

Look to the rock from which you were hewn
הביטו אל-צור הצבבתם



chicago jewish historical society

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CHICAGO JEWISH History

Doomed Poet

Maxwell Bodenheim, Writer from Jewish Ghetto, Led Tortured Life, Met Hard End

By Walter Roth

*In 1892, when literature and art in America
Presented a mildewed but decorous mien,
He was born.
During the first months of his life
His sense had not yet learned to endure
The majestic babble of old sterilities.*

From "Simple Accounts of a
Poet's Life" in *Introducing
Irony*, by Maxwell Bodenheim
(Boni and Liveright, 1922)

The Chicago Renaissance of Literature in the early part of the twentieth century had many luminaries who became great successes in American literature. Among them were Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Eunice Tietjens, Carl Sandburg and Ben Hecht. There was another one who was also a shining comet of the Chicago Renaissance, a Jew, a life-time compatriot of Ben Hecht, but whose personal career became such a failure that it is hard to convey the tragedy and horror that filled the later years of this man's life. His name was Max Bodenheim. He lived in Chicago for many years

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Publication Due in Fall:

Minsky Winners Announced

Eva Gross of Skokie and Morris Springer of Jerusalem are the co-winners of this year's Doris Minsky Award prize. Their respective manuscripts will be included in a book to be published by the Society and mailed to all members some time in the fall. The winning authors will each receive \$500 awards.

Springer's submission, *The Yeshiva, The Chayder, and I*

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Inside:

- Oral History Excerpt from Former Justice Seymour Simon
- Translating a Difficult Tombstone Inscription
- Renee Matthews Sings at Annual Meeting

President's Column

Society Welcomes Members Joining in the Last Quarter

On Sunday, June 6, 1993, we concluded another successful year of our "historical" efforts with a festive celebration (and annual meeting) at Temple Shalom. After a splendid brunch, Renee Matthews beguiled us with a nostalgic medley of American and Yiddish songs which evoked a wonderful reaction and great applause from the audience. It



Walter Roth

was a most appropriate rendition for our Society, for it was Renee's father, Avrum Matthews, who sang the lead role in "The Romance of a People" performed on July 3, 1933 at the Century of Progress" World's Fair at Soldier Field.

There are many Board members who contributed to our work during the year. The Minsky committee, consisting of Irvin Suloway, Norman Schwartz, Irving Cutler and its chairman, Charles Bernstein, selected our awardees for the year and are now in the process of arranging the publication of the new works, which will be mailed to our members in the Fall.

Leah Axelrod once again led our summer tours in 1992 and is now leading several tours this summer. We thank her and her tour leaders for their splendid efforts. Our bi-monthly programs continue to be outstanding and we

thank the program committee under its chairman, Burt Robin.

We also thank Herman Draznin for his continued role as our controller and treasurer. Herman has performed this function for the Society for many years and we are deeply appreciative for his financial guardianship. In the same spirit, we thank our new secretary, Clare Greenburg, and our office secretary, Eve Levin. Joe Kraus has been an outstanding success in his second year as editor of *Chicago Jewish History*. We are very proud of his achievements. In addition, we thank the entire Board of Directors in helping with the Society's programs.

Our Nominating Committee, under the chairmanship of Judge Sheldon Gardner, selected as nominees to our Board, Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel, Sol Gutstein, Seymour Persky and Sue Weiler. They were all elected at our annual meeting and we look forward to their presence on our Board.

And Norman Schwartz continued his tireless work as a researcher of the many questions that our members and non-members ask us for help in answering.

A number of our members concluded their terms on the Board, Daniel Beederman, Marian Cutler, Herbert Kraus and Stanley Rosen, and we thank them for their work and contributions to the Society as Board members. We look forward to their continued participation as members.

We wish all of you a good and healthy summer. □

It's been a quarter of growth for the Society and we would like to welcome the many new members who have joined in the last three months.

<i>Dr. Louis Bosches</i>	<i>Hilda Newman</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Dickman</i>	<i>Seymour Nordenberg</i>
<i>William Dolnick</i>	<i>Mel Noven</i>
<i>Maxine Hoffman</i>	<i>Mrs. Edward Oher</i>
<i>Betty Lans Kahn</i>	<i>Bernice Rosenberg</i>
<i>Mr. & Mrs. Fred Kramer</i>	<i>Bernard Sherman</i>
<i>Martha Mandel</i>	<i>North Suburban Synagogue Beth El</i>
<i>Melvin Marks</i>	<i>El</i>
<i>Bernard Neistein</i>	

We welcome each of them separately and all of them collectively. The job of telling the history of our community is possible only when all of us participate in it.

To aid in the mission of our Society, we encourage all of our members to participate in our ongoing projects. Look for announcements for our quarterly open meetings and consider participating in our oral history project, our proposed video history of the Jews of Chicago, and in the planning process behind the many events we undertake.

We are an entirely volunteer organization, so any contribution you can make to our work not only helps in our project but makes it possible in the first place.

What's more, we ask you to consider giving memberships to our Society to friends, family members or former Chicagoans who may have left the city but not gotten it entirely out of their hearts. Memberships include a subscription to our newsletter which we hope can work to involve Jews everywhere in recording and retelling our heritage. □

Society Elects New Board Members

The Society is proud to announce the four new members of the Board of Directors elected by the membership at the annual meeting on June 6. Rabbi Elliot Gertel, Solomon Gutstein, Seymour Persky and Sue Weiler have all been active for many years in different aspects of Jewish and Chicago history.

"I am delighted that these four have agreed to serve on our Board," Society President Walter Roth said. "They add a wide range of talent, expertise and energy and should make it possible for us to do some exciting work in the Society over the next few years."

Rabbi Gertel, leader of congregation Rodfei Zedek for the past five years, has a broad background in Jewish periodicals. He serves on the boards of *Conservative Judaism* and the *Jewish Spectator*. He also writes a regular column called "Media Watch" for the *Jewish Post and Opinion* that deals with the ways in which Jews are depicted on television and in the movies. In addition, he has contributed to *American Jewish History*, the journal of the American Jewish Historical Society.

At Rodfei Zedek he has been active in taking oral histories of congregation members and of Jewish synagogue architects. "I plan to give a set of those oral histories to the [Chicago Jewish] Historical Society," he said. "They are wonderful material."

