

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



chicago jewish historical society

Vol. 21, No. 7, Fall, 1996

# CHICAGO JEWISH History

## Habonim:

"The Builders" Have  
Been Part of Chicago  
for More than 60 Years,  
Instilling a Love for  
Judaism and Israel

By Danny Greenberg

Sixty years ago the idea of a Jewish state was only a dream. Nevertheless, in October 1935, a group of young American Labor Zionists, many just teenagers, gathered from across the country in Buffalo, New York to establish a youth organization they called Habonim. Four young Chicagoans were among the group, and Chicago would prove to be one of Habonim's most active and visible chapters.

Habonim's purpose was to nurture Jewish values in American life, to instill in its members a knowledge of and appreciation for the history and culture of the Jewish people, to strengthen the bonds between American and Palestine Jewry, and to encourage settlement in Palestine. Habonim, literally "the builders" in Hebrew, set out to establish a variety of institutions and activities toward those ends. The group continues to flourish today.

### *Chicagoans Among the Founders*

The four Chicagoans who were part of the Buffalo meeting that convened Habonim brought back a sense of purpose, excitement, and enthusiasm. Each would go on to a lifetime of commitment to the ideals of the group. Ben Cohen is currently vice-president of the Labor Zionist Alliance of America. Harry Sosewitz (now Yechiel Sasson) has been a resident of Kibbutz Kfar Blum since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. And Jack Ginsburg has been a prominent social work administrator, teacher, and consultant in the Chicago

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Habonim's Original Logo

## Video History Project Rolls Forward with Interviews

The Society's video history of the Jews of Chicago has taken several steps forward in the last three months. Director Beverly Siegel said she has nearly completed the on-camera interviews that will comprise much of the video and expects to enter the editing phase by the beginning of November.

Siegel said she hopes to have the completed video

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### Inside:

- Oral History Excerpt from Jack Fishbein, *Sentinel* Editor and Citizen
- Kaylia Katz Recalls the Hard Times and the Good Times on Maxwell Street
- Rare Commemorative Coin Helps Retell History of 1923 Fund Drive

# President's Column

One hundred-twenty-five years ago, on Sunday night October 8, 1871, as the Jews of Chicago were finishing their celebration of Simchas Torah, the joyous holiday celebrating the Torah, the great Chicago fire broke out on the near West Side of Chicago.



Walter Roth

Legend has it that a cow had kicked over a lantern in a shed at the rear of Mrs. O'Leary's home at 137 De Koven Street, igniting the fire. As H.L. Meites tells it in his *History of the Jews of Chicago*. "Without warning the mood of Simchath Torah changed to that of T'isha B'av" (the holiday commemorating the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem).

The fire exploded through the downtown area and headed north to the Chicago River and across it. The flames quickly consumed block after block during the two dry and windy days that the fire raged.

Many establishments and homes owned by Jews were destroyed as were many of their neighbors'. A number of synagogues burned to the ground and leading Jewish merchants lost their stores and wares.

The fire was indiscriminate, wiping out almost everything that was in its path and changing the shape of the city forever.

As Meites tells the story, observers tried to make sense of what had happened in a variety of ways, sometimes even humorous ones.

The Reverend Ignatz Kunreuther, the first rabbi of K.A.M. Congregation (Chicago's first synagogue) was then living at an establishment located on the south side of Harrison Street, in a section that was spared by the fire even though almost everything to the north of it wound up leveled.

Directly across the street from K.A.M., however, the building housing B'nai Sholom synagogue burned to the ground.

Kunreuther always insisted that it was his prayers that had saved his synagogue.

As Meites writes it, "It was probably, as a wag of the day suggested, because Kunreuther's prayers were in accordance with Minhag Ashkenaz (the German way) while B'nai Sholom's prayer-book was Minhag Pole (the Polish way)."

Unfortunately for the Reverend Kunreuther, another fire began on July 17, 1874, nearly three years after the great fire of 1871. This second fire threatened to be just as great as the first

and looked as if it might undo much of the rebuilding and rededication that the city had undertaken in the intervening years.

This time, fire fighters managed to stop the fire by timely dynamiting, but not before many blocks of the near West Side Jewish community -- which had been spared in 1871 -- burned down.

Kunreuther's prayers proved insufficient, however. K.A.M.'s building, which had been located at the corner of Wabash Avenue and Peck Court, was destroyed.

As it was, the second fire marked the beginning of the Jewish advance to the old West Side, on the west side of the Chicago River. The Mariampole Congregation soon crossed the river and built the first synagogue on the West Side.

Within a few years, the mass immigration of Russian and East-European Jews would follow, and they would establish the teeming Maxwell Street area. From there, later generations would move farther and farther west along the Roosevelt Road corridor, establishing Lawndale and a number of other major Chicago Jewish communities.

The spirit that energized Chicago's citizens, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, remains as a model for the continuing development of the city today. On behalf of our Board of Directors, I wish you all a happy and prosperous New Year. □

## You Can Get Tax Benefits from your Society Donations

Did you know that you can receive tax benefits for contributions to the Society? Of course, your annual dues are tax deductible. But, did you realize that any additional gifts during your lifetime also qualify for an income tax deduction (assuming you itemize deductions) and that gifts given at death

qualify for a charitable deduction against a taxable estate?

While we hope you will want to make lifetime gifts so you can see the good that is accomplished, it is very easy to make testamentary gifts by your last will or living trust. Simply have your attorney include language similar to the following in either your will or your trust, as the case may be.

For unrestricted gifts:

"I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or specified property) to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, of Chicago,

Illinois, for the unrestricted use of the Society, as determined by its Board of Directors."

