



# CHICAGO JEWISH HISTORY

## The Annual Book Issue

### Abraham Gottlieb and the Chicago World's Fair

By Dr. Chaim M. Rosenberg

In 1890, the United States Congress awarded Chicago the privilege of hosting a world's fair to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of America. The fair would showcase the spectacular growth of the city of Chicago and America's industrial might. On September 9, Chicago architect Daniel Hudson Burnham was appointed director of construction. America's leading landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted, was selected to design the grounds of the fair at Jackson Park, and Abraham Gottlieb was appointed chief engineer. Burnham, Olmsted, and Gottlieb "formed the nucleus of the Construction Department," each receiving a salary of \$6,000 per year (worth \$210,000 in 2025).<sup>1</sup> The three men undertook the design and building of a fair that would "stand before the world as the best fruit of American civilization... The committee further reported that it had called a meeting ... to consider the matter of a permanent art building on the lake front."<sup>2</sup>



Abraham Gottlieb

On January 12, 1891, in Chicago, Burnham, Olmsted, and Gottlieb met with America's leading architects to decide who would design the fair's main buildings. Richard Morris Hunt was selected to design the Administration Building; Charles McKim, the Agricultural Building; George M. Post, the Manufacturers Building; Henry Van Hunt, the Electricity

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### The Jewishness of Buffalo Grove: An Appraisal

By Dana Steingold



Shalom Bakery, a part of the Buffalo Grove community for many years

At my family's Seder table in Buffalo Grove, tradition is woven into every detail. The matzoh is carefully arranged, the charoset mixed to just the right consistency, and the Seder plate sits as a quiet storyteller of our people's past. Each year, we gather together—parents, grandparents, neighbors, and friends—to retell the story of the Exodus, of wandering, and of resilience. But, as we sip our wine and dip parsley into salt water, another story unfolds: the story of Buffalo Grove's Jewish community.

When I first dove into this project back in the summer of 2024, I had no clue where to begin—so I did what any slightly overwhelmed, overly ambitious researcher might do: I made a giant list. Every synagogue, local Jewish school, politician, youth group, and passionate community leaders I could find went on that list. Then I reached out one by one to each organization or person. I spoke with rabbis, temple presidents, school principals, and community members, each with their own unique story to share about our shared Buffalo Grove Jewish community.

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## CO-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



Dr. Rachelle Gold

Every fall, we admire the colors of nature. At CJHS, we celebrate the brilliance of books. We are proud that so many members have authored and edited books. This year, I want to introduce you to a CJHS member who has brightened the Jewish book world, but whose name you will not see on a book cover. Meet CJHS member Shoshanah Seidman, the former Judaica cataloguer and selector at Northwestern University Libraries. Her career path was not easy or direct. Her experiences were shaped by personal challenges and the sweeping events in the Jewish world since World War II.

Shoshanah retired in 2022 after 22 years at Northwestern University, 19 years in the Hebraica field. Her position was the culmination of a love for Judaism, pursuit of intellectual challenge, and a desire to be of service—all rooted in her early years and family background.

Shoshanah was born in Cairo to a traditional Sephardic family that had lived in France in the 1800s, followed by Algeria, and then Egypt for several generations. She noted that her family did not possess Egyptian passports because Egypt denied citizenship to minorities. When she was a small child, her family left Egypt for Marseille, France. The consequences of the Holocaust were a motivating factor, but the move was meant only to be an interim one, as *aliyah* (living in Israel) was the family goal. In 1949, the family made *aliyah*. However, conditions in Israel were very difficult. The young country had limited resources and was absorbing a large number of immigrants from many countries. Shoshanah's family was housed in one of the immigrant tent cities (*ma'abarot*). The adult family members tried to secure better housing and a livelihood but were unable to do so.

After one year, the family returned to the small Jewish community of Marseille, where Shoshanah spent the rest of her childhood and teens. Her parents knew French, but Arabic was the language spoken at home. She attended public school. There was no Jewish education for girls. Then, in 1962, when she was finishing high school, the Jewish community was transformed by a large influx of Jews from Algeria, which had just gained independence from France, as well as Jews from Morocco and Tunisia. Jewish communal services in Marseille and the south of France multiplied to meet the need, and Shoshanah became actively involved with the new immigrants. She organized Jewish education and youth groups. Meanwhile, Shoshanah and her family clung to their desire to live in Israel. To prepare, she studied Hebrew with a beloved local rabbi. After a few years of secretarial study and work in an astronomy observatory, she fulfilled her plan to live in Israel. Her family members could not join her then, but they were proud of her. In Israel, she hoped to use her Sephardic background, multilingualism, and organizing experience to become a social worker and help new immigrants.

The next chapter of Shoshanah's life set up the circumstances that led her to come to the U.S. and eventually pursue a profession as a Jewish librarian. In Israel, she lived on Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu, in the Beit Shean Valley in Northern Israel, to attend *ulpan*, an intensive Hebrew language course. She made many friends and became close to her "adopted" kibbutz family. Her career plans took a turn. Her social work aspirations and mentors' advice to study nursing were both put aside, as she was recommended to do secretarial work for Yuval Ne'eman, Professor of Physics at Tel Aviv University, an Egyptian Jew educated in France. It was there, in a stroke of destiny, that she met her future husband, David Seidman, Professor of Physics at Cornell University, who had come to Israel to prepare for a sabbatical. The sabbatical didn't materialize, but their relationship was kindled. A year later, Shoshanah and David got married in Marseille and went together to Ithaca, New York.

At Cornell, Shoshanah created a satisfying life. The three Seidman sons were born. Shoshanah worked in the office of the astronomer-physicist Carl Sagan. Concurrently, she earned a bachelor's degree in social work, as she was still thinking about *aliyah*. Meanwhile, she expressed her love of Judaism and helping others by getting to know faculty members who frequented the campus Hillel, engaging observant Jewish students, and teaching the families of faculty. After 12 years, the Seidmans decided they needed to move to a city with Jewish schools for their sons. A professorship offer for David from Northwestern University brought them to Chicago.

We are starting to see how Shoshana came to assume her distinguished role at Northwestern, but it would take a few more trials, detours, and timely events.

The social work jobs she considered in Chicago did not fit her interests. Instead, she again deployed her secretarial skills, for Northwestern Physics Chair Arthur Freeman, while looking for other options. Soon, her librarian career



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## Chicago Jewish History

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was born. Her first milestone was a job at the library in general acquisitions, executing book orders that are chosen by a "selector," a specialist with advanced knowledge of the field, from a list customized by a "vendor" familiar with the books published in that field.

She kept looking for a more stimulating fit for her interests. A new position for a Judaica cataloguer with Hebrew proficiency became available, but she lacked the job requirement of a Master in Library Science (M. L. S.) degree. She arranged to continue her work as a "copy cataloguer," an individual who uses existing subject headings, while earning her M. L. S. With her new credential, her job opportunities expanded, though not yet at Northwestern. In 1991, she became the Hebraica cataloguer at the University of Chicago Regenstein Library.

Shoshanah raved about her work at Regenstein. She said, "The collection was fabulous.... Ample funds were allocated.... I worked with actual books, not blurbs about them.... There was a large section of rare material." She catalogued material that was housed in departments across the library. As a complement to her work, she became active in the national and local associations of Jewish librarians.

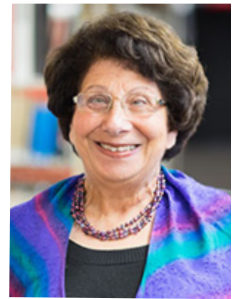
Though Shoshanah loved her job at Regenstein, the commute from her Skokie home had become a burden. Northwestern beckoned. In 2001, she took a position as cataloguer for the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, the largest separate Africana collection in the world, established in 1954 and named for the founder of Northwestern University's Anthropology Department (1938) and its Program in African Studies (1948). (My report of a guided tour of the Herskovits Library, organized by the JLNMC, the Judaic Library Network of Metropolitan Chicago, is in the Spring 2019 issue of *CJH*). In 1993, the Hebraica cataloguer position opened up, and she added it to her job duties.

Shoshanah's activities at Northwestern Libraries were not limited to cataloguing and selecting. She managed five endowment funds for Jewish studies. She developed close relationships with the faculty of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies and the Northwestern Hillel. Her work involved collaboration with esteemed library colleagues, such as University Archivist (now retired) and Historian Kevin Leonard. She participated in the Jewish intellectual life of the university by attending colloquia and special events.

