

MICHIGAN JEWISH HISTORY

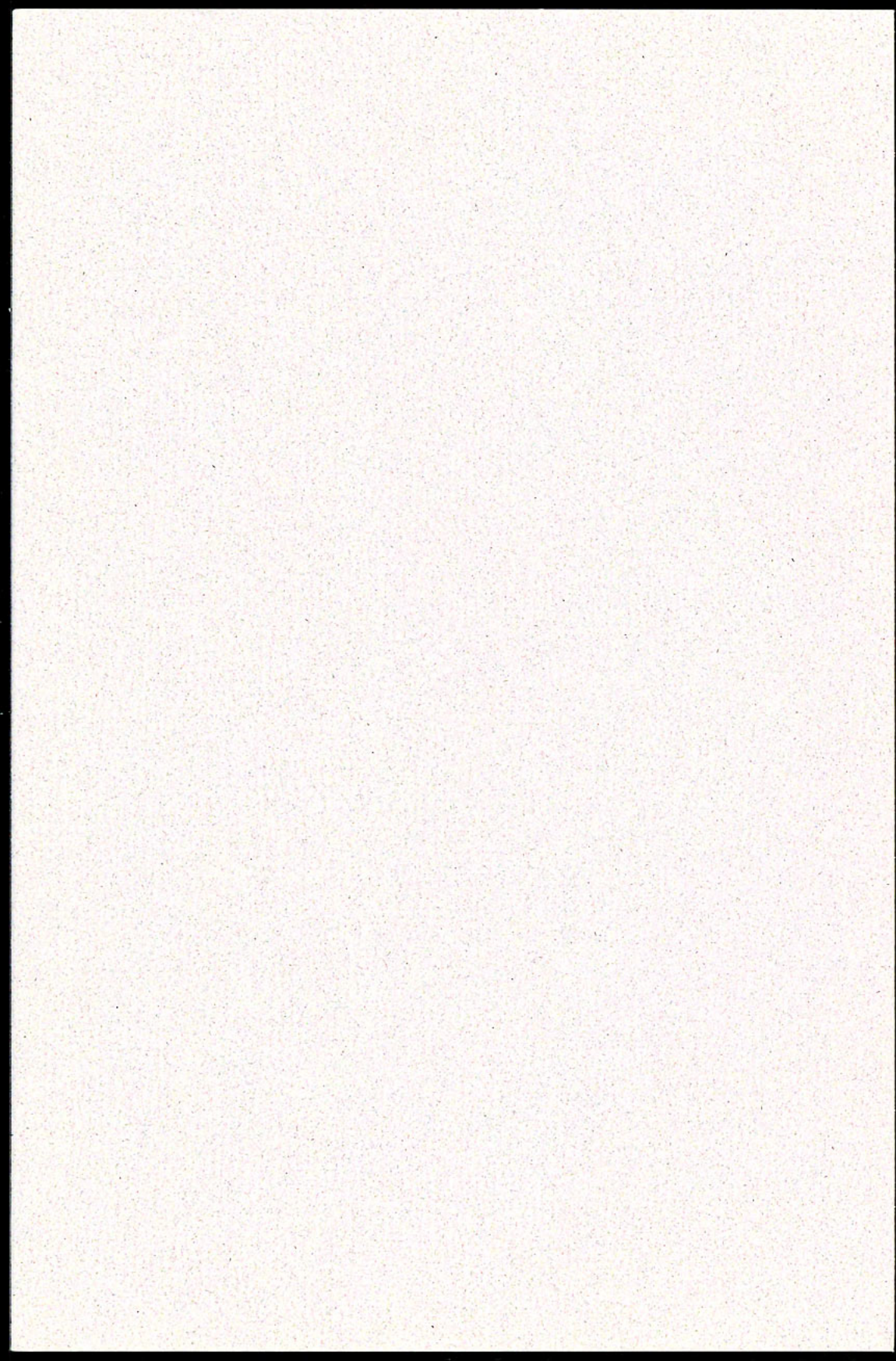


Official Publication of

The Jewish Historical Society of Michigan

Volume 21, Number 2

June 1981 — Sivan 5741



JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN

163 Madison Avenue
Detroit, Michigan 48226

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NATE S. SHAPERO AND CUNNINGHAM DRUG STORES, INC.

By Tom Sakely

The year was 1918. An enterprising, 26-year-old Navy pharmacist's mate used \$4,500 in borrowed money to open a drug store on the lower floor of a Detroit rooming house. He called the fledgling business "Economical Drug Store No. 1," displaying his optimism that more stores would be added.

Nate S. Shapero had no way of knowing then that this modest store situated in a residential neighborhood a few blocks west of Woodward Avenue would grow into one of the country's largest retail drug store corporations. At the time of his death on January 23, 1980, Cunningham Drug Stores, Inc., successor to Economical Drugs, was operating 170 stores located in 13 states and the District of Columbia under the names Cunningham, Shapero, Schettler and Crossroads. Stores operated by Cunningham recorded sales of almost \$200 million in 1980. Cunningham shares were traded on the New York Stock Exchange from 1945 to early 1981, when the drug store chain was acquired by a privately-held corporation. Today, Cunningham operates 165 stores in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The company employs more than 3,000 persons.

The story of Economical No. 1 is indicative of Nate Shapero's determination, business savvy and management ability.

"You might say we started out on a shoestring," he once recalled in an interview. "But I was certain there was a need for neighborhood drug stores and confident that a well-run business that met that need could be successful."

Stationed in Detroit, his hometown, the young Navy pharmacist found a civilian partner who agreed to put up \$2,000 in start-up funds for the venture. But more was needed, so Nate, on leave at the time, persuaded a doctor friend to loan him \$1,000. He succeeded in obtaining an additional \$1,000 loan through a local bank "primarily on the strength of my uniform." His mother chipped in with \$500 from a savings account, and the enterprise that was to occupy the bulk of the young entrepreneur's time for the next several decades was underway.

The location, a long-closed drug store in the Priscilla Inn at the corner of Cass and Ledyard, looked anything but promising. Dust and cobwebs were everywhere; extensive cleaning and renovation would be necessary. The task appeared formidable, but Nate had an idea. Several Navy pharmacist's mates were staying in the old Federal Building while restlessly awaiting discharge processing. Nate persuaded Navy officials to issue three-day furloughs for the sailors. He offered them free meals from the soda fountain in exchange for assistance with clean-up and inventory at the new store. The idea proved to be a good one, and Economical No. 1 was soon ready to

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Nate Shapero (standing, back row, second from right) as the violinist in a band in Big Rapids, Michigan, where he was enrolled in a pharmacy program at the Ferris Institute (now Ferris State University).

open its doors, selling prescription drugs, sundries and patent medicine. Short orders and dairy treats were available at the soda fountain, a fixture in every drug store in those days. Receipts for the first day totaled a modest \$21.

Unfortunately, problems developed almost immediately. The partner, who had agreed to operate the business until Nate received his discharge, pulled out of the enterprise. Then the doctor said he needed his money back immediately to meet an unexpected expense. Undaunted by this turn of events, Nate sought advice and assistance from the banker. Impressed by the young businessman's enthusiasm and determination to succeed, the bank officer arranged an additional loan for the money needed to pay off the defecting partners. The banker's faith was well-founded, for Economical No. 1 was operating in the black within six months. What's more, the store had 25 persons on its payroll by the end of the first year.

A firm believer in the efficacy of advertising, Nate began the first of a long series of promotions just a few days after the store opened. Coupons good for a free ice cream at Economical Drug were distributed to dentists for presentation to child patients. "The idea went over big," he told a magazine editor thirty years later. "Soon, we were getting back 30 to 35 coupons a day. Dentists began to give us their prescriptions. The kids talked about Economical Drug in their homes."

