

# Der Bay

## The International Anglo-Yiddish Newsletter

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January 2005

Vol. XV No. 1

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### Sightseeing & The Tour at the IAYC Conference: A Tale of Two Cities:

**Minneapolis, The City of Lakes, and St. Paul, The Capitol City, take center stage for this Twin Cities highlights tour.**

Your tour of the Twin Cities includes both unique downtown areas. While in Minneapolis, you'll experience the oldest pedestrian mall in the country, **The Nicollet Mall** and the second floor **skyway system** that connects over 35 blocks throughout Minneapolis. The tour stops at **The Minneapolis Sculpture Garden**, an 11-acre urban garden featuring some 40, sculptures by leading international & American artists.

The **Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge**, designed by Siah Armajani, connects **the Garden to Loring Park** and downtown Minneapolis. **The Cowtes Conservatory**, contains **the Regis Gardens**.

You tour **Kenwood**, one of Minneapolis' oldest and most beautiful residential areas. It is the site of **Mary Tyler Moore's Television Home**. Then you travel around the famous **Chain of Lakes**.

You'll follow **Minnehaha Creek** to the legendary **Minnehaha Falls**. It is here that **Longfellow** wrote the famous poem about **Hiawatha**, the Indian brave. You will cross the **Mississippi River** into **St. Paul**. You'll drive along fabled **Summit Avenue**, lined with magnificent restored Victorian homes.

It's on Summit Avenue that **F. Scott Fitzgerald** wrote *The Great Gatsby*. **The Governor's Mansion** is here. Then you'll see **Rice Park, The Ordway Music Hall, Landmark Center, The Cathedral of St. Paul** and **The State Capitol**.

As you go back, you ride through the **Univ. of Minnesota Campus**, home to 46,000 students, and you'll visit **St. Anthony Falls, the birthplace of Minneapolis**.

**TOUR DATE: June 5, 2005—TIME: 1:00 P.M.**  
**COST: \$20.00 per person—Includes: Deluxe motor coach transportation & guide.**

There are many other things to do. Come early or stay later. The hotel will honor convention rate. Here is a short list of other great sites.

- **Mall of America:** It is the largest shopping and entertainment complex in the United States.
- **Sculpture Garden:** The largest sculpture garden in the United States.
- **Theater in the Round:** Ph: 612-333-3010
- **Minneapolis Institute of Art:** Spans 5,000 years of art includes a Judaica collection.
- **The Guthrie Theater, Walker Art Center, and Weisman Art Museum,**

The Ninth IAYC Conference will be held from Thurs., June 2nd to Sun., June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in beautiful Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Yiddish Vinkl co-chair, Roz Baker is conference coordinator: 612-377-5456 or Annalee Odessky e-mail: annalee26@aol.com or 952-544-5423.

**Greater Milwaukee/Chicago area attendees can go by chartered Greyhound bus roundtrip for only \$100. Call Paul Melrood: 414-961-1715 or e-mail majpaulww2@sbcglobal.net**

**Go to the inside of the back page for your registration form. See you in Minneapolis!**

## Dos besere lebn durkh khemye:

Chemical Literature in Yiddish In honor of Dr. Paul S. Cohen (1938-2004), Professor Emeritus of Chemistry, The College of New Jersey

**Speaker: Stephen M. Cohen, HORIBA Jobin Yvon, 3880 Park Avenue, Edison, NJ 08820**

Press Release: American Chem. Soc.; Trenton Sect: Tues., Jan. 11, 2005; Fireside Lounge, Student Ctr., Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ Lecture: 7 PM

Abstract: Chemistry is usually studied in one of the principal languages of chemical research (e.g., English, Russian, German, French, Japanese, etc.). For minority groups, their only exposure to higher education may not be available in these languages. Yiddish, the language of the poor and segregated Eastern European Jews, has a highly developed fictional, political, religious, and theatrical literature, but also includes little-known scientific writings, mostly from Eastern Europe and United States.

This talk-- in English--presents a brief background about Yiddish and Eastern European Jewry, and a rationale for and history of 20th-century chemical works in Yiddish. Examples of these works will be shown, including textbooks, a teachers' guide, reference works and technical glossaries, chemical propaganda, and news articles using of chemical ideas—recent efforts to revitalize technical Yiddish.