For restricted gifts:

"I give \$\_\_\_\_\_ (or specified property) to the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, of Chicago, Illinois, to be used solely for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_."

If you or your attorney has any questions about this, please give us a call at (312) 663-5634. □

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# Video

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available for distribution and public showing some time during the spring.

The video project has been a major undertaking of the Society, and it promises to stand as a key document recording the history of the local Jewish community. "We are telling a hundred years of Jewish history," Siegel said. "We're telling the formative years of Chicago Jewish history."

Siegel said as well that she expects to be able to make valuable use of the many people who have first-hand recollections of key events and vanished elements of the community's history. "Something I find exciting is that Chicago is not that old," Siegel said.

"I think this is an exciting time to be making a video like this; so many people are still around," Siegel said.

Siegel and her crew have already filmed fifteen different interviews, and have plans to film several more in the two full days of shooting she has scheduled. In addition to the interviews, the video will feature an original score and voice-over narration.

The interviews Siegel has already shot draw upon a wide-range of perspectives and backgrounds. Some

subjects speak of their personal memories, while others draw on stories passed down in families or information they have learned through research.

Some of the interview subjects include Peter Ascoli, the grandson of Julius Rosenwald and an historian in his own right; Hamilton Loeb, grandson of Chicago Hebrew Institute President Jacob Loeb; Marian Despres, great-granddaughter of early Chicago settler Michael Greenebaum; and Lorraine Moss, whose family was close to long-time Lawndale politician Jake Arvey. Each draws on family memories and personal experience to tell stories of the earliest days of Chicago's Jewish community.

Some other subjects are themselves part of the history they recount. Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz speaks of Jews in Chicago politics. Sol Brandzel, long-time counsel for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, talks of labor history. Rabbi Oscar Fasman, who has been involved with The Hebrew Theological College for several decades, speaks about Chicago's Orthodox community.

Maynard Wishner, who has long been involved with the Jewish Federation, speaks about the history of Jewish social and community services. Long-time boxing announcer and

commentator Ben Bentley talks about Jewish boxers. And Geoffrey Stone, Provost of the University of Chicago, talks about the role Jews played in establishing the University.

Other subjects are active members of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society who have developed expertise in various aspects of Chicago Jewish history. These include Society president Walter Roth on Zionism; Society past-president Norman Schwartz on synagogues; Society past-president Adele Hast on Hannah Greenebaum Solomon and the founding of the National Council of Jewish Women; Chicago Jewish History editor Joe Kraus on West-Side Jewish toughs; and long-time Society board member Sid Sorkin on Jewish peddlers.

Siegel said that she believes the many separate voices will contribute to a narrative of Chicago's history that is nearly as multi-faceted as the Chicago Jewish experience itself. "I think that the video is really a celebration of the building of the community," she said.

"We are telling a real history, however. We are being scrupulous. It's not just an homage to the past."

The Society will announce plans for screening the video as well making copies of it available to members and others within the next few months. □

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## Society Welcomes New Members

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

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

We are a society comprised entirely of volunteers. We have no permanent paid staff, and we accomplish what we do on the strength of our shared expertise, our shared enthusiasms, and our shared energies.

We are grateful to our continuing

members as well as the following new members whose expertise, enthusiasm and energy we look forward to sharing:

<i>Seymour Abrams</i>	<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Howard</i>
<i>Esther Benjamin</i>	<i>Krause</i>
<i>Jeanne Berkowitz</i>	<i>Debbie Lindon</i>
<i>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Harry</i>	<i>Herbert Linn</i>
<i>Besser</i>	<i>Joseph Morris</i>
<i>Elaine Fiffer</i>	<i>Rabbi William</i>
<i>Barbara Gunther</i>	<i>Novick</i>
<i>Samuel Herman</i>	<i>Keith Porges</i>
<i>David Holan</i>	<i>Mr &amp; Mrs. Jack</i>
<i>Mr &amp; Mrs. Alvin</i>	<i>Reiss</i>
<i>Katzowsky</i>	<i>Louis Silberman</i>

We invite everyone to participate in all of our activities. See the newsletter and other mailings for announcements of our bi-monthly open meetings from

fall through spring, and consider participating in our oral history project, our continuing membership recruitment process, and in the planning necessary for the many events we undertake.

You, our members, supporters, and friends, are our most valuable resource and our most important component. We ask you to share your curiosity and your memories with us.

What's more, we ask you to consider giving memberships in our Society to friends, family members or former Chicagoans who may have left the city but not gotten it out of their hearts entirely.

Membership rates and information are printed on the back page of this newsletter. □

# Habonim

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area. Ruth Greenberg, the fourth delegate, is deceased.

Barely two months after their return from the meeting, *The Daily Jewish Courier* of December 24, 1935 contained the following notice:

...Chicago Habonim will convene to spend four days in studying the ideology of the movement. Many noted lecturers, including Goldie Meyerson [later Golda Meir], Palestinian delegate to the Labor Zionist movement this year; Nachum Guttman, national secretary of Habonim youth organization; Judah Pilch, instructor at the College of Jewish Studies, and many others will participate.

The Chicago group that grew out of the response to that ad and to the subsequent word of mouth campaign began meeting weekly at the Labor Zionist Institute at 3322 West Douglas Boulevard. (The building was known affectionately as "The Institute" in contrast to the Jewish Peoples Institute a short distance away and known as the "JPI.") Chicago Habonim never grew particularly large, but remained active learning Jewish folk dances, singing Hebrew songs, and holding discussions on Zionism, Jewish history, and philosophy. Habonim members were a dynamic group, often found at the forefront of Jewish youth activities in the city.

