



chicago jewish history

Another Successful Season of Sold-Out Society Summer Tours

Tour Committee Chairman Leah Axelrod once again scored a success with her expert planning of the 2000 season of tours co-sponsored by the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and the Dawn Schuman Institute.

Sunday, July 9: Chicago Jewish Roots. The sentimental journey, guided by Dr. Irving Cutler, visited the Maxwell Street area, Lawndale, Logan Square, Humboldt Park, Albany Park and Rogers Park. Highlight of the bus tour was a special stop at the beautifully restored Garfield Park Conservatory, 300 North Central Park Avenue.

Sunday, July 30: Walking Tour of West Rogers Park. Mark Mandle and Leah Axelrod guided a group of 16 enthusiastic participants on a walk along Devon Avenue and environs. Baruch Hertz, Rabbi of of Cong. Bnei Ruven, took the group into the synagogue to show them the newly refurbished sanctuary, where study tables and chairs have replaced auditorium seating in both the men's and the women's sections. Also visited: the F.R.E.E. Synagogue (Friends of Refugees of Eastern Europe), the Ark, Rosenblum's Jewish bookstore, and a *shatnes* testing lab.



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Pageant Program Book to be Mailed to Society Members in September

The CJHS reprint of the original program book for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair Jewish Day pageant, *The Romance of A People*, will soon be mailed. The fascinating 72-page book (9^{3/4}" x 12") is supplemented by eight pages of new material.

Enclosed with the book will be your invitation to the CJHS commemorative event on Sunday, October 29, 2 p.m., at the Chicago Historical Society.

Did You Take Part in *The Romance of A People*?

Were you a performer? Were you a member of the audience? The Society wants to hear from those who were present at the 1933 Fair's Jewish Day. Please contact Editor Bev Chubat at (773)525-4888 or Bevchub@aol.com.

DUDELE—*The plaintive Hassidic song is symbolized in the dance of the Rabbi. (From rotogravure advertising for the 1933 pageant The Romance of A People.) See article about the dancer Nathan Vizonsky on page 11.*

Annual Brunch: Review of Year's Activities, Election of Board Members, and Entertainment



Darwin and Marv

Society members enjoyed a get-together at the annual lox and bagel brunch held on Sunday, June 4 at Temple Sholom, 3480 North Lake Shore Drive. President Roth opened the program with a brief review of the past year's activities and a look ahead to coming events. He recalled the popular Summer 1999 issue of *CJH* that contained articles about historic Jewish summer camps, and he presented a gift to Office Manager Eve Levin, who is beginning her eleventh year of volunteer service to the Society.

The annual election of CJHS board members was held. Re-elected by unanimous voice vote were

Charles B. Bernstein, Herman Draznin, Sheldon Gardner, Janet Iltis, Seymour Persky, Walter Roth, Dr. Milton Shulman, and Norma Spungen for three years; Elise Ginsparg for one year.

The afternoon concluded with tuneful nostalgia and humor, as singing guitarists Darwin and Marv (Darwin Apel and Marvin Zelonky) performed a delightful program of Yiddish, English, and Israeli songs.

Society Elects Officers for 2000-2001

At the June 7 meeting of the Society Board of Directors, the following officers were elected for the year 2000-2001: Walter Roth, president; Burt Robin, vice-president; Dr. Carolyn Eastwood, secretary, and Herman Draznin, treasurer. Clare Greenberg, relinquishing her office after long-time service as secretary, will join Janet Iltis as co-chair of the Membership Committee.

Corrections and Clarifications

In the Spring 2000 issue of *CJH*, we misspelled the names of these new members of the Society: Mr. & Mrs. Bernhard Ebstein
Mr. & Mrs. Michael Karsen
CJH regrets the errors.

Welcome to New Members of CJHS

James Borman
Robert Clamage
Leonard Cohen
Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Lazar
Inez Levy
Bernard & Helene Miller
Joan Pomaranc
Alan Portis
Angele Schreim
Adina Sella
Marilyn Silkin
Mr. & Mrs. Mitchel Sweig
Howard Weinstein

It is through the generosity of our members, with their time, energy, and financial support, that the Society is able to accomplish its goals. Thanks to all of our membership.

Tours *continued from page 1*

Sunday, August 27: North Central Illinois—A Jewish Presence. An all-day bus tour of picturesque river towns; three on the Rock River: Dixon, Sterling, and Rock Falls; and three on the Illinois River: Spring Valley, LaSalle and Ottawa.

Guide Allen Meyer, whose family had lived in Dixon, provided narration about the Jewish "river people." Norman Schwartz read from the transcribed oral history of 91-year-old Fremont Kaufman, who was from the area. Tour participant Eleanor Greenberg, who lived in Spring Valley until 1944, offered her recollections of Jewish life in an Illinois *shtetl*.

The tour group was warmly received by Jewish community leaders at the local synagogues and at the Ottawa cemetery. Dinner was in Lockport, at the Public Landing Restaurant, in the historic Gaylord Building.

It was a day rich in Jewish history, expertly organized by CJHS Tour Chair Leah Axelrod.

A detailed report on the trip, with photographs, will appear in the Fall 2000 issue of *CJH*.

Thanks to Volunteers at Chicago Jewish Folk Arts Festival

Thanks to Paula Chaiken, Joe Kraus, Richie Chaiken Kraus, Carolyn Eastwood, and Clare and Danny Greenberg, who worked at the CJHS information table at the Greater Chicago Folk Arts Festival.

The festival was held on Sunday, June 11, in Caldwell Woods, Cook County Forest Preserve, and was a great success despite rainy weather.

Sol Bloom, The Music Man

BY WALTER ROTH

The World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, held in Jackson Park on the south side of Chicago, was called "the most stupendous, interesting and significant show ever spread out for the public." The fair drew an estimated twenty-seven million people, making it the greatest tourist attraction up to that time. The central feature of the exposition was a circle of colossal buildings and statuary in Romanesque and Renaissance styles, called in the aggregate, the White City. The buildings, filled with displays of high human achievement in the 400 years since the arrival of Columbus in America, were designed by prominent architects under the direction of Daniel Burnham.

But the fair had another feature—the Midway Plaisance. Located on the undeveloped one-mile strip of land connecting Jackson and Washington Parks, outside the exhibition proper, the Midway housed an enticing world of displays and amusements offered by private vendors, many from foreign countries.

This bohemian wing of the fair—the first of its kind at a world's exposition—became the great crowd pleaser and earned most of the income for the fair. "Midway" became the generic word for the area of a carnival or circus where sideshows are located.