Biography: Stephen Cohen received his B.A. in chemistry from the University of Pennsylvania, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from Rice University in Physical Chemistry, focusing on small-molecule chemistry on single-crystal germanium surfaces. At Nottingham University in the UK, he was a research associate, studying free-jet spectroscopy of aromatic molecules.

Dr. Cohen was at Lehigh University, with the Naval Air Warfare Center, investigating anti-corrosion treatments for aerospace aluminum alloys, and at Rutgers Univ., performing non-linear spectroscopy on polymers. He has taught chemistry at The College of New Jersey and Mercer County Community College. He was a science writer, and is a Technical Writer at HORIBA Jobin Yvon. At the Univ. of Pennsylvania,

Dr. Cohen studied Yiddish, and raises his children in a Yiddish-speaking household. He is a member of Yugntruf, League for Yiddish, and the ACS (Editor of the Trenton Section's *The Alembic* from 1999-2003), the Royal Society of Chemistry, and the Society for Technical Communication. He has published on topics, from peer-reviewed scientific research, history of science, and science humor, to religious studies Hebrew calligraphy and genealogy.

## Sid Weinstein's Yiddish Materials

Sid Weinstein, who has been preparing materials for Yiddish clubs for a long time, is making them available for individual purchase.

1. *Potpouri* - a collection of transliterated stories, poems and skits with vocabulary
2. A Purim Packet: (a) *Megiles Ester* - a hilarious spoof successfully produced by a number of clubs. (b) A Purim quiz (c) Skit: Sholem Aleykhem's *Shalekh Mones* (d) Purim songs with notation
3. *Moyshhe Nadir* collected stories in transliteration
4. *Making Love in Yiddish*: a program of Yiddish folksongs on the theme of love and marriage with an English narration.
5. *Gastronomical Judaism*- a glossary of Jewish foods, their derivation, stories, humor, recipes

\$14 each—postage included: Sid Weinstein, 5118 Carfax Avenue, Lakewood CA. 90713  
sidweinstein@earthlink.net ph: 562-866-2470

## Chaim Finklestein

**Bob Becker: bob@becker-ks.com 913-219-1584  
Overland Park, KS**

Chaim Finklestein was the last editor of *Haynt*, the Jewish Daily newspaper in Warsaw, Poland. His book, *Haynt*, chronicles Jewish life in Poland from 1908-1939.

Yadviga Finklestein, Chaim Finklestein's widow, is 91 and lives at Village Shalom in Kansas, USA. She gave me permission to reproduce *Haynt* and display at this website: [www.becker-ks.com/haynt](http://www.becker-ks.com/haynt)

*Haynt* is a rare book never published in English. It may contain historical information previously unknown outside of the Yiddish-speaking world.

The website makes *Haynt* available to Yiddish readers and seeks volunteers to translate a few pages each into English. I will send a CD containing the complete book to any one who will translate ten pages. As I receive these translations, I will add the English pages to this website and credit the translators for their contribution.

I would love to correspond with anyone who would be interested in this project.

*Der Bay* was extremely helpful five years ago in translating my grandmother's autobiography, *The Rose Leis Story*: [www.becker-ks.com/RoseLeis/](http://www.becker-ks.com/RoseLeis/) The Rose Leis website caught Mrs. Finklestein's attention and prompted her to ask me if I could do the same with *Haynt*.

***What Must Be Forgotten:***  
*The Survival of Yiddish in Zionist Palestine*  
By Yael Chaver

This book deals with the complex relationship between cultural politics and Jewish writing in the forming Hebrew Zionist Yishuv of Palestine. It also reveals a previously unrecognized, alternative literature that flourished there vigorously without legitimacy.

Specific examples are ethnically ambiguous fiction of Zalmen Brokhes, minority-oriented stories of Avrom Rivess, and multicultural poetry of Rikuda Potash. Using rare archival material and personal interviews, *What Must Be Forgotten* unearths dimensions largely neglected in mainstream books on Yiddish and/or Hebrew studies.

