

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



chicago jewish historical society

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# CHICAGO JEWISH *History*

## Scrapbook Provides Glimpses of An Unusual Chicago Jewish Life

*Parts of Davey Miller Story Unfold as Record Becomes Available to CJHS*

by Walter Roth

Some time ago, Sylvia Friedman, the daughter of Davey Miller, the famous Chicago prizefight referee, permitted me to make a copy of her father's scrapbook. The scrapbook is made up of newspaper clippings, personal letters and photographs detailing the public life of Davey Miller over the approximately thirty years he was Chicago's best-known boxing referee as well as a noted restaurateur. Almost like a time capsule, the scrapbook affords us a look back at a tough and generous man who helped shape Chicago and Chicago Jewry in an inimitable rough-and-tumble way.

Davey first won fame as the "protector" of Jews on the old West Side when his skills as a boxer helped keep anti-Semitic toughs away from otherwise defenseless Jews. The scrapbook picks up his story later, however, after he had already acquired respectability as a licensed referee and well-known man about town. He put the book together himself in the early 1950s, some time after suffering a stroke. The book is in virtually random order, and each page hints at yet another chapter of his rich and varied life.

### *Bribe Offer Revealed*

An invitation card for a testimonial dinner in his honor is the first item in the scrapbook. That dinner, which marked the end of Davey's public career, served also as a coda to his years as a boxing referee. Arch Ward, sports editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, was the principal speaker and over five hundred guests attended. Ward pointed out that Davey was a referee in 1923 at the first boxing tournament sponsored by the *Tribune*. Miller was also in the ring at the *Tribune's* first Golden Gloves meet in 1928. At the dinner, Davey received a trophy from the Illinois Boxing Commission and told the audience that his proudest moment in the ring came when he refereed the heavyweight

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## March 24 Meeting To Be at Campus Hillel Center

*Speaker To Tell of West Side Immigrant Experience*

The immigrant experience in the Maxwell Street area will be the focus of the Society's Spring meeting to be held on Sunday, March 24. The speaker will be Dena Polachek Epstein, who recently edited a book of her mother's memoirs of growing up at Hull House during the early years of this century.

The meeting will be held in the new Hillel Center building on the campus of the University of Illinois—Chicago and will also feature a guided tour of the Hull

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Davey Miller was a familiar name indeed to persons living in Lawndale during the first half of this century. As a restaurant owner, fight referee and "protector" of Jews menaced by anti-semitic street toughs and gangs, he became a legend in his own time. His daughter recently made available for photocopying by the Society a scrapbook Miller compiled during the last years of his life. From that fascinating record, Society President Walter Roth has prepared this account centering on Miller's career as a fight referee and discoverer of champions. Much more remains to be written about other aspects of Davey Miller's careers, and the scrapbook recently made available to the Society should prove valuable to such efforts.

# President's Message

## A Fruitful Trip To New England

I recently had the good fortune to be taken on a private tour of the building housing the library and archives of the American Jewish Historical Society in Waltham, Massachusetts. My host was Bernard Wax, the Executive Director of the AJHS, a charming and friendly man known to many of us, as he lived and studied in Chicago for many years. The building is located in a lovely setting on the campus of Brandeis University.

As one enters, there are scores of portrait paintings of famous colonial Jews that quickly reveal the legacy of the Jewish establishment which lived and prospered along the eastern seaboard a century or so before the first Jews arrived in Chicago. These colonial Jews seem to have been as lordly and wealthy as their Christian neighbors. Among the paintings are those of their little sons (dressed in girls' clothing during their early years, as was the custom of the times) and their wives adorned with the finest lace and jewelry.

One of the proudest possessions of the AJHS is an original notebook of Emma Lazarus containing some of her poetry, including the famous lines from the poem "Colossus," which appear on the base of the Statue of Liberty. The great treasures of the AJHS are, of course, the numerous archives it maintains of the papers of famous Jewish personages from all across the country, including materials from a number of well-known Chicago families.

### Exhibit To Be in Chicago

In recent years, the AJHS has made efforts to encourage and assist local historical societies such as ours. In the near future, the AJHS expects to bring an exhibit of colonial Jewish families to Chicago's Terra Museum of American Art on North Michigan Avenue. We shall, of course, support this exhibit and hope to plan a program around it.

If any of you are in the Boston area in the future, I urge you to stop in at the AJHS headquarters and talk to Mr. Wax and his colleagues. It will be a richly rewarding visit.

While I was in the Boston area, I also had the opportunity to talk to Ms. Nancy Green, visiting Professor of Jewish History at Harvard University and a granddaughter of Philip Bregstone, a well-known Jewish lawyer, judge and author in 1933 of a book of essays and reminiscences appropriately titled *Chicago and its Jews*.



President  
Walter Roth

### One Thing Leads to Another

I had received a number of letters containing various remarks about our republication of the Meites book. Among them was a letter from Mr. Philip Green of Santa Fe, New Mexico, which stated that he was a grandson of Philip Bregstone and that his "Gramps' book is better" than the Meites book. I phoned Philip, a good-natured and humorous gentleman, and he informed me that one of Bregstone's daughters, Mrs. Rochele Livingston, is still with us and lives in Rock Island, Illinois. Mrs. Livingston in turn informed me that her niece, Nancy Green, was a historian living in Paris. I wrote to Professor Green in Paris but received no answer.

Later I mentioned the incidents to my son-in-law, Mark Raider Roth, who is in the graduate school at Brandeis University. It will not surprise you to learn that he, of course, knew Professor Nancy Green and put me in touch with her. She informed me that she is continuing in the tradition of her well-known grandfather, and I hope that we will have an opportunity to hear from her when she visits Chicago.

So perhaps we have before us another project, a future life and works of Philip Bregstone and his family. That is the beauty and excitement of local history. One story invariably leads to another so that the strands of time and family ties seem almost continuous.

Walter Roth  
President

## March 24 Meeting

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House Museum. Free round-trip bus service will be available to the Hillel Center location from the rear entrance of the Marriott Hotel on Rush Street, south of Ohio Street.