In anticipation of her retirement, Shoshana advocated vigorously—and even raised money—for her Hebraica position to be retained by an equally qualified person, but she was not successful. Her position was not filled. She commented, with sadness, that the successors who perform her functions do not know Hebrew and do not have a Jewish background.

In retirement, Shoshana's passion for Judaism and people is undiminished. She is busy with Jewish learning; frequent travel to visit friends and family dispersed through the U.S, France, and Israel; and her local JLNMC professional association, of which she is a twice past president. The larger Chicago community benefits from her many volunteer roles: as a Northwestern Memorial Hospital chaplain's assistant, Travelers Aid guide at O'Hare Airport, Levy Senior Center gardener, and visitor to homebound people in her neighborhood.

The next time you look in the library for a Judaic volume, think about the people, like Shoshanah, who cherish Jewish scholarship and have devoted themselves to bringing it to all of us.



Shoshanah Seidman

# THE BOOK SECTION

*“Three possessions should you prize: a field, a friend, and a book.”*  
—Hai Gaon, medieval Jewish theologian

## The Portrait of a Poet as a Jewish Man: David Silverman

Like many other poets, including William Carlos Williams, who was a pediatrician, and Wallace Stevens, who was an insurance executive, CJHS member David Silverman, of Skokie, has always had a day job. For many years, he worked as a trader at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange. He is now a partner in a Tel Aviv-based venture capital firm.

His labors as a poet, however, far predate his entrée into the work world. In a delightfully discursive dialogue with *CJH* Editor Robert Nagler Miller, Silverman, 66, who released his first book of poems, *And God Created Hummus* (Glass Lyre Press), in 2019, spoke of his writing life, along with his other interests and passions. An edited version of their conversation follows.

**RNM:** David, in a 2022 presentation you made to your synagogue, you say, somewhat in jest, that you became hooked on poetry when, as a child, you discovered on your parents’ bookshelf *Candy Is Dandy: The Best of Ogden Nash*. Is that the whole story of your origins as a poet?

**DS:** I also write in the essay that it was a way to get girls’ attention, which, for the most part, was a colossal failure. But it’s still a way to get the attention of my wife, Lauren, and to make her laugh a little bit, cry a little bit. And it’s also to make sense of the random walk of life and to hear the still, small voice of God.

**RNM:** Did you come from a literary background?

**DS:** I grew up in Hyde Park. My father was a lawyer. Both of my parents liked to read. My parents were ardent Zionists, and my mother was particularly well read in translations of Israeli literature. My father was a huge nonfiction reader.

We eventually moved from Hyde Park to the North Side, to West Rogers Park, and I attended Ida Crown Jewish Academy before returning to the South Side to spend my undergraduate years at the University of Chicago. I dropped out of law school to work fulltime at the Mercantile Exchange.

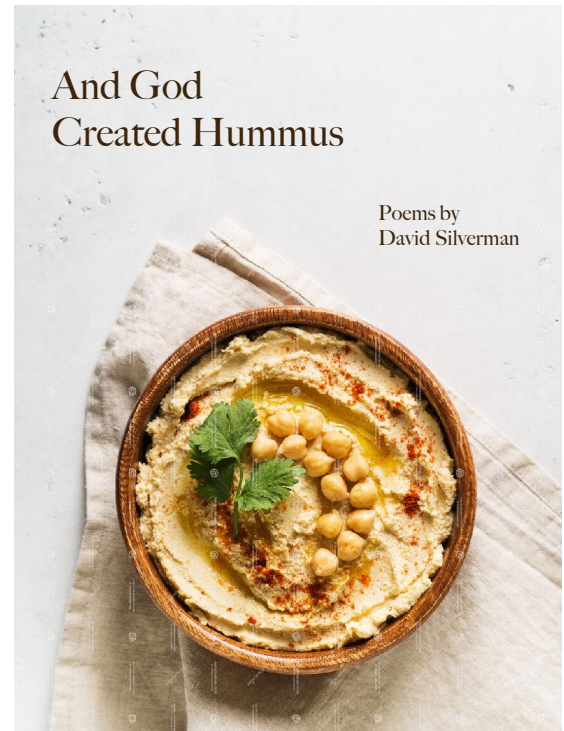
**RNM:** All this time, though, you were writing poetry—even with a job, a wife, and four children. How did that work?

**DS:** I wrote at night. I still do. If I had an idea for a poem during the workday, I would write it down on blank trading cards.

**RNM:** But you do more than write poetry. You’re an avid reader of poetry, correct?

**DS:** I estimate that I have read more than 50,000 poems over my lifetime. I have a room in the house where I post, like wallpaper, those poems that have meant the most to me. They include poems by Yehuda Amichai, Jeffrey Harrison, Michael Blumenthal, and Billy Collins.

**RNM:** What were the origins of *And God Created Hummus*?





David Silverman

**DS:** A few years before Covid, I was participating in a poetry reading at a coffeehouse in Evanston. I was reading the poem that became the title of my collection. The editor of a literary press, Glass Lyre, was in the audience that evening. She approached me and asked whether I wanted to write a book.

**RNM:** Are you working on a second book?

**DS:** It's unclear to me whether it will be another book—or two books. I do have 80 percent of poems for another book.

For a while, following the events of October 7, I paused. October 7 made me stop and think whether my writing really mattered. I thought of a quote attributed to Seamus Heaney: “no lyric ever stopped a tank.” I also thought about the line from “Letter to the Front,” a poem by Muriel Rukeyser, a Jewish writer, which reads, in part, “To be a Jew in the twentieth century is to be given a gift....The gift is torment.” It seemed that nothing has changed—the horrors that fascism is bringing to the world.

**RNM:** But you have resumed writing.

**DS:** Yes. I have written three poems, two of which relate specifically to the events following October 7. Israel is very important to me, to my family. It's in my DNA, and it is at the center of our lives. We go to Israel quite often. One of my children lives there with his wife and family, and it's where—at the Hebrew University—I met Lauren during our third year of college. My business is there. And it's where my parents, having made aliyah, spent the last 40 years of their lives.

In one of the poems, I speak of the first fallen soldier from Mazkeret Batya, the town in central Israel where my son lives.

**RNM:** Thank you for a wonderful interview. And thank you for consenting to share one of your poems from Hummus, “Boys Fool Themselves That They Can Fly,” with *CJH* readers.

**DS:** I wrote it in 2008, when my best friend, Jeff Zaret, died at age 49. We had been best friends for 35 years. Brothers, really. To say that not a day goes by that I don't think of Jeff is an overstatement, but I feel like he's always present.

### **Boys Fool Themselves That They Can Fly**

In my dream I hear the drum of balls,  
And am transported back across the years.  
So simple then, were my life's protocols,  
And in the dream a memory reappears.

We sprint, we shoot, we run our drills,  
Our sweat drips to the floor.  
Hoping that the work instills  
The strength to fly, to soar.

A teammate passes the leather sphere,  
I squeeze its pebble grain to get a grip.  
And all distractions round me disappear,  
Amidst the humble joy of fellowship.

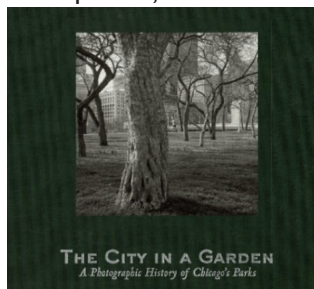
Boys fool themselves that they can fly.  
Men know the truth and all such truth implies.

# THE BOOK SECTION

## Books by CJHS Members and Friends

**The Midwestern Native Garden: Native Alternatives to Nonnative Flowers and Plants, an Illustrated Guide.** By Charlotte Adelman and Bernard L. Schwartz. Ohio University Press/Swallow Press, 2001.

**Prairie Directory of North America: U.S. & Canada.** By Charlotte Adelman and Bernard L. Schwartz. Lawndale Enterprises, 2002.



**The City in a Garden: A History of Chicago's Parks**, Second Edition. By Julia S. Bachrach. The University of Chicago Press, 2012.

**Inspired by Nature: The Garfield Park Conservatory and Chicago's West Side.** By Julia S. Bachrach and Jo Ann Nathan. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

**The Chicago Jewish Source Book.** By Rachel Heimovics Braun. Follette Publishers, 1980.

**The Florida Jewish Heritage Trail.** Co-authored by Rachel Heimovics Braun. State of Florida, 1990.

**Chicago: Metropolis of the Midwest.** By Irving Cutler. 4th Edition, Southern Illinois University Press, 2006.

**Chicago's Jewish West Side.** By Irving Cutler. Arcadia Publishing, 2009.

**The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb.** By Irving Cutler. University of Illinois Press, 1996.

**Synagogues of Chicago.** Edited by Irving Cutler, Norman D. Schwartz, and Sidney Sorkin. Project supervised by Clare Greenberg, 1991.