Nate Shapero was introduced to the pharmacy business at an early age. Born September 27, 1892, he grew up in an austere, lower-east-side

neighborhood in Detroit. At the age of 12, in order to help support his widowed mother, he took a job as a part-time errand boy for the Louis K. Liggett Co., a drugstore firm. It was while working at the Liggett store on Woodward at Elizabeth Street that he developed an interest in pharmacy.

Before long, he was handling duties behind the counter as a soda jerk. He gained additional experience and confidence over the years as his responsibilities at the store increased. By the time he graduated from Cass High School in 1910, he had saved enough money to enroll in a pharmacy program at Ferris Institute (now Ferris State University) in Big Rapids, Michigan. While attending Ferris, he helped meet educational expenses by playing the violin in a 13-piece band. The band hired out for various engagements in the area.

Two years after entering Ferris, Nate earned his degree in pharmacy. "The experience I gained from (Ferris) had been a bulwark of strength in my business endeavors," he noted several years later.

Returning to Detroit, he became manager of the Liggett store, and was soon transferred to one of the firm's large new stores in New York City. By the time the hardworking young pharmacy graduate entered the Navy, he was supervising a large part of the Liggett business on the East Coast.

Able to work full time in his own store following discharge from the service, Nate flung all his energies into making the enterprise a success. He held nightly meetings with his staff to review the day's activities—what went wrong, what went right, and what could be done to improve sales the following day.

Hard work and attention to business details paid off. Economical Drug Store No. 2 opened at Cass and Sproat in January 1920, just 14 months after the debut of Store No. 1.

As Detroit grew with a burgeoning auto industry, so did Nate's young company. His plan was to establish new market areas that would generate business even though they were located away from the heavily-trafficked downtown areas, where rent was high and competition strongest. Customers obviously liked the convenience of having full-service drug stores in their own neighborhoods, because Shapero's business prospered. By the time Economical Drug celebrated its 10th birthday in 1928, its 31 stores were ringing up \$1.7 million in total annual sales. Frequent advertising and special promotions helped to attract customers. So did Nate's policy of stocking shelves primarily with name-brand merchandise familiar to customers. The taste-tempting treats available at Economical Drug Store soda fountains were another tradition. Store No. 1 even made chocolate syrup in the back room for use at all the soda fountains.

Economical Drug was less than four years old when the first store in what was to become a new chain of stores under the "Shapero" name was opened in the new General Motors Building, three miles north of downtown Detroit. Nate proudly announced that his new store was "America's finest drug store." Nevertheless, it was something of a gamble to open a store in a new building where only a small fraction of the many hundreds of offices it housed were rented. Recognizing that the store might need an extra boost, Nate touted the malted milks there as "the best available anywhere in Detroit"—and many customers agreed. (Visitors to the bustling GM

Building today will find Shapero's (and the malteds) there in its original location, and doing quite nicely.)

The successes were many during those first 10 years, but the happiest event for Nate Shapero was his marriage in 1925 to Ruth Bernstein, of Chicago. They had two children, Ray A. Shapero, current board chairman and chief executive officer of Cunningham's, and Marianne (Mrs. Alan E. Schwartz). There are six grandchildren.

Mrs. Shapero, who currently resides in the Detroit area, played a major part in her husband's success, according to family and friends. She not only shared in his interests and achievements, but she was also involved in many of the major decisions her husband made during the next 55 years. She was his confidante and constant travel companion. Rabbi Richard Hertz, a long-time friend who delivered the eulogy for Nate at Temple Beth El on January 25, 1980, referred to the love and mutual respect the couple had for one another: "Always at his side, Ruth was his inspiration and the power behind his dreams . . . Nate respected her judgment and her values . . . They were a team."

Something occurred in 1931 that altered the Economical Drug policy of operating stores only in neighborhood and suburban areas. Economical, which had by now blossomed into a 43-store organization, assumed control of the floundering Cunningham Drug Store chain. That firm, operating 11 stores in downtown Detroit, had been organized by Andrew Cunningham, a Detroit druggist who opened his first store in 1889.

Uninhibited by the severe, nationwide economic downturn following the stock market crash, Economical-Cunningham opened nine new stores and remodeled 10 within a year after the merger. So confident was Nate that well-run drugstores would continue to prosper that he opened two new stores in March 1933, right in the middle of a bank holiday. By 1935, the company was operating 71 stores, 25 of them added between 1930 and 1934. Sales volume more than doubled in four years, to \$6.2 million. In 1937, the Economical name was dropped, and Cunningham Drug Stores, Inc. became the official corporate name. Nate headed the corporation as chairman of the board and president. His office was in a huge, block-long, warehouse-office facility on Twelfth Street, two blocks south of Michigan.

The Cunningham chief executive's penchant for special promotions to draw customer attention to the values offered by his stores never ceased. In 1932, he rented a circus elephant and had it carted around town on a trailer to promote Cunningham's "jumbo" chocolate sodas and chocolate sundaes. An artist's sketch of an elephant was to serve as an identifying logo for many Cunningham services for years. In the early 1950s, an \$8,000 mechanical elephant made in England was used to promote Cunningham's "jumbo photoprint" service; the elephant symbol is still used today.

Remembering how baseball excited him as a child, when he lived across the street from Tiger slugger Sam Crawford, Nate decided to tie the sport in with store promotions. Accordingly, in the mid-1930s, he arranged an annual baseball party in which Cunningham's provided tickets for 40,000 youngsters to watch the Tigers at Navin Field (now Tiger Stadium). Children received tickets for submitting brief testimonials on such subjects as "Why my family shops at Cunningham." During other years, youngsters

would receive a ticket with purchase of a few cents' worth of candy or a "Jumbo" chocolate soda.

Nate's philosophy was that proper advertising is essential to successful merchandising. Accordingly, in its October 15, 1951 issue, *Sales Management* magazine reported that Cunningham was the number-one television and radio advertiser in Michigan and the second largest newspaper advertiser in Detroit. To highlight the variety of products available at Cunningham Drug Stores, the firm's slogan became, "Don't say drug store—say Cunningham's." Later, this gave way to "We're a drug store and a whole lot more."

At various times, the drugstore chain processed its own MacDairmid's brand coffee and ice cream. In the early 1940s, Cunningham's purchased the Mazer Cresman Cigar Company on Grandy Avenue, and the old Heidner Candy Company on Twelfth Street at Abbott. Manuel, Humo and Swift cigars and MacDiarmid's and Wedgewood candies became familiar brands to Cunningham customers. The cigars and candies, in fact, were very popular brands in several midwestern states. Although the company no longer makes its own cigars and sweets, it still markets many products under the Cunningham label.

"Actually we are not all that different from other drug chains," Nate told *Sales Management* magazine in 1951. "If I were to point out the single most important factor in our success, it would have to be our people. There is simply no substitute for finding, training, and developing good people."

This commitment to finding and developing quality personnel—along with a measure of gratitude to returning World War II veterans—led to a full-page ad in the *Saturday Evening Post* in which Cunningham's offered pharmacy scholarships to veterans who met certain requirements. Scholarships were subsequently provided for more than 250 veterans. A modified scholarship program for qualified Cunningham employees continues to this day. In 1944, the Detroit-based firm became the first drug chain to institute a profit-sharing plan for employees.

Nate himself always took a keen interest in the people who worked for him. Personable and unassuming, he was described by one long-time employee as a "down-to-earth person who doesn't make you feel uncomfortable." He often swapped favorite jokes with employees at Cunningham headquarters. His fondness for practical jokes generated many a hearty laugh. He once joined with some friends to stage a mock recognition event at the Masonic Auditorium for a former Detroit mayor. With house lights down and the stage brightly lighted, a number of dignitaries took turns presenting glowing testimonials to the official's many achievements. As the beaming guest stepped forward to receive a special award to cap off the program, everyone walked off the stage. The house lights were turned up to reveal an empty auditorium.