Gertel has a particular interest in oral history as a tool for recovering local history. "It's an opportunity of being close to people who have the memories of a different time," he said, "and to make them comfortable in sharing them."

In addition to his other accomplishments, he was recently

elected president of the Hyde Park-Kenwood Interfaith Council.

Solomon Gutstein was practically born to be a Jewish historian. His father Morris Gutstein was the author of *The Jews of Newport*, a history of the Jews in Newport, Rhode Island and one of the first extensive histories of a Jewish community in America. Morris Gutstein also wrote *A Priceless Heritage*, one of the most extensive histories of Chicago Jewry ever written.

As Gutstein described the work of his father, "He was probably the one who took the study of Jewish history out of the back room and made it the focus of more serious study."

Gutstein himself has been active in historical writing. He and his father worked together on a history of the windows of Shaare Tikvah, a North Side synagogue. Since his father's death in 1987, Gutstein has completed the history which should be available very soon.

In addition to his work in history, he has written an analysis of the book of Psalms for an adult study group as well as a two-volume work on Illinois Real Estate law.

Seymour Persky is well known throughout Chicago and the country as an architectural historian and preservationist. Chairman of the Board of Parliament Enterprises Limited, he was recently presented with the American Institute of Architecture's Distinguished Service Award. He is also the Executive Vice President of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois and a board member of the Chicago Land Commission and the National Society of Architectural Historians.

A life-long Chicagoan, Persky sees Chicago producing a different kind of Jew than other places. "We have pride like other Chicagoans; we're tough like other Chicagoans; everything good and bad about Chicagoans we have," he said.

He pointed out as well that Jews in Chicago have had a peculiar relationship with other ethnic groups. "In New York, the Jews get along with the Italians. In Chicago they get along with the Irish," he said. "Most of us who are lawyers went to a Catholic school...look how close Mayor Daley and Abe Marovitz were.

"We have to respect our past. Chicago Jews have a personality we have to respect and we have to understand; we have to firstly acknowledge it. I think that much about Jews transcends restaurants. We should talk about our contributions to medicine, our contributions to law, to the bench and to academics.

"We have to admit as well our involvement in the 1920s and 1930s with the criminal element. I think [Society President] Walter Roth has done some very good work in that area."

Sue Weiler has already contributed to the work of Society. With the help of outgoing Board member Stanley Rosen, she obtained and helped transcribe the interview in last quarter's issue of *Chicago Jewish History* with labor leader Archie Aronin.

With a PhD in history from the University of Illinois at Chicago, Weiler is a professional historian. She currently works as the Executive Director of the Jewish Labor Committee in Chicago, is active with the League of Women Voters and the Chicago Area Women's Historical Conference, and is an adjunct faculty member at Roosevelt University.

She wrote her dissertation on the history of aging in New York from 1900-1930 and has published three articles out of that research.

Her particular interest is labor history, however. As she said, "Things that are written about Jewish labor is all on New York, but things happened in Chicago." □

Doomed Poet

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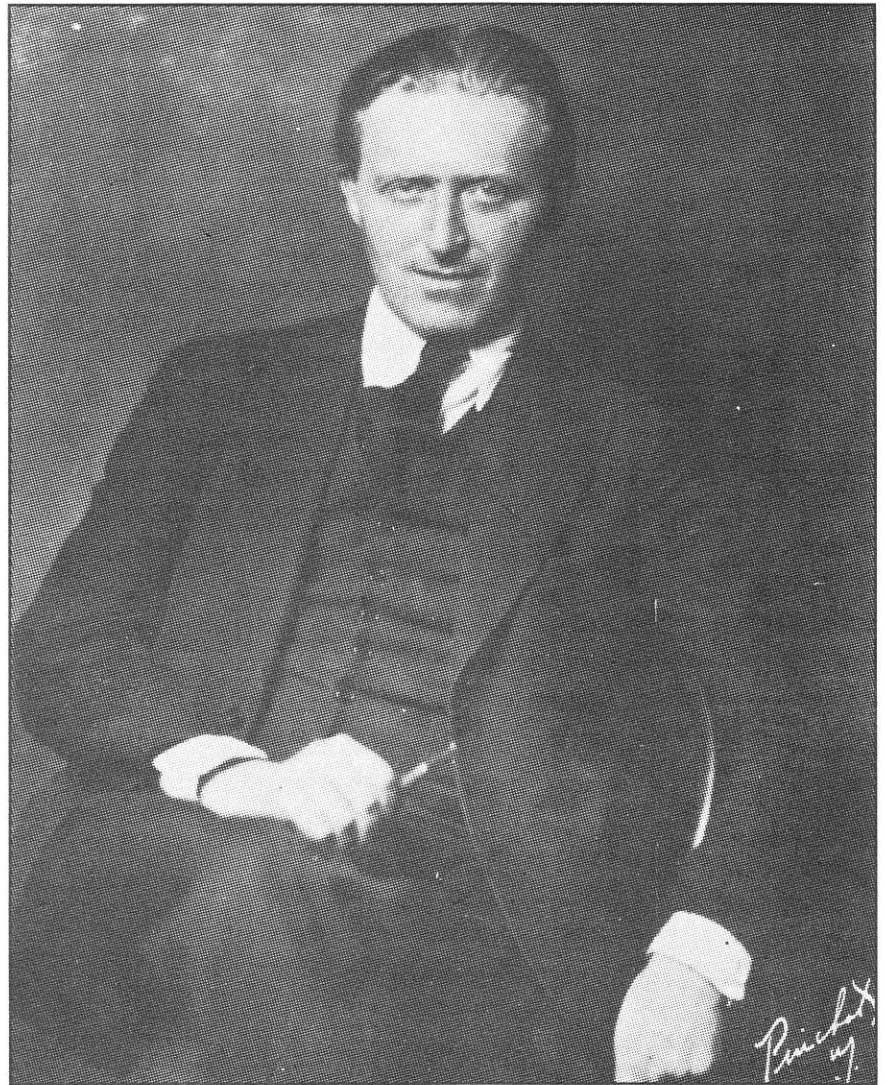
until about 1922. His works in many ways have come to epitomize the misery and degradation so characteristic of the big American cities, such as Chicago.