Mrs. Epstein will give an account of the memoirs themselves as well as the fascinating story of the research she did in order to make the memoirs publishable. Together they provide additional insights

into Jewish immigrant life on the near West Side.

The meeting will begin with the usual social hour and refreshments at 1:00 PM followed by the program at 2:00 PM. Immediately afterwards will be the Hull House tour. CJHS members and friends will also be able informally to tour the new Hillel Center building, in which the Society has been allotted space used to interest students and other young people in Chicago Jewish history.

The new building, known as the William and Mildred Levine Hillel Center in honor of the principal benefactors, is located at 929 South Morgan Street on the UIC campus. Parking is available.

Bus service will depart from its usual Marriott Hotel location on Rush Street at 12:30 PM and return riders to the same spot following the conclusion of the day's activities. Admission to the meeting as well as to the bus is open to all without charge. □

## CJHS President Roth Contributes to New Biography of Ickes

A recently published, well-received biography of the late Harold Ickes, Chicagoan and member of Franklin D. Roosevelt's cabinet, acknowledges the assistance to the author of Society President Walter Roth.

The book, titled *Righteous Pilgrim: The Life and Times of Harold Ickes*, by T. H. Watkins recounts an incident in Ickes' early career as a liberal Chicago attorney which Mr. Roth had earlier researched as part of a book he is writing. It concerns the strange and tragic death in 1908 of Jeremiah (Lazar) Averbuch, a young Jewish immigrant to Chicago.

Averbuch was shot down under odd circumstances while attempting to visit the then chief of Chicago police at his home. In the uproar which followed this unnecessary death, Jane Addams and other liberals enlisted the aid of Ickes, then an unknown lawyer, in a vain effort to clear the immigrant's name and to assign blame for his death.

The police chief, taking advantage of the anarchist scare of the time and abetted by sensation-seeking newspapers, declared himself an intended victim and Averbuch entered history, unjustly, as a would-be assassin despite the subsequent abnormal behavior and ultimate suicide of the police chief.

President Roth, in the course of research on Averbuch, was put in touch with Mr. Watkins, chief editor of the

Wilderness Society in Washington, D.C., and ultimately furnished him with the Averbuch material. In his Ickes biography most of a chapter is devoted to Averbuch, and credit is given to Mr. Roth for his substantial contribution to the biography. □

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## Time To Renew Memberships Once Again

*Only Members Get Free Minsky Fund Monographs*

Letters reminding readers to renew their CJHS membership are currently in the mail according to Membership Chairman Marian Cutler. All memberships, except those of life members and individuals who have joined for the first time since July, expired at the end of the calendar year; and timely renewal is necessary in order to insure receiving *Chicago Jewish History* and meeting notices.

### *Many Benefits of Membership*

Among the other benefits available to members are reduced rates for the Society's popular summer tours, the right to attend the annual members' brunch, invitations to exhibit openings, discounts on purchases at the Spertus Museum and free bus service to meetings at distant locations. Members in good standing will also be eligible to receive a free copy of the two monographs currently being published by the Doris Minsky Memorial Fund.

Although extremely modest, the Society's dues structure makes possible most Society efforts to preserve local Jewish history, including exhibits, the taping of oral histories, the collection of archives, publication of *Chicago Jewish History*, provision of speakers and meeting places and the customary social hour which precedes meetings.

### *Dues Purposely Kept Low*

Dues are kept low in order to enable anyone actively to participate in the Society's efforts. Regular dues begin at \$25.00 per year, with seniors and students able to belong for lesser sums. A full schedule of dues appears on the last page of this publication. Mrs. Cutler reminds us that the voluntary decision by many to select one of the higher dues categories is what makes it possible to continue our lowest rates.

She also advises members to send in their renewals without delay to prevent any interruption in Society benefits. They are a bargain as well as a contribution to the preservation of Chicago's Jewish history. □

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## New Meites Edition Sells Better Than Original Printing

Sales of the *History of the Jews of Chicago*, the Society's reprint of the H.L. Meites classic long out of print, have exceeded expectations with purchases so far already surpassing those of the original printing in 1924.

"Jews and Gentiles, members and non-members alike, have taken advantage of an unusual opportunity to own this unique encyclopaedic study of the early years of Chicago Jewry," said Society President Walter Roth. "Dozens of persons have been delighted to learn that members of their own families are among the several hundred Jews whose photos and individual biographies are interspersed throughout the book."

In addition to being an illuminating and detailed record of Jewish communal and civic activities during the seventy-five years preceding 1924, the volume is also a veritable *Who's Who* of Chicago Jewish families in the years 1845-1924 and a record of business and professional achievement during the period. Supplemental chapters covering years through 1927, which are also included in the reprint, bring the current volume to more than 900 oversized pages.

Copies of the book are available in Jewish and other bookstores for \$48.95 or by mail or phone using the order form on page 11. Society members in good standing can secure copies at the basic discount price of \$45.00 □

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## Begin Project To Summarize Oral History Content

A new project designed to make the Society's growing oral history collection more useful to students of Chicago Jewish history has gotten underway. The project involves the preparation of a precis or brief summary of the content of each of the scores of taped oral histories in the CJHS collection.

Heading the project is Carole Gardner, a member experienced in the preparation of precis of legal documents, who is starting the oral history precis project under the supervision of Society Past President Norman Schwartz and Oral History Chairman David Passman. Oral history tape transcripts, where they exist, will be read for summarizing purposes. The tapes

themselves will be listened to where transcripts do not exist.

"Having summaries of topics discussed in each oral history tape will permit students of local Jewish history efficiently to search our files and maximize their usefulness for research purposes," said CJHS President Walter Roth. "We are indebted to Mrs. Gardner for undertaking this project and hope she is able to secure additional expert assistance so that the project can move along rapidly. Generations of scholars will be grateful to her as well."