**The Argentine Right: Its History and Intellectual Origins, 1910 to the Present.** Co-edited by Sandra McGee Deutsch. Scholarly Presses, 1993.

**Counterrevolution in Argentina, 1900–1932: The Argentine Patriotic League.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

**Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation: A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. Duke University Press, 2010.

**Gendering Antifascism: Women's Activism in Argentina and the World, 1918–1947.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2023.

**Las Derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939.** By Sandra McGee Deutsch. Stanford University Press, 1999.

**Women of the Right: Comparisons and Interplay Across Borders.** Co-edited by Sandra McGee Deutsch. Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

**Clear It with Sid! Sidney R. Yates and Fifty Years of Presidents, Pragmatism, and Public Service.** By Michael C. Dorf and George Van Dusen. University of Illinois Press, 2019.

**Creating Chicago's North Shore: A Suburban History.** By Michael H. Ebner. University of Chicago Press, 1988.

**Twists and Turns: There Once Was a Dream.** By Betsy Fuchs, 2025

**Out of Chaos: Hidden A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction.** By Joel Greenberg. Bloomsbury USA, 2014.

**A Natural History of the Chicago Region.** By Joel Greenberg. University of Chicago Press, 2002.

**Of Prairie, Woods, & Water: Two Centuries of Chicago Nature Writing.** Edited by Joel Greenberg. University of Chicago Press, 2008.

**Tables Turned on Them: Jews Guarding Nazi POWs Held in the United States.** By Michael Greenberg. Page Publishing, 2019.

**Women Building Chicago, 1790–1990.** Edited by Adele Hast and Rima Lunin Schultz. Indiana University Press, 2001.

**The Alexandria Letter. A Novel.** By George Honig. Synergy Books, 2010.

**Avondale and Chicago's Polish Village.** By Jacob Kaplan et al. Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

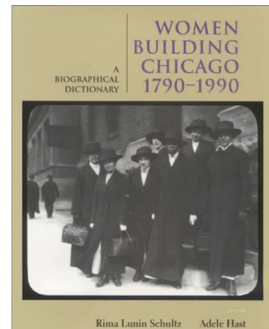
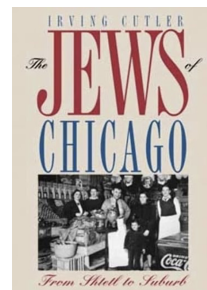
**Logan Square.** By Jacob Kaplan et al. Arcadia Publishing, 2018.

**A Walk to Shul: Chicago Synagogues of Lawndale and Stops Along the Way.** By Bea Kraus and Norman D. Schwartz. Chicago Jewish Historical Society, 2003.

**The Kosher Capones: A History of Chicago's Jewish Gangsters.** By Joe Kraus. Cornell University Press, 2019.

**Chicago's Only Castle: The History of Givins' Irish Castle and Its Keepers.** By Errol Magidson. Magidson LLC, 2017.

**Minyans for a Prairie City: The Politics of Chicago Jewry 1850–1914.** By Edward H. Mazur. Garland Publishing, 1990.



**East Lakeview.** By Matt Nickerson. Arcadia Publishing, 2017.

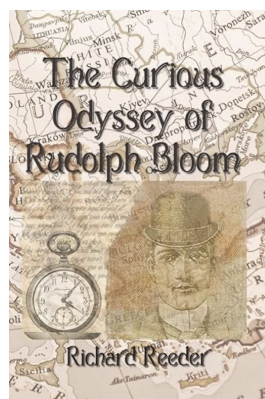
**Lakeview.** By Matt Nickerson. Arcadia Publishing, 2014.

**Doors of Redemption: The Forgotten Synagogues of Chicago and Other Communal Buildings.** Photographed and edited by Robert A. Packer. Booksurge, 2006.

**Chicago's Forgotten Synagogues.** By Robert A. Packer. Arcadia Publishing, 2007.

**1001 Train Rides in Chicago.** By Richard Reeder. Eckhartz Press, 2018.

**Chicago Sketches.** By Richard Reeder. AMIKA Press, 2012.



**The Curious Odyssey of Rudolph Bloom.** By Richard Reeder. Propertius Press, 2022.

**America at the Fair: Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Arcadia, 2008.

**Child Labor in America: A History.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2013.

**Goods for Sale: Products and Advertising in the Massachusetts Industrial Age.** By Chaim Rosenberg. University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.

**The Great Workshop. Boston's Victorian Age.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Arcadia Publishing, 2004.

**John Lowell Jr. and His Institute: The Power of Knowledge.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Lexington Books, 2021.

**The International Harvester Company: A History of the Founding Families and Their Machines.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2019.

**The Life and Times of Francis Cabot Lowell, 1775–1817.** By Chaim Rosenberg.

Lexington Books, 2011.

**Losing America, Conquering India: Lord Cornwallis and the Remaking of the British Empire.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland & Company, 2017.

**The Loyalist Conscience: Principled Opposition to the American Revolution.** By Chaim Rosenberg. McFarland, 2018.

**Shields of David: A History of Jewish Servicemen in the Armed Forces.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Wicked Son, 2022.

**Yankee Colonies Across America: Cities Upon the Hill.** By Chaim Rosenberg. Lexington Books, 2015.

**The Fate of Holocaust Memories: Transmission and Family Dialogues,** By Chaya Roth, with the voices of Hannah Diller and Gitta Fajenstein. Amazon Kindle, 2013.

**An Accidental Anarchist: How the Killing of a Humble Jewish Immigrant by Chicago's Chief of Police Exposed the Conflict Between Law & Order and Civil Rights in Early 20th Century America.** By Walter Roth and Joe Kraus. Academy Chicago Publishers, 1998.

**Avengers and Defenders: Glimpses of Chicago's Jewish Past.** By Walter Roth. Academy Chicago Publishers, 2008.

**Looking Backward: True Stories from Chicago's Jewish Past.** By Walter Roth.

Academy Chicago Publishers, 2002.

**Memories of Growing Up in Chicago: Recalling Life in the 20th Century.** By Neal Samors. Chicago Books Press, 2024.

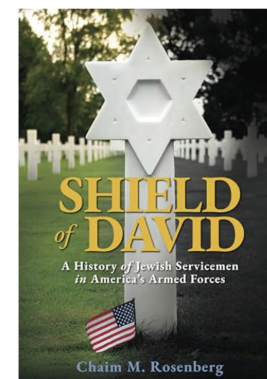
**A Bicentennial Commemoration of the Prairie State: Readings from the Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society.** Edited by David W. Scott. Foreword by Leah Joy Axelrod. Southern Illinois University Press, 2018.

**Discovering Second Temple Jerusalem: The Scriptures and Stories That Shaped Early Judaism.** By Malka Z. Simkovich. Jewish Publication Society, 2018.

**The Making of Jewish Universalism: From Exile to Alexandria.** By Malka Z. Simkovich. Lexington Press, 2016.

**Beyond the Scent of Olives.** By Alice Solovy. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012.

**A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War: Marcus M. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers.** Edited by Jean Powers Soman and Frank L. Byrne. University of Nebraska Press, 1995.



## Book News

CJHS member Joel Greenberg writes, "I am excited to share the news that my new book will be released on May 6, 2026. The book is titled *To Life: Jews Exploring Nature*; it is being published by Rutgers University Press. It includes an introduction that deals with the threads related to Jewish engagement with nature, but the heart of it is eight chapter-long biographies of Jews who studied various aspects of natural history. Four have strong ties to Chicago. There is the infamous Nathan Leopold (my one bad apple), who was a lifelong student of birds and made some significant contributions to ornithology. Two of the subjects spent their careers as curators at the Field Museum: Phil Hershkowitz, a mammalogist focusing on the Neotropics, and Hymen Marx, a herpetologist best known for his work on snakes. And the fourth is Libbie Hyman, who authored a seven-volume work on invertebrates. She studied at the University of Chicago, from BS to PhD, and then spent years working for her doctoral advisor."

## Abraham Gottlieb

continued from front page

Building; Robert Swain Peabody, the Machinery Building; Henry Ives Cobb, the Fisheries Building; and the Chicago firm of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, the Transportation Building.