In his autobiographical poem quoted above, Bodenheim commences the poem by stating his birthdate as 1892, though his family Bible (printed in Hebrew, with French translation) records the year as 1893. He was born in Hermanville, a small town in Mississippi, of parents who had immigrated from Alsace. The town was named after his mother's brother, M.B. Herman.

Herman was a well-to-do merchant and surgeon while Bodenheim's father, Solomon, was a travelling whiskey salesman, clothing store clerk and financial failure. Bodenheim's mother, Carrie, a strong-willed woman, dominated the weak and failed Solomon. Around 1902, the family moved to Chicago, living in poverty and tension on Chicago's South Side.

Bodenheim attended Hyde Park High School for a time and then around 1908, fled Chicago. He worked odd jobs in the South for a time and finally enlisted in the American Army. After two years, he deserted, was caught, jailed and dishonorably discharged.

He returned to Chicago sometime around 1912. He began to write poetry and his works appeared in Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* and Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*. Bodenheim's biographer, Jack B. Moore writes that during this period "Bodenheim wandered through Chicago's Literary Bohemia, as the incarnate terrible child; sarcastic, sardonic, ironic; he behaved disgracefully but was recognized as a young talent in the heady, liberal,



Bodenheim in Prosperous Days

amorphous society. He was described as a golden-haired youth, with pale eyes and the looks of a pensive Christ."

It was at this time that Bodenheim met Ben Hecht, then a newspaper reporter, who wielded a sharp, sarcastic, ironic pen like Bodenheim and who had a self-hating view of traditional Jewish life, like Bodenheim. But while Hecht went on to fame and some wealth, producing successful plays and movies and changing his views on Judaism to Jewish Nationalism in order to combat Nazism in Germany, Bodenheim could not make a successful change.

In Chicago, in those early years, Hecht and Bodenheim wrote, played and made fun. In one of their more famous routines, they appeared before a literary society to debate, "Resolved, that people who attend literary debates are

imbeciles." Hecht would announce the affirmative to the audience and sit down. Bodenheim, would then announce that the presence of the audience to hear such a debate was conclusive proof that Hecht was correct, and so no further debate was necessary.

Hecht also later founded an underground newspaper, *The Literary Times*, of which Bodenheim was editor and principal writer. This biweekly newspaper was full of satire and ridicule of anyone and anything that Bodenheim and Hecht could deem important enough for their treatment.

Bodenheim not only wrote a great deal of poetry, but also produced plays and novels. In 1923, he published an autobiographical novel, *Blackguard*, in which Bodenheim introduced Carl Felman, a young Jew living on the fringes of society, returning to Chicago after serving in the Army. He slips into his parents' apartment, which stands with others "like factory boxes awaiting shipment, but never called for." The family, though Jewish had little Jewish culture. "They are middle-aged Jews with starved imaginations and an anger at the respectable poverty of their lives."

The mother comes from a wealthy family, but Felman's father hovers on the brink of financial failure. Both want

their son to stop taking writing seriously and "go out and get a regular job like a man."

She is the typical Jewish mother soon to become famous in American fiction: the martyred, guilt-driven woman driving her son to "success." The father, of course, is ultimately blamed for all failure. His weakness and softness have resulted in his lack of success. As the mother says, "All your wildness, Carl, has come from your father's side and not mine." Carl then leaves home, enters the world of Chicago poetry and severs his ties with his lower-middle class

Jewish heritage and his parents.

In the second part of the book, Carl has an ill-fated love affair, and leaves Chicago to be with his wealthy uncle, the man so often held up to Carl's father as a symbol of success. But Carl decides to leave Memphis and return to Chicago to live as a poet - as a blackguard.

At the end of the book, Carl joins with one of Bodenheim's most adored creatures - a prostitute. They live together in bliss "without touching each other and each will be the monk and nun that they should have been."

*At twenty-four his flesh became tired,
And to amuse his weariness
His hands wrote poetry.
He had done this before,
But only as a gleeful reprimand
to the speed of his limbs.*

--"Simple Account of a Poet's Life"

As in his novel, *Blackguard*, Bodenheim returned to Chicago and wrote poetry, novels and plays. He caroused with the new literary lights.

Bodenheim left Chicago in 1923... While Hecht went on to fame writing screenplays and plays in New York and Hollywood, Bodenheim descended into his living hell.

He was part of the avant-garde, a hippy and a "character." His plays and poems were read at Ben Reitman's Dill Pickle Club and

Hecht's Chicago Players Workshop.

He travelled East and met Eugene O'Neil. He then travelled with his wife Minna to Europe where they met T.S. Eliot and stayed with other important English and French poets and writers. He had written his first volume of poems for her entitled "Minna and Myself," containing many of his poems about nature, city life, old age and death. One of his poems illustrates his style in the early 1920's. In a poem titled "North Clark Street" he wrote:

Time and ghostly coffins

*Display their shameful greys and reds
 Against the passive, vividness of morning.
 No illusion of hope exists now,
 No dreamed of place of escape.
 Afternoon has fallen on this street.
 Like an imbecilic organ-grinder
 Grinning over his discords...
 Real men and women spin
 Their miracles of motion
 Upon the greyness of this street.*

In 1923, his "good friend" Ben Hecht wrote a novel called *Count Bruga*, about a caricature of a "Poet" modelled supposedly on the life of Bodenheim. It was vicious and mean, and repeated all the myths and tales then circulating about Bodenheim's Bohemian life-style. Bodenheim wrote a poem in his book of poetry, *Advice* which he titled "To a Friend" in which he wrote a reply to Hecht, but in a somewhat kinder tone:

*"Your head is steel cut in drooping lines
 They make a mask satirically meek.
 Your face is like a tired devil weak
 From many vapid, unsought wines.
 The sullen skepticism of your eyes
 Forever trying to transcend itself
 is often entered by a wistful elf
 Who sits naively unperturbed and wise.*

Bodenheim left Chicago in 1923 for New York, though he returned at various times, the last time apparently in 1952 when he was arrested for vagrancy. While Hecht went on to fame writing screenplays and plays in New York and Hollywood, Bodenheim descended into his living hell.

The book that contributed most to Bodenheim's reputation as a rogue and libertine was *Refinishing Jessica*, published in 1925. The character of Jessica sleeps with many men and Bodenheim described at length her sex life with words that would be considered mild today, but charges were brought against Bodenheim and his publishers for publishing an obscene and

pornographic book.