The Society has been taping the reminiscences of local persons involved in important aspects of Chicago Jewish history for nearly fifteen years and is also the custodian of dozens of oral history tapes made by other organizations and congregations. Many of these have been transcribed into written form but most have yet to undergo that expensive, time-consuming process. The preparation of content summaries and the publication of a descriptive catalog are means of increasing this important collection's value. I.J.S. □

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## Seek Artifacts for World War Exhibit

Memorabilia regarding the home front war effort during 1941-45 are being sought by the Chicago Historical Society for an exhibit on that topic to be mounted next year. Our Society has been asked to aid in the search for appropriate artifacts.

"We would be particularly pleased if our members could contribute items which would demonstrate the extensive Jewish component in the many activities which were included in the war effort," said President Walter Roth. Any posters, photographs, war honor rolls or other items dealing with war activities on the part of congregations, fraternal organizations or community groups will be especially welcomed.

Among the many activities Jewish and other groups were involved in during the 1941-45 period were bond sales, victory gardens, civil defense, servicemen's centers and recycling collections. Any materials relating to these activities, particularly those referring to actions by Jewish groups would emphasize how involved the Jewish community was in the war effort.

Arrangements for providing such materials - can be made by calling the Chicago Historical Society direct at (312)642-5035, Extension 278 (Mr. Scott LaFrance) or by contacting former CJHS President Norman Schwartz through the CJHS office at (312)663-5634. □



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# Meites Daughter Recalls Life With Father and His Goals

*Growing Up in an Unusual Household During Early Years of the Century*

by Hannah Meites Gordon

**M**y parents, H.L. Meites and Rose Fuerstenberg Meites, had four children: Leonard, Irving, Gilbert, and myself, Hannah Meites Gordon. As my father's only direct survivor, I am delighted by the Society's invitation to discuss my father and his unique achievements.

As we rededicate his newly republished *History of the Jews of Chicago*, I am reminded of another great event that has also recently taken place, the dedication of the new Museum of Immigration at Ellis Island. My father, himself a product of the immigrant experience, foresaw many years ago the need for and the importance of preserving that critical part of American history which today is embodied both in the republication of his history and the new Museum of Immigration.

Many readers already know the museum has a special exhibition of artifacts that people from all over the world brought with them to America. H.L. Meites' own father, Eliazar Meites, brought with him when he emigrated from Russia in 1890 his father's precious Hebrew type faces used for printing purposes. "In 1891 he established the first Hebrew printing company in America, using special type and specializing in the printing of holy books and the works of rabbis," according to his son. Sixty-six years ago, when that son published *The History of the Jews of Chicago*, over which he had labored for many years, he was in a way fulfilling the destiny of his forbears.

## *A Man of Wide Interests*

To understand better the man, his mission, and his vision and to comprehend fully what would drive a man to undertake and complete such an enormous task, it is necessary to examine the fabric of which he was made and the circumstances that fueled his energies.

We often hear of a person referred to as a renaissance man, a many-sided, multi-gifted individual. My father fit that description perfectly. Intellectual, politician, printer, publisher, raconteur, public servant, author, pioneer Zionist, visionary, historian—Father was all of those things and more.

Let us address the "father" first. What was it like to live in such a household? Complex, exciting, challenging, and a whole lot quieter than you might suppose. Although the house was filled with the comings and goings of people from all walks of life, my father was king of all he surveyed, albeit a very gentle and concerned one. No one ever would have presumed to question his authority about anything! If he chose to bring ten extra guests home for dinner, ten extra places were laid; and somehow my mother

seemed always to manage. (No wonder we needed fifty pounds of ice every other day!)

## *Enlisting His Daughter As Aide*

And then there was the business of my helping him to promote his utopian dream—a homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. When I was a child, he taught me to recite and I went on the speaking "circuit" with him. Papa wrote the scripts and I learned to project and enunciate before thousands of people. No sooner had I memorized and delivered his message than he was busy on my next essay, with those "unpronounceable" words burned into my memory.

One might ask how a girl like "Little Miss Hannah Meites" could have benefitted from such experiences. Well, I met luminaries from Justice Louis Brandeis and Chaim Weizmann to Dr. Albert Einstein. It was a very heady experience for an eight-year-old. Did I adore my father? Absolutely!

## *The "First" Zionist*

All of us set goals for ourselves, but they are usually small and personal goals in the larger scheme of things. Not so my father. Before the turn of the century he was dreaming of a permanent home for the Jewish people where they could go into the land and not be afraid, where ghettos would not circumscribe their lives and where tyrants would not rule their destiny. Where they would be free from religious bigotry and where they would work together for the common good.

To this cause, then, he dedicated his life. He was, as he wrote, "the possessor of the first membership certificate of the Knights of Zion, dated October 20, 1897." This document makes him the first "officially organized Zionist in the United States."

The complexity of the man manifested itself equally in his fervent belief that to make *aliya*, to migrate to Palestine, was most certainly not for every Jew. For himself, he wanted nothing more than to live in his adopted

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The re-awakened interest in H.L. Meites' monumental *History of the Jews of Chicago* caused by its availability once more after nearly a half-century of difficulty in securing even the temporary use of a copy has also kindled interest in the man responsible for writing it. What sort of man would expend all the effort and money to produce a volume which clearly would never make a profit?

The answer to this question has been provided by one who knows better than just about anybody else: H.L. Meites' only living child. Hannah Meites Gordon, whose crystal-clear mind and gracious manner belie her advanced years, is herself an accomplished woman: pianist, teacher and mother and grandmother of equally accomplished individuals. This reminiscence of her father and her growing up in a singular Chicago environment is adapted from a talk she gave at a republication party for the book held last autumn at the Chicago Historical Society. Her daughter, Elaine Silets, kindly made available the accompanying photographs.

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country, America, and to prove to Jew and Gentile alike that American Jews could be sound, upstanding citizens, ready and willing to contribute to their country without in any way compromising their faith or their ideals.

Originally as editor of the *Advocate* and later as editor and publisher of *The Chicago Jewish Chronicle*, he had informed the Jewish community of items of local interest and exhorted them on matter affecting their brothers and sisters worldwide.

### *Chicago's Divided Jews*

In order to further understand my father and his work, we must first understand the political and social climate at the turn of the century. It was a time when anti-semitism was everywhere. Jews of prominence would never figure in the "accepted" society of the day, no matter how well assimilated. To the non-Jew they were still foreigners.