Interior of the Manufacturers Building, 1893

Burnham, Olmsted, and the architects became famous for their roles in the World's Fair. Far less known is the contribution of Abraham Gottlieb. The engineers of the water, sewerage, design, railways, and fire departments all reported to Gottlieb. He tested the sandy soil of Jackson Park to determine whether it could support vast and heavy buildings. Piles driven deep into the ground and solid foundations were needed to prevent these buildings from subsiding or collapsing. Gottlieb designed "the foundations, the iron and wood construction, the roof trusses and the interior retaining walls" of the Manufacturers, Horticultural, Electricity, Transportation, and Agriculture buildings.<sup>3</sup> "A large part of the construction was planned by him [however] the exposition did not give him independence of action."<sup>4</sup> Burnham and Gottlieb disagreed over the "strains in timber and the low allowance made for wind pressure on the structures already under way." Gottlieb insisted that the infrastructure of buildings was strong enough to sustain heavy wind loads. Burnham halted construction and "ordered all designs strengthened to withstand the highest winds recorded over the previous ten years."<sup>5</sup> Their disagreement led Gottlieb, in August 1891, to resign from the Fair project.

Gottlieb's diplomatic letter of resignation stated that he had "overestimated my strength to do justice to the position I occupy at the World's Columbian Exposition [and] tend to my private affairs. I feel it is my duty to myself to resign one or the other. It is with much regret that I have come to the conclusion that the only course open to me is the resigning of the position which the Exposition committee has honored me as chief engineer of the World's Columbian Exposition." In response, Daniel Burnham recommended "the acceptance of Mr. Gottlieb's resignation." The true reason for the resignation was "the inability of Mr. Gottlieb to harmonize with his superior officers; an inability that has grown more obvious." At a meeting of the Western Society of Engineers on November 4, 1891, Gottlieb "offered a defense of his work on putting in the foundations of the World's Fair buildings. [He] gave a detailed account of the preparations and tests made before driving the poles for the foundations, and claimed that his calculations in regard to the strength of the various woods [sic] load carrying capacity of the driven piles tallied with those made by the best engineering experts, and were, beyond question, safe. After his calculations had been made and the foundations had been begun, the buildings had been increased [by Burnham] in area, and the load to be carried by the foundations greatly increased without consulting with him." A large audience listened to Gottlieb's explanation but "no one seemed inclined to discuss the subject."<sup>6</sup>

### Gottlieb's Early Years

The lives of Abraham and other members of the Gottlieb family have been lovingly recalled by Jean S. Gottlieb in her 2022 book *Braided Generations*. Abraham Gottlieb was born June 17, 1837, in Taus, Bohemia (then part of the Austrian Empire, now in the Czech Republic), where his father was a successful merchant. On completing his studies in engineering at the University of Prague, he worked for the Kaiser Francis-Joseph Railway Company. Later, he returned to his hometown and married Rose Pollock, "a devout and observant Jew." In 1866, the couple immigrated to the United States, where Abraham worked his way up in various companies engaged in the dramatic expansion of the American railroad network. In 1872, he became an American citizen. In Pittsburgh, he worked for the Keystone Bridge Company, founded in 1865 by Andrew Carnegie. In 1878, Gottlieb rose to president and general manager of Keystone. He designed railroad bridges over the Mississippi River at St. Louis; the Ohio River at Cincinnati; the Plattsburgh Bridge over the Missouri River at Omaha for the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad, (America's first steel-truss bridge); the bridge over the Monongahela River at Pittsburgh for the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Company; the Madison Avenue Bridge in New York City; the Susquehanna River Bridge at Havre de Grace for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad; the Point Pleasant Bridge over the Ohio River for the Ohio Central Railroad; and the Missouri River Bridge at Blair Crossing, Nebraska. He built the iron-cast infrastructure for the Mexican Mining Pavilion at the 1884-85 World Cotton Centennial Exposition, New Orleans, and the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railroad, New York City.<sup>7</sup>

Gottlieb served as president of Rodeph Shalom Congregation, Pittsburgh's first synagogue, which became one of America's largest Reform congregations.<sup>8</sup>

In 1885, Abraham Gottlieb and his family left Pittsburgh and moved to 3424 Vernon Avenue, Chicago. He established the structural engineering firm of A. Gottlieb & Company, building viaducts and railroad bridges, and engaged in the design and erection of the infrastructure of tall buildings. The company took part in the construction of a number of Chicago's pioneering buildings, including the 13-story Chicago Stock Exchange Building (designed by Adler & Sullivan); the 10-story, steel-framed Rand McNally Building (designed by Burnham and Root); and the 22-story Masonic Temple (designed 1891 by Burnham & Root, demolished 1939).

Gottlieb was a member of several engineering societies. In 1888–89, he served as president of the Chicago-based Western Society of Engineers.

Gottlieb was active in Jewish affairs. Moving from Orthodox Judaism, he served twice as president of the Reform Zion Congregation, Washington Boulevard and Ogden Avenue, on the near South Side, Chicago.

Gottlieb was a member of B'nai Brith, as well as the Standard Club, where well-to-do German Jews gathered to socialize, conduct business, share meals, celebrate bar mitzvahs and weddings, and play sports. "[T]he well-known builder and contractor" chose the Standard Club to celebrate the October 16, 1890, wedding of his third-born child, 19-year-old Caroline, to Sigmund Woolner, "son of one of the millionaire distillers of Peoria." The ceremony was conducted by Rabbi Joseph Strass before "a brilliant assemblage of guests." The Standard Club was also the venue for the March 15, 1892, wedding of Gottlieb's fourth-born child, Minnie, age 20, to Benedict J. Greenhut of Peoria. Two hundred guests, mainly from the German-Jewish upper crust, attended the wedding, held "under an arch of roses and lilies in the grand ballroom," which was conducted by Rabbi Joseph Stolz of the Zion Congregation. The bride wore "an exquisite Paris robe of glistening crystal silk with a long sweeping train. Over the wedding gown a veil of illusion fell in soft perfusion, confined to the hair by a diamond pin." <sup>9</sup> Benedict was the son of Joseph Greenhut, who, like Gottlieb, was born in Bohemia.



Chicago Stock Exchange building, 1893

### Gottlieb's Death

"Famous in his line... He left many monuments in this city," announced the *Inter Ocean* newspaper on the death by heart failure of 56-year-old Abraham Gottlieb. On the morning of February 9, 1894, "Mr. Gottlieb came down to his office in the Major Block on LaSalle Street at the usual hour, and busied himself about his affairs with his usual industry. He appeared well, made no complaint, and worked until 2 o'clock when he left the office." At 4 in the afternoon, he entered the Rookery Building on business with the Illinois Steel Company (then one of America's largest steel companies). Gottlieb was "observed to stagger, and then, tottering, made his way to the stairway, and sank down upon the steps. Mr. Gottlieb seemed much shaken, but spoke feebly.... Mr. Gottlieb breathed heavily and gasped, and before medical assistance could reach him, he died." At the time of his death, he was engaged in several building projects in Chicago.

On February 11, despite the cold weather, many "friends and fellow-members of the various lodges and social organizations of which he was a member, came to pay tribute to his memory. A number were obliged to stand outside during the service owing to the overflow." Rabbi Stolz "spoke in glowing terms of the life of the deceased. He was an earnest, conscientious and careful man. His life was distinguished by deeds, not promises." Chicago-based engineers and the elite of the Midwest German-Jewish society attended the funeral, including State Senator Moses Salomon, Morris Rothschild, Joseph Greenhut, Sigmund and Abraham Woolner, and Morris Seifert. Abraham Gottlieb was laid to rest at the Rosehill Cemetery.

### Endnotes

1 Daniel H. Burnham. *World's Columbian Exposition: The Book of the Builders*. Chicago: Columbian Memorial Publication Society, 1894, p. 15. Rossiter Johnson. *A History of the World's Columbian Exposition, Held in Chicago in 1893*. New York: Appleton, 1897, p.135.

2 *Inter Ocean* newspaper, December 13, 1890, p.1.

3 Johnson, p. 176.

4 Memoir to Abraham Gottlieb. Association of Engineering Societies, Volume XIII, No., 5, May 1894, p. 233

5 Erik Larson. *The Devil in the White City*, New York: Vintage, 2004, p.140.

6 Johnson, p.185. *Inter Ocean*, August 12, 1891, p. 5. *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 1891, p. 3.

7 Cyrus Adler and Joseph Stoltz. *Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1907, p.54.

8 *Chicago Tribune*, February. 10, 1894, page 4.