**Cloth \$29.95. 254 pages, 10 black and white photographs, glossary, bibliography, notes, index.**  
Syracuse University Press, 1-800-365-8929

## **Amanda Miriam-Khaye Seigel**

Amanda Miriam-Khaye Seigel iz a zingerin un shrayberin fun lider af mame-loshn. Zi arbet in der yiddisher kultur-velt in Nyu-york. Zi iz a graduantke fun Hampshire College un fun der YIVO zumer-program.

"Ikh hob gehert nor a por yidische verter in der heym, ober der interes tsu yidish hot zikh antviklt ven ikh hob zikh bateylikht in an yidish-klas in universitet. Ikh hob zikh gelernt vayter, say in der akademisher svive, say fun stam azoy farbrengen mit eltere fraynd. Ikh halt az me muz ufhaltn yidish vi a geredte shprakh, un azoy muz men redn af yidish (befrat mit natirlekhe yidish-reders) vifl es lozt zikh".

Amanda (Miriam-Khaye) Seigel is a Yiddish singer/songwriter, and works in the Yiddish cultural world of New York. She is a graduate of Hampshire College and of the YIVO summer Yiddish program.

"I heard only a few Yiddish words at home, but my interest evolved during a college Yiddish class. I continued learning, both in an academic setting and also simply by spending time with older friends. I believe that we must uphold Yiddish as a spoken language by speaking Yiddish (especially with native speakers) as much as possible."  
Editor's note) Miriam-Khaye can be reached at: 718-222-0908. She will appear at the upcoming IAYC Conference in Minneapolis June 2-5, 2005.

## **Center For Yiddish Culture** **2004-2005 Calendar**

### **Jewish Cultural Lecture Series**

(A Library of Destruction and Hope: The Book Series of Polish Jewry, 1946-1965)  
Dr. Jan Schwarz lectures in Yiddish about the destroyed Polish Jewish community, a 100 volume series by Mark Turkov of Bueno Aires.  
Thurs., Jan. 20, 2005 7:30 PM 305-866-0221  
Temple Menorah, 620 75th Street, Miami Beach

Understanding Modern Jewish Art from 1700-the present Dr. Samantha Baskind Jewish art historian Baskind discusses her new book about Raphael Soyer and the influences of Jewish art on the world.  
Date/time: March 11, at 6:15PM shabbot dinner and lecture Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center, 204000 NE 30th Avenue, Aventura  
For information call: 305-935-0666

Behind the Pastel Façade: A Tropical Yiddishland Called South Beach, David Weintraub, Director of Center for Yiddish Culture discusses the Yiddish world of old South Beach and what its disappearance means for the larger culture.  
Tuesday, March 22, 2005 1 PM Pembroke Pines Hadassah, Pembroke Pines  
For information call: 954-431-2073

### **CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

*Pincus the Pig*, Storytelling and a performance by the Shirim Klezmer Band  
Sun., Jan. 9, 2 PM Ph: 305-271-9000  
Alper JCC, 11155 SW 112 Avenue, West Kendall

### **EDUCATION**

Yiddish On-Line:Featuring three semesters of college level Yiddish for beginners or intermediate students. Spring: January 15-April 15, 2005  
Register on-line at [www.yiddishculture.org](http://www.yiddishculture.org)

### **FILMS**

A Tropical Yiddishland, South Beach. Is a short concerning the rich Yiddish cultural in South Florida.  
• Broward Film Festival: Posnack JCC, 58505 Pine Island Road, Davie, 954-434-0499 Sun., Feb. 6, 1 PM  
• Miami Beach: Miami Jewish Film Festival March, 2005 Date/Time TBA

### **NEW FROM THE CENTER**

For more information, contact the Center for Yid

# One Man's Vilna: Part III (Final)

by Britt Albritton

A question that I have been asked many times—even by one of my instructors at Vilna, "What is the *why* of your interest in Yiddish?" It is a language used in Jewish old folks' homes and by slapstick borscht belt comedians. Aside from a perceived renaissance of the language, my primary interest is and has been in its vast literature—much of it yet to be translated.