All but forgotten today is the fact that Sol Bloom, a twenty-two year old Jew born in Pekin, Illinois, was the leading planner and organizer of the Midway Plaisance entertainment.

Sol Bloom was born in 1870 to religious Polish Jewish immigrant parents, and was just an infant when the family moved to San Francisco.

In his book, "The Autobiography of Sol Bloom" (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1948), he tells of getting his first chance in show business when he was about 11 years old. At that time, young Sol was working at a brush factory. He had attended public school for only one day, he writes, because it was required that students buy their books, and he could not afford them.

"One day on my way home from the factory, as I stood gaping at the new playbill outside the Baldwin Theater, a man called to me from inside the lobby. He was the son of a Jewish family named Belasco who lived a few blocks from my own home." This was David Belasco, then working as call boy, a humble job that required him to prompt the actors to go on stage. But Bloom notes that Belasco, even then, had an air of distinction, and was treated with deference. David

Belasco went on to become one of the world's great theatrical producers and dramatists. (He was the author of *Madame Butterfly* and *Girl of the Golden West*, both of which were set to music by Puccini in his operas.) Belasco introduced young Sol to show business.

Bloom took small parts in theatrical productions. He also worked as an usher, candy vendor, hat checker, and seller of violets; he took orders for tickets, and learned all he could about the business side of theater. This experience, he writes, led to a job as box-office manager of the new Alcazar Theater, owned by Mike de Young, member of a leading family, and through his ownership of the *Chronicle* newspaper, one of San Francisco's most powerful figures.

This theater had a gymnasium on the second floor. (Other theaters had art galleries, or combined hotels and theaters, as did the Auditorium in Chicago.) Bloom writes that in the 1880s boxing had the appeal for young college men that football has in our day. Every young man tried to be a boxer. Bloom himself claims to have had a measure of success as an amateur lightweight, perhaps because his instructor was James "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, who was to become the world's heavyweight champion. Bloom staged boxing matches at the Alcazar gym; one of the most exciting was a 28-round bout between Corbett and a Jewish San Franciscan, Joe Choynski.

In his autobiography, Bloom relates the sequence of events that eventually brought him to Chicago.

Seeking spectacular new shows to stage (a la Barnum), he sailed for New York, and went on to Europe to see the Paris International Exposition of 1889. He visited all the various buildings with business on his mind, and found his movements governed by a kind of natural selection (though not exactly of the Darwinian type). He came to realize that, for himself, a fellow from Arabia who could swallow a sword exhibited a culture on a higher plane than that of a Swiss peasant who passed his days making cheese and milk chocolate. He writes that of all the exhibits at the fair he found those of the French colonies most fascinating, and his favorite was the Algerian Village, although he doubted that anything like it had ever been seen in Algeria. The show they presented was spectacular. Nothing like these dancers, acrobats, glass-eaters and scorpion-swallowers had ever been seen in the Western Hemisphere, and he was sure he could

make a fortune with them in the United States. Before leaving Paris, he negotiated an exclusive two-year contract to exhibit the Algerian Village in North and South America.

Arriving back in New York, Bloom learned about the planned Columbian Exposition. He hurried to Chicago to see what he could do about establishing the Algerian Village at the fair, but found that plans were going slowly. So he returned to San Francisco to wait for developments, and to manage a boxing match between Corbett and John L. Sullivan.

He returned to Chicago and found things poorly organized. Progress was being made in construction of the principal buildings, under Burnham's direction, but not on the Midway Plaisance. Bloom writes that he was astonished to learn that a professor of ethnology at Harvard University, Frederic Putnam, was in charge of the Midway. (The area had originally been planned as a location for exhibits of historical and cultural interest, and although it was also meant to include "the rare human exotic"—like the French colonial troupes that had been so popular at the Paris exposition—Prof. Putnam was to keep it "dignified and decorous.")

Sol Bloom writes: "To have made this unfortunate gentleman [Putnam] responsible for the establishment of a successful venture in the field of entertainment was about as intelligent a decision as it would be today to make Albert Einstein manager of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus."

With the recommendation of his mentor Mike de Young, who had been appointed one of the commissioners of the exposition, the 22-year-old Bloom was named manager of amusement concessions and superintendent of construction of the Midway Plaisance, with the full confidence of Daniel Burnham.

Bloom introduced the central feature of the Midway, the Ferris Wheel, the popularity of which rivaled the Eiffel Tower of the Paris Exposition. The Algerian and Tunisian Village, as Bloom's production was called in Chicago, became a great money-maker. The dancing girls gave performances in a 1,000-seat hall. Their great specialty was the *danse de ventre*. When

the public learned that the literal translation was "belly dance," they delightedly concluded that it must be salacious and immoral, and the paying crowds poured in. Bloom states that the *danse de ventre*, while sensuous and exciting, was a masterpiece of rhythm and beauty. Almost immediately, though, the dance was imitated in amusement parks around the country, and became associated with debasement and vulgarity as a crude, suggestive dance known as the "Hoochy-Koochy."

Bloom admits to contributing an essential ingredient in the success of the corrupted version of the *danse de ventre* by composing his "hoochy-koochy" melody. He writes that shortly before the fair opened, he was invited to present a preview dance performance for the Press Club of Chicago. Only a pianist was present to provide the music. To give him an idea of the rhythm, Bloom claims to have hummed a tune and then picked it out on the piano. From this improvisation a score was later arranged, and the music became better known than the dance itself. Bloom tells of his regret at not having copyrighted the music: "The failure to do so cost me at least a couple of hundred thousand dollars in royalties."

Tragedy marked the close of the fair. Mayor Carter Harrison had been assassinated on his own doorstep a few days before, and a great Depression was causing turmoil in the American economy. The joy of the fair turned to misery for the working class.

After the fair, Bloom decided to remain in Chicago. Through his successful style of showmanship, he had become acquainted with many of Chicago's politicians, particularly those of the First Ward, "Bathhouse John" Coughlin and Michael "Hinky Dink" Kenna. He made important contacts within the Democratic party, both locally and nationally.