9 *Chicago Tribune*, October 17, 1890, p. 3, *Chicago Tribune*, March 16, 1892, p. 3. *Inter Ocean*, March 16, 1892, p.3. The Standard Club was established in

# The Jewishness of Buffalo Grove

continued from front page



The sanctuary of the now-defunct Temple Chai

According to the Encyclopedia of Chicago, “At the end of the twentieth century Jews constituted approximately 30 percent of the village’s population,” meaning around 13,000 Jews lived in Buffalo Grove. The community continued to expand and grow. The Jewish United Fund’s (JUF) 2000 census reported an 18% increase in Jews moving into the Northwest suburbs of Chicago, including Buffalo Grove.

With this surge came the need for Jewish infrastructure. Orthodox, Conservative, traditional, and Reform congregations established roots. Temple Chai, a Reform synagogue in neighboring Long Grove, served the Buffalo Grove community, as did Beth Am, a Reform congregation; Beth Judea, a Conservative congregation; and Congregation B’nai Shalom, attracting a more traditional community. Project Seed, which became BAY (Bais Ahavas Yisroel) Shul, and Chabad sought to strengthen Orthodox Jewish observance in the up-and-coming area. Jewish preschools flourished, including Torah Academy and the now-closed JCC. The Buffalo Grove Jewish Community Youth Services, though not exclusively Jewish, saw a rising number of Jewish preschool students. Kosher resources expanded with the arrival of Brooklyn Market and even a kosher Dunkin’ Donuts.

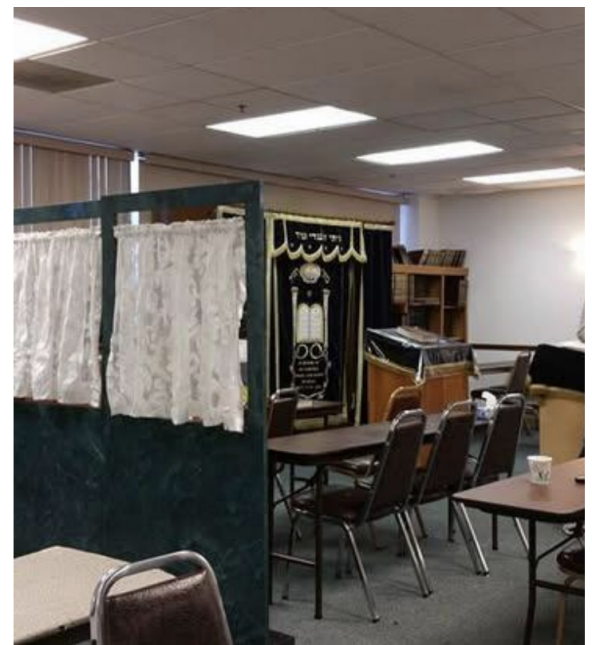
It was a golden age for Buffalo Grove’s Jewish life. Shuls were within walking distance of nearly every home, and community events filled calendars. If you drove down Lake–Cook Road and IL Route 83, you would find nine synagogues, multiple Jewish day schools, a mikvah, a kosher bakery, and you would still find yourself within the confines of the community eruv. The public high school even offered Hebrew as a foreign language option and a Club Israel.

The 2008 financial crisis hit Buffalo Grove hard. Property values dropped, leading to an economic slowdown that affected synagogue memberships and school enrollments. By the 2010 JUF census, the growth rate of young Jewish families moving into Buffalo Grove had fallen to 11%. While Jewish families were still moving into the area, young families started to seek different communities and those already here faced new challenges. According to Alicia Honan, a Buffalo Grove resident of over 20 years and educator at Sager Solomon Schechter Day School in nearby Northbrook, which attracted many Buffalo Grove families, “the mom and tots [of the early 2000s] grew up” and the community weakened.

Many young families began to move west and north to areas like Vernon Hills, Lake Zurich, and Deer Park, thus spreading the Chicago Northwest suburban Jewish community past the boundaries of Buffalo Grove. Orthodox families seeking a more immersive Jewish lifestyle relocated away from Buffalo Grove to larger established Orthodox hubs in Skokie and West Rogers Park. Many Reform and Conser-

Like the Jewish people throughout history, this community has grown, flourished, and changed. Once a vibrant center of Jewish life, Buffalo Grove is now witnessing a shift—synagogues closing, families moving, and the fabric of the community reshaping itself. The question that lingers, like the last echoes of the *Mah Nishtanah*, is: where did the Buffalo Grove Jews go?

Buffalo Grove’s Jewish history is not ancient—it’s recent, built on the dreams of young families searching for stability, education, and a welcoming community. In the late 1980s until the early 2000s, Jewish families flooded into the area, drawn by affordable housing and the high-ranking Adlai E. Stevenson High School. At the time, the population of Buffalo Grove was around 43,000 people.



BAY Shul

vative families became disaffiliated after their children's bar and bat mitzvahs or became another statistic of intermarriage, echoing a national trend, leaving congregations struggling to sustain themselves.

The decline was gradual, then sudden. Brooklyn Market closed. The kosher Dunkin' Donuts disappeared, and Temple Beth Am saw a drop in membership and sold its building in the early 2010s. And then due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2023, Temple Chai—once a thriving congregation of 900 families—closed its doors forever. Its building, which had been a cornerstone of Jewish Buffalo Grove, is now a Hindu temple. The congregants of Temple Chai were encouraged to join Temple Beth El in Northbrook. While some community members followed and made the move, others dropped synagogue affiliation or joined other synagogues, like Beth Am and Wheeling's Shir Hadash.

For some, however, COVID-19 strengthened their Jewish identity. Families celebrated Shabbat together at home for the first time, while online Torah classes and virtual community events allowed participation from those who previously felt disconnected.

When I think about my own Seder table, I think about how the faces around the table have changed throughout the years. What began as a family gathering has transformed into a community table where, as my mother likes to say, "The door is not only open to Elijah, but also the whole community." The ways in which each individual found their way to our table stems from all different parts of the Buffalo Grove Jewish community. Some belong to the Reform temples at which my parents have taught Sunday school for over 20 years; some have children who grew up attending Jewish day school alongside me and my siblings; and some are neighbors, who have joined in our tradition. While the traditions are the same, the community around us is changing.

For example, a more recent addition that has proven to be a crucial part of the Buffalo Grove Jewish community is the Russian Jewish community of Buffalo Grove. When researching material for this paper, I reached out to my neighbors, Olga and Constantine Madorsky, to understand more about what draws Russian Jews to not only this area, but also to this community.

For many Soviet Jews, Buffalo Grove remains an attractive home. Having come from a country where Jewish identity was suppressed, these families embrace traditions they were once denied. They generally find their place in Chabad of Buffalo Grove, Vernon Hills, and Riverwoods, each offering unique services tailored to Russian-speaking Jews. Due to the lack of Jewish practices in Soviet times, many members of the Russian community came here and "mixed Old World traditions into the new traditions that needed to be made into Jewish holidays," said Olga Madorsky. Every year on Passover, the Madorsky family comes over to our house for Seder. They bring Russian foods, games, and culture, which have now become a part of our yearly traditions.



The author (center) with her younger sisters, Maya (left) and Brooke

Alongside the growth of the Russian community in Buffalo Grove in the 2020s, Orthodox institutions like the Torah Academy have seen steady enrollment, particularly among younger families. Reform congregations battle the decline in population, "pulling from all over western suburbs," according to Laura Perpinyal, former Director of Congregational Learning at Temple Chai. Today, Buffalo Grove has about 43,000 residents, and the Jewish community makes up about 25% of the population. Even as overall numbers decline, some Jewish life continues to thrive, adapting to new realities and demographics.

As our Seder comes to a close, we recite the timeless words: "Next year in Jerusalem." But for Buffalo Grove's Jewish community, the question remains: next year, where? Despite the fluctuation in population numbers, Buffalo Grove's Jewish story isn't over. The Jewish community continues to move forward. There are plenty of options for kosher food at the local grocery stores, a mikvah, Jewish day schools, and an eruv. There are at least four different locations where a Jew can pray on a Saturday morning.

Buffalo Grove's Jewish community may not be what it once was, but, like the Jewish people throughout history, it evolves, adapts, and continues—one generation, one home, and one Seder at a time.

*An undergraduate at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the author is the Society's first Dr. Irving Cutler Jewish History Fellow.*

## CJHS Welcomes New Board Members

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society is pleased to announce the appointment of two new members to its Board of Directors, Rabbi Laurence M. Edwards, Ph.D., and Jessica Kirzane, Ph.D. Read more about them below.

### Rabbi Laurence Edwards, Ph.D.

Rabbi Laurence Edwards (Larry) grew up at Congregation Solel in Highland Park, where his parents were among the founders. He served as Hillel Director and Jewish Chaplain at Dartmouth College (1975–1981) and at Cornell University (1981–1997).