When I was a young man in college, the idea of Yiddish and Judaica in a university curriculum would have been preposterous. Today, these subjects are not only available in the best of colleges, but they are becoming increasingly popular. Even in Israel, where for a long time there were bumper stickers which demanded, *Help stamp out Yiddish!* There has been a major change in attitude.

The Israelis were embarrassed to find it necessary to turn to New York for textbooks on Yiddish. There were none in Israel. I saw for the first time ever in Vilna a Hebrew-Yiddish, Yiddish-Hebrew dictionary in the possession of a young lady from Israel. "Fresh off the press", she said.

Any student of Yiddish would have benefited during the Soviet era from the subsidization policies of the government with regard to serialized publications. I took advantage of the relatively low prices to subscribe to several Russian and Yiddish language periodicals, among them the monthly literary journal *Sovyetish Heymland* and the weekly *Birobidzhaner Shtern*.

Birobidzhan is the remnant of an Autonomous Jewish Republic of the USSR founded in the '30s as an intended homeland for the Jews of the Soviet Union. Its location, Siberia, was one of the main reasons for lack of attraction by large numbers of settlers. The *Birobidzhaner Shtern* revealed, perhaps more than it intended, about the rigors of daily life in the Jewish republic. The language was Yiddish, albeit a *Sovietized* version of Yiddish.

In the general campaign against what was termed national chauvinism, the policy of the *Yevseksiya* of the Central Committee of the Party was to phoneticize Yiddish orthography so as to eliminate, as far as possible, the Hebrew spelling of words that occur in Yiddish. What might be called the orthographic shorthand characteristic of Hebrew writing (the substitution of *nikud* dots and dashes under the printed letters of vowel sound) was to be eliminated and strictly phonetic spelling was instituted.

After his first contact with *Sovietized* orthography, my Yiddish instructor in Germany commented, "Did you see what the mamzers have done to the Hebrew words!?" The new spelling system was also used in the more literary *Sovyetish Heymland*, contrary to the blindness and superficiality of the *Birobidzhaner Shtern*. There appeared many well-written articles and poems in *Sovyetish Heymland*. The editor Arn Vergelis (I believe) wrote some insightful pieces about Israel—mostly critical.

As to Jewish immigration to Israel, he said that many, if not most of the Soviet Jews who wished to make aliyah to Israel, planned to move on to the United States. One of his pieces, written while he was on a trip to NYC, goes "... hearing *Israeli-accented Yiddish* on the subway." (I'm not sure I'd recognize *Israeli-accented Yiddish* if I heard it!)

Other than my own collection representing a subscription of several year, the only complete (or nearly complete) collection of *Sovyetish Heymland* I know of is in the library of the Baltimore Hebrew College. There was a small collection in the library of the JCC in San Diego. The librarian there, a Mrs. Harris, had established a very respectable separate Yiddish collection.

Once she noticed the time I spent in the Yiddish section, she asked if I would transliterate the titles and names of authors from Yiddish books "down in the cellar." I asked her, "Mrs. Harris, with all the Jews around here you can't find one to transliterate book titles?" She said, "If there are any, I haven't found them. I have cartons full of Yiddish books donated by the kids of deceased old people. If you find duplicates you want, you can have them."

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One of the oldest, if not the oldest in Europe, the University of Vilna is located in the old town part of the city. Established by Jesuits in 1570, it was closed for nearly a century. When it reopened it offered courses in over 60 subjects. Although both Arabic and Russian were taught, Lithuanian was banned (by the Russians, who were in control). After several name-changes it became the Univ. of Vilnius and has remained so ever since.

American students notice the absence of U.S. college features which they take for granted: ultra-modern student centers featuring swimming pools, shopping emporia and frat and sorority houses, mega athletic facilities with humungous stadia, and risqué student-published campus newspapers.

The Vilna school operates at a bare minimum: Academics only! There is a small book and souvenir shop. Yiddish books are available only at a special library, which operates on short hours. There are no Yiddish books in the bookstore.

Lithuania has been a crossroads for warring armies, most recently the particularly brutal conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. The Litvaks have become adept at coping with radical changes imposed by the various occupying powers—some of long duration, some short.