Enter once again the dreamer. To the first unattainable goal, the fantasy of a homeland for the Jews, my father added an equally unthinkable equation: unify and integrate those disparate entities, the German and the Eastern European Jewish communities in the City of Chicago.

Jews of German extraction, well educated, monied, established, understandably distanced themselves from the newly-arrived emigres on the West Side. This was the case although they nevertheless undertook great financial responsibility for their less fortunate Jewish brethren.

Meanwhile, the Eastern European Jewish community, as represented in Chicago, was divided by ethnic and other cultural considerations. The Russians didn't speak to the Poles, the Poles didn't speak to the Bohemians, the Hungarians didn't speak to anybody. The Spanish-Portuguese Jews considered themselves landed gentry, having arrived in America first, and therefore formed a totally separate entity. All this you may be sure did not contribute to a cohesiveness within the community.

### *Book Helped Unify Jews*

The amazing thing about *The History of the Jews of Chicago* is, then, that with all of the divisiveness within Chicago Jewry, my father was able to unify the various factions within the covers of his history book.

How did he accomplish this without offending anyone? Frankly, by dint of personality, his extraordinary sense of humor, and the ability to get the most unlikely people to work together.

Within the community he found a great number of individuals who had already made their mark on Chicago and were willing to help him make the history a reality. They included, first and foremost, his very dear friend Julius Rosenwald, without whom the work would never have been published; Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, Mr. E. Greenebaum, Dr. Otto L. Schmidt, the Foremans, the Eisendraths, the Sulzbergers, the Bensingers, the Fantuses, the Adlers, Col. Jacob M. Arvey, Alfred S. Austrian, Harry Hart, Judge Henry Horner, P. D. Block, A. D. Lasker, Jacob M. Loeb, Mr. and Mrs. Marks Nathan, Judge Hugo Pam, Samuel Phillipson, Albert Pick, Herman H. Newberger,



H. L. Meites as a young man returned from studies in Germany

Georgio Polacco, Louis Eckstein, Judge Julius Miner, and others too numerous to mention at this time. These individuals and families had made significant contributions by the time the book was published. Many of their descendants still live in the Chicago area and are continuing to contribute to the greatness of the city.

Acknowledgment is also due to Joseph L. Gatzert, "the staunch pioneer of Chicago Jewry, for his zealous cooperation in the securing of data embodied in the early chapters." Also "the venerable Elias Greenebaum...whose ninety-six years did not deter his interest in the project. He furnished much valuable information."

### *Securing Gentile Cooperation*

Special mention should be made of Prof. Edward C. Baldwin of the University of Illinois, who contributed the section on the history of the Jews in Illinois during the colonial period. As my father relates: "I went and met Prof. Baldwin...who, as Dr. James then said, knows more about Jews and their history than most Jews themselves. Prof. Baldwin offered to contribute an article to my book and asked what subject I preferred him to write on. I told him I would let him know and after returning to Chicago I wrote asking him to prepare an article dealing with the 'Jewish influence on the *cultural* development of Illinois.'"

But Prof. Baldwin made a mistake—a fortunate mistake, as it proved. Instead of *cultural* he read *colonial* and accordingly began his investigations into colonial times. His search was richly rewarded. He found records proving that "way back in 1747 a group of Jewish fur traders from Pennsylvania purchased the land which comprises practically the whole of Illinois for the sum of \$37,000." And he found other interesting and little-known facts, such as that these Jews helped Washington in the

Revolutionary War. He embodied them all in an article which is published in this volume as an introduction.

### *Being Both American and Jewish*

As if Zionism and uniting different groups of Jews were not enough, my father's agenda also included integrating all Jews into mainstream America without compromising their Jewish religious identity. What could he do as an individual to attain that lofty goal?

For years he had been deeply concerned that nothing had every been done to develop a comprehensive outline of Jewish life in Chicago. He dreaded the thought that the historic information might be irretrievably lost. He thought that as an amateur historian and a third generation printer, marrying his gifts and skills as a means of preserving the historic material, he could produce a history of local Jews. He attempted at the same time also to reconcile some of the aforementioned divisions within the community.

He wanted it never to be forgotten that Jews had played a truly important part in the development of our city, and he wished to honor those individuals whose talents and charitable contributions represented outstanding achievement not just for the city but for the country as well.

### *How the Book Came About*

How then was the book actually put together? Using his newspaper as his major means of communication, he began to urge his readers to send him appropriate information and photographs. To his great delight and surprise, items of real historic value began arriving, dating back to the period when there were only one hundred Jews in Chicago. He began to think and speak of the History.

Meanwhile he found time also to publish books of Jewish interest, among them a two-volume biography of Theodore Herzl by Jacob de Haas and an English translation of humorous tales by Sholom Aleichem, who had been part of his own father's literary circle.

Thus it was, on the eve of the Illinois Centennial celebration, on April 30, 1918, in the original building of the Chicago Historical Society, that the Jewish Historical Society of Illinois was formed. The primary purpose of the Society was to collect, preserve, and publish historic infor-



**Zionist performer:  
Little Hannah Meites  
(Gordon)**



**Meites when Chicago  
Water Commissioner,  
about 1931**

mation relative to the history of the Jews of Illinois. World War I interfered with plans to publish a history, and the project was dropped. However, in March of 1922 the Jewish Historical Society was reorganized and its focus limited to Chicago. Subsequently, it was decided to publish a comprehensive history of the Jews of Chicago. That task fell to my father.

### *Book To Serve as Motivator*

As we rededicate that most remarkable volume, I would like to read to you a portion of an article from the *Chicago Tribune* of May 20, 1924, describing the original dedication of the history and quoting my father's words of that night:

This book I have written after ten years' work, and I give it [to] you, that, reading there the glories that your people have achieved here in Chicago, you may read its facts to your children, and have more self-confidence, more respect for your people, more love of them.

Through this record of your deeds, since the first Jew came to Chicago 73 years ago, realize how much you have done for the city, how truly American you are, and lift up your heads higher and be better Americans.