Actually, Bloom's political career had started almost as soon as he came to Chicago in the Spring of 1893 during the mayoral campaign of Carter Henry Harrison, who had strong support from the First Ward. Harrison was elected and became a strong booster of the Columbian Exposition, and apparently of Bloom and his ideas. Bloom was getting his education in practical politics—the amalgamation of the corruption

of the First Ward politicians with the power of a strong mayor, a formula that was somewhat new to Chicago but already in full force in New York, with Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall. As Bloom notes: "If this seems somewhat sordid, I can only remark that every great

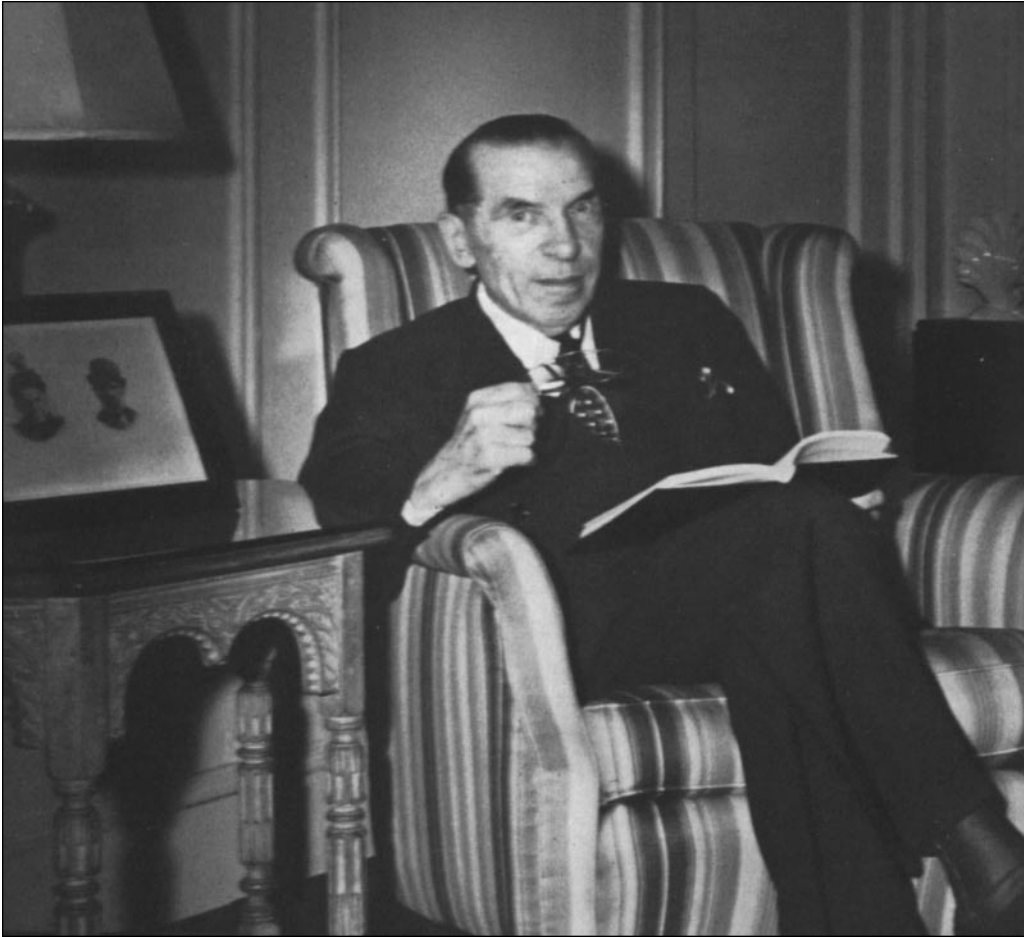


Sol Bloom's "Hoochy-Koochy" Melody

Lyrics were often sung to this tune, such as:

"O, they don't wear pants in the southern part of France."

continued on page 6



Sol Bloom in 1948

From his autobiography: "In the photograph of me...another photograph is shown resting on the table at my right. The bearded man in the old-fashioned derby is my father; the woman in the old-fashioned bonnet is my mother. They never posed for any other photograph in their lives, and they consented to pose this one time only because it was necessary for their pictures to appear, as identification, on the passes I got them for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893." Years later, Bloom had these cherished images enlarged and framed.

Sol Bloom *continued from page 5*

accomplishment outside the realm of pure art has been brought about through compromise."

Bloom quickly found employment as the Chicago branch manager of M. Witmark & Sons, then the biggest publisher of popular music in America. By 1896 he had left Witmark to establish his own firm, located at the corner of Wabash and Jackson. His business prospered and many of the musical compositions that he published became hits.

On June 22, 1897, he married Evelyn Hechheimer. At their engagement party at the Wellington Hotel, composer Paul Dresser sang his own song *On the Banks of the Wabash* and Charles K. Harris performed his own composition *After the Ball is Over*. The new couple had an apartment at 4736 South Prairie Avenue, a very fashionable area at that time. In his autobiography Bloom writes with nostalgia of his old neighborhood, located between Washington Park and Lake Michigan.

Bloom's music publishing business continued to prosper. He was also managing the music department of Rothschild's department store [see box on page 7].

Ever an innovator in entertainment, Bloom introduced a piano player and singer to the department, who gave live performances of the songs on the sheet music to encourage customers to purchase the merchandise.

He broadened his reputation by organizing the "World's Musical Library" and placed ads in newspapers in Chicago and surroundings. He introduced photographs on his sheet music to make the product more attractive. Before long, he became known as "Sol Bloom, the Music Man."

In a big display advertisement in newspapers he proclaimed that "Sol Bloom, the Music Man" had secured "Copyright Number One for the Twentieth Century" on January 2, 1900 for *I Wish I Was in Dixie Land Tonight* by Raymond A. Browne.

WALTER ROTH *is president of the Society. CJH Editor Bev Chubatz also contributed to the research and writing. Thanks to Society board members Harold T. Berc, Charles B. Bernstein, and Milton Shulman for providing information about the Rothschild Building. Thanks to Mr. Bernstein for allowing us to excerpt material from his book "The Rothschilds of Nordstetten: Their History and Genealogy" (1989).*

Bloom's songs were now being printed as a separate feature in William Randolph Hearst's Chicago newspapers. He also began to sell musical instruments. At that time he was commuting between Chicago and New York, and decided that was the time was right to move east permanently. In 1903, with great fanfare, he moved to New York.

Bloom became a New Yorker. He invested in real estate and dabbled in the theater, opera, and nearly all types of music, some of which he composed himself. In his autobiography he claims that by 1910 he owned over 70 music departments in retail stores throughout the country. He involved himself in the new recording industry by opening a store in New York selling Victor Talking Machines.