They have enjoyed some triumphs of their own, one being the defeat of the Prussian Teutonic Knights at Gruenwald (aided by Polish allies). The high water mark came during the era of the combined kingdoms of Poland-Lithuania which stretched all the way from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

Lithuania was the last European country to convert to Christianity, in the 1300s. Some say this is the reason for the easy accommodation of other religions, especially the Jewish. One of the more interesting revelations to me was the history of the Karaites, a Turkic sect which adopted the Jewish religion back in ancient times. They have traditionally been recognized by rabbinic authorities as members of the Jewish faith with all rights & privileges.

A colony of Karaites has been in Lithuania for centuries, in the picturesque lake country at Trakai, location of the imposing *Fortress in the Lake*. They were the palace guards for royalty. Imagine this, if you will: An SS Colonel requesting the assistance and advice of a Jewish Rabbi in determining whether the Karaites were racially related to the Hebrews. The Rabbi explained that while indeed the Karaites practiced the Jewish religion, they are not racially akin to the Hebrew people—they are of Turkic origin. Thus, the Karaites were saved by the Rabbi from certain extermination by the Nazis!

The SS Colonel believed what the Rabbi told him. "After all", he figured, "Would a Rabbi lie?" The Rabbi did not indeed lie. What he told the SS Colonel was true. Do you think the Rabbi would have lied if indeed the Karaites and Jews were Semitic brothers?

Each of the succeeding occupying powers in Vilna brought their church with them: The Russians the Orthodox, the Germans the Lutheran, The Poles the Roman Catholic, and the Jews the synagogues.

Thus Vilna has by far the densest population of magnificent churches of any city I have ever seen. There are approved plans to rebuild and restore to original condition the old synagogue in Vilna, with its fabled *shulhoyf* at its original location. For the

Jews who knew it, *Vilne fun amol* no longer exists.

"On its site stands a place identified on the map as Vilnius, capital of Lithuania, a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. Like Troy, the Vilna I knew—the Vilne described in the Jewish annals—now lies buried beneath the debris of history, beneath layers of death and destruction. When the Soviets first occupied Vilna in 1940, they Sovietized it, destroying its historic identity and its Jewish particularity.

The Germans who followed destroyed Vilna altogether, murdering nearly all of its 60,000 men, women, and children. Since then, nothing has remained of Vilna's Jewish culture and spirit. Hardly anything has remained of its buildings—the sticks and stones of Jewish architecture. What little the Nazis left standing, the Soviets, who returned after the war, erased. A visitor to today's Vilna can no longer find a trace of what had been "the Jerusalem of Lithuania".

Since Lucy Davidowicz wrote these pessimistic words, there have been increasing signs of a Jewish renewal in Vilna and Lithuania. There is hope among the Jewish people I met there, and I hope that my modest participation in the 2004 9th Annual Yiddish Language Program at the University of Vilna has contributed, at least in some small way, to the rebirth of the Jerusalem of Lithuania.

#### About the Author

A retired career Air Force officer, Lt. Col. Albritton served a combined total of 27 years active duty in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force. During service in the Navy, he served in the Mediterranean Fleet and was in the area during the campaign for Israel's independence in 1948. After college he entered active duty in the Air Force and served in Korea and Japan during the Korean conflict. He was assigned to the National Security Agency. While at the Agency, Col. Albritton earned a Master's and a Doctor's degree from the University of Maryland. He was assigned to Hqs., Tactical Air Command, and subsequently to Hqs., Military Assistance Command, Saigon, Republic of Viet Nam.

After retirement from military service, he was an Asst. Prof. in the field of International Relations at the University of Maryland's European Division, Heidelberg, Germany. Col Albritton's interest in the Yiddish language goes back many years, beginning with private instruction in Erlangen, Germany. After his return to the states, he resumed study of Yiddish at the Baltimore Hebrew College, and the Israeli-sponsored *Ulpan* study of Modern Hebrew. He resides in Gulfport, Mississippi.

## Jewish Storyteller in Cuba

Roslyn Bresnick Perry <fokelore@juno.com>

I am now in Deerfield Beach, Florida as is my sister Phyllis. As you know I went to Cuba a few months ago to attend an International Storytelling Festival. It was a wonderful experience being with so many storytellers from ten other countries. Since I do not speak Spanish I was given a wonderful Spanish interpreter who explained what was going on, and who also interpreted my stories and the lecture and workshop I gave for the festival.