## *Summer Camping*

Habonim was one of the first Jewish youth groups to realize the value of summer camp as an educational opportunity. Perhaps the most meaningful and lasting influence of any program, ideology, or social experience was the experience of Habonim camp. Unique among Jewish camps, Habonim camps were -- and continue to be -- patterned after kibbutz life and were distinguished by concepts of the dignity of labor, self-government, leadership from within the ranks of the campers, and an unusual educational program, all of which go to make up that special spirit called *ruach*.

Because of their central location, Chicago's Habonim summer camps have served as a focus for all of the Midwestern cities in which Habonim groups were organized. Milwaukee, Madison, Detroit, Ann Arbor, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, and Cleveland have sent their children to the "Chicago" Habonim camp, thereby expanding the social contacts of the youngsters and creating many long-lasting friendships.

Camp Tel Chai in New Buffalo, Michigan, established in 1936, was the first Habonim camp in the

# H A B O N I M

## WE KNOW HOW OUR BOY AND GIRL SPEND THEIR TIME !

- They spend it in a progressive Jewish environment.
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- They are inspired by Labor Palestine, the Chalutzim.
- They enjoy Jewish songs and folk dances.
- They celebrate Jewish national holidays.
- They become acquainted with social and economic problems.
- They develop their bodies and minds.

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- IF you want your child to grow up to be an intelligent and active Jew;
- IF you want your child to have a balanced cultural and physical life —

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# HABONEH

(The Builder)

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JEWISH BOY AND GIRL IN AMERICA

In the language of children and youth, "HABONEH" tells the story  
of Pioneering Palestine; of world Jews; of Jewish folk lore.

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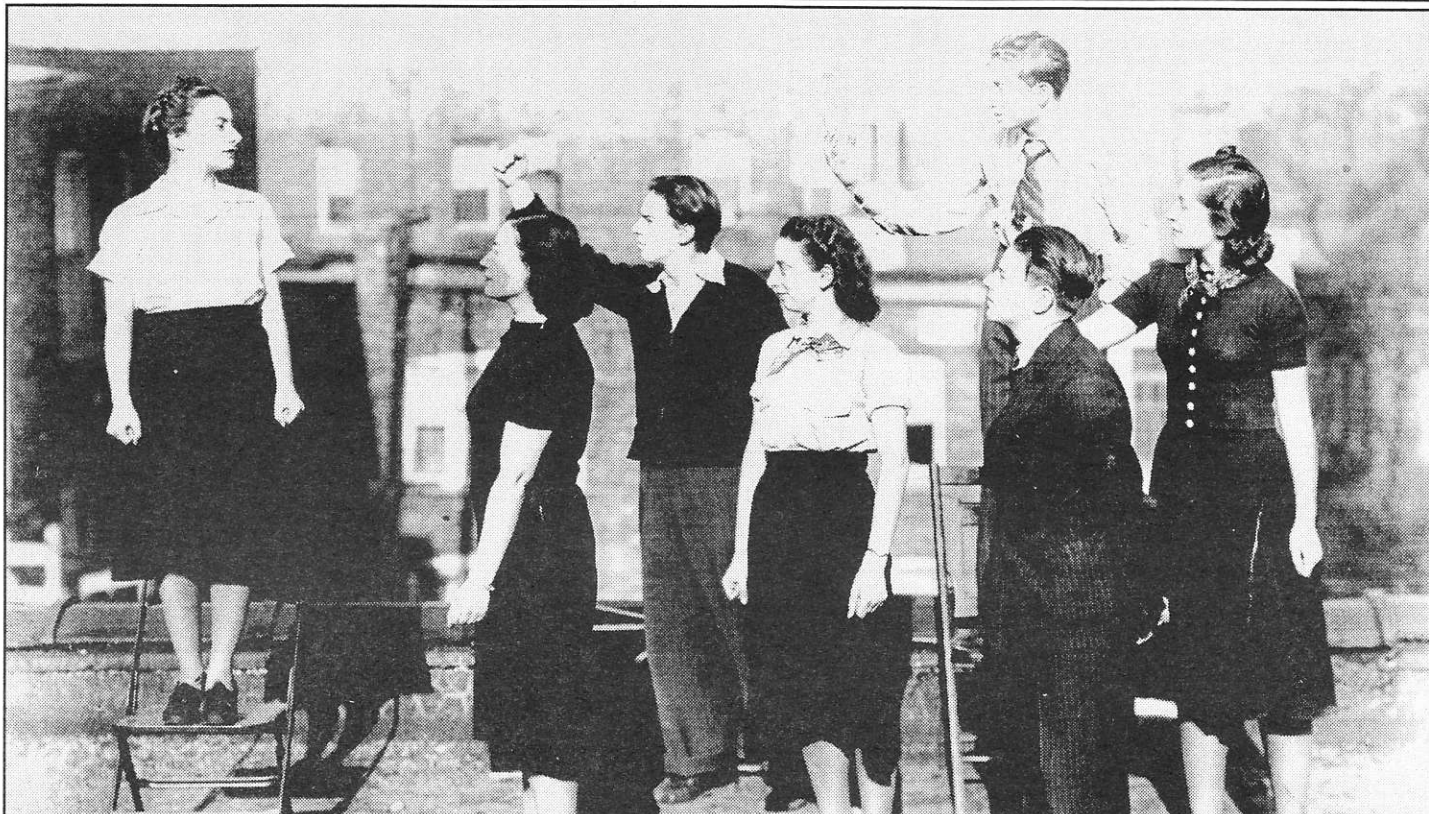
HABONIM 3322 Douglas Boulevard

## Habonim Recruitment Paper, circa 1940

Midwest and the second in the United States. This was followed by Camp Habonim in Savannah, Illinois from 1946-1947; Camp Yad Ari in Waupaca, Wisconsin from 1948-1954; and Camp Kinneret in Chelsea, Michigan in 1955. In the spring of 1956, Habonim settled in its current location of Camp Kvtutza. The group purchased eighty acres of farmland overlooking beautiful Kaiser Lake near Three Rivers, Michigan. That site became Habonim Camp Tavor, now celebrating its 40th anniversary and serving the entire Midwest area.