He writes that by 1920 he was 50 years old, financially secure, and in need of a new stimulus. He had continued his political activities as a staunch Democrat and member of Tammany Hall, so when the

U.S. Representative of New York's 19th Congressional District died in November, 1922, and the Democratic Party called on him to run for the vacant seat, Bloom accepted the challenge. He won the normally Republican "silk stocking" district by 145 votes, and was re-elected for over 25 years, until his death in 1949.

He directed the George Washington Bicentennial Exposition (1932), and the Constitution Sesquicentennial Exposition (1937). In 1938, he became chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. He was a U.S. delegate to the Anglo-American Conference on Refugee Problems in 1943, a member of the delegation to the conference that established the United Nations, and a strong supporter of Zionism.

Sol Bloom was a genius in the field of musical entertainment, and a long-time New York Democratic politician. But his career essentially started in Chicago in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition, with his belly dancers and "hootchy-kootchy" melody. ❖

Viewing relating to Sol Bloom:

RIVERWALK GATEWAY MURALS

These newly installed murals by Chicago-born painter Ellen Lanyon line the 170-foot trellised pedestrian and bicycle passageway under the Lake Shore Drive Bridge near Lake Michigan. They depict images of the history of the Chicago River from about 1673 to the present. The Columbian Exposition mural includes the White City and a belly dancer.

MOVIE /VIDEO

Gentleman Jim (1942).

Directed by Raoul Walsh. Starring Errol Flynn as heavyweight boxing champion James "Gentleman Jim" Corbett. Cast includes Alexis Smith, Jack Carson, Alan Hale, and Ward Bond as John L. Sullivan. (Is there a "Sol Bloom" character in the movie?) Leonard Maltin's Movie & Video Guide gives it three and a half stars.

The Rothschild Building

Sol Bloom managed the music department in the store owned by Abram M. Rothschild. Rothschild & Co. was located on the east side of Chicago's State Street, between Jackson and Van Buren.

The family sold the building in 1904, and in 1912 the new owner of the department store rebuilt on the site. (This was Marshall Field & Company, which established its wholly-owned Davis Store as a place to sell low-end merchandise.) However, the name "Rothschild" commanded so much respect in the community that the architects of the new building, Holabird and Roche, provided for a series of decorative, encircled "Rs" on its facades, and the building continued to be known as the Rothschild Building. (It later became the main branch of Goldblatt Bros. department stores, and was renamed the Goldblatt Building in 1936.)

In the mid-1980s, almost a century after A.M. Rothschild served the community as a member of the committee which organized the Columbian Exposition, the building was under consideration as the site for the Chicago Public Library, but those plans were abandoned.

DePaul University now occupies most of the building, and its name is incised on the Jackson Boulevard facade. Near the entrance, a plaque proclaims that the Rothschild Building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. On the State Street and Van Buren Street facades, the Rothschild "Rs" are still clearly visible.

The main floor and lower level of the building are now occupied by the Music Mart—a group of stores selling musical instruments, recorded music, and sheet music. There are also restaurants and a performance space for live music events. No doubt "Sol Bloom, the Music Man" would approve of this outcome. ❖

AROUND the TOWN

A THOUSAND AND
ONE AFTERNOONS
IN CHICAGO

By BEN HECHT

DOMASHOVITZ



DOMASHOVITZ is dead. Who was Domashovitz? It is possible you never heard of him. I never heard of him until a young man said to me one afternoon, "You should have

known this man, Domashovitz." So I asked, "Why?" And the young man said, "You ask why. How can I tell you why? If you had known him you would have seen why."

"Where is he, then?" I asked. The young man shrugged his shoulders. His name is Zollatareff [sic]. He is a journalist on the west side. It would take up a great deal of space to describe a west side journalist.

"Well, he is dead," said this one. "He was my boss. You never heard about him?"

"No."

"Well, listen. The Daily Free Russia is a newspaper on the west side. I am the editor now. I am also the janitor and the stove polisher and the reporter. But let me tell you. Domashovitz came to America maybe ten years ago. He was a muzhik. You know what that is?"

"Yes."

"That's good. A muzhik is a Russian peasant."

"But I knew that."

"Well, sometimes you can't tell, when an American journalist says he knows, if he really knows. But let me tell you. Domashovitz was a muzhik. That means he couldn't read and he couldn't write. And he had no ideas, that is what you would call ideas. But he was a man. He got a job in an ink factory on the west side here and at night he talked with other Russians. And what did they talk about? Do you know what Russians talk about?"

"Yes."

"Let me tell you."

"But I know already."

"All right, then you know. I won't tell you. So Domashovitz sat at night and talked. And if you would come to him and say, 'I am hungry,' Domashovitz he would say, 'Here, I have some money. Take it.' Or he would say, 'Here, I have a watch. Maybe you can sell it. It isn't much good, but try and sell it.' Did you ever know such a man?"

"Yes."

"But not like Domashovitz. No, not like him. So what does he do? You must understand he wants to do something. So he says, 'I will learn to read and write. Not only English, but Russian also. And I will start a newspaper. It will be a newspaper that will help people. It will help all Russians.' So what does he do then? Well, he learns to

read and write and he starts a newspaper four years ago. And he forms a corporation and he is the president of it. Have you heard of this corporation?"

"No."

"Well, it is a corporation. You know, workingmen and people come in and so on. Well, let me tell you. All day Domashovitz works in the ink factory. And he's a good workingman. He makes his salary. So he brings his salary to the newspaper and at night he works on the newspaper. He can't write. And maybe he can't think well enough. So what does he do? He sweeps the floors. He washes the windows. He runs errands. And he signs the checks. He was my boss. Did you ever hear of such a publisher?"

"No."

"Who would? Well, let me tell you. It goes along like that. He works all day long, at night, too. And money? He never has any. He gives it to everybody. Do you know how old he was?"

"No."

"Well, he was older than 60 years, I'm sure. And if you have no money he says, 'Here, take it.' And if you said, 'No, Domashovitz, keep it. You haven't got much,' what would he say. Well, he would say, 'You need it. Then why not take it? I am an old man. What does an old man need? A package of cigarettes and a cup of coffee.' And he would make you take it.

And if it was his shoes you wanted he would make you take them. Did you ever hear of such a man? No, of course not. But that was Domashovitz."

"Go on. How did he die?"

"Well, I'm coming to that. So he starts orphan asylums."

"What?"

"Yes, let me tell you. He's always busy trying to start something for helping people. The newspaper is not enough. He must do more things. Maybe you won't like this story. Because the Daily Free Russia is a soviet paper. You know that."

"Yes. I thought it was."

"Hm. You thought. And why did you think? But Domashovitz was not a politician. He was a man. In Russian they say, 'Look, here is a man.' And it means something. What does it mean in English, tell me?"