Leonard Simons, a business associate who knew Nate for 40 years and also was a close friend, had personal experience with Nate's practical jokes. Simons, founder and currently vice president of Simons-Michelson-Zieve, Inc. advertising in Troy, Michigan, is a past president of Temple Beth El. He once received a copy of the Beth El bulletin on the front page of which was a picture of him (as president) in top hat and tails hoisting a glass; the

photo had been taken at a social gathering. Somewhat upset over what he considered the inappropriateness of the photo in the temple bulletin, Simons immediately contacted the editor, who hastily informed the concerned caller that the photo did not appear in the bulletins mailed to members. The copy Simons held in his hand was the only one in which the picture appeared, having been concocted by Nate.

During his many active years at the helm of Cunningham's, Nate set a hectic pace that few people could match. A man of boundless energy, he was often the first to arrive at the office and the last to leave—almost always with a briefcase crammed with “homework.” Evenings were often filled with meetings for one or the other of the numerous civic and philanthropic organizations in which he held memberships or directorships. To assure that important details did not escape his attention, he kept a priority list on his desk. Business not accomplished one day went to the head of the list for the next day. As busy as he was, he still found time to visit all stores regularly, taking time to personally greet and visit with each employee. He knew most of them by name, and was always interested in news of their family and details of their personal lives.

Rabbi Hertz first met Nate in 1952 when the Cunningham's president was co-chairman of the pulpit selection committee which brought him to Temple Beth El. Hertz was associate rabbi at Sinai Congregation in Chicago when he received a call from Nate in 1953 informing him of his selection as new senior rabbi at Beth El, then located at Woodward and Gladstone in midtown Detroit (since moved to Birmingham, Mich.). In the January, 1980 eulogy, Hertz spoke about Nate Shapero the man and Nate Shapero the close friend:

Ever since that day [in 1953], he has been my friend, my counselor, my adopted father, my host in New York, Palm Beach, or the Detroit River, in Warsaw, in Moscow or any other place I needed him for guidance and support. He was an amazing man of diversified talents, of many far-ranging interests, a fabulous person, a ‘doer and shaker’ who had creative ideas about how to improve the quality of life in this community, the like of which I have never seen. He was truly a man for all seasons who you could always count on.

An active member of the Temple Beth El board of trustees for many years, Nate was elected president in 1949, a post he held through 1951. In the appendix to Irving I. Katz's *The Beth El Story*, a book commemorating the temple's 100th anniversary in 1950, Nate expressed his feelings about the temple's heritage and about Reform Judaism:

We pay homage...to the founders of our Temple and to their successors. With their vision and understanding, they realized that in order to survive on the American scene Judaism must be constantly adjusted to changing needs and circumstances without surrendering its basic ideals. For one hundred years Temple Beth El has been in the front rank of progressive Judaism....

Temple Beth El shall always strive to achieve new levels of accomplishments in making Judaism more vital and more meaningful....

We can best pay our respects to the past and our gratitude for this priceless heritage by rededicating ourselves to the sacred tasks and responsibilities which lie immediately ahead of us; to further strengthen our Temple and build an even better and stronger community as Jews and as Americans.

Leonard Simons, among others, did not see Nate as a pious person in the strict sense of the word. “I’d call him a secular Jew, although Judaism was

important to him. Overall, however, he was more concerned with the well-being of people in general, particularly in every-day life, civic affairs and education. Once when we were discussing Judaism, he asked me why it was important to be a Jew. He said it seemed to him that the most important thing was to be a good person and to treat others honestly and decently." Writing, however, in the "What My Religion Means to Me" column of the 1952 *Detroit Free Press*, Nate noted, "I have drawn strength and inspiration from the prayers and precepts of my faith."

Nate earned the respect of his peers in the retail drugstore trade relatively early in his career, as evidenced by the fact that he was elected president of the National Association of Chain Drug Stores in 1937, the second industry executive to hold that position.

But he was better known among the general public and the Jewish community for his ubiquitous involvement in civic, charitable and philanthropic endeavors. A list of community organizations of which he was a member fills three typewritten pages. One admiring friend even gave him the nickname "Mr. Detroit" because of his unselfish contributions of time, talent and money to so many organizations.

One of his favorite organizations was the Jewish Welfare Federation, where he served on the board of governors and was a member of the Detroit Service Group. As chairman of the Allied Jewish campaign in 1946, he was instrumental in helping the annual fund-raising effort reach the \$2 million mark for the first time in history. He also was a board member and past president of the Jewish Community Center of Detroit. From 1970-1974, he was on the board of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In 1965, the Detroit Jewish community honored Nate with the highest tribute accorded by the Federation, the Butzel Memorial Award.

But the Cunningham president's affiliation with Jewish organizations and institutions was not limited to his hometown. He belonged to the national executive board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations headquartered in New York. Fund-raising and publicity efforts on behalf of Brandeis University (Waltham, Mass.) resulted in his being named a fellow of the university. For more than 40 years, Nate took an active interest in the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovot, Israel. His work on its behalf dates back to the time when it was still known as the Sieff Institute. During a New York fund-raising event sponsored by the American Friends of Hebrew University of Jerusalem, he had the honor of introducing special guest-speaker Eleanor Roosevelt.

A strong proponent of quality education, Nate also took an interest in non-Jewish institutions of higher learning. He was a member of the lay board of directors for the University of Detroit, which conferred on him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. The one-time Navy pharmacist's mate also remained close to the School of Pharmacy at his alma mater, Ferris State University. In tribute to his many contributions to pharmacy education and medicine, Wayne State University (Detroit) named its new Shapero Hall of Pharmacy in his name at dedication ceremonies in 1965.

One of the projects closest to Nate's heart was construction of Sinai Hospital of Detroit. Leaders in the Jewish community and Jewish medical professionals had been concerned for many years about the subtle



Nate Shapero, on the left, decorated for his efforts as a "Dollar a Year Man" in selling Series E Bonds to support the U.S. effort in World War II. Affixing the decoration is Frank Isbey, wartime regional bond-sales chairman, and at the time, president of the Detroit Produce Terminal.

discrimination which prevented many Jewish physicians from getting appointments at leading hospitals in the Detroit area. Construction of a Jewish hospital had been discussed off and on since the turn of the century. But the hospital idea took a back seat due to lack of funds and more pressing needs until a handful of men decided the time was right to launch a city-wide fund-raising effort in 1941. The organized effort began with a meeting of 21 men at the home of businessman Max Osnos in the summer of that year. Attending, in addition to Osnos, were Dr. Harry Saltzstein, Maurice Aronsson, Leonard Simons, Charles Agree, Sidney and Harold Allen, Irving Blumberg, Nate Borin, Irwin Cohn, Abe Cooper, Alfred Epstein, William Fisher, Nate Fishman, Harry Grant, Larry Michelson, Jake Neiman, Leo Siegel, Barney Smith, and Abe Sere. They formed the United Jewish Hospital Committee, later to be incorporated as the Jewish Hospital Association. But the effort was placed on the back burner again when the United States entered World War II, just a few months after the committee was formed. Although not in on the effort at the outset, Nate soon became one of the most effective spokesmen and staunchest supporters of the hospital drive, which saw fruition with the construction of the hospital in 1953. Many of the largest donations to the hospital came about through Nate's efforts, for he had an innate talent for fund-raising. In addition to possessing a persuasive personality, he could point to his own generous contributions as an example. When he turned his persuasive talents loose on someone, he more often than not succeeded in obtaining a commitment from him. Nate also had a hand in convincing Dr. Julien Priver, long-time chief administrator at Sinai, to come to Detroit from Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York.

Nate served on Sinai's board of directors, including a stint as president, for many years. He demonstrated his commitment to quality medical care and the future of Detroit's only Jewish hospital by contributing \$500,000

through the Nate S. and Ruth B. Shapero Foundation and the Cunningham Drug Company Foundation for construction of a school for practical nursing at the hospital. Appropriately, the school bears the Shapero name.