## *Close Ties with Israel*

Habonim's activities were not limited to meetings and summer camping. Between 1945 and 1948, Chicago Habonim members assisted in the rehabilitation of displaced persons in Europe, helped bring "illegal" immigrants to what was then Palestine, and volunteered in Israel's War of Independence. These activities were carried on through the efforts and programs sponsored by Habonim, organized specifically with the purpose of



helping where needed.

In the course of the last sixty years, many Chicago Habonim members have become chalutzim (pioneers) in Israel, realizing Habonim's motto *Aleinu U'vnei* (arise and build). They helped establish kibbutzim such as Kfar Blum, Maayan Baruch, Gesher Haziv, Urim, Grofit and Gezer, as well as other collective settlements (moshavim) such as Bet Cherut and Orot.

Today, these Habonim "graduates" continue to play active roles in the ongoing operation of these settlements. There are also large numbers of Habonim "alumni" to be found in all walks of Israeli life, throughout all of Israel.

Just as many graduates of Habonim have enriched the life of Israel, so have successive generations of Habonim contributed immeasurably to Jewish life in our community as distinguished leaders in Jewish communal, educational, academic, and religious institutions. Among the latter are the late Ernst Lorge, Rabbi of Temple Beth Israel; Herman Schaalman, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Emanuel; and Herbert Bronstein, Rabbi of North Shore Congregation Israel.

#### *New Faces*

In 1981, Habonim merged with Dror, another North American Labor Zionist youth organization, and became Habonim Dror. This merger has contributed to a broader spectrum of membership and a wider scope of activities.

Most Habonim members today are high school and college age youth, many of whom participate in the

Habonim Workshop, one of several Israel-based programs sponsored by Habonim for young people. The program, a year of work and study in Israel, established by Habonim in 1951, was the first of its kind. Since its inception, Chicago has been well represented.

#### *From Generation to Generation*

Today, Chicago Habonim continues its activities -- in the city, at camp, and on the college campus. Habonim members are in the vanguard of American student groups fighting against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel propaganda, and fighting for civil rights.

Many Habonim youth in Chicago are the children and grandchildren of former Habonim members, many of whom are active in *Na'amat* (Women's Labor Zionist Organization), and the Labor Zionist Alliance, which comprise the "senior" movement. It is this ongoing commitment to the ideals transmitted from generation to generation, as well as the well-deserved pride in its pioneering accomplishments, that make the sixtieth anniversary of Habonim -- celebrated by several hundred alumni of Chicago on May 26, 1996 at Beth Emet Synagogue -- a meaningful and important milestone in the history of the Chicago Jewish community. □

**Habonim members Maiteh Fox, Rochel Hurwitz, Ezra Gordon, Jennie Greenberg, Roy Landzbaum, Bob Miller (on chair), and Lakey Topin rehearse a scene from the Yiddish drama *Oif Der Vach (On Guard)* atop the Labor Zionist Roof in 1939.**

## New Archivists Plan to Build on Solid Foundation

Several changes are happening at the Chicago Jewish Archives.

Long-time Archivist Norma Spungen has taken emeritus status and been replaced by Joy Kingsolver and Andrew Wertheimer.

The new team looks to build on the strong foundation Spungen leaves behind, as they continue to catalogue and expand the collection.

Spungen served as Archivist from 1986 until earlier this year. She will continue to contribute her expertise to the archives on a part-time basis.

Kingsolver, the new Archivist, comes to the archives with masters degrees in history and library science, both from Indiana University. Since January she has been Serials Librarian at the Asher Library of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, a position she will retain.

Kingsolver's own research focuses on Jewish history in terms of women, immigration, and libraries. She is a member of the American Libraries Association, the Association of Jewish Libraries, and the Society of American Archivists.

Wertheimer assumes the position of Head of Acquisitions. He has an MLS from Indiana University and has experience at the Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. He is also the Public Services Librarian at the Asher Library.

Wertheimer recently reviewed



**New archivists Andrew Wertheimer and Joy Kingsolver**

Society Board Member Irv Cutler's *The Jews of Chicago* for the Association of Jewish Libraries Newsletter. He is a member of the Council of the Association of Jewish Libraries and serves as Recording Secretary for the Chicago Judaica Librarians Network.

Kingsolver and Wertheimer received training in archival work at the Lilly Library and New York's YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, and they worked together to process a major collection at the American Jewish Archives. They are editing a book on the history of Jewish libraries and printing.

Both are excited about the potential for the archives. "Electronic communication offers new possibilities and concerns for the archives," Wertheimer said, "and should some day provide electronic access to a

computerized archival catalogue."

The two have begun a campaign to gather funds to preserve the oldest archival materials, and are being assisted in their efforts by Michael Terry, director of the Asher Library, and the administration of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

The Chicago Jewish Archives was founded in 1966 by Rabbi Morris Gutstein. It is housed at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, 618 South Michigan Avenue.

The new archivists welcome interested volunteers.

Individuals interested in conducting research in the archives should arrange in advance for appointments to insure they will receive the necessary assistance.