"The same, perhaps."

"Hm. Maybe. Well, let me tell you. The story is that this Domashovitz goes on living till one night he goes home. He lives in Chicago avenue near where the paper is. On this night he is tired. In the factory by day. Sweeping up in his newspaper office by night. And all the time studying. He used to say, 'Education is what people need. Not to be educated is to live in darkness.' So this night he goes home. And he stretches out on his bed. And he picks up a book. And then what does he do? He lights a cigarette. It is long after 2 o'clock in the morning. But Domashovitz must read. And why? Because he is old and there isn't much time left to read and he must learn. You know how he said—he didn't want to live in darkness. Well, all this you will have to imagine."

"Go on, Zolly. The story must have an end."

"Hm. An end it has. So he lies in bed studying. What is he reading? I forget. But then he is tired. So his eyes fall asleep. And this Domashovitz forgets to put the cigarette away. So when he is asleep the little cigarette falls out of his mouth and starts burning the bed. So the bed catches on fire and pretty soon the whole room is on fire."

"So he was burned up?"

"No, listen. Let me tell you. That is the strange part of it. Of that part I want you to write the story. He is not burned up."

"Then he doesn't die?"

"Die he does. But listen how. When the fire starts up and is burning good Domashovitz suddenly opens his eyes. What does he see? Fire all around him. But he is not afraid of fire. Remember what he says, he is afraid only of living in darkness. You understand. But there is smoke from the fire. And listen, the smoke chokes him. So the next morning they find Domashovitz and he is not burned at all. The bed is burned and the room is burned. But Domashovitz is choked to death by the smoke that comes from the fire. So you see what a story it is?"

"Yes."

"No, you don't. Because I don't tell it right. But you will fix it up, yes? And you will put in something nice about Domashovitz. And listen, if you don't mind, you will say how he was my boss and how Zolly is now the editor?"

"Yes."

In reprinting this Ben Hecht 1921 Chicago Daily News column, we have used the original spelling and punctuation, simulated the original column heading and reproduced the original decorative drop letter.

This Ben Hecht *Chicago Daily News* column, and those printed in the Spring and Summer, 1999 issues of *CJH*, were sent to Society president Walter Roth by Florice Whyte Kovan of Washington, DC., who claims to have collected all of Ben Hecht's 400 *Daily News* columns. Ms. Kovan is the editor of Snickersnee Press, publisher of *The Ben Hecht Story and News*, which contains a Ben Hecht reprint in every issue. **E-mail:** Snickersneepress.bigstep.com

Ben Hecht and Meyer Zolotareff: Beginning a Series on Chicago Jewish Newspapermen and Women

In his autobiography "A Child of the Century" (1954), Ben Hecht writes, "I have lived in other cities but have been inside only one. I knew Chicago's thirty-two feet of intestines. Only newspapermen ever achieve this bug-in-a-rug citizenship."

He tells of walking through the streets of Chicago when he stops here between trains from New York to Los Angeles. He recalls the old *Chicago Daily News* building on Madison Street near Wells, where he worked as a young reporter in the 1920s.

Who better than the young Ben Hecht to begin our series on Chicago's Jewish newspapermen and women? In the dialogue on these pages he introduces us to our first subject, Meyer Zolotareff.

Zolly continued on page 10

Zolly *continued from page 9*

These notes about Zolly are gathered from past pages of *The Late Edition*, a periodical published by veteran newspeople who had been employed by the last Hearst newspapers in our city, *Chicago Today* and *Chicago's American*.

An obituary from the December 1965 issue of the *Press Veterans Bulletin* is quoted in *The Late Edition*:

"Meyer Zolotareff, who retired as labor editor of *Chicago's American* in 1950, died November 16, 1965, in Edgewater Hospital of a heart ailment.

He began his career on a paper in Borisoglibsk, Russia, and came to the United States in 1914. After 10 years with a Russian-language newspaper, he joined the staff of the *Herald and Examiner*.

Surviving are his widow, Ethel, two sons, a daughter and five grandchildren."

News of Zolly's death brought back memories of the man. *The Late Edition* reports receiving a note from Nick Shuman, who adds this anecdote: "On the night in 1948 that Henry Wallace was nominated for the presidency by the Progressive Party, Meyer came to my desk, picked up my phone and said, 'Well, Nick, so let's call up Henry.' To my astonishment, he reached him in his hotel room on the first try and said, 'Henry, congratulation. So when you're elected President you'll make me Secretary of State?' To which Wallace responded, 'No, no, Meyer. Secretary of Labor.'"

An anecdote from former city editor John Madigan: "When Meyer was insistent on telling you something, and he didn't think you agreed with him, it was extremely difficult to break off the conversation. One day in the late '40s I gave him the supreme test. I had my hat and coat on when he brought up a matter in the newsroom. He was in his shirtsleeves. Within minutes, he had accompanied me to the hallway, then into the elevator, down to the lobby, across it to Madison Street and out into the cold."

The Late Edition refers to anecdotes about Zolotareff as "Zolly Zingers." Most of them involve his Russian-accented way with the English language.

Vern Whaley is reminded of the time Meyer phoned the city desk to offer a story about a guy who was "bitten." When [editor] Harry Reutlinger asked what kind of dog it was, Meyer yelled, "No, no! He was bitten by a broom by a neighbor!"

Malden Jones recalls: "I climbed aboard as one of Meyer's protégés and understudies in the 1950s when he appeared in Springfield to cover the annual AFL state convention...Zolotareff had a speaking acquaintance with all labor leaders, big and small...His flowing tie, Borsalino hat, and inimitable dialect were wonderful trademarks...I fielded many labor stories, and I do remember a unique episode: Zolotareff was calling the city desk from a phone booth in the state armory, and in the course of his conversation I heard him say (in broken English), 'Finally, I see you have got a well-dressed reporter here, and not bums...'" ♦

Notes on Some of Chicago's Memorable Jewish Newspeople

Our city's daily newspapers have employed many well-remembered Jewish journalists:

Ed Eulenberg worked at the *Chicago Daily News* and the City News Bureau, and was responsible for the tutelage of many Chicago newspeople... **Isaac Gershman** headed the City News Bureau for many years... **Sam Lesner** was entertainment critic at the *Daily News* for almost 50 years. He was the father of Roberta Bernstein, first editor of the CJHS quarterly. He addressed a meeting of the Society in its early days... **Peter Lisagor** was a renowned *Daily News* writer and a participant in television's "Washington Week in Review"... **Howie Mayer** was editor of the University of Chicago campus paper when he "broke" the Loeb and Leopold case. Mayer later became the publicist for Sally Rand.