I'm proud to tell you that I was voted the best foreign storyteller of the festival. The best part of this is that the stories I told were all Jewish, and the story most loved was "My Bobe Shayne Never Liked Me." It was a story about my father's mother when I was a child in my shtetl of Wysocie Litovsk.

Cuba is a sad place but her people and her art are absolutely wonderful.

## Queensview Yiddish Club

Frances Freyde Brill

I live in a Cooperative development in Long Island City, and we recently formed a Yiddish club. We have had two meetings and the members present establish the agenda. The last meeting's theme was Yiddish songs—from the Grine Kuzine to songs of protest and the like.

My brother, Israel Kugler, helped us with any history or information regarding poets or subjects of music. The twenty people present all participate in the *gezang*.

Our next meeting will be on the theme of Yiddish Theater. Needless to say—it is very exciting. We meet the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month at 2:00 P.M. We welcome guests, and I can be reached at: 718-932-1550

Both Israel and I are products of the Arbeter Ring Shule and Mitlshul located in Upper Williamsburg, Brooklyn. For me, looking back, it was the best of times—exciting lerers and caring farvalter. What more could anyone want? Our parents were avid Trade Unionists and Arbeter Ring members.

I enjoy *Der Bay* and look forward to receiving it each month. I love being called Freyde.

**Editor's note:** *Der Bay* published a five issue series by Israel Kugler on the Yiddish Theater. Israel has been very active in fostering the expansion of the Folksbiene.

## Portia Rose of Los Angeles Asks....

Recently I had a phone call from a stranger. Someone had told her I was a fluent Yiddish speaker. She asked if I would go to an assisted living senior home and speak Yiddish to her mother on a weekly basis. I had to decline, regrettably, nor could I refer her to anyone or group who does it for a fee or on a voluntary basis.

However, I got the idea to drop you a note. Perhaps *Der Bay* could stimulate interest in either some volunteers or individuals willing to earn a small fee to fill such a need in Jewish communities. What's your opinion? Have you personally encountered this? The more I've thought about this, the more I see where there is a need here.

**Editor's note:** Dear readers, what do you think? Please write and let us know.

## Rokhele fun Dorem Afrike

Here I am once again writing to you from Dorem Afrike. Thank you so much for your last 2 *Der Bay*, issues. I always receive them with great nakhes and while reading the various articles, I derive great fargenign as well.

I was in Johannesburg for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and while there we had a wonderful Yiddish evening—all funds went for Wizo. There were 250 people in the hall of this hotel where Jewish people are now living. They were re-located by the Chevra Kedisha from other areas, which have become run-down and it was not safe to leave elderly Yidn there—some not so elderly but slightly impoverished and in need of help. A full buffet supper was served and it was a real heymishe dinner.

My talk went very well, and after I had spoken for over an hour, by that time I was really oysgematert and thirsty. A few people came to me and said: Rokhele, it was very good, but why so short? Nu, Fishl, you can't please everybody. I'm always afraid people will get bored, but when it comes tsu hern a Yidishn vort, apparently they can't get enough.

My talk was based on Shprikhverter and when I translated I also told a story to illustrate a point, and as always happens with a Yidishe maysele, one thing leads to another, and it can become a lange mayse, but the audience can identify with proverbs—in any language!

**Rochelle Winer, Natal, South Africa,**  
rochel@icon.co.za

# Uncovering Yiddish in Seattle, Washington's Jewish Past: Part I

by Murray B. Meld

The Washington State Jewish Historical Society landmark achievement is the publication, *Family of Strangers: Building a Jewish Community in Washington State*. It illuminates the early history and the acculturation our forebears went through to become the vibrant and diverse groupings we currently know and enjoy.

The historical record shows that Jews began to settle in Seattle during the 1860s, along with other early immigrant groups who arrived in the new territory. On the whole, these Jews were German-speaking and they largely carried with them a bias against the language of their brethren the "Ost-Juden".