The archives can be reached by phone at (312) 922-9012. □

## Board Member Gertel to Speak on Solomon Goldman

Society Board member Rabbi Elliot Gertel will speak on the life of famed Chicago Rabbi Solomon Goldman at the next bi-monthly Society meeting, December 15 at Temple Shalom.

Goldman, who served as the rabbi of Anshe Emet in Lakeview from 1929 to 1953, was also one of the best-known Zionist leaders in the United States. In 1938, he succeeded Rabbi Stephen S. Wise as president of the Zionist Organization of America.

Gertel himself is the rabbi of Congregation Rodfei Zedek in Hyde Park.

Gertel's talk, entitled "The Life and

Times of Rabbi Solomon Goldman," will begin at 2 p.m., and there will be a casual hour for conversation starting at 1 p.m.

Gertel's talk is open to the public. We encourage members to bring guests to share this interesting topic and to introduce them to what we do as a society.

Temple Shalom is located at 3480 N. Lake Shore Drive. □

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Memoir:

## Kaylia Katz Recalls Hard Times and Good Times Living on Maxwell Street

*The following letter was written earlier this year by Kaylia Katz, a former Chicagoan living now in the Fort Lauderdale area. Her brother, Seymour Persky, is a Board member of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society.*

Dear Seymour,

Received the copy of the *Jewish News* [with the article about Maxwell Street] and did it ever start a rush of memories that I am still trying to sort out.

I can still imagine (if one imagines) the scent of the hot dogs, Polish sausage and onions on the outside stand at 14th and Halsted, the Irish green of the pickle relish and the bottle of orange soda (the stain of orange resisted any removal -- even dry-cleaning was impervious to that dye). I can well remember the slush in the streets -- how it remained in the heat of summer is another mystery.

But, for me the memories are not of pleasant nostalgia. The memory of mama dragging burlap bags of second-hand shoes and repaired clothing on the 14th-16th street car early Sunday on the first car out of the barn in order to get a stand before they were all given out to the shmearers.

Pressing the night before with the 22 lb. iron (that I think you still have). Then we learned how to tell people's sizes: Have the customer hold a cuff in each hand and stretch their arms out sideways -- if there was no slack in between then the fit was made to order. Ladies dresses from the center of chest to middle of spine, also O.K. but only if she didn't have hips like a rhino.

O.K. they were also the golden days when every "puller" knew the difference between a lumber-jacket and a "Peltzel." They had the instant magic of how they knew just what size you were and about the amount you could afford. Only once in a while would they show you something you couldn't afford to give you an idea of the high quality of their wares.

No one ever bought on "Lay-Away" because if it wasn't picked up at a prescribed time, it was gone -- along with the down payment forfeited.

If you wandered over to Jefferson Street you could find a handle for a broken hammer, dented pots and pans, odd bicycle wheels, and even second hand scissors. Truly a pack rat's heaven.

That is where it was really necessary to be trilingual, which Mama was. The Pole or Russian cursing the "Yid" while dickering on the price, telling their kids to say they "didn't like"

whatever the kid was really ready to die for, while the merchant stood and listened and understood every word -- even down to the real price they would eventually pay.

But "poor" Mama (and I mean that in every sense of the word) stood in the street selling whatever Mrs. Casidy or *landsmench* Mrs. Solomon let her have on consignment. (I am sure you remember Mrs. Solomon who paid 5 cents for a cup of coffee at Manny Goodman's and let everyone know she was from Maxwell Street and wanted her cup full to the top.)

Today I wonder -- would we have been even better off living on the West Side in Lawndale where everyone was on relief and no one really cared, instead of the constant struggle to "save face."

I suppose that is one reason I care so deeply about so many things.

-- Kay

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## Society Newsletter Seeks Memoirs of Jewish Chicago

*Chicago Jewish History*, the newsletter of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society, occasionally publishes memoirs of individual Chicagoans.

Examples of the sort of memoirs we publish include Kaylia Katz's letter (printed above), one man's memories of

growing up as the grandson of a West Side butcher and one woman's recollections of helping to entertain Jewish soldiers during World War II.

Individual memoirs give us the opportunity to present history in its narrowest contours. The stories that you might recall from your childhood or from some unusual situation in which you found yourself often prompt other peoples' memories to flow as well.

The memoirs we seek are refined versions of the same stories you may

well tell at family gatherings or when you and old friends come together.

Manuscripts should be no longer than six double-spaced pages. The editors consider both the caliber of the writing and the originality of the subject matter in weighing which memoirs we will be able to publish.

Memoirs should be sent to Joe Kraus, 1416 W. Catalpa, Chicago, IL 60640. Be certain to include a return address and phone. We try, but we cannot respond to all submissions. □

*Mystery Solved:*

## Unusual Medal Points to Historic Fundraising Effort

Society member Gil Levy turned recently to Society past-president and current Board member Norman Schwartz with a few questions.

Levy had owned a small coin-shaped medal for some time and was curious about just what it represented.

One side had the inscription, "The United Drive for \$2,500,000.00. If you won't who will? 1923."

The other side bore the name of Emil G. Hirsch without explanation.

Levy knew from H.L. Meites' *History of the Jews of Chicago* that Hirsch, the long-time rabbi of Sinai Congregation, had died in January 1923.

Levy's questions had to do with the medal itself. He wanted to know how many had been minted, what they were for, to whom they had been given, and why had they been given.

Schwartz, who is widely experienced in tracking down details of Chicago Jewish history, turned to the pages of the *Sentinel* to see what he could uncover.

