up their time to do it. Then, when we broke up, I believe I was the only one left doing bond drives. And I proudly tell you we took in close to \$18 million.

We're talking about Israeli bonds -- Israel bonds. Are there any other kind of bonds?

[Laughter]

**Schwartz:** Well, you know, if you worked in the war it could be the U.S. bonds...

**Lind:** We sold them, too. Believe me, we did. Right from the stage in the Palace Theater in New York, in Washington and many other cities -- by special assignment of the government. You see, the Hadassah thought this was important -- and Bertha Read Rissman got an award for her activities getting Hadassah interested in selling U.S. bonds. And that's why I tried to make the...

**Orlinsky:** That's commendable.

**Lind:** I think that all the Jewish organizations rallied to the fore. You must realize at that time Israel was not even born... And the Jewish people, in my opinion, have always been the most patriotic people... □