Seymour Raven was a music critic at the *Tribune*. He was guest speaker at a meeting of the Society in 1991... **Harry Romanoff** was the long-time night city editor of the *Herald-American*... Reporter "**Dynamite**" **Sokol** was well-connected; one of his colleagues at the *American* claimed to be writing an "as told to" magazine article entitled "I Fixed Ten Thousand Traffic Tickets" by Edward Sokol as told to Copeland Burg.

We appeal to our readers for articles and anecdotes about Chicago's many notable Jewish reporters, columnists, critics, editors, and cartoonists of the past.

Thanks to CJHS board member Harold T. Berc for suggesting this series and sharing with us his treasure of reference material and his extraordinary memory.

Nathan Vizonsky: He Wrote the Book on Jewish Folk Dances

Nathan Vizonsky brought Jewish dance to the concert stages of Chicago in truly spectacular fashion. In the 1930s, he directed the dancers in great Jewish pageant-dramas: the *First Chanukah Festival* at the Chicago Stadium; *The Romance of A People* at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933; *The Epic of A Nation*, the following year at the Fair; the *Second Chanukah Festival* at the Civic Opera House; and the *Purim Festival* at the Coliseum. These Jewish spectacles featured hundreds of performers and were witnessed by audiences in the hundreds of thousands.

The CJHS has reprinted the program book for *The Romance*, in which Nathan Vizonsky is described as “a pioneer of Jewish plastic expression and a former member of the Max Reinhardt group and the Metropolitan Theatre of Berlin.” He immigrated to America in 1924.

Ann Barzel, the Chicago writer, critic, and dance historian, was acquainted with Vizonsky. She recalls that he taught classes and gave private lessons in Jewish dance at the Glickman School of Music in studios located above the clothing store on the southwest corner of Roosevelt Road and Kedzie Avenue.

Ms. Barzel remembers that he presented solo concerts in which he performed dances based on Jewish activities in the *shtetlach* of Eastern Europe. She recalls his dance based on *Dudele*, a wordless Hassidic melody, in which he imitated the gestures and poses of the *shtetl* Jew at prayer. [Vizonsky performed *Dudele* in *The Romance*.]

His live performances are preserved only in black and white



SPANISH COURT DANCERS

Colorful group who entertain the court of Isabella and Ferdinand.

(From rotogravure advertising for *The Romance of A People*.)

Nathan Vizonsky is pictured.

photographs, bits of motion picture film, and the memories of the audience members at his shows.

But Nathan Vizonsky did leave us a permanent dance document—his unique book, “Ten Jewish Folk Dances: A Manual for Teachers and Leaders”—published in Chicago, in 1942 by the American-Hebrew Theatrical League. Leading figures in Chicago’s Jewish arts community contributed to Vizonsky’s book: the introductory chapter is translated from the Yiddish by Ben Aronin,

the music is arranged by Max Janowski, and the illustrations are by Todros Geller.

The ten dances described in the book are characteristic of the Jews of Eastern Europe. In addition to describing the steps for each dance, Vizonsky provides detailed notes on the costumes to be used, based on generations of Jewish tradition.

A copy of the book can be found in the Asher Library of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 618 South Michigan Avenue. ❖

The Boy Scouts of America: Jewish Troops on Chicago's Northwest Side in the 1930s

BY DAVID H. HELLER

In the 1930s, the Chicago Council of the BSA was divided into five districts. Troops of the Northwest District bore numbers under 100 and their scouts wore distinctive maroon neckerchiefs. Among the Jewish troops were:

Troop 32: Humboldt Boulevard Temple Bnai David–Ohave Zedek. 1910 Humboldt Blvd.

We regarded this as a sister troop of 38, and often saw each other at joint activities. The building is now used as a church.

Troop 34: Masonic Temple.

Kedzie Blvd. at Albany Ave.

Around 1935–36, this was started as a spin-off of Troop 38. Avers I. Wexler and Eugene I. Heller were among the founding members.

Troop 38: Logan Square Congregation Shaare Zedek. Fullerton Ave. near Kedzie Blvd.

The rabbi was Benjamin Birnbaum, and the religious school director was David Cohen. The building has since been demolished and replaced by a commercial structure.

Around 1932–1935, the scoutmaster of Troop 38 was Julian Cohen. His brother, Wilbur Cohen, was an assistant scoutmaster, as was Marty Resnick. Seymour Goldstein (Gale) was junior assistant. David H. Heller was senior patrol leader. Among the members were: his brother, Eugene I. Heller; Avers I. Wexler, Melvin and Sheldon Goldberg, Bernard Savage, Seymour Jurbin, David Emalfarb (Malfarb), Roy Goldstein (Gale), Sidney and Ralph Goldstein (Fisher), Earl Tauff, Sanford and Harold Bernstein (Berkey), Sheffield Laterman, Joseph Aroner, Sidney Paddor, Clarence Judd Braude, Phillip Eisenman, Milton Schechter, Shepard and Melvin Eisenman; the Henkin brothers, Lester Gootnick, Sidney Paddor, Harvey Roland, Marvin Sage, Sonny Kirschenbaum, Norman Edidin, and Harold Novak.

DAVID H. HELLER *was president of Loop (now Harold Washington) College, 1969-1980. His wife, formerly Dvora Halushka, and he have two daughters and four remarkable grandchildren.*

The names in parentheses were changed of course, usually by Anglicization. The Goldstein-Fisher metamorphosis was a special case. When Sydney Goldstein, a former member of Troop 38, was admitted to the United States Military Academy at West Point in the early 1930s, he adopted his mother's maiden name, Fisher. Later, his younger brother, Ralph, chose the same name. Sydney later became an Army officer; Ralph, a physician in California. Seymour and Roy Goldstein were not related to the "Fishers"; they became "Gales."

In the summer of 1932, many of us attended Camp Chekagou, one of the Owasippe Scout Camps, located with Camp Blackhawk (for West Side troops) on Crystal Lake, near Muskegon, Michigan. In 1934, Chekagou and Blackhawk were closed and the Northwest and West Districts were moved to Camp MacDonald (renamed Camp Stuart) on nearby Big Blue Lake. The camp period was ten days, from Sundays to Wednesdays, and we got there on the Pere Marquette Railroad. The camp fees were \$10.00 and the fare was \$5.00.