While Bodenheim was never called to the trial, he was described by witnesses as a Don Juan and lecher, belonging to the "Greta Garbo Social Club," a Greenwich Village club whose avowed purpose was seducing young innocents. Even though the publishers and Bodenheim were acquitted and sales of the book increased (it was the best seller of any of his novels), Bodenheim's reputation was ruined and Bodenheim's later life played down to his reputation.

He continued to write poetry, and some novels, but they were not accepted -- and he drifted into the dives of Greenwich Village and Manhattan's Lower East Side. He became associated with Communist fellow travellers and his espousal on behalf of the underdogs of society became more pronounced. His first wife divorced him, and he remarried and his second wife died a tragic death.

For a short time, he appeared to have worked with Hecht in his propagandist efforts in the early 1940's on behalf of Zionism and Jewish Revisionism. Little of the material that Bodenheim wrote in his attempt to regain his Jewish identity has remained in print. Ben Hecht in his book, *Letters from Bohemia*, quotes a sonnet written by Bodenheim during this period:

*"To Israeli Jews and to Gentiles"
 The scapegoats of the centuries have shaped
 A slow enduring miracle from pain.
 Their spirits, tortured, vilified and raped,
 Now climb, embattled, fused in growing gain.
 They claim as glory, exaltation, might.
 Plain hearts and brains with ordinary faults,
 They move with common Gentiles seeking light
 Against dark ignorances and assaults.
 And yet, this spread of understanding still
 Confronts sly hypocrites and hate-filled groups.
 Too often, words of tolerance and good will
 Slide slinking Gentile prisoners and their dupes.
 Intelligence can never yawn or flinch.
 It must fight hard for progress, inch by inch.*

Despite his own personal misery and glory,

this poem tells us how the Gentile world looked to Bodenheim during World War II, his appreciation of the Israeli Jews in their struggle and his mistrust of the Gentiles in their professed efforts on behalf of Jews. In this, he was as one with his friend, Ben Hecht, who not only mistrusted the Gentile world, but many Jews as well.

*In 1962 he died with a grin at the fact
That literature and art in America
Were still presenting a mildewed, decorous
mien.*

--"Simple Accounts of a Poet's Life"

In prophesying

his death in 1962, Bodenheim was in error as he may have been at the beginning of this poem when he wrote that he was born in 1892. In fact he was murdered on February 6 or 7, 1954. Our "Poet" had sunk deeper and deeper into poverty, drink and misery.

Like a character in one of his novels, he lived with a rather attractive younger woman, Ruth Fagan, whom Bodenheim called his wife. Bodenheim and his Ruth became homeless people in New York before that term became commonplace. Ruth befriended a drifter, Harold Weinberg, who offered her and Bodenheim a place to stay in his run-down hotel room.

No one knows exactly what happened, but whether drunk or sober, Weinberg attacked Ruth; Bodenheim came to her defense and was shot by Weinberg, who took a long hunting knife and stabbed Ruth to death.

Weinberg was caught on February 10 and brought to trial. He raved at the trial that, "I ought to get a medal. I killed two communists." He was committed to a State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Bodenheim was buried near Oradell, New Jersey in the Cedar Park Cemetery.

Hecht announced he was paying for the funeral, but some say, there is no proof that he ever did.

Bodenheim's place in American Literature, one hundred years after his death, is still uncertain. Like Hecht, he was a second generation American Jew, born in America of immigrant parents who could not comprehend their Jewish heritage, and sought to escape its confines and strictures. For this attempt he paid a heavy price of personal suffering and alienation.

Later Jewish writers would write on the same theme. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* has a story closely paralleling Bodenheim's salesman father's relationship with his rich brother-in-law; Bud Shulberg in *What Makes Sammy Run* carries

the theme of Jewish alienation in an American capitalistic society further; and, of course, the spokesman for all Jewish parental "martyrs," Philip

Roth brings it all to a modern setting.

As for his place in American literature, Bodenheim is mostly remembered for his poetry, as his fiction has largely been forgotten. Jack B. Moore, has summed it up this way:

His poetry was noteworthy for its wit, its fancy, its individuality, its humor, its use of jazz rhythms and idioms, and especially its incisive portrait of city life. It is in the city that Bodenheim finds the congeries of destructive forces most concentrated, therefore the inhumanity of city life is his frequent target...In his emphasis upon the individual's need for private and sexual liberation his attacks upon the impersonal bigness of highly materialistic American society...he seems to anticipate much of the cultural dissent of the 1960's. □

*In prophesying his death in 1962,
Bodenheim was in error ... In fact he
was murdered on either February 6
or 7, in 1954*



Tombstone of Barnett Novitsky
 Photograph by Norman Schwartz

Translating a Difficult Tombstone Inscription from Hebrew to English

*Unusual Abbreviations and References Make
 Reading Tombstone Good Model for Study*

Pictured above is the grave of Barnett Novitsky at Oakwoods Cemetery. To the right of it is a literal translation of the inscription by Ronald Krebs, an undergraduate and president of Hillel at Princeton University. As the footnotes underneath the translation indicate, the inscription contains several obscure abbreviations and phrasings that may appear on other tombstones.

The Society first became involved in the project when Richard Sobel, a former Chicagoan working on his genealogy, contacted former Society President

Here is Buried:
Our father, a man of truth and uprightness,
Who lived in virtue and was dear,
Reb Tanchum Dov², the son of Reb Israel
Yehuda³ Novitzky.⁴
He passed away on the day of the holy
Sabbath,⁵ the tenth of Nissan.
May he be a remembrance for us.⁶
The year 1901 according to a small
chapter.⁷
May His Soul be Bound in the Bondage of
Life.⁸

Footnotes

1. The Hebrew is an abbreviation "pn," "po nikbar."
2. Although family tradition relates that his name was "Tanchum Ber," there is no contradiction. Dov is Hebrew for "bear," and "Ber" is the Yiddish equivalent. It was common to give both the Hebrew and Yiddish names on a headstone. For example, a friend's name is "Joshua Chaim, the son of the Rabbi, Yitzchak Isaac."
3. Interestingly, Yehudah is misspelled on the tombstone. It should end with the letter "hey," not "aleph."
4. The term "Reb" does not mean that they had rabbinic ordination. Rather, it was a term of respect that was very widely used. Such is still the case in many Hasidic sects.
5. The Hebrew is an abbreviation "shk," "shabbat kodesh," holy Sabbath.
6. The translation does not convey what the words really mean. They actually convey the idea expressed by the following: "May his soul be in Heaven for our merit."
7. The reference to "small chapter" refers to methods of dating. According to the Jewish calendar, the year is currently 5753. When the date is written out in full, it is considered according to the "perek gadol," the great chapter. But when written out in short (i.e. only the 753) it is considered according to the "perek katan, the small chapter. (The Hebrew is an acronym form, "pk.")
8. The phrase is an abbreviation in the Hebrew and is standard on Jewish tombstones.