When Nate Shapero joined an organization or took on a project, he took the responsibility seriously. "What's the point of being involved if you're not going to do anything," he once commented pointedly. "I believe that a businessman should put something back into his community." During World War II he was instrumental in raising many thousands of dollars for the U.S. war effort through the sale of Series E Bonds as a Dollar A Year Man for the U.S. Treasury Department in Detroit. As vice chairman of the Greater Detroit Hospital Fund, he played an important part in helping to raise \$16 million to help alleviate a serious shortage of hospital beds.

An experience at a night club in Hamtramck illustrates Nate's adeptness at raising funds. On the spur of the moment, he persuaded the owner of the old Frank Barbaro's Bowery on Jos. Campau to stop the show so that he and two colleagues could make a quick plea for badly needed funds for an emergency USO project. The surprise interlude netted several hundred dollars in contributions.

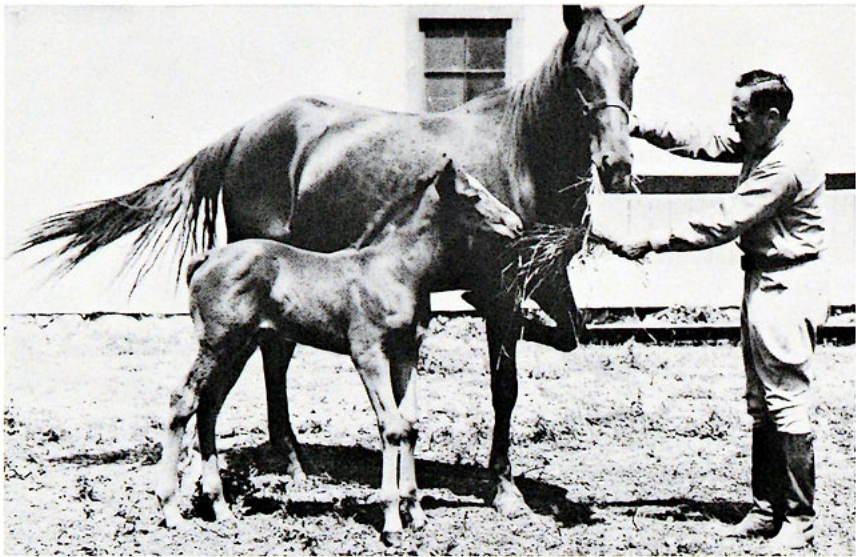
It was during the depression years that the Cunningham organization helped brighten Thanksgiving for 2,500 impoverished Detroit area families by providing food baskets. And he never forgot his friends. During Christmas they could usually expect a bushel of apples from his own orchard, Apple Crest Farms in Northville, Mich. He frequently invited friends to his Northville home for picnics. The lucky ones got a ride on one of the horses he kept.

During a 14-year stint as a member of the Detroit Fire Commission, including a term as president of that body, Nate spent many hours at fire scenes. A red phone on his office desk was patched directly into the fire department, and it was not uncommon for employees to see his rushing from the office to his red, siren-equipped car. He kept fireman's togs in the trunk. "In order to do my job properly, I felt it important that I have first-hand knowledge of how the Department was operating. That meant being on the scene whenever possible," he once explained.

He was a founder and vice president of Detroit's "100 Club," an organization which provides financial assistance to the widows and children of policemen and firemen who died in the line of duty. He often took time out from a busy schedule to visit the families personally. When other U.S. cities expressed an interest in forming similar organizations, Nate assisted them in setting up their own 100 Clubs.

"As a businessman, I have more and more recognized the truth that it is impossible for me to enjoy a measure of self-esteem unless I devote a part of my time, energy and substance in behalf of institutions and causes which are sanctified by human needs and aspiration," he told the *Detroit Free Press* in 1952.

During a lifetime of community service, the Cunningham chief executive received numerous special awards from diverse groups. Among those honors is a 1952 testimonial resolution awarded by the City of Detroit for public service. In 1967, the Detroit Roundtable of the National Conference of Christians and Jews presented him with its highly prestigious Round Table Award.



Nate Shapero with his horses at his summer home near Northville, Michigan.

In a story about Nate Shapero a few years back, a Detroit newspaper noted the frustration of attempting to list all of the non-profit organizations with which he had been involved. "The only trouble with trying to tick off a few things..." the reporter wrote, "is that outraged citizens are going to pop up to say you are neglecting [to mention] a lot of worthy enterprises with which Nate has more than a nodding acquaintance."

He was once asked to place a dollar estimate on the contributions he had made over the years to charities and civic projects. The response: "Money's not important; it's what you do with money that makes the difference." Philip Slomovitz, publisher of *The Detroit Jewish News*, summed up Nate's charitable endeavors this way: "Nate Shapero is an outstanding example of what philanthropy really means. He believed strongly that philanthropy was an important part of humanitarianism."

In spite of a hectic schedule, he found time to enjoy various hobbies throughout his life. Among his interests were farming, apple growing, horsemanship, boating, pinochle, and golf. Frequent golfing partner Leonard Simons noted good-naturedly that his friend wasn't the most accomplished golfer around. "We often played two or three times a week—mostly for the exercise. We didn't adhere very strictly to the rules. In fact, we seldom kept score." But his shortcomings on the course didn't affect the respect his fellow golfers had for the man. In fact, they elected him president of Franklin Hills Country Club in suburban Detroit.

One of Nate's most enduring avocations was collecting vintage coins and historic memorabilia. He later donated many of his collections to museums, for the enjoyment of others. "I can't see the point of having a collection no one can see," he told an interviewer. "Acquiring items for my collections has brought me a lot of joy over the years. I wanted to share some of this satisfaction with others by making the collections available for permanent public display."

One of his most extensive collections, begun when he was a child, is now on display at the National Bank of Detroit, where he served on the board of directors. That collection was the basis of the bank's internationally known Money Museum. Another collection of coins and memorabilia became the nucleus of a permanent display now housed in the Nate S. and Ruth B. Shapero Judaica Museum at Temple Beth El. Memorabilia from the nation's birthday celebrations in 1826, 1876, 1926 and 1976, and a collection of mementos from the Panama-Pacific Exposition were donated to the world-famous Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.

At age 65, when many persons are cutting back on their activities and entertaining pleasant thoughts of retirement, Nate showed few signs of slowing up. He continued to play an active role as chief executive officer of Cunningham's and as an influential civic leader. When failing health forced him into semi-retirement several years later, he missed the fast pace that became so much a part of his life during seven decades. Friends say he also found it difficult to accept the inevitable changes that come with age and with rapidly changing local and world conditions. Even when his health took a dramatic turn for the worse during the years prior to his death, he continued to visit his office regularly and often.

Nate Shapero died in January, 1980 at his winter home in Palm Beach, Florida. Yet, the story of the company he headed continues.

In January 1981, shareholders voted at a special meeting to approve a proposed merger between Cunningham and CD Acquisition Corp. The Cunningham board had recommended approval of the merger the previous November as being in the best interest of the company and its shareholders. The transaction brought to a close a 44-year period in the drug chain's corporate history during which it had been a publicly-held company. Cunningham's, now a wholly-owned subsidiary of privately-held CD Holding Company, is still based in Detroit and continues to operate as a Michigan corporation.

The drug chain that grew into one of the nation's largest under the dynamic leadership of Nate Shapero continues as a corporate entity under the Cunningham Drug Stores name. Ray A. Shapero, Nate's son, continues in the top post as chairman and chief executive officer.

A complete chronicle of Cunningham Drug Stores, Inc. and Nate S. Shapero would require several volumes. It is a success story that began when an ambitious youngster from a poor family landed his first job as a drugstore errand boy. Nate left an indelible mark on the company he built, the communities he served and the people whose lives he touched.

On the occasion of his 65th birthday, his friends paid him the ultimate compliment: "Nobody, but nobody, ranks higher in our esteem and in our hearts than you do," they wrote in a testimonial. "What is more, you have earned it..."