Larry studied in Jerusalem in 1970 and 1971 and has returned numerous times since. He has served on the faculty of the Bronfman Youth Fellows in Israel, based in Jerusalem.

Since his return to the Midwest, Larry has served as Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Abraham in Beloit, Wisconsin, and as Associate National Director for Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee. From 2003 to 2013, he served as Rabbi of Congregation Or Chadash, a congregation founded in 1976 with special outreach to the Jewish GLBT community.

Larry has published articles and reviews in *Judaism*, *Cross Currents*, and other publications, including Rodfei Zedek's in-house journal, *Lilmod Ul'lamed*. He has taught at Loyola University Chicago, DePaul University, University of Illinois Chicago, and the Hebrew Seminary in Skokie. He was Book Review Editor for the *CCAR Journal/Journal of Reform Judaism*.

A graduate of New Trier High School, Larry received his A.B. degree in Humanities from the University of Chicago in 1970 and was ordained by Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in 1975. He received his Ph.D. in Bible, Culture and Hermeneutics from the Chicago Theological Seminary in 2005, with a dissertation entitled “Resurrecting the Pharisees: Ideology and Identity Between Christians and Jews,” focusing on the constructions of the Pharisees in New Testament, rabbinic literature, and modern scholarship.

In retirement, Larry has returned to an early interest in numismatics and has published in that field as well. He and his wife, Susan Boone, live in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood and are members of Congregation Rodfei Zedek.



### Jessica Kirzane, Ph.D.



Jessica Kirzane is an associate instructional professor of Yiddish at the University of Chicago. She is also the Editor-in-Chief of *In geveb: A Journal of Yiddish Studies*, an online publication that includes essays and peer-reviewed articles of interest to Yiddish scholars and students.

An enthusiastic translator of Yiddish literature, Jessica has been published in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Pakn Treger*, *Azonal*, *Columbia Journal*, *Your Impossible Voice*, *In geveb*, and elsewhere. She has translated three books by popular Yiddish writer Miriam Karpilove: *Diary of a Lonely Girl, or the Battle against Free Love* (Syracuse University Press, 2020), *Judith* (Farlag Press, 2022), and *A Provincial Newspaper and Other Stories* (Syracuse University Press, 2023). She is currently working on a translation of *Zlatke*, a coming-of-age story of a Bundist activist, by Miriam Raskin.

Jessica was a 2017 translation fellow at the Yiddish Book Center and is the 2025 Rabbi Emanuel S. Goldsmith Translation Fellow at the Yiddish Book Center. She earned a Pedagogy Certificate from the Yiddish Book Center in 2024. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia and her Ph.D. in Yiddish Studies from Columbia University in 2017.

Jessica is married to Daniel Kirzane, Rabbi at KAM Isaiah Israel, in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood. She and her husband have two children.

## Program Review: Jewish Walking Tour of Downtown Chicago

By Dr. Rachelle Gold

September 14 was a beautiful, sunny day and a perfect time for a walking tour. Our guide, CJHS member Matthew Schlerf, led us through downtown Chicago—the site of the first Jewish settlement in the city—in an informative and fun exploration of Chicago Jewish history from the 1830s through the turn of the 20th century. He enthralled attendees with his knowledge and dynamic delivery and enlivened the tour with quotes from writings by and about Jewish people of the time.



The group started at LaSalle and Wacker drives and walked its way to Jackson Street, Plymouth Court, and Wabash and

Michigan avenues, finishing at the Chicago Cultural Center at Michigan and Washington Street. Highlights included the Chicago River, the site of Lake Street Jewish businesses, the Kluczynski Federal Building (with its plaque commemorating the location of Chicago's first synagogue, KAM), the Standard Club, and the Auditorium Theatre.



CJHS Board members Matt Nickerson and Patti Ray

Participants learned about events that shaped Chicago's history and development: its Indigenous history, the Battle of Fort Dearborn, the failed German revolutions of 1848 that spurred Jewish immigration, the founding of the Board of Trade, the Civil War, the Chicago Fire of 1871, the movement of Jews south and west of downtown, the large influx of East European Jews after the 1870s, the 1893 Columbian Exposition, and the Progressive Era. Matthew spoke about Jews who were religious leaders, businessman, city officials, architects, cultural figures, reformers, and everyday people.

Attendees raved about the tour, with one writing, "I just wanted to thank you for arranging the wonderful tour. I thought Matthew was amazing. His knowledge, enthusiasm, and passion made it such a great tour. It was truly a memorable afternoon."

## The Great Vest Side Bids Farewell

By Dr. Rachelle Gold

"It has been a long and wonderful run. Thanks for your support."

These are the words of the Board of Directors of GVS (Great Vest Side) in an announcement to supporters that the organization has closed its active operations. The Board made this decision because of dwindling membership and funds. The most recent GVS annual luncheon, on June 8, 2025, was its last formal event. The group hopes to plan informal annual get togethers for members to "enjoy meeting and reminiscing with each other."

GVS, a casual social club turned charitable organization, was founded in the early 1990s by men who grew up on Chicago's West Side from the 1930s to the 1950s. It grew to attract hundreds of members and supporters, including CJHS stalwart Dr. Irving Cutler z"l. In recent decades, GVS directed all of its fundraising efforts to Magen David Adom (AFMDA), Israel's only national Emergency Medical Service and blood services organization. GVS has financed the purchase of scores of ambulances and other medical vehicles and equipment, and it is completing its commitment to donate an electric generator.

In 2019, CJHS was approached by GVS's longtime leaders to help preserve the legacy of this great organization. I was honored to conduct oral history interviews with Herb Kanter (president) and Art Farber, in conjunction with the CJHS Rose L. and Sidney N. Shure Chicago Jewish Oral History Library, and to write about GVS in the Summer 2019 issue of *Chicago Jewish History*. It is well worth rereading about its history and accomplishments. (Look for the issue under the publications tab of the CJHS website: [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org).)

GVS is a product of a dynamic and influential period and community in Chicago's Jewish history. Its good works will endure.

# The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation and Chicago

By Jerry Klinger

The Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation (JASHP) is a nonprofit volunteer organization. The purpose of the Society is to identify and recognize sites of American Jewish Historical interest. JASHP programs are focused on historical interpretive markers.

Why place a historical marker, especially if there are no Jews around anymore? Because publicly sited historical markers are silent lampposts of light, fighting antisemitism. A key element of antisemitism is to deny Jewish historical presence, contributions, legitimacy, and commonality as Americans.

**“[T]he hardest part of doing a Jewish historical marker is finding local partners who are willing to tell their Jewish story.”**

Jewish Americans may not have been here in great numbers, but no one can deny that Jews disproportionately helped build America.

Our first marker effort was in Las Vegas, New Mexico, at the site of the first permanent Jewish house of worship in the state, Temple Montefiore, formed in 1884.

Afterwards, we asked a simple question. “Can we do this anywhere else? No Jewish organization was doing what we were doing.

Since that six-word question, JASHP has completed projects in 44 states and nine countries. An estimated 7 million people annually learn something about the American Jewish experience.

Each project is a stand-alone effort. JASHP funds the markers. The problem is not funding; the hardest part of doing a Jewish historical marker is finding local partners who are willing to tell their Jewish story.

Our first opportunity to tell an Illinois Jewish story was in Cahokia, Illinois. The marker, sited adjacent to the historic Cahokia Courthouse, told the story of John Jacob Hays (1770–1836), whose ancestors founded several synagogues in the United States, including the historic Sephardic Shearith Israel congregation in New York, in 1654, the first Jewish house of worship in the United States. Hays made a name for himself in Illinois, serving in several governmental capacities. (Read more about him in the Winter 2018 *CJH* Co-President’s Column.)

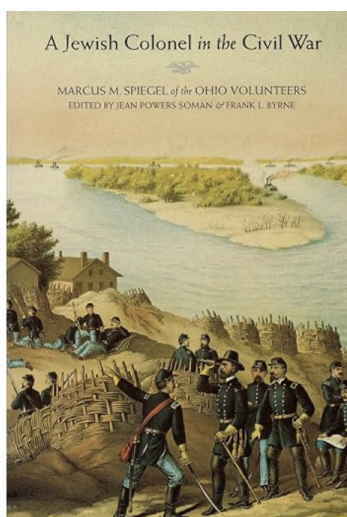
Frank Jastrzmski, who runs a very specialized historical society, Shrouded Veterans, which focuses on preserving the memory, honor, and dignity of veterans of the Mexican–American and the American Civil Wars, approached JASHP in 2021. He asked whether we would be interested in preserving the memory of Chicago Colonel Marcus Spiegel. Colonel Spiegel’s cemetery stone was wearing away to a state of nothingness. Spiegel was one of the highest-ranking Jews in the Union Armies during the Civil War. Frank explained that the Spiegels have a family burial ground in Chicago. The Colonel was not there.