Norman Schwartz for help in his work. Schwartz located the grave of Novitsky, Sobel's cousin, and requested that Sobel supply the Society with a copy of the translation.

We present the tombstone and translation as a means of sharing the fruits of an unusual inquiry and in the hope that it might answer questions some of you have in your own research. We invite our readers to share similar findings with us.

For information on Society research, contact Schwartz at the Society office. □

-- Geoff Heller

Julia Kramer Speaks on Origins of National Council of Jewish Women

In a talk delivered at the Society's April 18 meeting, Julia Kramer discussed the origins of the National Council of Jewish Women. Focussing on founders Hannah Solomon and Sadie American, two women out of very different social milieus, Kramer also discussed the Council's founding in the context of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

Solomon has gone down in history as the founder of the Council and she is certainly more responsible for its inception than anyone else. In 1893, the 35 year-old Solomon and her German-Jewish family were members of Emil Hirsch's socially acceptable reform Sinai Temple and so moved in the same circles as the gentile women organizing the Women's Congress Auxiliary. Invited to serve on the governing committee of the Parliament of Religions, Solomon determined that the Jewish Denominational Congress of the Parliament ought to serve as a means for organizing Jewish American Women to serve as a charitable organization of the sort that was popular among upper-class American women at the time.

According to Kramer, Solomon pulled together a wide variety of people for her undertaking. Whereas discussions in the existing Men's Jewish Congress centered on Jewish philosophy and doctrine as reflected in the Reform tradition, Solomon included civic reformers, educators, and religionists. The highlight of the Jewish Women's Congress was the formation of a permanent national organization to represent all Jewish

women (despite the absence of any Orthodox congregants at the Congress). Curiously, Solomon did not give the long, rousing speech that called for the creation of what became the National Council of Jewish Women; instead she gave the honor to the woman who would emerge as her chief rival for control of the new group's direction: Sadie American.

The only child of a German-born dry goods tradesman who had changed his name in a fit of enthusiasm for his adopted country, American came from a markedly different social circle than Solomon.

The "cause" of Judaism had bound them together but the "sharply defined line that exists between the wage-earner and the home-maker" began to separate the two

In her speech, she dwelled on the idea of a woman's duty to reach beyond her own personal interests and assume a role "in the representations of Judaism." Such a call to action grew in part out of the impulse common to many German Jews to assimilate into the American body politic without losing their Jewish identity altogether. It represented as well a Jewish impulse to emulate the "new" philanthropic efforts of many upper class gentiles. As American put it, philanthropy was for the educated classes to help working women, boys, and girls to "lift themselves up" by teaching them "self-reliance and independence." By living and working among the lower classes, not as "benefactors or patrons" but as genuine helpmates, the philanthropists would bring about the desired social change.

In its early years, the Council remained in the hands of upper-class

German Jews, chiefly guided by the charismatic Solomon but aided by American's work as corresponding secretary. At first the two were a formidable team, working together both in the Council and as members of the Chicago Women's Club and the Civic Federation of Chicago. As the organization evolved, however, the sharing of power became strained. The "cause" of Judaism had bound them together but the "sharply defined line that exists between the wage-earner and the home-maker" began to separate the two. The tensions between the single, self-supporting American and Solomon reflected tensions that were becoming increasingly apparent between Reform and Orthodox women and that came to a head at the 1900 Triennial Convention of the Council in Cleveland. Notwithstanding the Council's passage of a resolution favoring Sabbath observance on Saturdays, American

delivered a guest sermon in which she advocated Sunday as the "Lord's Day." Solomon and others accused her of being tactless, power hungry, and insensitive to the Council's wishes. Reelected nonetheless to the position of corresponding secretary, American promised Solomon that henceforth she would do as she was bid; later, American moved to New York and became the executive secretary of the Council, a paid staff position.

According to Kramer, the strong cause that had brought Solomon and American together had been their shared identities as women and as reform-minded German Jews bent on creating an American-Jewish identity modelled on American Protestantism. Yet American discovered that where power and leadership was concerned, it was hard to challenge the already established leader.

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Book Review:

History of American Jewry Impressive but Mistaken in Parts

Of the five volumes in the recently published landmark history, *The Jewish People in America*, commissioned by the American Jewish Historical Society, the third, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920*, is in several respects the most interesting and significant. Whereas the first two volumes featured a slow expansion and relatively painless integration of early arrivals into the American landscape, Professor Sorin's book deals with the arrivals of a seemingly indigestible mass of Eastern European Jews whose integration was delayed by their tendency to mass together in cities rather than spreading throughout the land.

The way in which they recreated European-style enclaves and clung to "foreign" ways dismayed both the earlier arriving Sephardic and "German" Jews from Central Europe as well as many gentile Americans who wanted them to disappear into the American melting pot and emerge completely homogenized. Most of these Eastern European Jews with their drive to succeed and their respect -- indeed thirst -- for education moved relentlessly into American life without disappearing into the pot. They typified the not yet articulated notion of cultural pluralism. It soon also became apparent that they were not to remain part of a relatively docile American working class.

The tensions caused by the way of life adopted by this immigrant group and the conflicts they created constitute the heart of *A Time for Building* and Gerald Sorin does a commendable job of portraying them

after sketching in the state of American Jewish life on the threshold of the new migration. He also provides a remarkably lucid portrayal of Jewish life in Eastern Europe as the nineteenth century ended and the new century began, making clear the causes of the emigration from the Old World. After discussing the mechanics and machinations of the immigration process itself, Sorin begins his treatment of the new immigrant settlements, usually in a "ghetto" in one or another major U.S. city.