The medal, it turns out, commemorated donors contributing to a massive fund-raising campaign of 1923. The goal of the campaign was to raise funds to rehabilitate a range of Jewish communal institutions: the Jewish Peoples Institute, Michael Reese Hospital, and Mount Sinai Hospital among them.

The campaign was chaired by Jacob Loeb, the chair of the Chicago Hebrew Institute and a successful businessman, and Sol Kline a lawyer and leader in the local charities field.

Loeb and the other campaign leaders had determined that it would take \$2.5 million to repair and endow the facilities.

Loeb, Kline, and honorary chair Julius Rosenwald adopted as part of their campaign slogan a paraphrase of

Hillel's "If I am not for myself, who will be; and when I am for myself what am I? If not now, when?"

That slogan, "If you won't, who will," is part of the legend printed on the coin.

The fundraising effort officially began on March 12, 1923. Organizers were nervous because \$2.5 million was an unprecedentedly large sum.

What's more, the committee putting the drive together, although drawing from much of the leadership and membership of the Jewish Charities of Chicago, came together for the exclusive purpose of overseeing the campaign. It did not have the benefit of an established infrastructure.

By May 31, however, the campaign had netted \$2.75 million

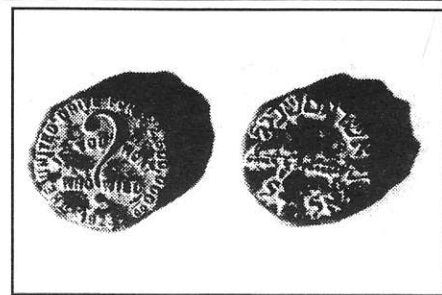
Perhaps even more impressive than the money, though, was the fact that Jewish Chicagoans of every background had participated. The campaign had been the first great test of the approach behind the idea of The Jewish Charities, which would evolve into the Jewish United Fund the idea that the combined community could accomplish more than the sum of its separate elements.

Meites would proclaim the fund drive the "greatest of all campaigns," and describe it in glowing terms.

No longer will there be South Side and West Side, reform Jews and orthodox Jews, German Jews and Russian Jews. Henceforth, in all the undertakings for the general good, all of Chicago's three hundred thousand Jews shall be comprehended, in fact as well as in form, in the term, the Jewish community of Chicago.

Levy's coin, therefore, marked an auspicious moment in the history of Chicago's Jewish community. There yet remained some of his other questions, however.

Schwartz speculates that the reason Hirsch's name appeared on the coin was that he had long stood as perhaps the most visible Jew in Chicago. For years, mainstream newspapers had turned to him for comment when an issue affected



Front and back of Gil Levy's medal

the Jewish community.

Schwartz guesses that Hirsch's name on the coin was intended both to honor his memory and to carry forward his sense that Chicago Jews needed to conceive of themselves as a single community.

As for Levy's final questions about the medal itself, Schwartz was able to ascertain that Sinai Congregation possesses a handful of other similar medals, but that those medals do not bear the date 1923.

Whether Levy's medal was stamped differently or marked once it had been given out as a token of someone's donation is impossible to tell.

It is also impossible, at this point, to determine how many such medals were created. Clearly not every donor to the campaign received one -- or there would almost certainly be many more such medals extant.

The medal seems to have been one small piece of a very large campaign.

We are sorry that we could not answer all of Levy's questions, but pleased that he turned to us to help solve the mystery.

Local history often makes itself known through strange-seeming relics like Levy's medal. The story of the 1923 campaign was hardly unknown, but it took the combination of Levy's curiosity crossed with his and Schwartz's expertise to tell the story again.

We invite all of our members to look through their collections of Chicago Jewish memorabilia. It's never clear just what semi-forgotten story the smallest clue might lead us to remember, recover, and re-tell. □



Oral History Excerpt:

## *Sentinel's* Jack Fishbein Speaks of Journalism, Fundraising and Jewishness

The following is an excerpt of an oral history given by long-time *Sentinel* publisher Jack Fishbein to Walter Roth and Sol Brandzel on October 23, 1986.

*Fishbein died July 17, 1996.*

**Walter Roth:** Tell me how you first came to the *Sentinel*.

**Jack Fishbein:** I was employed with the old Chicago American. I was one of the youngest employees at that point in the Classified Advertising Department. You know when I got out of university...

**Roth:** Which university was that?

**Fishbein:** Northwestern.

**Roth:** Was that the Journalism School?

**Fishbein:** No, in the School of Commerce. And I could not get a job.

**Roth:** When'd you graduate?

**Fishbein:** It goes back ... it's fifty years.

**Roth:** You were 19 years old at the time.

**Fishbein:** Yeah, I was quite young. In my twenties. And, what happened was, even though I was one of the youngest, I finally got a job at the *Chicago American* in what was then called Classified Advertising. I sold Room to Rent want ads. And you know that the *Chicago American* in those days was bucking against the *Tribune* ... We had the *Daily News*, *Chicago American*, ... that's right. And we had the *Chicago Evening American*, which was a Hearst newspaper. And it was shortly afterward that Marshall Field began the *Chicago Sun*, it was called, which was a full sized newspaper.

And, of course, there was the *Chicago Tribune*. But in any event, I was doing very well and I was moved up into what we called Display Classified Advertising. And an opening occurred in Display Advertising which is the hope of every advertising salesman to reach there. That's where the big money is. And two of the division managers in my department, who were Jewish, were passed over in favor of non-Jews who really didn't deserve it. And then I began to see the writing on the wall so I went to the manager of the Advertising Department. I said, "How did this happen?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you. We just have too many Jews in Display Advertising and we had to balance it off." So I said, "Then that ends my regime, term of office with the *Chicago American*."