Shortly afterwards, on the occasion of my father's fiftieth birthday, the Chicago College of Law conferred upon him an honorary doctor of laws degree.

Having stated what my father's principal goals were: statehood for the Jewish people, forming a cohesive community here in Chicago, and the integration of American Jews into the mainstream without losing their religious and cultural identities, I would like to venture an opinion as to how we have fared.

### *Were His Goals Achieved?*

The State of Israel, of course, is a reality; but she sits isolated and alone, surrounded by enemies bent on her



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destruction. The Jewish community here in Chicago *has* become a successful and cohesive whole with the same high degree of social consciousness evident in the *History*.

In 1990, Jews are no longer considered foreigners and their children are not subjected to alien religious doctrines in the public schools. At the same time, we face the dilemma of an intermarriage rate of almost fifty percent with the result that, more often than not, Jewish identity is lost. Anti-semitism is on the rise along with its doctrine of fascism, and hate crimes have become everyday events across the country.

However, as much as anywhere else in the country, Jews have taken their places in the professions, hospitals, universities, charities, clubs, and learned societies along with the non-Jewish population. In 1924 this would have been unthinkable. Yes, all things considered, we've come a long way. As we approach the twenty-first century, it is now up to the new generation to set high goals just as my father, H.L. Meites, did at the turn of the last century.

At the first dedication of the *History*, Dr. Joseph Stolz, one of Chicago's most prominent rabbis said: The people said of Hosea, "the prophet is a fool, the man of spirit is Mad." And I have no doubt that many a one has ridiculed Meites as a crank, that oft when he looked into the mirror he derided himself as a fool.

But it takes such men of one idea and one inspiration to launch a big enterprise. It requires such fanatics to ignore the difficulties and to despise the obstacles that stand in the way of a vast undertaking. And it seems in accord with the eternal fitness of things that some of the representative men and women of the community have assembled tonight in this hall...to give public expression to their appreciation of the "crank" who persisted in his folly until his dream came true.

For, every community is the richer if it prizes and encourages its dreamers. "Where there is no vision the people perish," and blessed the city where "old men dream dreams and young men see visions," for it is they who bring the kingdom of Heaven on earth; it is they who make for progress, for beauty, for truth, for righteousness, for the appreciation of the higher, better and nobler things of life.

My father is gone, having died on May 5, 1944; but I know that he would be just as proud today at the republication as he was sixty-six years ago when his book first became a milestone for the city and for all the people of its Jewish community. □

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## Scrapbook Provides Glimpse of Davey Miller's Life

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fight between Jersey Joe Wolcott and Ezzard Charles in Comiskey Park in June of the prior year.

On the occasion of his retirement dinner, Miller apparently revealed to Chicago newspapers for the first time the details of how he turned down a bribe in connection with the Jack Dempsey-Gene Tunney heavyweight fight in 1927. The Chicago *Herald-American* article by Leroy McHugh, in the scrapbook, savored the following story: Miller was slated to be referee in the Dempsey-Tunney fight, but Dave "Long Count" Barry was assigned to do the fight by the Illinois Boxing Commission a few minutes before the fight began for reasons never disclosed. At a dinner held on the night before the fight, Miller was summoned from his meal and taken for a ride to a hotel near 22nd Street and Michigan Avenue. There Al Capone appeared, got into the car, put his arm around Davey's shoulder and told him he was betting fifty G's (\$50,000) on Dempsey and said, "Dave, all I want you to do tomorrow night is give Dempsey an even break." Davey told the reporter, "There were no actual threats, but...."

Asked why he never disclosed this incident to the Illinois Athletic Commission in the years after the fight, Davey replied, "I didn't want to get anyone into trouble. After all, nothing came of it." As it was, after Miller's abrupt removal as referee, Dave Barry refereed the fight in which Dempsey, after knocking down Tunney, did not go to a neutral corner as required by the rules, resulting in the

famous "long count" by referee Dave Barry, who did not continue the knockdown count until Dempsey went to the right corner. Tunney subsequently arose from the canvas and won the fight.

### *Ties to Jewish Boxers*

Numerous articles in Davey's scrapbook deal with the legendary fighters that Miller either discovered, managed or whose fights he refereed. The most famous of all these boxers born in Chicago was Bernard Rosofsky, better known as Barney Ross. A Jewish boy from the Maxwell Street slum, Ross had run with a bad crowd, as he tells it in the newspaper stories, when Davey discovered him in the 1920's and brought him into the Golden Gloves Tournament, which Miller was then refereeing.

For a while Miller also managed Ross, but he turned him over to Gig Rooney, a well-known Chicago manager who already had under his wing another successful Jewish fighter, Jackie Fields. Ross' father had been killed in a hold-up in his Maxwell Street store and Ross, always a provider for his mother and brothers and loyal to his friends, often thanked Miller because of their early relationship.

Ross, of course, became an American hero as welterweight champion, a World War II hero who caught America's heart because of his courage and exemplary conduct as a Marine who became addicted to drugs during

the treatment of his wounds but fought to recover his dignity and good name. A clipping in the scrapbook contains an article authored by Damon Runyon that recounts the friendship between Davey and Barney Ross in Runyon's unique style.

### *Letters from Leonard, Dempsey*

A plaintive letter from Benny Leonard, another Jewish fighter and lightweight champion, indicates the great affection these young fighters had for Davey. The letter from Leonard, written in 1930, complains that Miller had not informed Leonard of the sudden death of one of Davey's brothers. Why didn't you let me know, Leonard complains. "Dave, I like you. You are a real and sincere pal. You have been in there shooting for me many times and don't think that I didn't appreciate it.... Please remember me to your dear ones and tell your daughter that she has my every good wish for happiness, health and prosperity."

A letter from Jack Dempsey dated July 23, 1935, is written on letterhead of the "Jack Dempsey Restaurant," opposite Madison Square Garden in New York and is addressed to "Dear Friend Davey." And a letter from Governor Henry Horner dated November 17, 1932, addressed to "Dear Davey," thanks him for "his great help," no doubt during the recent successful election campaign.