*A Time for Building:
The Third Migration 1880-1920*

By Gerald Sorin

Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins
University Press, 1992.

306 Pages. \$45.

(Volume 3 of *The Jewish People in
America*)

Reviewed by Irwin J. Suloway

As a reviewer, I sympathize with the task faced by the author as he attempts to trace and generalize upon the new immigrant experience throughout the United States without overemphasizing the East Coast and the New York City area in particular. (Indeed, an argument can be made that such emphasis would not be overemphasis at all inasmuch as more than half the Jewish population of the country lived on the East Coast at the time.) His treatment of the immigrant experience in other cities is commendable if brief and reflects an honest if not too thoroughly researched attempt to reflect the broader Jewish experience.

Yet by treating in his longest chapter, "New York as the Promised City," such general topics as family relationships, educational aspirations, *landmanschaften*, and Yiddish language culture, he makes them and others appear to be New York rather than broadly-based phenomena.

His discussions of other major centers of Jewish immigration seems to lack the depth and variety that familiarity with broader treatments of local Jewish histories would provide. Often such treatment relies on only a few specialized studies dealing only with certain aspects of a community's history. This said, I do want to emphasize both the enormity of Sorin's task and the generally commendable results produced.

Other reviewers have noted a bias toward Conservative or even Traditional Judaism in the five-volume series. This volume seems to reflect such leanings only when the author implies that Conservatives had already won the battle for the allegiance of the immigrants by 1920, when the volume ends. In reality, Conservative Judaism was much too young and feeble at that time to have been so successful, though later it would prove to achieve notable success. Some indication of the numbers of Eastern European immigrants (and their children) who had indeed made the transition to Reform would have been enlightening and possibly more balanced.

Soren's treatment of politics, Zionism and labor and of such communal bodies as the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress hits the high spots and reveals the steady movement of the new immigrants into Jewish and American life. One of the book's major strengths is its even-handed treatment of the relationship between established German Jews and the Eastern European newcomers. While not minimizing the conflicts and condescension, he makes clear the positive, generous, and necessary contributions made by German Jews to immigrant acclimatization and integration. This slow moving-together of the two groups was already underway by 1920.

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Minsky Winners

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deals with his recollections of growing up as a student of Hebrew and Judaism in a succession of Chicago-area schools. Gross's *Memories of the Manor* recalls the south side Jeffrey Manor Jewish community that flourished in the late 1940s and 1950s and its influential synagogue, Congregation Kehilath Israel.

According to Society Board member Charles Bernstein, chairman of the Minsky Awards committee, "We ordinarily look to publish a single manuscript as the prize winner. This year, the committee felt that both of our winning manuscripts had the merits we were looking for. We are very pleased with both of them."

Although currently living in Israel, Springer grew up in Chicago in the decades before World War II and brings an astonishing memory for detail to his description of the religious schools of the time. With a PhD in French from the University of Chicago and having taught for years at Roosevelt University, he works currently as an opera critic.

According to Springer, *The Yeshiva, The Chayder, and I* is something he has worked on for years. On being notified of his winning the Minsky Award, he wrote in a letter to Bernstein, "I am gratified at the good news...Perhaps you will better

understand why when I tell you that the portion called "The Year of the Big Sunburn" is at this writing 47 and a half years old (!!), having been composed at the Atlanta Ordnance Depot right after World War II ended, in the summer of 1945, when the idea of writing pieces about my growing up in Lawndale finally began to take some concrete shape.

"We ordinarily look to publish a single manuscript as the prize winner. This year, the committee felt that both of our winning manuscripts had the merits we were looking for. We are very pleased with both of them."
-- Minsky Award Chairman Charles Bernstein

"I leave it to you to imagine my satisfaction at the prospect of *finally* seeing it in print!"

Gross has lived in Skokie for most of the last 20 years, but she brings a keen eye to her time in Jeffrey Manor. *Life in the Manor* consists of several distinct chapters drawn from a longer work of hers, *Chicago Lace*. Each chapter weaves a particular theme or incident throughout the community she knew and illuminates not only the events of her family's life, but of the entire neighborhood as well.

A former teacher, she currently devotes much of her time to writing. "I wake up every day at 5 a.m. and write until about 9 a.m.," she said. Her efforts have been rewarded as she has received several Women of Cable Awards for her work on *Beyond the Magic Door* and is a two-time winner

of Chicago's annual Dial-a-Poem competition.

In addition to the religious children's stories and poetry that have won her notice, she has completed three unpublished novels about the Holocaust. Born in Hungary and arriving in the United States in 1948, she is a Holocaust survivor herself and knows first hand the terrors she describes.

During her acceptance speech at the Society's annual meeting, Gross paid tribute to Rabbi Elliot G. Einhorn, the leader of Congregation Kehilath Israel who passed away recently, and dedicated her Minsky Award to his memory.

The Minsky Awards were established by former Society Board Member Joe Minsky in honor of his late wife, Doris Minsky, one of the Society's founders. Joe Minsky himself died within the last year, leaving the Society without someone whose work made possible the publication of otherwise unavailable documents in Chicago Jewish history.

The first volume of the Minsky Award publication, featured the first two Award winning manuscripts *Memories of Lawndale* by Beatrice Michaels Shapiro and *Chicago's Jewish Street Peddlers* by Dr. Carolyn Eastwood. That volume was so well received that it went into a second printing and copies of that second printing are now virtually sold out. □

Space Available for Loop Walking Tour

There are still spaces available for the Society's final tour of the summer, a walking tour of the Loop area on August 22 led by Board members Leah Axelrod, Judge Sheldon Gardner, and Norman Schwartz.

People interested in taking part should contact Leah Axelrod at (708) 432-7003. □

Corrections:

Due to an editing error, the oral history excerpt with Archie Aronin from the last issue of the newsletter confused Morris Seskin, a Chicagoan

who worked with *The Daily Forward* and helped Aronin early in his career and Boris Shiskin who worked with the national AFL-CIO in New York and visited Chicago often.

In addition, Marvin Rogoff should have been identified as being with the Dade County Equal Opportunity Commission. □

Singer Renee Matthews Performs at Annual Meeting

The highlight of this year's annual meeting on June 6 at Temple Shalom was the singing of Renee Matthews.

Running through a variety of Yiddish, Hebrew and English songs, Matthews kept the crowd of 150 entertained throughout the afternoon.