Nate expressed his appreciation. But he didn't have much time to bask in the praise; there were projects to be tackled and goals to be met. He was typically reticent about detailing his many accomplishments. "I was fortunate to work with a lot of dedicated people who deserve much of the credit," he said a few years before his death.

In a fitting tribute to the man who demonstrated his commitment to Judaism through service to his fellow man, Rabbi Hertz summarized the special qualities of Nate Shapero in one brief sentence: "He loved life and he loved people."

The Cunningham slogan, "A drug store and a whole lot more," might well have applied to Nate Shapero as well. He was an outstanding businessman—and a whole lot more.

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What My Religion Means to Me, special booklet published by *Detroit Free Press*, compilation from series of same name that ran in the newspaper, edited by Adrian Fuller. Series ran February-April 25, 1952.

Additional Sources

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Text of eulogy for Nate Shapero, delivered by Rabbi Richard Hertz, January 25, 1980.

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RABBI ABRAHAM M. HERSHMAN

By Ruth and Eiga Hershman

The year was 1896. The ship plowing its way across the Atlantic was one of many which carried in their holds masses of Jews headed for the New World during the late 19th century. Among those crowded together on the ship which was bringing them to these shores was the Hershman family, consisting of the parents, Judah Eliezer and Hannah Rachel, and their two sons—Zvi, the elder, and sixteen-year-old Abraham Moses. Seeking to escape the poverty of the Old Country and the threat of anti-Semitism, their faces and hopes were set toward the Golden Land.

Once arrived at Ellis Island, within easy sight of their new home, the Hershman family, among others, waited anxiously to learn their fate: Would they pass the strenuous health check administered to new immigrants? Would they reach their goal, but a short ferry ride away, or would they be placed on a ship headed back to their point of origin? The fateful question was finally answered. They were among the lucky ones to pass the health tests (just how ironic this was would soon become apparent) and to cross the bay separating them from New York City. Once in New York, they became part of the "teeming masses" of European Jews crowded into the city's lower east side.

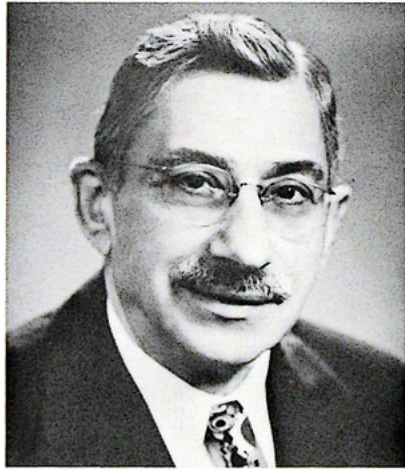
In their native town of Neustadt, Lithuania, as in all the towns of Eastern Europe, it was not uncommon for the head of the Jewish family to spend his time in the study of the Talmud, while his wife assumed the financial support of the family. She did not resent this or consider it an undue burden because she gloried in her husband's learning. So it was with the Hershman family. Hannah Rachel was the primary breadwinner, selling sundry wares to peasants and townspeople. Once they were in New York, the traditional pattern was of necessity altered, and Judah Eliezer became a partner with his wife in selling tea, coffee and household commodities. Poverty, however, continued to be their constant companion; each day was a struggle for economic survival.

Ruth and Eiga Hershman are the daughters of Rabbi Abraham M. Hershman.

RUTH HERSHMAN was born in New York City. She attended school in Detroit and has a B.A. degree from Detroit City College and an M.A. degree in Sociology from the University of Michigan. She did editorial work for the *Palestine Economic Review* (publication of the American Economic Committee for Palestine), and edited the *Proceedings* of two annual sessions of the American Jewish Conference, as well as the *Proceedings of the First American Zionist Assembly* for the American Zionist Council.

EIGA HERSHMAN was born in Detroit, where she received her early education and was graduated from Wayne University with a B.A. degree. She wrote the liner notes and lyric translations for record albums produced by the Palestine Art Corporation in New York. As editor, for a number of years, of *The Jewish Chaplain*, publication of the Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy of the National Jewish Welfare Board, she wrote a regular column and feature articles. Her historical article, "Judaism at West Point," appeared in a number of Anglo-Jewish publications, including *The Detroit Jewish News*.

Not long after they had struck roots in their new home, another problem of survival confronted them. Zvi, the older son, contracted the dread disease then known as "galloping consumption." There was no help for tuberculosis patients in the crowded ghetto; there was only one prescription—to move to a more favorable climate. Once again Hannah Rachel uprooted herself, leaving behind her husband and younger son to go to a strange and far-distant place called Colorado in the hope of saving Zvi's life. But Zvi finally succumbed to the disease, and Hannah Rachel, bereft and alone, returned to New York.



Rabbi Abraham M. Hershman
1880-1959

In their old age Judah Eliezer and Hannah Rachel made what was then the long and arduous journey to Palestine to live out their years there and to fulfill the wish of pious Jews of that day: to die in Palestine and be buried in its soil. Only Hannah Rachel had the privilege of achieving this goal; she was buried in the ancient cemetery on the Mount of Olives overlooking Jerusalem. Judah Eliezer returned to New York, where he lived until his death in 1935.

Our father's Jewish learning was grounded in his schooling in Lithuania. He received his initial education in the traditional *heder* in his home town of Neustadt and later studied in the Kovno Yeshiva, as well as under the guidance of Dr. Israel H. Daiches, a noted Talmudic scholar. From a *heder* boy and *yeshiva bochur* steeped in the study of the Bible and the Talmud, Father was transformed into a student exposed to the process of Americanization, which involved learning a strange language and unfamiliar ways. After being initiated into the New York public school system and completing his preliminary studies, he enrolled in the College of the City of New York. Despite the lack of money, a combination of factors made it possible for Father to acquire a college education: the school was tuition-free and textbooks were provided gratis. Moreover, during his student days he earned whatever he could by teaching Hebrew and Sunday School, walking from one end of the city to the other in order to save the nickel carfare. In addition, these earnings were supplemented by help from relatives who had come to the United States at an earlier date.

It was during his years at City College that Father developed a lasting enthusiasm for many subjects of the curriculum, among them philosophy, world history and the social sciences. During this period, too, he acquired a great fondness for the English and American classics, and later took much pleasure in quoting from them in sermons and speeches as well as in daily conversation.

With all of his interest in and devotion to the new culture he had acquired

during his college days, Father still had an overriding passion for Judaism and Judaic studies. It was perfectly natural, then, for him to choose the rabbinate as his career, and he entered the Jewish Theological Seminary of America while he was still a student at City College. What was not completely in line with his background and home atmosphere was his choice of the Seminary, which represented somewhat of a departure from the Orthodox Judaism in which he had been reared. The Seminary had been established by the new Conservative movement in American Judaism, which was conceived as a modified form of Orthodoxy intended to accommodate itself to the American scene. Father's choice of the Seminary was dictated by his belief that tradition and modernism could be harmonized and that it was not only possible, but desirable, to combine the two.

Father graduated from City College with honors in 1904. His newly-acquired Bachelor of Arts degree was the source of great pride to his friends—like himself, students relatively new to the American scene—who, writing in Hebrew, Yiddish, German and English, filled an album with expressions of tribute and admiration for his achievement. After graduation from City College, he took graduate courses in philosophy at Columbia University.

Life was not quite all work and no play for Father during his student days. Characteristically enough, he was drawn to the game of chess, precisely because it offered a mental challenge. Indeed, so enamored did he become of the game that he devoted an entire summer to it, sitting in a chess club morning, noon and night, to the neglect of his studies. It was only in sheer self-defense that he finally wrenched himself away from this addiction.

As far back as his student days Father was a committed Hebraist. To him Hebrew was of vital concern both as the language of the Bible and as the symbol of the modern revival of the Jewish national culture. During his college and seminary years he was active in, and served as president of, a young people's Hebrew-speaking society called M'fitsei S'fat Ever, the purpose of which was to promote Hebrew as a living language. This society played an especially important role in his life, for it was here that he met his future wife, Miriam Lewin-Epstein, the daughter of Eliahu Ze'ev Lewin-Epstein, one of the founders of the colony of Rehovot, Palestine, where she had spent her early years.