Miller and members of his family owned various restaurants and clubs, starting with the E&M restaurant and club at 3216 Roosevelt Road and including the 2530 Club at Milwaukee and Kedzie and later, for a number of years, a well-known tavern at Clark and Randolph Streets, across from the Sherman Hotel. Personages from all walks of life frequented his places; and the scrapbook has pages of autographs from famous boxers, such as Joe Louis and Jack Dempsey, and of famous entertainers like Bob Hope. Davey knew them all.

The scrapbook includes a number of photographs of Davey and members of his family at family gatherings. A photograph under the caption "1909" shows the family, including a policeman, in front of their Roosevelt Road restaurant. Davey had a number of brothers, and one of them, Harry, was a policeman. Harry later won lasting fame, or infamy, as a policeman while in the service of Mayor Anton Cermak. As a Cermak cop, he had been involved in an attempt on the life of Frank Nitti, the notorious Capone mobster, leading some to believe that Nitti retaliated with the assassination of Mayor Cermak in Miami, Florida, while the mayor was seated alongside the president-elect, Franklin D. Roosevelt. At his side when Cermak was shot was the same Harry Miller.

### *Shot by Mobster*

Another of Davey's brothers was often a source of hurt to him. In January, 1924, Davey was shot critically at the LaSalle Theater apparently by Dion O'Banion, the notorious mobster. A clipping from a Chicago newspaper recounts that this shooting seems to have occurred because of gang warfare involving Hirshie Miller, another brother. Hirshie was a pal of Samuel "Nails" Morton, a Jewish World War I hero who later became an alleged accomplice



Young Davey Miller (cap in hand) at the racetrack

of Dion O'Banion. Morton, like Davey, was a hero among the Jews of the West Side, for his role in protecting them against marauding gangs. Hirshie and "Nails" were often in trouble with the law and were charged with murder, but neither of them was ever convicted.

New York newspaper clippings in the scrapbook tell of the anger Davey felt when a book written in 1929 called him a racketeer. This book, written by one Edward Dean Sullivan and titled *Rattling the Cup on Chicago Crime*, dealt with more than two hundred underworld characters. In one place in the book, mention was made of the shooting of Davey. In another it asserted that the Miller brothers had been pushing Dion O'Banion around, and in a third it declared that Davey Miller's brothers had been "pushing into rackets." Davey sued for libel in the Federal District Court in New York. During the jury trial, Benny Leonard and Abraham L. Marovitz, then an assistant state's attorney of Cook County, testified as character witnesses for Davey, "the man who had come from Chicago not to collect damages of \$250,000, which he had originally demanded,...but to clear his name."

### *Testifies at Libel Trial*

Davey, the newspapers reported, took the stand and testified that O'Banion had shot him "not because he had belonged to the 'mob' of Hirshie Miller, his brother and family black sheep, but just out of plain meanness." Davey also told the court that he sought vindication rather than money and that the smallest sum permitted by law would be adequate. He said that he had conducted a restaurant at 3216 Roosevelt Road, a place that had "kept open for twenty-four hours a day for the last nineteen years. He was a member of the Elks, an Odd Fellow, a Zionist and a Mason as well as a licensed referee." Emil K. Ellis, Miller's attorney, stated that Davey had been libelled and stated, "He suffered because of what was written about him; and, gentlemen of the jury, one who is here in court, his daughter, who was a student at Northwestern University, suffered." The judge agreed with Davey and his attorney



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that Davey had been libelled and directed a judgment in his favor of six cents.

Several articles and letters in the scrapbook take account of Davey's many charitable services as referee during the Second World War, when he also ran his tavern at 159 North Clark Street. A clipping of November 27, 1944, contains a picture of Miller and his old friend Commander Jack Dempsey, who was in Chicago promoting the Sixth War Loan. The paper quotes Davey: "Oh yeah, by the way, Jack, I want to buy a couple of bonds for my granddaughter, Elaine. Sort of a start on a college education. Her mother, my daughter, that is, is paying for one. And my wife holds out a buck here, a buck there, and is buying the other one. But I figure that, well, maybe you'll get credit for selling 'em."

### *Davey and Jewish History*

By the end of his career in 1950, the scrapbook indicates, Davey had been a fight referee for twenty-seven years, with five thousand fights refereed in Chicago. Great boxers were his friends and confidants, among them Jewish

fighters such as Barney Ross, Kingfish Levinsky, Davey Day and Jackie Fields. He continued to donate his services for intramural fights held at Navy Pier and at army and naval stations. Many letters of appreciation for his efforts are contained in the scrapbook, which ends at this point. (Miller died in 1956.)

The Davey Miller scrapbook recalls his fame as the "Great Chicago Referee." Other stories and tales will tell the story of his deeds in protecting Chicago Jews against those who wished to do them harm. His daughter has done the Chicago community a service by making the scrapbook available to the Society as a glimpse of an important aspect of the Jewish experience in Chicago. Basketball, football and baseball are today's avenues for minority youths to obtain fame and fortune on the American scene; but in the years in which Davey Miller was a referee, Chicago Jewish youths often used their fists to pound their way out of the West Side tenements. As his scrapbook indicates, Davey Miller was often there to lend a guiding hand. □

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## Runyon on Davey Miller

*D*amon Runyon, the author and journalist best remembered today for "Guys and Dolls" wrote dozens of sports features for various publications. Among them was one, written in his inimitable humorous style, telling how Davey Miller gave "for free" the management of the then-unknown fighter Barney Ross to the man who guided him to a world championship.

An excerpt from a clipping in Davey Miller's scrapbook follows:

A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in Mr. Leonard Sachs' room in a Chicago hotel a couple of evenings after Jackie Fields of California had won the welterweight title from Joe Dundee of Baltimore over in Detroit.

We had moved on from the scene of Dundee's disaster to observe some sports event of importance in Chicago. It was so important that I've forgotten what it was.

Mr. Gig Rooney of Los Angeles was among those present. Mr. Rooney was flushed and happy in his new role as manager of a world champion. For many and many a year Mr. Gig Rooney had been striving to those heights, talking a blue streak as he toiled onward and upward and was sitting on top of the world.