Matthews's performance at the annual meeting was appropriate in two ways. First, she was scheduled to appear at the annual meeting two years ago, but a last minute conflict forced her to cancel. Second, she has been a friend to the Society as a



source or information on her father, the noted Cantor Avrum Matthews.

Society President Walter Roth tells the story that he was at work researching his series of articles on the

Jewish pageants of Ben Hecht when he noticed that Avrum Matthews had performed as cantor at both the "Romance of a People" and "We Shall Never Die." The name sounded familiar to him from Renee Matthews first engagement with the Society, so he contacted her to find out whether she was related.

Not only is Renee Matthews the daughter of Avrum Matthews, but she has preserved his papers. As a result, she provided Roth with much of the material essential to the articles he eventually wrote.

Accompanying Matthews on the piano was Jerry Presskill who appeared as part of a Society annual meeting program two years ago as well.

Review

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Errors, perhaps inevitable in a work of such scope, are present. No clothing worker in the first years of the century put zippers into trousers; Baja is not the name of an area in California but a Mexica-governed peninsula south of it; Chicago has no West End neighborhood; Hannah Solomon founded not only a Chicago chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women but founded the entire organization itself. Perhaps most astonishing to Chicago readers is the consistent misspelling of Bernard Horwich's so well-known name. Readers more familiar with the histories of other cities may find similar errors. Johns Hopkins Press editors should know when to use *principal* and *principle*.

Of course this is carping and nitpicking at a book which, with its sisters volumes admirably fills a real need and which should be an authoritative reference work for many years to come. When the second edition appears, these minor errors

should disappear and the work will be even better.

Kramer

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American could not match Solomon's informal connections through her family, social, cultural and business ties. This network, although not part of the Council itself, still provided a strong base by which the fledgling Council's work was communicated to the public for approval.

It is to Solomon's credit that these class-influenced power struggles, which threatened to overwhelm the causes for which the organization was founded, did not destroy the organization itself. Her desire to preserve and promote Judaism in a nation that had declared itself Christian and in a Jewish community veering toward assimilation, was a strong glue that kept the women of the Council together despite their differing views and economic backgrounds.

Otherwise, Kramer pointed out, the National Council of Jewish Women

might never have celebrated its centennial this year as a continuing significant social and philanthropic body.

--Geoff Heller

Gold in the Attic

One way you can consider helping the Society in our efforts to preserve and retell the history of the Jews of Chicago is to donate archival material that you have tucked away in old drawers, trunks, boxes, or attics.

Given the constraints of our own limited archival storage space, we cannot take most documents relating to individual families. What we are looking for instead are documents relating to the history of the larger community. This might include synagogue directories, programs from Jewish events, vintage photographs or anything else that gives the flavor of Chicago Jewry in an earlier time.

There is no telling how useful your forgotten scraps might be. To a historian, it may be as if you have gold in your attic.

Oral History Excerpt:
Justice Seymour Simon
Talks of his Political Roots

The following excerpt from an oral history interview with former Illinois State Supreme Court Justice and former Chicago Alderman Seymour Simon was conducted on November 7, 1981 by Society board members Sol Brandzel and Sid Sorkin. Simon is currently a partner with the Rudnick and Wolfe law firm..

This excerpt concerns the beginning of Simon's career in Chicago politics.

Brandzel: Now we're starting to get into the political phase?

Simon: Yes.

Brandzel: When did that start and what prompted your interest in it?

Simon: Being a lawyer, being a debater, and loving the New Deal naturally I had an interest in politics. I watched it in Washington on a national scale while I was a New Deal lawyer in the anti-trust division of the U.S. Justice Department, but I didn't have any real opportunity or time to participate. When I came back from the war and started working for Harold Schradzke, I came to know my precinct captain, and I got to know the Democratic Committeemen of the 40th ward in which I lived, Christ Jenson, and particularly I got to know the man who became alderman of the ward in 1947, Ben Becker. In the aldermanic election of 1947 I probably made a contribution to Ben Becker, I probably rang a few doorbells, not many. In 1948, I recall I assisted my precinct captain. After we got through with the precinct at night we stopped in at the neighborhood tavern and had a few beers. We used to meet there, and we'd say "Gee, what damn liars these people are, why can't they tell the truth?", because you'd go to the doors and they'd all say they were going to vote for Harry Truman, and we didn't believe them. But they were telling the truth. During those years I felt politics was a hobby and that I'd better stick to practicing law and getting some clients, make some money, and develop some security. I was kind of a dilettante around the 40th ward Democratic organization because I didn't depend on it for my living, I used to come and go as I pleased. In those

years, 1949 and 1950, I was getting a lot of cases outside Chicago so I was away from the city quite a bit, but I'd make some contributions to my local ward organization. In politics, in an organization, anyone who isn't getting anything out of it and makes contributions is a different sort of animal.

Brandzel: Is a rarity.

Simon: Yes, is a rarity. Once in a while at 40th Ward meetings I would be called on to give a speech and in those days I could rouse them up a little, and sometimes pretty good. In 1952 I remember Ben Becker said "What do you hang around for like this?", and I said "Well, I'd like to run for office some day." So he said, "You know you'll never be able to run unless you become a precinct captain; take a precinct." I said, "I don't want to be a precinct captain." But Ben insisted so I became a precinct captain then. Three years later Ben Becker, whose term was up as alderman, this was in 1954, was selected to run by Richard J. Daley as his candidate for city clerk. They needed someone to replace Becker as a candidate for alderman. On a Sunday morning I was down in my office working getting ready for a trial, I got a call from Ben saying they wanted me to come to Christ Jensen's apartment that night and discuss my running for alderman. That was probably some time in early December, 1954. I went there, and that's how I got to run for alderman in the 1955 election.

Brandzel: How long were you alderman?

Simon: I was alderman of the 40th ward from April, 1955, until November 1961. I had been re-elected in that period, in the best way to get re-elected -- I got re-elected without any opponent, in 1959. Then I served as alderman until 1961.

Brandzel: During that period, were you a favorite? Were you considered part of the Daley clan?