**Roth:** Do you have any sense that experience was common in the journalism field?

**Fishbein:** Oh, I think so very much. Because I know that I

spent six months trying to get into advertising agencies. I remember distinctly J. Walter Thompson, which is a very large agency still in business. And I was told very frankly that they had a quota. So ...

**Roth:** Were there any Jews working for these papers?

**Fishbein:** Oh, they were but they had ... they definitely were using quotas. No question about it. So, I just could not get a job. And I went six months. That's how I happened to end up in Classified Advertising, paid \$40 a week.

**Roth:** Had you intended when you graduated to go into the journalism field?

**Fishbein:** No, I didn't. I wanted to go into the newspaper field, and openings in journalism, in the editorial department were slim, and I thought if I got into advertising, I could ease my way in. It didn't work out that way. Anyhow, to make a long story short, in 1936 ... I then came over to the *Sentinel*, which was owned by Louis Berlin, the founder and publisher. And he started ... He offered me a job at I think it was \$40 a week. He called me the next day. He thought it over and that was too much. He said, "I can only pay you thirty!" Imagine! I was a graduate with the highest ranking. I had almost a straight A average.

**Roth:** Was it a weekly then?

**Fishbein:** Oh yes. And so I did take it. Eventually I did get \$40 a week. And when I became co-publisher in 1943, I was asking fifty dollars.

**Roth:** How did you happen to come to the *Sentinel*? Because there must have been other Jewish publications.

**Fishbein:** Well, there were four Jewish weeklies. We had in Chicago at that time seven Jewish publications. Just bear that in mind.

**Roth:** Can you recall the names?

**Fishbein:** Oh sure. I have them on the display at the reception. There were four Anglo-Jewish weeklies. One was the *Chicago Israelite*, which was the oldest of all the Anglo-Jewish weeklies and was published by a Mollie Haushumann who was related to the people in the steel business, from Inland Steel.

And then there was the *Jewish Chronicle*. Then there was the *Reform Advocate*, ... Then there were three Yiddish dailies. One was the *Forward*, which was doing very well then. Had its own delivery trucks and everything else. And there was an orthodox Yiddish paper, the *Morning* ... , I should know. It was at 12th and Halsted. Well, I'll think of it. [Editor's note: it was *The Morning Journal*.] And then there was, of course, the Communist weekly *Freiheit*. And so we had seven papers. Gradually they disappeared. Now there is only one left.

**Roth:** Go back a little before we pursue your history with *The Sentinel*. You were born in October of 1912. Were you born in the City of Chicago?

**Fishbein:** Yes.

**Roth:** What about your parents? What are their antecedents?

**Fishbein:** My mother came from a little town in Poland called Plaunch, which was, by the way, the home of Ben Gurion. And then my father came from a town called Stasich. ...

**Roth:** Where did they live here in Chicago? ...

**Fishbein:** I was born at 3609 Wentworth Avenue which no longer exists.

**Roth:** Did your parents meet here?

**Fishbein:** No, they were married ... My mother became engaged to my father when she was twelve years old, which was the custom. And she never saw him again until ... she was 18 or 19 years old. Can you imagine? And my mother gave birth to twelve children, ten of whom survived.

**Roth:** Were they Orthodox?

**Fishbein:** My folks are very Orthodox. I come from that background.

**Roth:** Did they send you to ... did you have an Orthodox training?

**Fishbein:** Oh sure. I wore *tzitzes* until I was 18 years old.

**Roth:** Where did you get your orthodox training?

**Fishbein:** In my home and in those days, we had a ... We didn't have Talmud Torahs where we were living so I had what they called kind of a *melamed*, but he teaches. He came to the house and taught. We were very poor. And then we moved to 3759 Wentworth Avenue and right across the street was a little storefront which was used as a schul for the holidays.

**Roth:** What did your father do for a living?

**Fishbein:** He was a tailor, a *schneider*. ... He had his own store right ... and we lived above it.

**Sol Brandzel:** Where?

**Fishbein:** At 3759 Wentworth. We lived there until we moved out south on Cornell. This painting here is the painting of my father-in-law. My wife comes from that same kind of a background and he was a very orthodox man. To the day he died, he went to the synagogue twice a day, morning and night.

**Brandzel:** How old was he when he passed away?

**Fishbein:** 89 years old.

**Roth:** He also lived on the West Side?

**Fishbein:** No, my wife is from Detroit. And so I met her here in Chicago. Much of the art you see around here is my wife's father. My wife is a very well known artist.

**Roth:** You went to Bowen High School?

**Fishbein:** Yes.

**Roth:** And then you went to Crane?

**Fishbein:** Crane Junior College.

**Roth:** During that period when there were a lot of Jews in Crane Junior College.

**Fishbein:** Oh yes. My teacher who influenced me greatly [was] ... Lillian Herstein. ... [She] Changed my whole attitude toward life! ... Another teacher I had there was Lillian Franklin, a sister of Pearl Franklin, one of the architects of Hadassah.

**Brandzel:** Yes, I remember her.

**Fishbein:** Lillian Herstein in those days was a firebrand. She was a radical! ...

**Brandzel:** We just recently did the same kind of oral history with Justice Goldberg. And in that oral history, he again pays tribute as you just have to Lillian Herstein.

**Fishbein:** Absolutely.

**Roth:** ... Now you have been with *The Sentinel* for some fifty years now.

**Fishbein:** Fifty years last June.

**Roth:** You have sometimes been considered *l'enfant terrible* of the Chicago Jewish community and the things

that you have said and written. How do you see your role? How does *The Sentinel* affect, do you think, Jewish life and the Jewish community in Chicago?