In 1906 Father's student days came to an end. On June 10th of that year he was ordained a rabbi by the Seminary. In recognition of his outstanding scholarship, he was chosen to speak for his classmates on that occasion. Standing before the audience at the ordination ceremony, he began his valedictory address by relating a Talmudic legend:

When the last priests saw the Chaldeans scale the walls of the Sanctuary, when they realized that the end had come to Israel's House, they took the golden keys that unlocked the Temple and threw them towards heaven, exclaiming, 'Master of the Universe, preserve these keys!' And lo! A mysterious hand appeared from beneath the skies and grasped the keys.

In this beautiful legend our sages unfold to us the secret of Israel's vitality and strength... Crushed was the temporal power of the nation, but impregnable was the spiritual Temple. The keys of this Temple were preserved and saved...

This solemn occasion consecrates us, the graduates of this class, as ministers of the temple of our religion, as bearers of the banner of Judaism... Forty centuries look down

upon us... The old Temple still towers in full splendor and grandeur. [The] original keys have been spared for us...

Henceforth, it shall be our duty, with all the fervor... with all the mental and moral strength of our being, to labor in the field of Judaism and to sanctify all our energies to the promotion and to the glory of our religion. With the blessing of the Almighty upon our endeavors, we shall not prove unworthy of the confidence implied in the office and degree that have been conferred upon us today.¹

Immediately after graduation, the newly-ordained rabbi moved into his first pulpit at Congregation Adath Yeshurun in Syracuse, New York, where he served for one year. In 1907 he was called to the pulpit of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Detroit, where he remained for the balance of his rabbinic career. He was the first Conservative rabbi of the previously Orthodox congregation, which continued to be the sole Conservative congregation in Detroit during most of the years of his ministry.

At a special ceremony on August 24, 1907, he was inducted into his new position by Dr. Solomon Schechter, president of the Jewish Theological Seminary and a distinguished Jewish scholar. In his inaugural address, the new rabbi referred to the difficulties facing the occupant of a Conservative pulpit. He indicated, however, that no matter what the difficulties, his duty was laid out for him by tradition. "The modern rabbi," he said, "is not to preach a new Judaism... There is but one Judaism, which is neither ancient, nor medieval, nor modern... Different conditions in different ages and different countries require different methods, but the goal remains the same, the principles unchangeable."²

When the young rabbi first arrived, Shaarey Zedek had a membership of 135 and was housed in a building on Winder Street between Beaubien and St. Antoine, on Detroit's lower east side. The impact of the new spiritual leader's personality was felt by the congregants soon after he took over his duties. The modest structure on Winder Street became a hub of congregational activity, with the rabbi establishing a Hebrew school, re-organizing the Sunday school and introducing Friday evening lectures, which drew a large and interested audience. To bring the youth closer to the synagogue and Jewish life he also organized a Young People's Society. The Ladies' Auxiliary, which was formed in 1906, shortly before the rabbi's arrival, developed a full program of activities under his guidance. It later became known as the Sisterhood and has fulfilled a vital function in the life of the congregation throughout the years.

In his annual report to the congregation on October 12, 1908, William Saulson, president of Shaarey Zedek, said: "The year just brought to a close has achieved greater results than the record of any other one of our 46 years of congregational existence and has been secured for us by the guidance and whole-souled and unselfish efforts of our leader, Rabbi A. M. Hershman, who has given the benefit of his knowledge with the cheerful spirit of devotion to duty which has characterized him the faithful teacher in Israel."³

Father's love of Zion amounted to a passion. At a time when Zionism had not yet become popular, he founded the Kadimah (Zionist) Society in Detroit and served as its president from 1908 to 1911. The gauge of his commitment to the cause can be judged by the fact that when he was advised not

to stress Zionism in his sermons he replied that under no circumstances would he refrain from preaching what he so firmly believed. A measure of his success in bringing the message of Zionism to his listeners was the fact that many of his congregants followed him into the Kadimah Society.

Father was responsible for organizing the Detroit branch of the Zionist Federation of America, precursor of the Zionist Organization of America. Later, he served for some years as president of the Detroit District of the ZOA. He was also a member of the national boards of the ZOA and the Keren Hayesod (Palestine Foundation Fund) and served as local chairman of the Keren Hayesod campaigns for a number of years. He was later to become active in the Mizrahi Organization of America and to serve on the National Committee for Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

His concept of Zionism was carefully spelled out when the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed in 1917. He pointed out that "*hysterical* reasons for Zionism are inadequate," that there is "a higher or *historical* reason for it," that Zionism is not only justified as "a solution to the problem of Jews in lands of oppression," but has a "*raison d'être* for Jews in lands of freedom."⁴ To him, Zionism signified the renaissance of the Jewish people.

Father's pioneer efforts on behalf of Zionism were complemented by the contribution of his wife, Miriam, whom he married in June 1909 at the Jewish Theological Seminary in the presence of family and friends, among them fellow scholars, Zionist leaders and other active participants in American Jewish life. The young couple shared and brought into the home they established together a strong love for Hebrew and Zionism. When the Detroit chapter of Hadassah was organized, Mother was a co-founder and served as its first president. In this, as in other important respects, she was to prove a constant source of support and encouragement to her husband, who never failed to value her opinion.



Abraham and Miriam Hershman on honeymoon in 1909.

The rabbi's impact on the congregation resulted in a steady increase in membership. From the humble building on Winder Street, Shaarey Zedek moved further north to more imposing buildings twice during his ministry: in 1915 to Willis and Brush, and in 1932 to Chicago Boulevard and Lawton. Yet, paradoxically enough, Father preferred smaller congregations which allowed for greater intimacy and a closer relationship among the members as well as with the rabbi. In decrying the stress placed on size, he insisted that "bigness is no criterion of worth."⁵ The synagogue "has a message for the individual Jew," he said, and its effectiveness "is to be judged not by its

size, the number on its roster, but by the spirit that pervades it ...the sort of-Jews it produces." 6

Fortunately, size was not the sole attribute of Shaarey Zedek. The spirit that pervaded it was such that under the rabbi's ministry it came to be one of the most influential Conservative congregations in the United States. In 1913, under the rabbi's leadership, Shaarey Zedek became one of the founders of the United Synagogues of America, the national organization of Conservative congregations. The rabbi himself was an active participant in its program: At the 1927 convention he was named national chairman of a committee to sponsor religious activities among college students.⁷ He also served on the U.S.A. executive board, as well as on the executive committee of the Rabbinical Assembly of America, the national organization of Conservative rabbis.

Father's absorption in Jewish affairs did not in any way diminish his awareness of the American scene. He never took his Americanism for granted. When, in 1918, the Detroit community organized a war relief effort, a specified amount of the targeted goal was earmarked for Jewish relief. The Jewish community took upon itself the task of raising this sum. In a message to his congregation the rabbi urged:

We must do even more. We must give not only as Jews but also as men and as Americans. The Red Cross...is engaged in work of a humanitarian and patriotic nature. We must contribute to the Red Cross and similar agencies adequately and generously. We must demonstrate our Americanism, our loyalty to the cause on which our country is embarked and for which the gage of battle has been thrown down.⁸

While he prized his Americanism greatly, he rejected the then-popular notion of the melting pot, insisting that American society would be the richer if each ethnic group were to remain true to its own traditions and values.

A geographic shift in the Detroit Jewish population led to some years of displacement for the congregation. In the late 1920's Shaarey Zedek left its magnificent building on Willis and Brush. Because of the great Depression, the congregation had to modify its original plan for the new building to be constructed on Chicago Boulevard and Lawton, in the northwest section of the city, to which the Jewish population had moved. For some time the congregation was obliged to worship in rented quarters on Twelfth Street near Clairmount, where a full program of activities was maintained. During this troubled period, Shaarey Zedek gratefully accepted the rabbi's proposal that his salary be reduced in order to lighten the financial burden on the congregation.