The opening of the Klondike gold fields and word of opportunities for trade, however, brought an influx of East-European Yiddish-speakers, many of whom came up from San Francisco along with others immigrants who were able to travel by train across from Chicago and other mid-western and eastern cities.

The chapters on the East European Jews and their neighborhood, and on the arts, music and theater, highlight areas where Yiddish shone. But the social and political undercurrents involving or affecting Yiddish deserve further exploration. These are what this article hopes to bring to the surface.

In 1914, the Henry Yesler Branch Library was dedicated. Soon afterward, the people living in the surrounding streets petitioned the library to add some books in Yiddish. The response was quick and gracious. The library placed ads in *The Jewish Voice* (forerunner of *The Jewish Transcript*) and posted signs around the area telling readers that they will find Yiddish books there.

Eighty-eight titles were listed, including works by Sholem Aleichem, I.L Peretz and Mendele Mokher Sforim, and translations of English and Russian classics. Patrons were invited to read them there or take them home on loan. The renowned Yiddish author, Sholem Asch, visited and gave readings in April 1917.

But in an editorial of the same newspaper, Yiddish wasn't looked upon quite as hospitable. Earlier, on November 15, 1914, one read: "Though of late there has been a notable increase in the number of new

books written in Yiddish and the Yiddish literature owes its development to the free atmosphere of America, it is to be regretted that works of merit should not be written in suitable language...

Though for expressing cheap sentiment or causing mild laughter Yiddish may be more handy, yet the best that is in us can only find expression in real Hebrew."

By 1924 the *Jewish Transcript* was in place and announced that casting was proceeding for a Yiddish production of *King Lear* at the Jewish Theater Academy. In November of that year, the Yiddish Dramatic Society moved to produce *Madam Butterfly*, while the Temple Players were casting *Ir Man'z Veib*.

The Society ventured to put on Asch's *Gott fun Nekome* (God of Venegance) which in its English version was to cause the jailing of its director and cast in New York (The ACT Repertory Theater presented the play in Seattle last year—in English of course).

And so it went. The Silver Players did *A Gast fun Yener Velt* in 1928, and, more ambitiously, Ansky's *Dybbuk*. The crowning event of that season was Boris Thomashefsky's arrival from the Yiddish theater world of Second Avenue., New York to deliver two performances of *Der Toyfel's Shabbos* (The Devil's Sabbath).

This is hardly the picture of Seattle today. Many things worked to put its expression into a deep sleep. Chief among these was the pressure (or drive) to "Americanize." If immigration had watered the roots, its tightened restrictions since 1924 withered the flowers. And the Palmer Acts with deportations of suspected Reds, Anarchists and other questionable immigrants (and there were Jews among all of these) put open expression of Yiddishkeit into the closet.

There was, of course, a political context to this negative assessment. To the many who were newly arrived, as well as the well-established Jews, the dream of a Jewish homeland seemed to be realizable. The issue of a language for official and literary purposes troubled all political factions, including those whose agenda did not include Jewish resettlement in Zion.

At that time, In Seattle that issue showed itself in the choices people made in their religious and political affiliations. (These differences were subsequently subordinated by the Holocaust)

### Yiddish and Religious Practice

Early on, the families who came to Seattle from Eastern Europe had problems more pressing than their use of Yiddish. Their mother tongue was dominant at home, among friends and neighbors, and in the shops along Yesler and adjacent streets. Among the Orthodox, Hebrew was the language of prayer and ritual at Chevra Bikur Cholim synagogue. But in its vestibule and between prayers, Yiddish was how its congregants *talked shop* and exchanged news and sociability.

Yiddish was also how Bikur Cholim addressed Seattle Jewry publicly. "Kinder, Kumt in Cheder Lernen" (Children, Come Learn in School) reads a flyer (undated) seeking pupils for its religious school where children were taught to read in Hebrew and translate to Yiddish.

*The Jewish Voice* of October 6, 1916, ran the following ad in Yiddish and English: "To all Jews proud of their origin... who have not allowed that light to die out which their ancestors had kindled in their home... (come) to a mass meeting at Bikur Cholim where means will be devised that will prevent that light from being extinguished."