Colonel Spiegel was killed in action along the Red River in Louisiana. His remains, hastily buried along the riverbank, were washed away and lost. Would JASHP consider a project to place a new footstone in the family burial site to honor his memory?

Frank contacted Jean Powers Soman, a descendant of Colonel Spiegel, as well as a life member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, to seek permission. Jean, who co-edited a book about Spiegel, *A Jewish Colonel in the Civil War*:



The footstone of Colonel Marcus Spiegel, who fought with the Union Army during the Civil War



The Marcus Spiegel book, co-edited by CJHS life member Jean Powers Soman

*Marcus W. Spiegel of the Ohio Volunteers* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), readily granted it. The placement of a simple footstone in the Spiegel plot in Jewish Graceland Cemetery faced unexpected complications and delays, but it was finally accomplished after years of effort.

JASHP has been involved in several efforts in Chicago that have been unsuccessful, including the placement of a historic marker in the “Sunken Garden” across from the Sears, Roebuck and Company landmark building. The marker would help interpret the life and contributions of the company’s co-founder, Julius Rosenwald.

But we remain undeterred. JASHP is ready and willing to do what it can to preserve Jewish memory and Jewish Chicago. Reach out to us at our website: [www.jewish-american-society-for-historic-preservation.org](http://www.jewish-american-society-for-historic-preservation.org)

*Jerry Klinger is the President of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation.*

## Welcome New Members

David Berman  
La Mesa, CA

Colman and Susan  
Buchbinder  
Evanston, IL

Dorothy Canter  
Washington, D.C.

Richard Greenthal  
Chicago, IL

Doris Gould  
Northfield, IL

Sarah Isaacson  
Forest Park, IL

Gary Laser  
Chicago, IL

Irmela Levin  
Chicago, IL

Sandra K. Parker  
Normal, IL

Perry Shorris  
Buffalo Grove, IL

David Skora  
Chicago, IL

Marshall Sorkin and  
Joanne Kalnitz  
Chicago, IL

Daniel Spiegel  
Chicago, IL

Ruth Tupper  
Chicago, IL

Rallis and Rebecca  
Wiesenthal  
Chicago, IL

## CJHS members...

### YASHER KOACH!

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

**Rabbi Larry Edwards, Ph.D.**, reconsidered the impact of German Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt in the fall 2025 issue of *To Learn and To Teach*, the biannual publication of Chicago’s Congregation Rodfei Zedek.

**Dr. Rachelle Gold** authored the essay “Who Built Ezras Israel? A Challenge for Today” for the Congregation Ezras Israel Memorial and Brachot book, which was published for the High Holidays.

**Joy Kingsolver**, a professional archivist, is featured in a *Publishers Weekly* article about the late writer Shel Silverstein’s archives. Joy has been heading the Silverstein archive since 2002.

**Dr. Jessica Kirzane** served on the faculty of the 2025 KlezKanada Summer Retreat, a Canadian celebration of Yiddish culture.

**Matthew Schlerf**, a recent recipient of an Illinois Humanities grant to develop a series of downtown Chicago walking tours in connection with his Chicago Jewish History Project, was interviewed about his initiative in the 2025 Illinois Humanities newsletter. In the q-and-a, Matthew spoke of his union activist great-great-grandfather, who was on the lam in Chicago after beating up a scab in New York. He said, “This personal connection to Chicago’s Jewish history inspired me to learn and share more stories about Jewish Chicago in my work as a tour guide and theater maker.”

## Ken Holtzman: A Tribute to an Athlete, Scholar, and Jewish Role Model

By Dr. Edward Mazur

Ken Holtzman, considered the greatest Jewish pitcher in Major League Baseball history, died on April 14, 2024. A native of St. Louis, Holtzman was raised in a Conservative Jewish family. He attended and graduated from the University of Illinois. After a lengthy and successful career, he spent much of his post-baseball career working for the St. Louis Jewish Community Centers and even coached the Petah Tikva Pioneers of the short-lived Israel Baseball League.

In addition to throwing two no-hitters, Holtzman won four World Series rings and beat the legendary Sandy Koufax head to head. According to Dan Epstein, the contributing music critic of *The Forward*, Holtzman won 174 regular season games compared to Koufax's 165. Both players won four games apiece in their teams' World Series contests. Both pitched against each other only once. Holtzman beat Koufax on September 25, 1966, when the 20-year-old outdueled the 30-year-old Los Angeles Dodger in a 2-1 complete game victory.

On August 16, 1969, Holtzman threw a no-hitter and beat the Atlanta Braves without striking out a single batter. According to Jacob Gurvis of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, only three pitchers in MLB history have ever accomplished a no strikeout / no-hitter—and none have done so since Holtzman.

In 1965, Holtzman was drafted by the Chicago Cubs at age 19 out of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. At that time, I was completing my master's degree in urban history and working at the Illini Union. Holtzman would frequent the Union for coffee, soft drinks, and something to "nosh" on. As a sports fan and Illini Union regular habitué, I recognized and got to know the southpaw pitcher who would be nicknamed "The Thinker" because allegedly he had read Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* in the original French. He and I frequently worked crossword puzzles together, and in 1965, we had the puzzles from the *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Herald American*, *Daily News*, and even the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*.

Holtzman was raised with education as a top priority and even after signing with the Cubs as a college sophomore for a \$65,000 bonus, he went back to the University of Illinois during off-seasons and earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in business administration.

Both of his parents, Henry and Jacqueline, were at Wrigley Field for his September 25, 1966, game. According to Dan Epstein of *The Forward*, only one of them watched what would later go into the record books as the greatest Jewish pitching showdown of all time. The Holtzman-Koufax pitching duel took place the day after Yom Kippur. It was originally scheduled the day of the holiday but was pushed back because both attended services and did not show up at Wrigley Field. (Although I am no detective, I believe that the family probably attended religious services at the Anshe Emet congregation. First, it was a Conservative synagogue; secondly, it was within easy walking distance of Wrigley Field.)

Holtzman's parents were seated directly behind home plate. Holtzman could see his mother and father after each pitch. He later would recall that his mother was so nervous that she walked around the park the entire game without sitting down.

During his baseball career, Holtzman encountered antisemitic insults at times from fans, players, managers, and others associated with the sport. But in his career in the big leagues, every manager that he played for was respectful of his wishes to go to Jewish High Holiday services and miss the games on those days. Holtzman

**"I recognized and  
got to know the  
southpaw pitcher who  
would be nicknamed  
'The Thinker' because he  
allegedly he had read  
Marcel Proust's  
*Remembrance of Things  
Past* in the original French."**

man pitched for three legendary teams: the star-crossed Cubs of the late 60s and early 70s, the three-time world champion Oakland Athletics, (1972–74), and the New York Yankees in (1976–77).

While on the Oakland A's, Holtzman and teammate Mike Epstein (whose nickname was Super Jew) made headlines on September 6, 1972, when they took the field for a game against the Chicago White Sox at then Comiskey Park. Both wore black armbands in acknowledgment of the murders of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics. Holtzman and Epstein felt, as Jews, that they had to say something. They were joined by another teammate, Mr. October, Reggie Jackson, an African American, who also donned a black armband.

Holtzman rejoined the Cubs in 1978 and retired from the Major Leagues in 1979. He lived in the St. Louis area and worked as a stockbroker and in the insurance industry and became very active at his local JCC. In 2007, he briefly returned to the game that he loved as manager of the Petah Tikva Pioneers. The team had a record of seven wins and 31 losses and finished in the cellar of the six-team league. After his retirement, he earned four Hall of Fame votes in 1985 and five in the 1986 balloting. He is a member of the St. Louis Jewish Sports Hall of Fame, the International Sports Hall of Fame, and the Chicago Cubs Hall of Fame.

It was always my pleasure, following our days at the University of Illinois, to sit in the grandstands and bleachers at Wrigley Field and watch the left-handed Holtzman pitch more than a few of his 174 wins and “rack up” more than a few of his 1,601 strikeouts—second to Koufax’s 2,396 among Jewish pitchers—and a 3.49 career Earned Run Average.