On a personal note, I remember these amounts very well because, in the depths of the Depression, my family could not afford such astronomical costs, and I had to miss the summer of 1933. Later, our finances improved and I was able to attend in 1934 and, with my brother, in 1935. That year was the 25th Anniversary of the BSA, and Troop 38 held a competition for a scholarship to attend the National Jamboree in Washington, DC. I won the contest but the event was cancelled because of a terrible national epidemic of what was then called "Infantile Paralysis."

In 1933, our troop participated, with about a thousand other Jewish kids, in *The Romance of A People*, at Soldier Field. We performed a "wand drill," for which we rehearsed for several weeks. I was the speck at the left-hand corner in photographs of the presentation.

The wand drill was a gymnastic exercise. At that time, under various European influences in Chicago (e.g.: German turnvereins, Bohemian sokols, etc.), calisthenics and group drills played a large role in physical education activities. The wands were dowel

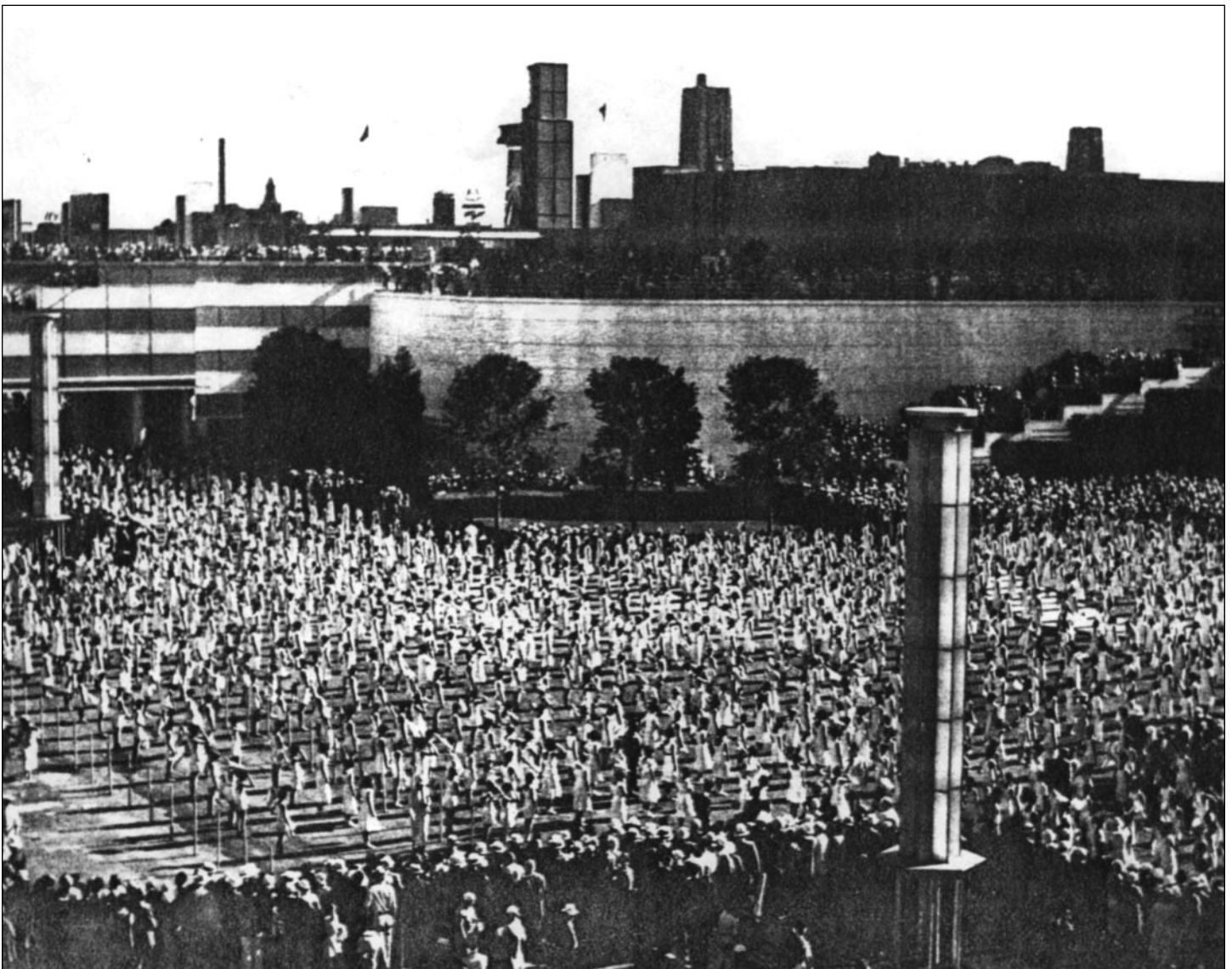
rods about a half-inch by 18 inches. We wore white sleeveless undershirts and shorts. (Mine were actually undershorts with the fly sewn shut). Boy Scouts were only one element in the display; many other Jewish youth groups participated. Although the rehearsals extended over several weeks, they totalled no more than 4-5 hours of practice, so the show was certainly more stately than flashy. Indeed, it would perhaps have been rather dull, except for the enthusiastic audience *kvelling* at so many healthy *kinder* performing in a quiet and orderly manner, for once.



Ticket (Chicago Jewish Archives)

In the summer of 1934, Troop 38 provided Boy Scout guides for the Century of Progress Exposition. I was one of them. We had to pass an examination about the Exposition, and were housed for a

week or so at a camp on Northerly Island near the east tower of the Skyride. Mostly, we wandered around the grounds to answer questions from visitors. We also managed to enjoy the fair and to see some of the shows on the Midway, including Sally Rand. [Northerly Island, which was called Enchanted Island at the Century of Progress, later became Meigs Field. The fan dancer Sally Rand was featured in the *Streets of Paris* show, and became the sensational star of the fair.] ❖

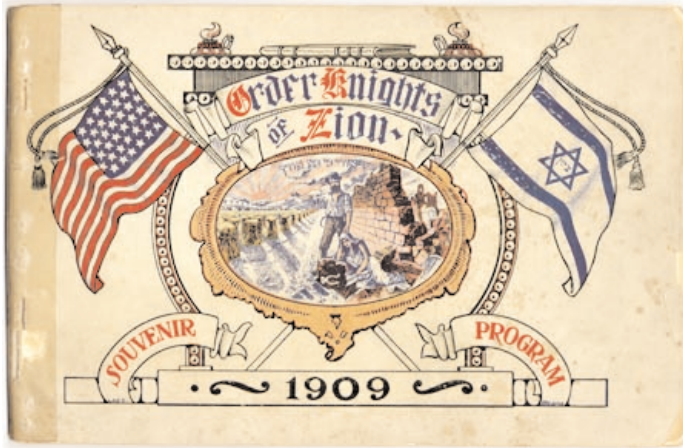


A Century of Progress: Jewish Day in the Court of Hall of Science; July 3, 1933
(from a booklet about the fair; title unknown)

FROM THE
CHICAGO JEWISH
archives

Researching Zionism in Chicago

By Joy Kingsolver



**Cover, Souvenir Program,
Knights of Zion Convention, 1909**

“**T**he future historians who will delve into the origin and the development of the Zionist movement...will look back to the handful of valiant dreamers in Chicago who were the voluntary leaders to clear the path which the Jews of America, after two decades of scoffing, aloofness and hesitation, were destined to tread.”