On December 28, 1917, *The Voice* posted this headline: "Bikur Cholim To Have a Real Rabbi." The announced qualifications included: "He must be an Orator, both English and Yiddish, and besides being a thorough Hebrew scholar, he must be qualified to decide cases of Kashre..." The following April, Rabbi Simon Glazer, Chief Rabbi of the United Congregations of Montreal, lectured in Yiddish and English to the congregation. In July, his contract was ratified.

### The Workmen's Circle

Others in the Yiddish-speaking population were indifferent or even negative toward religious observance. Having experienced life in the Pale of Settlement under the Tsar, many were imbued with the teachings and secular spirit of socialism. As early as 1909, they formed Branch 304 of the "Arbeiter Ring" (Workmen's Circle) whose national organization in time had 740 branches and a membership of 90,000.

Yiddish was prized not only in the conduct of Branch affairs but as a cultural asset to be carried

on by succeeding generations. Accordingly, Yiddish lectures, plays, concerts and the teaching of Yiddish in a Sunday school became central to the Branch's program.

A few local members were craftsmen or artisans, but for the most part shopkeepers and small businessmen made up the ranks. This did not deter them from identifying with the struggle of exploited workers and those denied political rights and justice. Most were, if not actual party members, socialists in philosophy and political orientation. Until the election of 1932 when their votes shifted to Franklin D. Roosevelt, most members read the daily Yiddish *Forward* and voted for Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist candidate.

In her interview with Howard Droker, Clara Gordon Rubin describes her father's attachment to the Branch and his identification as a worker. Solomon Alexander Gordon was born in Dvinsk (now Daugavpils, Latvia) in 1886.

Trained there as a machinist, he found employment in a Seattle shipyard during World War I. But after he participated "heart and soul" in the General Strike of 1919 he was laid off along with other strikers. By this time he was proficient enough in English to obtain a high score in the City's civil service examination and found employment as a street car conductor.

Before long he was elected to the Executive board of the Street Car Union, and represented on the Seattle Central Labor Council.

Her father, Clara Rubin said, spoke and wrote both Yiddish and English but "never mixed the two in correspondence or when he wrote for the labor press." Active in Branch 304, where "they all spoke Yiddish and were all interested in socialism," Gordon was among the "not religious." Evidently this was no handicap. He was elected Northwestern District Secretary and was honored at the dedication of the Branch's new building in 1942.

**Murray Meld:** The author, Murray Meld taught social work at the University of Washington and returned to Seattle in 1984 when he retired as Professor and Dean of the School of Social Service at Saint Louis University. Murray and Frank Krasnowsky (klezmer Chutzpah group) co-lead the Seattle Yiddish Group.

This is Part I of a two-part series. Part II will appear in the next issue (Feb.) of *Der Bay*.



## ADVICE vs. OPINION

**Yiddish needs expert advice—  
not casual opinions.**

If someone who gives advice is called an advisor, what would you call someone who gives an opinion? Judges write an opinion, but would you refer to a friend who gave you his opinion a judge?

When one gives advice, he advises, he is advising, and is your advisor. This denotes permissiveness on your part, or perhaps even a request for the advice.

On the other hand, an opinion may or may not be requested or even desired. The basic difference relates to one's receptiveness.

The relationship to the receiver is the key to the reception. When an employer gives advice, there is a greater possibility of acceptance than a casual passerby.

Our attitude toward many salespeople is one of doubt. The salesperson's objective is to sell the item, which returns the highest commission, and not necessarily the item, which best meets your needs. That is why we hear the phrase, *caveat emptor*.

### Der Bay

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Networking is having other people help you get what you want. *Der Bay* is a great networking tool. Use it to publicize, ask for info, or locate someone.

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The nature of the terminology generally determines if one is receiving an opinion or advice. In the case of advice—usually one uses, *you*, but in giving an opinion, one tends to use, *I*.

Opinions are what one has and advice is what one gives. Advice is meant to produce a specific response, while an opinion does not necessarily expect a response.

Advice is usually singular. When have you heard the word *advices*? However, you often hear the word *opinions*.

**Yiddish needs expert advice, not casual opinions.**