Simon: Well, I thought I was a maverick but a lot of the newspapers thought I was a Daley spokesman. I'll tell you why. Either the Tribune or Sun-Times ran an article about me, and it said that I had come in there as a freshman alderman and in a very short time I had become a spokesman for Daley on the floor, and I was an assistant to Alderman Keane, and Parky Cullerton, who was finance committee chairman, in expressing the Democratic position, but I never thought I was. I think this was just before O.W. Wilson came here. A few days after this, a few weeks after this, I was talking to Daley about O.W. Wilson.



I told him I didn't like the skirting of the law which required the Police Commissioner to be a resident of Chicago, and I thought I ought to vote against Wilson. Daley says, "How can you do it? Here you are, an administration spokesman. How will that look?" Well, I think Daley had read the same paper I had.

Brandzel: He hadn't told you of that situation?

Simon: No, he hadn't ever told me that before. (They laugh.)

Brandzel: Apparently you got it by default.

Simon: I got it by that newspaper article. So, I followed the Democratic position often. On the other hand, I remember in January, 1961, Al Robbin wanted to get the clay pit, which is now the area of Winston Towers, rezoned to build apartment buildings there. No one envisioned anything like Winston Towers. He was going to build townhouses there. We were thinking, and I'm sure Al was too, thinking in terms of two and three story apartment buildings, maybe

townhouses. Well, the area, as you know, is primarily Jewish and there was a great deal of opposition in the area to have this rezoning. The day we considered the rezoning, people came down in buses, mostly Jewish; they jammed the galleries. Some people had spoken to me about it, and I had said that I wouldn't vote for the rezoning. So, the debate started and I got up and said that I was opposed to it, it was on a preliminary motion but I would reserve my remarks until we got to the issue on the merits of the rezoning ordinance. At which point, Tom Keane came up to me, he said, "Look, I wish you'd vote for this rezoning." I said, "I won't do it, I can't do it." So he said, "All right, if you can't vote for it then please don't speak against it." So I said, "Well, I'm going to." He said, "Well, I'm asking you to. Vote the way you want but don't speak against it." I said, "I'm going to speak against it." And, I did speak against it.

That afternoon we got on a Baltimore and Ohio train to go to Washington for the Kennedy inauguration. My wife was with me, Keane was there, all the Democratic politicians were there, the committeemen, and we had a drawing room. My wife had brought food, there was liquor in there, people dropped in and had a drink, and Keane came by and I invited him in. He said, "After what you did to me today I wouldn't dare go into that room and taste anything; you'd probably poison me." Well, we had a pretty good crowd of his friends in the room, so he stood outside talking to people but he wouldn't come in the room, and he wouldn't talk to me anymore. Finally, we got to Washington, and I was having a luncheon there at which I had my old Navy Commodore, W.R. Carter, the man who ran the supply operation to which I was assigned, and Keane finally consented and came to the luncheon. So I did what I wanted to do, what I thought was right, and what I had to do, most of the time in the city council.

Brandzel: Were there any other Jews on the council at that time?

Simon: Oh sure, there were a lot of Jews. Depres was there, Jack Sperling was there, Phil Shapiro of

the 39th ward, Sidney Deutsch was on the council at that time. I mentioned Phil Shapiro but he wasn't there in 1955, he came in 1959. The 49th ward had Hartigan, Neil Hartigan's father. Sidney Deutsch was still there from the 24th ward, Alan Freeman was there from the 48th ward, and that was the extent of the Jewish representation.

Brandzel: Did you ever have any sense when you served with those fellows, along with the others, that you had any common interests that you pursued as a block at any time? Any feelings about the fellows on the council at that time? Did you have any sense of special concern about that?

Simon: Well, I always had a feeling that the regular machine politicians were a little suspicious of me. Their attitude was that they didn't know how far I would go with them, because I was practicing law and it was obvious to them that I didn't depend on being an alderman for a living. If I ceased being an alderman I could go on eating. From that stand point they always were uncertain as to what I might do.

Brandzel: What about the other politicians who were active in the party but were not (unintelligible), but guys like Arvey and (unintelligible). To what extent were you associated with them in determining what Democratic policy would be?

Simon: Well, very little. I always admired Colonel Arvey. I have the greatest of respect for him; he was a great man. He was one of the great Jews of my lifetime, in America. But there was never any professional relationship between us, politically. I used to see him socially. I asked him to come to a meeting in our ward when I first ran. He came there and he made a brilliant speech. But he would never call me in and ask me my views or suggest that we operate together in a certain way, or stand together.

Brandzel: There was no Jewish block, as such, that was operating together?

Simon: Right, that we talked and advanced as a group. There was the Donkey Club but I didn't consider that that was a...

Brandzel: What was the Donkey Club?

Simon: The Donkey Club was an organization of

Jewish precinct captains. They used to have meetings and speakers, and play cards after, and have coffee. Most of them were from the 24th ward. They started it and then they spread out to other wards. There was, of course, always a suspicion about it. The suspicion was that this was an effort on the part of the 24th ward to find a foothold in another ward.

I overlooked this. In those days, before an election, there would be a meeting called of all the Jewish precinct captains in the city. It was called by Arvey and Arthur Elrod. We would meet at the Covenant Club. On a Saturday morning before the election -- it shouldn't have been on a Shabbes probably (laughter) -- we would get there and they would exhort the Jewish precinct captains to get out and turn in a big vote for the

Democratic candidates. They'd have some of the Democratic candidates there as well.

Brandzel: This was at the Covenant Club?

Simon: They were usually held at the Covenant Club. Now one thing that I recall. Shortly after I became an alderman, Charles Swibel, who was a member of the Chicago Housing Authority...

Brandzel: Even then. (laughter.)

Simon: Yes. And the chairman of the Chicago Housing Authority was a general. I've forgotten his name. He started to attack Swibel and I felt the attack had some overtones of anti-semitism. I went to Arvey and asked him if he thought that I should try to help Swibel in the City Council Committee hearing. This was coming up before a City Council Committee, this whole dispute between Swibel and the General. I forget the guise in which it came before the committee, but there was going to be a discussion of it, so I asked Colonel Arvey if he thought that I should be helpful. He said yes. I didn't know Swibel, so he called Swibel in and we had lunch together -- at the Covenant Club I remember. That's the first time I met Swibel.

Swibel told me his side of the story. And when the committee meeting came I pictured this General, as I believe he was, as a Captain Queeg in the Caine mutiny court marshall trial. That seemed to be the kind of person and chairman he was. □

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