The door suddenly opened. In came a man. It wasn't the waiter so who cared? He was a stoutish man. We recognized him as none other than Mr. Davey Miller, the well known Chicago referee.

"See here, Gig," said Mr. Miller. "I've brought you a couple of young fighters. You take them out to Los Angeles with you, and let them breathe in plenty of that

good old California sunshine, and become champions of the world like Jackie Fields. I'm making you a present of them, free, gratis, and for nothing."

"Where are they?" demanded Mr. Rooney. "I don't see nobody."

"Oh," said Mr. Miller, "I beg your pardon."

Then he stepped aside, and we could see beside him a brace of kids about the size of squirrels.

"These are them," said Mr. Miller. The little one is Barney Ross, and the littler one is \_\_\_\_\_."

Well I've forgotten the name Mr. Miller mentioned.

But I remember the name Barney Ross because of its simplicity, though after one glance at Barney I was prepared to lay plenty of 6 to 5 that he had another moniker I wouldn't remember or spell. [It was Rosofsky—Ed.]

He was a dark-haired kid with a good pan for a fighter.

"He's Jewish," explained Mr. Miller rather unnecessarily, noting my glance at Miller. "He's going to make a great fighter and I'd like to handle him myself, but goodness gracious alive, I'm too busy."

"And you're giving them to me!" queried Mr. Rooney incredulously.

"For nothing," said Mr. Miller.

"It don't seem possible, said Mr. Rooney. "Nobody ever gets nothing for nothing."

"Well I want to see the boys get along," said Mr. Miller. "So you just take them with my blessing."

I believe Mr. Rooney did take them, at that. [Indeed he did and he saw that "kid" become lightweight-champion of the world, thanks in no small part to Davey Miller—Ed.] □

# Winter Meeting Learns of City's Sephardic Jews

*Rabbi Azose Discusses  
Our 'Unknown' Brethren*

A large and rapt audience heard Rabbi Michael Azose discuss the history of Chicago's Sephardim, "a minority within a minority," at the Society's winter meeting on January 13. His wide-ranging presentation also touched upon the general history of Judaism's older branch, some of its differences from the more familiar Ashkenazi Judaism and the nature of Ladino, the unique language of many Sephardic Jews.

Rabbi Azose spoke in the social hall of the Sephardic Jewish congregation, which he serves as spiritual leader. Located today on Howard Street near California Avenue in Evanston, the congregation is officially named The Sephardic Congregation of the Portuguese Israelite Fraternity and originally worshipped in different rented locations in Lawndale before moving north and later acquiring its own building in 1970.

## *Pre-Dates Ashkenazi Jewry*

He discussed the roots of the Sephardic tradition in pre-Inquisition Spain and how the dispersal of Spanish and Portuguese Jewry led to the growth of the Jewish communities in Turkish, Balkan and Arab lands which were to serve as the sources of the more recent (since 1920) waves of Sephardic immigration to Chicago.

He also talked briefly on the earlier Spanish and Portuguese Jewish immigration to the United States, indicating how few came to the Chicago area and how those disappeared through assimilation either into the Ashkenazic or even the Christian communities.

## *Maintaining an Identity*

Assimilation of a sort also affected the other Sephardic congregation, the Iran Hebrew Congregation of Skokie, which today has a rabbi and majority membership of Ashkenazic extraction. Rabbi Azose's congregation has maintained its Sephardic character by requiring that members be at least half Sephardic in ancestry. The rabbi later made clearer that Sephardic character as he led a tour of his sanctuary, displaying the wooden cases which are used instead of cloth Torah covers in the ark, the ornate chair of Elijah used for circumcisions and the stand used to hold the Torah scroll upright while it is being read from.

**Rabbi Azose (center)  
with Vice-President  
Burt Robin and  
Board Member  
Moselle Schwartz,  
a Sephardi.**

*Photo by Norman Schwartz*



Rabbi Azose, who himself is of Turkish Jewish background, is a graduate of the local orthodox seminary where, in order properly to understand his teachers, he had to learn Yiddish although his family used Ladino, a mixture of Spanish, other Mediterranean languages and Hebrew written in Hebrew script.

His presentation was preceded as usual by refreshments and a social hour. President Walter Roth chaired the meeting and Vice-President Burt Robin introduced the speaker. After the meeting Norman Schwartz once again made possible the purchase of the newly republished *History of the Jews of Chicago* to members at a discount price. □

## Plan Historical Directory of Congregations

A comprehensive directory of Chicago's synagogues during the past 150 years including their various locations and, often, their rabbis and presidents through the years has been compiled and is currently in the publication stage.

A project of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, the compilation was supervised by Clare Greenberg and is being edited and prepared for publication by Norman Schwartz with the assistance of Irving Cutler and Sidney Sorkin.

The compilation was made by computer, using city directories for the years 1829 through 1928 and classified telephone directories since 1928. The resulting directory will include separate listings arranged by synagogue names, by street location and by rabbis' and presidents' names.

"While it is likely that some small or transient synagogues of the *stiebel* variety are not included, especially if they had no telephones, the directory will certainly

be the most complete historical directory of its type ever produced," according to Mr. Schwartz, "and should be very useful to students of local Jewish history."

Details about availability dates and cost of the finished directory will be announced at a later date. □

## Record Numbers Join Society

A record number of new members have joined the Society during the past four months, in part perhaps as a result of attention drawn to the Society's work by the republication of Meites' *History of the Jews of Chicago*.

A hearty welcome is extended to the following, who have joined in the Society's multifaceted efforts to preserve and disseminate the record of Chicago's Jewish past.