No, I do not have Holtzman’s rookie card, or the coffee cup that he enjoyed drinking from at the Illini Union, or any of the crossword puzzles that we tried to complete, but I have distinct memories of a great Jewish American athlete.

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## Ten Reasons You Should Renew Your Membership in CJHS

By Robert Nagler Miller

CJHS members and friends, the season of membership renewal is upon us. Reflecting on the advantages of membership in our esteemed Society, we thought it apt to enumerate the manifold benefits to be derived from your support of CJHS. Here are two handfuls:

- (1) We offer wonderful in-person and virtual programs with scholars, authors, and other experts—and for members, they are absolutely free!
- (2) We provide dynamic walking tours of Jewish Chicago—this year, we *shpatzired* around downtown, as well as Humboldt Park.
- (3) We enlighten and entertain through our award-winning quarterly publication, *Chicago Jewish History*.
- (4) We serve as an expert resource to people throughout the world who seek us out for information about Chicago’s rich Jewish history and culture.
- (5) We offer research and writing opportunities for budding Jewish scholars who want to learn more about our proud history and heritage.
- (6) We collaborate with other Jewish institutions in the Chicago area to promote Jewish learning.
- (7) We are the only organization of our kind in the Chicago metropolitan area—and have served with distinction for almost 50 years.
- (8) We are a nonprofit organization, which means that membership comes with tax-derived benefits.
- (9) We are passing on our proud history to future generations.
- (10) We make membership easy, as well as inexpensive. Learn more at [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org) or mail in a basic membership of \$54—or more, if you are able to do so—to CJHS, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659-7004.

Thank you sincerely for your ongoing support and participation. And remember, Chanukah starts December 14—a great opportunity for gift memberships!

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## New Exhibit on Growing up Jewish and Middle-Class in Middle America

By Robert Nagler Miller

Longtime CJHS member Sybil Mervis, whose tireless efforts to document the history of Jews in Central Illinois culminated several years ago in the creation of the Sybil Mervis Collection on Central Illinois Jewish Communities at the University of Illinois, her alma mater, has not slowed her pace, despite having recently celebrated her 90th birthday.

The author of the memoir *In the Middle: Growing up in the Middle of America, in the Middle Class, in the Middle of the 20th Century*, a look at growing up Jewish in the small Central Illinois city of Bloomington, where her family ran Stern's Furniture, a business that started in the early 1900s and operated for more than 80 years, Mervis is now focusing her attention on a new, similarly titled exhibition that is based on her book. The Illinois State Museum's Lockport Gallery is showing *In the Middle*, featuring Sybil's photographs and childhood artifacts, through June 2026.

"For quite some time, we had been looking to produce an exposition on Jewish life in Illinois," said Illinois State Museum History Curator Erika Holst in an October 2025 press release. "What Sybil created in her book—with her words and pictures—has become the touchstone for this amazing exhibit."

"What Erika has done in bringing my book to life has been remarkable," said Sybil, at the exhibit's opening ceremony, "not only for me, but for anyone seeking a deep and emotional understanding of how middle-class people, Jewish people, and little girls and boys lived during the Depression and war years in a Midwest city."

The Lockport Gallery is located at 201 W. 10th St., in Lockport, a city in Will County about 30 miles southwest of Chicago. Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information, call (815) 838-7400.



Sybil (left), in 1944, with her younger siblings, Judy and Harry, who both predeceased her. Judy went on to become Judy Stern Markowitz, the first female and Jewish mayor of Bloomington, Illinois.



Sybil, center back, at her 13th birthday in 1948



Sybil at the gallery this fall.

Photo by Amanda Bryden

## Upcoming Program: Join CJHS at The Ark on December 7

CJHS members and friends, please mark your calendars now for Sunday afternoon, December 7, when you will have an opportunity to learn more about the history of The Ark, Chicago's human services organization that, since 1971, has provided a range of programs—from case management, financial counseling and assistance, and employment services, to mental health, housing, food assistance, and health services—to Jewish community members.

The afternoon program, commencing at 1:30 p.m., will include a panel discussion about the history and mission of The Ark, along with a tour of its facilities. CJHS member Allen Ray, husband of Board member Patti Ray, will be among the panel members. Registration for the program is already available on The Ark website: [www.ark.chicago.org/cjhs](http://www.ark.chicago.org/cjhs). Stay tuned for more information about this exceptional program.



## Reflections from a CJHS Friend

I got an email alerting me to the news that it has been 62 years since I graduated from Sullivan High School in East Rogers Park. The note arrived about noon on a warm sunny day as I sat in my garden overlooking the hills of Jerusalem. *Dolce far niente*, as Italians say, is the pleasantness of doing nothing. It started me reminiscing about growing up in West Rogers Park in the 50s and my four years at Sullivan High School. Then, Thoreau's quip came to mind, "Never look back unless you're planning to go that way."

My graduating class from Rogers, Boone, Mather, and Sullivan public schools is the last of the Baby Boomer generation, and we're thinning fast. We had a charming time in West Rogers Park—there was little crime to speak of, we had caring teachers smart enough to have been college professors, and we enjoyed a well-run city that provided clean and safe parks, playgrounds, tennis courts, and beaches just a half-hour away. There were no visible antisemitic or anti-Catholic demonstrations, attacks, or media misinformation. It was pleasant and fun being a child of the 1950s.

Our generation was sandwiched between two others: young people in the 40s (in Germany, they were Hitler Youth; in America, children of the Great Depression) and those of the tumultuous 1960s, many of whom were involved in political and antiwar movements. Ours was a brief moment in a time of joy. We never understood the meaning of hiding under the desks at 10 a.m. to protect ourselves from Russia's nuclear missiles. Be what you wanted to be—so long, of course, as you weren't gay or a feminist. We never festered resentment towards established political leaders—until we became

taxpayers ourselves. Most of us were poor but didn't know it because our parents would do anything to make our childhoods happy times.

When Mather High School was built, the Board of Education split West Rogers Park in two, separating friends from friends. Public schools were largely segregated, operating under the mayor's notion of separate but equal. Health care was cheap and affordable. We were vaccinated against smallpox and the fearsome polio, first with shots and then in the form of a sweet pink liquid. I think back that West Rogers Park, from Peterson Avenue to Howard Street, from Western to Kimball avenues, in the 40s and 50s, was what God had in mind as the Garden of Eden.

—Dr. Harold Goldmeier, a teacher, business consultant, public speaker, and financial writer.

## Author's Query

CJHS member Michael Zmora, who has written about the history of the Oak Park Jewish community, is now embarking on a research project about another western suburb. He writes, "I am a researcher writing about the history of the Jewish community of Maywood, Illinois, which formed in the 1880s and peaked in size around 1940. Maywood had at least two active synagogues, B'nai Israel of Maywood and Agudath Achim. I am looking to speak with any Jews who grew up in Maywood or whose families lived in Maywood. There are very few documents or records of this community, which largely moved west to Westchester in the late 1950s, where B'nai Israel of Maywood became Bnai Israel of Proviso. Please email Michael Zmora at [mzmora@gmail.com](mailto:mzmora@gmail.com) with any sources you may have. Thank you in advance!"

Look to the rock from which you were hewn

הביטו אל-צור חצבתכם



chicago jewish historical society

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### Our History and Mission

The Chicago Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1977, is in part an outgrowth of local Jewish participation in the United States Bicentennial Celebration of 1976. Forty-eight years later, our mission remains the discovery, collection, and

### ABOUT THE SOCIETY

dissemination of information about the Jewish experience in the Chicago area through publications, open programs, tours, and outreach to youth and others interested in the preservation of Chicago Jewish history.

**Tribute Cards for Celebrations or Memorials** The card design features the Society's handsome logo. Pack of five cards and envelopes \$36. Individual cards can be mailed for you from our office at \$5 per card, postage included. Mail your order and check to CJHS, P.O. Box 597004, Chicago, IL 60659-7004. You may also order online at our website.

**Back issues of *Chicago Jewish History*** cost \$12 apiece. To request back issues, please email the Society at [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org)

Visit our website [www.chicagojewishhistory.org](http://www.chicagojewishhistory.org)

Pay your membership dues online via PayPal or credit card, or use the printable membership application.

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

**Membership** in the Society is open to all interested persons and organizations, and includes

- A subscription to our award-winning quarterly journal, *Chicago Jewish History*.
- Free admission to Society public programs. General admission is \$10 per person.
- Membership runs on a calendar year, from January through December. New members joining after July 1 are given an initial membership through December of the following year.

Life Membership \$1,000

Annual Dues

Historian \$500

Scholar \$250

Sponsor \$108

Member \$54

Student (with I.D.) \$18



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