**Fishbein:** You know, our approach is different from all the other Anglo Jewish weeklies in America. In fact, next month, we're having our annual convention of the American Jewish Press Association here in Chicago during the meeting of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.

**Roth:** And you were one of its founders.

**Fishbein:** I was the founder. And they're going to give me some kind of an honor or other. But, we believe that the role of the Jewish press is to act as a weapon for Jewish survival and not just to make money. It's not a business to make money out of, not today. The costs are too high. ... But we consider our role to challenge the thinking of the Jewish community. And you know our slogan is "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comforted." And that's what we try to do.

**Roth:** You write often against what you call "check book Judaism" and that is that our fundraising, so much of our life is spent on fundraising. Which many people view as an unfortunate necessity but nevertheless has to be done. Is it your concern with the direction that fundraising takes that bothers you? That it lifts up people to levels because of their capacity to give money rather than involving the mass of Jewish people in the city?

**Fishbein:** No. Our concern is that it is effectively killing Jewish life. ... You take my young assistant editor out

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*"I sure do consider myself a maverick.  
And I want to die in that vein. I want to  
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there. Wonderful young man. He's only two classes away from getting his Ph.D. degree. Now, if you talk with him, he will tell you that where does he fit into Jewish life today? You know frankly speaking that it's based 90% on fundraising. And that doesn't interest him. He's an idealist. He wants to struggle for a better world. And you know, speaking honestly, in most congregations, most organizations, that's the last thing in the world they worry about. So what happens? They are driven off into non-Jewish [organizations]. And that's why you'll see in our editorials -- I frequently refer to the alienation of our young people. I use that expression very frequently. ...

**Brandzel:** Jack, let me put this ... When you first took over the *Sentinel*, ... Why did you become editor of the *Sentinel*? So you could influence the editorial policy?

**Fishbein:** Mr. Berlin, at that time that I came into the *Sentinel*, was already heavily involved in the Webby Printing Company which was making a fortune. And the last thing in the world that he was interested in was the *Sentinel*. So I was his assistant. You would call me the Assistant to the Publisher. And he let me run the *Sentinel* pretty much the way I wanted to do it. And in 1943, when Jack Feldman and I bought the *Sentinel*, we had already in a sense turned its direction away from being a North Shore social journal into one concerned with the problems of Jewish life. And that continued even more so when Jack Feldman left in 1951, I think it was. ...

**Roth:** It seems to me also that we were living during a period when people were labeling, as we are labeling people now. The sign progressive which is now associated with liberal, which now becomes ... sometimes by some people a word of negative connotation. Do you still consider yourself a maverick?

**Fishbein:** Well, I sure do. And I want to die in that vein. I want to even do more than I'm doing. Because you know, I consider Jewish life to be sick. You probably don't but I do. And I want to do even more than I'm doing. ...

**Fishbein:** Now I've read all [of Elie Weisel's] books and I know when he speaks and he runs his hand through his long hair, you know, and he bemoans the plight of the Jews and how terrible the Holocaust was and everything else. But do you know that in forty years of preaching the Holocaust, he never has mentioned the word "fascist"?

**Brandzel:** It's an interesting commentary of omission.

**Fishbein:** Sure. Now, let's be honest about it! You know, you can hate the Communists -- we all do -- the fact of the

matter is that it was the Nazis, which was the term for fascism in Germany, is what killed the Jews. It was not the Communists. You know, we could rewrite history but we cannot alter that fact, can we? So, therefore, he doesn't mention it. And now, he's gone on an altogether [different] tack. He doesn't even mention the Nazis as much. He talks about hatred. I just read his report from the last speech he made. He talks about don't blame God. You know, God did it but God shouldn't be blamed. My mother used to say, "If people knew where God lived, they'd go and break out all his windows." You know. But, you know, as a matter of fact, the business of the murder of six million Jews, which also took my grandfather and my grandmother in Poland, was the work of human beings.

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*"The business of the murder of six million Jews, which also took my grandfather and my grandmother in Poland, was the work of human beings. And it was the work of an economic system which we call fascism."*

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And it was the work of an economic system which we call fascism, you know. And he never speaks of that. So the difference is he's a mysticist and I'm a pragmatist. And he gets all the glory and

honor and I don't believe it. So, we would differ. ...

**Roth:** We understand your attitude and your position. Now tell me, in this long history with *The Sentinel* and this observing role that you have of the Jewish scene in Chicago, who do you think, who do you see as the figures in Jewish history in Chicago that have impressed you?

**Fishbein:** ... I mentioned Solomon Goldman, who was my theoretical teacher. And you know, he was a curmudgeon if you'll remember. He was the first man who spoke, who said it was all right to ride on Friday night. He said it's better for Jews to ride to *schul* than not to go to there. ...

**Roth:** What about Rabbi Wise, Stephen Wise?

**Fishbein:** Oh, Stephen was my close friend! I glory in him.

**Roth:** He came to Chicago ...

**Fishbein:** Oh, he did and I knew him and we helped raise money for him. See, we don't oppose ... the raising of money for legitimate causes and we do much of it. You know our whole history with regard to the Ethiopian Jews. You know that. But we're talking about the use of money, not as a means toward an end, but as an end in itself. It was two different things.

**Roth:** Back in the thirties, Stephen Wise organized, tried to organize boycotts against Hitler.

**Fishbein:** Yes, that's right. And he was ... he was ... Not only opposed, he was thrown into *charem* [i.e. ostracized]. He was not a fighter in the sense of being an antagonist, if you know what I mean. He was a theoretical fighter. He was a human being of tremendous proportions. ... He was a giant! We haven't had anybody like that since. □