Mr. and Mrs. Helman Allswang	Dr. and Mrs. Henry Loeb
Sanford Altschul	Fred A. Loewinsohn
Bernard Annenberg	Joshua Lowitz
Mr. and Mrs. Henry X. Arenberg	Carol Horwich Luber
Azulay & Azulay	Mrs. Norma A. Mark
B. E. Bensinger III	Joyce D. Miller
Mrs. and Mrs. K. Z. Braude	Fredric S. Newman
Edmund Choler	Mrs. Nancy Polevoy
Mrs. Joan H. Epstein	Mr. and Mrs. Paul Rosenberg
Ira O. Glick	David Rosenman
Emily Gordon	Mrs. Robert S. Rosenwald
James E. Greenebaum	Steven Rothstein
Lawrence R. Hamilton	Alice Rubovits
Norman Hoffman	Arthur Shapiro
Jack Karp	Myron B. Shure
Frances King	David R. Smith
Fanny K. Kohn	Jerome F. Strauss, Jr.
Ruth Kolodny	Marian Ury
Dr. Shelly J. Korshak	Edward Weil
Mr. and Mrs. H. Loeb	Dr. and Mrs. B. Zeiger

Marion Cutler  
Membership Chairman □

## Fall Meeting Hears Three Speakers, Views Slide Show

*Attracts Large Attendance;  
Many Buy Meites History*

Centered around the Society's republication of H.L. Meites' *History of the Jews of Chicago*, the October 28 CJHS meeting included a talk by the author's grandson, reminiscences of Chicago in the author's time by Federal Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz and slides of Meites' Chicago shown and discussed by Dr. Irving Cutler. The meeting, held at Emanuel Congregation, attracted so large an attendance that extra seating had to be provided twice during the Sunday afternoon activities.

Jerry Meites, lawyer and civic activist, discussed his grandfather's motivations for publishing the volume, what the book has contributed to local Jewry and why his family was willing to underwrite most of the substantial costs of republication. Judge Marovitz, a distinguished senior jurist and community leader, told how it was possible, in his youth as well as that of H.L. Meites, for the Jewish community to bring forth leaders of high caliber without benefit of privileged birth, wealth or fancy educations. Dr. Cutler, Chicago historian and urban geographer, provided visual recollections of Chicago Jewry at the time of the Meites book's publication with his slide lecture.

An opportunity for members to buy copies of the history at a discount price following the meeting was taken advantage of as all copies physically available for purchase were sold. The sale was under the direction of Norman Schwartz, who was assisted by Janet Hagerup, Eve Levin and Elaine Suloway.

The social hour and refreshments, under Ms. Hagerup's direction, followed the meeting rather than, as usual, preceding it. Vice-President and Program Chairman Burt Robin presided at the meeting and Daniel Beederman introduced the speakers.

**HAVE YOU RENEWED**

**YOUR MEMBERSHIP?**

October meeting speakers Dr. Irving Cutler (left), Judge A.L. Marovitz and Attorney Jerry Meites

—Photo by Moselle Schwartz



## Archives Receive Mystery Photo, Shul Histories

Among the recent acquisitions of material for the archives have been two brief synagogue histories and a mysterious group picture according to Past President Norman Schwartz.

The congregational histories are of Mount Sinai Congregation, formerly located at 4710 North Kedzie, and Tomche Shabbos Congregation, formerly at 1356 North Leavitt. Both were small Orthodox institutions which became victims of changing neighborhoods. Although Tomche Shabbos closed down several years ago and currently exists only in the sense that its plot at Waldheim Cemetery is still

receiving burials, Mount Sinai closed its doors only during the past year.

The mystery picture is a large group photo of several dozen men and women taken at a South Chicago Ladies' Aid Society picnic sometime around 1904. The photo was given to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society by Marie Goldberg Armin, who can identify her mother and father, Jennie and Max Goldberg, her Uncle Ben Levin and a few other individuals known to have been members of Bikur Cholem Congregation in the South Chicago area.

She does not know whether the Ladies Aid organization was connected in any way with the synagogue or whether it was a secular group. Many unidentified persons in the photo may not be Jewish. Can any reader help to identify the photo more completely?

### MEITES BOOK ORDER FORM

Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copies of *History of the Jews of Chicago* @ \$48.95 (\$45.00 for CJHS members) each, plus shipping and handling charges of \$3.50 (\$2.50 for additional copies). Illinois residents add 7% sales tax (\$3.43 or \$3.15).

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# About the Society

## What We Are

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society was founded in 1977 and is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the American Bicentennial celebrations of 1976. Muriel Robin was the founding president. It has as its purpose the discovery, preservation and dissemination of information concerning the Jewish experience in the Chicago area.

## What We Do

The Society seeks out, collects and preserves appropriate written, spoken and photographic records; publishes historical information; holds public meetings at which various aspects of Chicago Jewish history are treated; mounts appropriate exhibits; and offers tours of Jewish historical sites.

## Minsky Fund

The Doris Minsky Memorial Fund, established in memory of one of the Society's founders and longtime leaders, seeks to publish annually a monograph on an aspect of Chicago area Jewish history. Members may receive a copy of each monograph as it is published. Manuscripts may be submitted and contributions to the Fund are welcome at any time.

## Membership

Membership in the Society includes a subscription to Chicago Jewish History; each monograph published by the Doris Minsky Memorial Fund as it appears; discounts on Society tours and at the Spertus Museum Store and the opportunity to learn and inform others concerning Chicago Jewish history and its preservation.

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations.

## Dues Structure

Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year. The following dues schedule applies to categories indicated:

Regular Membership.....	\$25.00
Family Membership.....	\$35.00
Patron.....	\$50.00
Sponsor.....	\$100.00
Senior Citizen Membership.....	\$15.00
Student Membership.....	\$10.00
Synagogue or Organization.....	\$25.00
Life Membership.....	\$1,000.00

Checks should be made payable to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. Dues are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.

## Officers 1989-90

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Burt Robin.....Vice President  
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## Chicago Jewish History

*Chicago Jewish History* is published quarterly by the Chicago Jewish Historical Society at 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60605. Telephone (312) 663-5634. Appropriate manuscripts are invited and should be directed to the editor at 3500 North Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Illinois 60657. Single copies: \$1.50 postpaid. Successor to *Society News*.

Editor.....Irwin J. Suloway

### Editorial Board

Mark Mandle, Walter Roth, Norman Schwartz, Milton Shulman, Elaine Suloway

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



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