Writing in 1919, as Chicago was preparing to host the national convention of the Zionist Organization of America, H.L. Meites expressed both pride in the leadership of the city's Jewish community and frustration that it had taken so long to bring a national Zionist convention to Chicago. New York had already eclipsed Chicago as the national center for Zionist activity and organization.

But Chicago could take pride in the fact that the first organized Zionist group in the United States, the Chicago Zion Society, was formed here in 1895 by Bernard Horwich, according to Meites. This organization was short-lived, but the Knights of Zion endured

much longer. It was founded in 1897 by Leon Zolotkoff, Bernard Horwich and others just after the First Zionist Congress in Basle, Switzerland, where Zolotkoff had served as delegate.

In the following years, Chicago produced many organizations, representing the entire spectrum of Zionist ideology. Unfortunately, the early groups, many of which were very small, left only sketchy records of their inner workings and public activity. For most of them, there is little archival material that survived.

The Chicago Jewish Archives has two items from the Knights of Zion that help to illuminate the early years. A letter from 1904 announces a memorial service for Theodore Herzl, who had recently died. The service was held at KAM, and attendees were advised to “kindly avoid the wearing of light or flashy apparel, especially headgear, if possible, as this is an occasion of mourning.” All Zionists in Chicago were invited to attend, regardless of ideology—a rare occasion of unity in the movement.

In the early years, the Knights of Zion held annual conventions at the Chicago Hebrew Institute (founded by members of Kadimoh Gate of KOZ); the report of the 1908 event is reproduced in Meites' book, and the Archives owns a copy of the program book for 1909. The program contains several articles outlining the goals of the organization; one was to promote national fundraising through the Jewish Colonial Trust, a bank incorporated in London (and a forerunner of Bank Leumi), which sold shares at one pound each, to allow all to contribute. The Archives has two of these share certificates from 1900 and 1901; they are fascinating artifacts, bordered with images of Palestine. A full century old, they are very fragile, and are currently being restored by a professional conservator.

Other Zionist organizations soon joined the scene in Chicago: Poale Zion (Labor Zionist Organization of Chicago) in 1905, the Jewish National Workers

Alliance (Farband) in 1912, and the Zionist Organization of Chicago in 1918, and others. Archival collections for these groups are helpful for research in spite of the gaps that exist in them.

The largest collection of material is from the various Labor Zionist organizations (28 boxes). Although it contains relatively little from the early years, there is a small collection of early photographs of Poale Zion in the Unterman collection. Correspondence, flyers, membership lists and other documents are more complete for the years after 1950, and continue through the 1970s, when a merger between PZ and the JNWA produced the Labor Zionist Alliance. The collection of the JNWA consists primarily of commemorative and anniversary books, which can often be surprisingly revealing.

The Zionist Organization of Chicago Collection is lacking in early material, but has some yearbooks from the 1940s, and is fuller for the 1970s. Anniversary celebrations and conferences, correspondence and internal documents help to document the changing role of the ZOC.

Research in Zionist history is hampered by the gaps in the archival record; some organizations, such as

Mizrachi and Hadassah, are not well represented in the archives. Some material may be found in other repositories such as the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.

Personal collections may add another dimension to Zionist activities in Chicago. The Archives has personal papers from Captain Herman Weiss, who was involved in the KOZ and was a delegate to the 9th Zionist Congress. Rosemary Krensky, the Unterman family, and A.H. Rosenberg all preserved records of their Zionist activities. The collection of Evelyn Hattis Fox, which is currently being processed, documents a life of musical and dramatic performance devoted to promoting the Zionist cause.

This is far from an exhaustive description of material available for research. The Archives is indebted to many people for helping to preserve this record: chief among them is the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, which both donates material and refers donors to the Archives; Fagel Unterman, who recently added to the LZA collection; the Fox family, and many other people who have donated items to augment the records. The Archives is grateful to all of them, and still hopes to add to the historical resources on this vital topic. ❖



Jewish National Workers Alliance (Farband) Choir, 1929

Center, row 3: Max Sosewitz; center, row 2: Julius Miller.

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 Celebration of 1976. Muriel Robin was the founding president. The Society 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.

Volunteer Opportunities

Would you like to become more involved in the activities of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society? We'd love to have you! Following are the various committees on which you can serve. Contact the Society at (312)663-5634 or any of the Chairpersons listed here.

■ PROGRAM COMMITTEE

Do you have a great idea for a meeting topic? If you are organized and creative, friendly and outgoing, the Program Committee would welcome your help in planning and implementing our bi-monthly and annual meetings. Contact Burt Robin (773)667-6251.

■ MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Society's membership continues to grow, and you could help us introduce Chicago Jewish history to even more people. Share your ideas and energy! Contact Janet Iltis (773)761-1224 or Clare Greenberg (773)725-7330.

■ TOUR COMMITTEE

Bring your creativity and organization to planning and promoting our popular roster of tours on Jewish history. Contact Leah Axelrod (847)432-7003.

■ EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Do you like to write? Are you a great proofreader? You can contribute to our quarterly publication, *Chicago Jewish History*. Contact our editor, Bev Chubat (773)525-4888.

Membership

Membership in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations and includes a subscription to *Chicago Jewish History*, discounts on Society tours and at the Spertus Museum store, and the opportunity to learn and inform others about Chicago Jewish history and its preservation.

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.

Life Membership	\$1000
Historian	500
Scholar	250
Sponsor	100
Patron or Family	50
Senior Family or Individual	35
Synagogue or Organization	25
Senior Individual or Student	20

Make checks payable to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, and mail to our office at 618 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago IL 60605. Dues are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law.



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