On Sunday afternoon, May 26, 1930, some 2,000 guests gathered under a large tent to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone of the new building. In his address on that occasion the rabbi said:

No institution in Israel is fraught with more far-reaching possibilities than the Synagogue. It is the cornerstone on which the edifice of the entire Jewish life has rested for more than 1800 years. We have no substitute for it. If you tamper with this Jewish cornerstone, the entire structure goes down. Without it, Jewish activities may continue for a while, carried on by their own momentum, but not for long.⁹

Great was the rejoicing when, on January 10, 1932, the new building was finally dedicated. In his dedication sermon the rabbi expressed the feeling of that day: "We rejoice that we are home once more. We rejoice that after years of anxious deliberation, arduous labor, painful experiences, disap-

pointments and difficulties which at times seemed insuperable, this building stands forth bright and radiant—a graceful and noble structure.” He cautioned, however, that “a mere edifice, though artistically elaborate, and furnished with all that wealth can afford, does not make a Synagogue.... A building becomes a Synagogue only when the worshippers give it their hearts and souls.”¹⁰

At the end of that year, in December 1932, a gala celebration was held in the social hall of the new building, where some 500 people assembled to observe an event of threefold significance—the festival of Hanuka, the 70th anniversary of Shaarey Zedek and the 25th anniversary of the rabbi’s ministry at Shaarey Zedek. In recognition of his twenty-five years of dedicated service, the congregation elected him rabbi for life, and gave him a six-month leave of absence so that he and his wife might visit Palestine in fulfillment of a long-cherished dream.

To our father, the rabbi’s primary role was that of teacher, and the pulpit was intended to serve as a medium of instruction. He believed, however, that the rabbi could be effective only if there was an informed and enlightened laity which, working in tandem with him, could ensure the democratic character of the synagogue. He therefore laid great stress on the educational aspects of the various activities conducted by the synagogue.

The 1930’s saw a further enrichment of the many-faceted congregational program:

In 1930 the rabbi organized the Men’s Club, which has continued to play an important role in the life of the congregation.

In 1932 he inaugurated the Junior Congregation, reportedly the first of its kind in Michigan and one of the first in the country. Many were the youngsters who received their early training in religious services in the Junior Congregation and went on to become active and devoted adult members of Shaarey Zedek.

In line with his insistence that the religious education of girls was no less important than that of their brothers, the rabbi had proposed to the United Synagogue convention in 1928 that a committee be appointed to look into the possibility of formulating a ceremony for girls in their teens, as a substitute for the Bar Mitzva for boys.¹¹ In 1934 he introduced into the Shaarey Zedek program Consecration classes for girls who were about to reach the age of fifteen. This program represented an innovation in Conservative synagogues, and the Consecration ceremony which climaxed the special training of these young girls became a colorful and impressive annual event at Shaarey Zedek.

The conviction that Jewish education must continue through life also led the rabbi to introduce adult classes into the synagogue program in the 1930’s. Courses were given in Hebrew, the Bible and Jewish history, many of them taught by the rabbi himself.

His concern for Jewish learning never overshadowed the pastoral aspect of Father’s ministry, which he considered a vital part of his responsibilities. Even as the growth of the congregation accelerated, he strove to maintain as close a relationship as possible with the individual members, sharing in the major events of their lives, counseling them in their troubles, providing them with a sense of support and constancy in a changing world. In later

years, the opportunity of officiating at third-generation marriages gave him special satisfaction, underscoring, as these occasions did, the continuity of the rabbi-family relationship.

Although Shaarey Zedek had prior claim on our father's time and efforts, there was hardly a worthwhile cause in the Jewish community which did not benefit from his counsel and leadership. The organizations to which he belonged—both local and national—and on whose boards he served were numerous. Such time-honored institutions as the Home for the Aged, the Jewish House of Shelter, the Jewish Orphanage and the Hebrew Free Loan Society, to mention but a few, found an ever-ready champion in him. From his earliest years in Detroit he served on the board of the United Jewish Charities. When the Jewish Welfare Federation was formed in 1926, he was one of the incorporators and became a member of its Board of Governors. His activities in the Jewish social service field also included membership on the boards of the Jewish Community Center, the Jewish Community Council and the Jewish Social Service Bureau. Among the numerous other groups with which he was affiliated were such national organizations as the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith.

Another area of his activity was membership on the board of the United Hebrew Schools. The fact that for some years Shaarey Zedek had its own daily Hebrew school, under his direct supervision, did not diminish his interest in a communal Hebrew school, which he regarded as a unifying force in the Jewish community.

Even this type of communal school did not, in the rabbi's judgment, go far enough. As early as 1921—some twenty-five years before the Jewish day school movement became popular—in an address before the convention of the United Synagogue, the rabbi advocated the establishment of Jewish day schools with a combined curriculum of secular and Jewish studies. Moreover, he indicated that this idea was not new to him, but that he had been giving serious consideration to it for a number of years.¹²

His organizational activities were not confined to the Jewish community. Among his interfaith activities was his participation in the Detroit Round Table of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. His approach to Christian-Jewish relations was reflected in an address which he delivered before the Presbyterian Ministers' Association of Detroit in 1923:

There are vital differences that divide the Jew from the Christian. It would be idle to overlook or attempt to gloss (over) those differences... Nor is it possible that all religions should be welded and fused into one... The essence of God is unaffected by what you or I conceive Him to be... Your history and religious experiences constitute the medium through which God has disclosed Himself to you. The history of the Jew and his religious experiences are the vehicle through which God has revealed Himself to him.

My respect for your religious convictions springs not from any preference for those convictions, but from the deference due your sincerity. I shall reverence my religion and my religion only, but I shall respect the religious sentiments of my Christian neighbor. I shall be true to myself and just to all men. Let the Christian be faithful to Christianity, and let the Jew be true and faithful to Judaism.

The attitude I am pleading for will beget in the followers of the different ethical religions an earnest desire to cooperate in the solution of the great problems with which mankind is confronted.¹³

Although Father had no reticence about speaking out forcefully in advancing his ideas and in making himself heard whenever the occasion required, he tended to be a person of considerable reserve. He was essentially a student and a scholar and was recognized for his learning not only in the local community but on the national Jewish scene as well. In this connection, his family recalls a dramatic experience which one of his daughters had while traveling in Mexico some years ago. In a restaurant in Guadalajara, a city which was then off the beaten track, she was recognized as a compatriot and coreligionist by an elderly gentleman at a nearby table. In the course of conversation he asked whether she knew Hebrew. When she replied in the affirmative, he told her that he was a retired physician who at one time had been the editor of a Hebrew medical journal, *Ha-Rofeh Ha-Ivri*. Learning that she had studied Hebrew in Detroit, he exclaimed: "There's a fine Hebrew scholar in Detroit. I wonder if you've ever heard of him—Rabbi Hershman."

In recognition of his scholarship and learning, the Jewish Theological Seminary conferred upon Father the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1930. Another honor was to come his way in 1932, when the Seminary awarded him the degree of Doctor of Hebrew Letters for the work he had undertaken on the history of Jewish life in Spain and North Africa in the 14th and early 15th centuries. This work centered on the life of an outstanding personality, Rabbi Isaac Perfet.

Published in 1943 under the title, *Rabbi Isaac Ben Sheshet Perfet and His Times*, this book was the culmination of many years of research and writing during a busy period in the rabbi's life. Dealing in large part with Perfet's *responsa*, the book was described in the foreword by Professor Alexander Marx, eminent Jewish historian, as "a notable and lasting contribution to the history of the Jews." In a review appearing in the journal, *Historia Judaica*, Rabbi Isidore Epstein of Jews College, London, author of scholarly works on medieval *responsa*, had this to say:

The *responsa* of Perfet have been drawn upon before by a number of scholars, but never in so comprehensive a manner as has been done by the author of the present work... He has extracted an incredible mass of data which he has been able to reconstruct into the highly readable and instructive account he presents to us.¹⁴

Some time after the volume appeared in English, Father translated it into Hebrew, and the Hebrew edition was published in Israel in 1955. Many years later, in 1967, an ABC-TV program entitled "Lovers of Righteous Judgment" included him among important scholars concerned with *responsa* literature.

From time to time our home was the scene of a silent drama which epitomized Father's intense commitment to the tradition of Jewish learning. On those occasions when the desk in his study became too crowded for his needs, the dinner table was cleared after the evening meal, only to be set with a repast of quite another kind: a profusion of books of all sizes and descriptions, from thin volumes to heavy tomes, interlaced with innumerable sheets of paper inscribed with Hebrew and English notes. Father would sit at the table contentedly, immune to the sounds of the busy household around him, and absorb himself for hours on end in study and research—whether in preparation for a manuscript, or an address, or simp-

ly for his own edification. He had never returned to the scene of his early education in Lithuania, and seldom did he have the opportunity of revisiting the site of his rabbinical studies in New York. Yet his engrossment and obvious delight as he now pored over his beloved texts—Biblical passages, Talmudic tracts, the works of the sages and scholars of Israel—were a vivid and touching evocation of his life at those memorable seats of learning. It was clear that he preserved intact the spirit they had instilled in him and that he drew from this spirit never-ending nourishment.

Another memory which is still fresh harks back to those hours after the family had retired for the night, when Father could be heard pacing back and forth through the empty rooms until the early morning hours. We knew that he was sunk in thought, perhaps composing—or putting the finishing touches on—a sermon or address to be delivered, perhaps developing ideas to be incorporated in the books or articles he was writing, or again working out the thoughts which his mind was constantly generating.

No matter what the preoccupation of the moment, however, Father's thoughts never failed to reflect his concern with world events. In December 1941 the United States entered World War II. As early as February 1941 our brother had been drafted into the Army, as though in fulfillment of a prophecy Father had made many years earlier, when the Versailles Treaty was signed in 1919. Convinced that that treaty was an unjust one and therefore a prelude to a second world war, he looked at his infant son—born before the Armistice and named Shalom David in anticipation of this event—and said to Mother, "Mark my words: We are raising a soldier for the next war."

For one like Father, whose religious beliefs imbued him with a deeply-rooted faith in human nature and in man's potential for good, the years of anguish which world Jewry suffered during the war was the ultimate test of that faith. In his sermon on *Shabat Nahamu* (Sabbath of Consolation) in 1944, he exclaimed: "Alas!... 'The earth is given into the hands of the wicked.' Wherever we turn, we see 'blood and fire, and pillars of smoke' going up from concentration camps. The 'remnant' is given over to trouble and captivity. From our hearts, too, comes the cry of anguish, 'O root not out the remnant of Thy sons!'"

Yet his inextinguishable faith enabled him to end this cry on a note of hopefulness. Invoking the spirit of Isaiah, he continued: "Peering through the thick darkness that enveloped him, he [Isaiah] sees the dawning of a new day... He perceives through the gloom rays of sunshine and hope. Israel's oppressors and persecutors will disappear; the glorious promise of God will be fulfilled... 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.'"¹⁵

On May 13, 1945, Congregation Shaarey Zedek gathered in the sanctuary to celebrate victory in Europe. While rejoicing that Germany had fallen, the rabbi once again, as after World War I, sounded the admonition that victory could be meaningful only in terms of a just peace. Although he prayed fervently for a speedy victory over Japan, he later vigorously deplored the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He considered these bombings immoral acts, for which he could never forgive the Administration responsible for the decision.

Shaarey Zedek, the only Conservative congregation in Detroit until the 1940's, had so expanded its membership and activities during the 1930's

that the responsibility became too arduous for one rabbi. Therefore, Rabbi Morris Adler was invited to serve as assistant rabbi in 1936 and later, in 1941, became associate rabbi. At the beginning of 1944 Rabbi Adler entered the U.S. Army as a chaplain. In September 1945 Father suffered a heart attack, and a rabbi was taken on temporarily to serve the congregation for the duration of Father's illness or until Rabbi Adler's return.

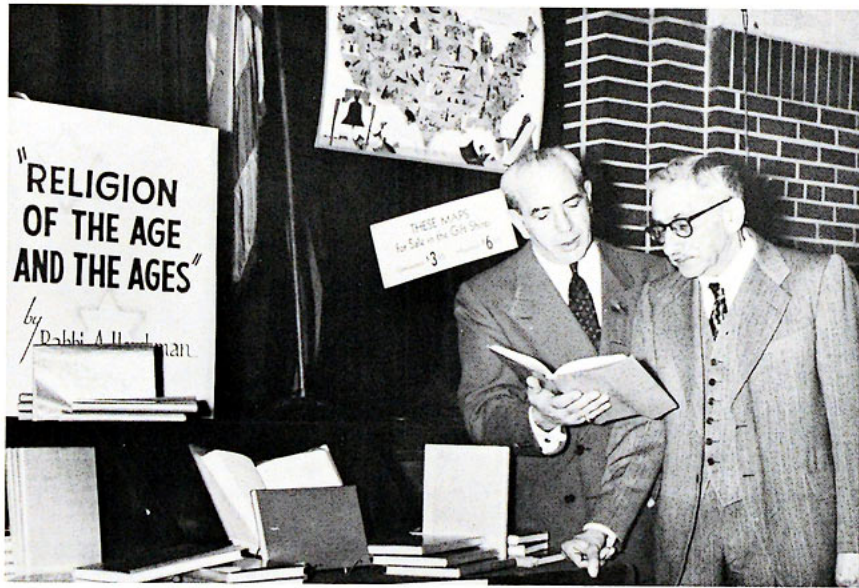
In October, 1946 Father was obliged because of ill health to retire from the active rabbinate after almost forty years as spiritual leader of Shaarey Zedek. On his retirement he was elected rabbi emeritus of the congregation, and Rabbi Adler was named his successor.

Father's love of research and his dedication to learning signalled a new career after his retirement. He actually retired into his study, where he became immersed in his scholarly pursuits. Oblivious to time and place, he had to be reminded when it was time to eat and sleep. It was mainly from this period that his published volumes emerged.

Father was invited to translate from Hebrew into English "The Book of Judges," Volume XIV of *The Code of Maimonides*. The translated volume was published in 1949 by the Yale University Press as part of a fifteen-volume Yale Judaica Series. As the jacket of the book indicates, "This volume offers the first translation ever made of all the treatises in Book Fourteen of *The Code of Maimonides*." In a column in *The Detroit Jewish News* devoted to a discussion of the book, the volume was hailed for its "clarity of translation" and its "scholarly introduction."¹⁶ The review highlighted that part of the introduction in which Father called attention to a lengthy passage about Jesus of Nazareth which had appeared in Chapter XI, Treatise V (Kings and Wars), in some of the early editions of "The Book of Judges." He pointed out that the greater part of this passage had been deleted by the censors in later editions. In an article appearing in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*¹⁷ and in a subsequent article in the Hebrew periodical, *Hadoar*,¹⁸ he elaborated upon this subject. In these articles he arrived at the conclusion that censorship over a period of time had resulted in a distortion of the text—not only of the passage itself but of the chapter in which it had appeared. He then incorporated the long-lost passage into the chapter, ingeniously rearranging the text of the chapter in order to restore its logical sequence.

In 1950, in honor of Father's 70th birthday, the congregation adopted a resolution to mark the occasion by publishing a volume of his sermons and addresses. In 1952 the volume, *Israel's Fate and Faith* appeared. It contained, in addition to Sabbath and Festival sermons, addresses and articles prepared for special occasions. A second volume of sermons, entitled *Israel of the Age and of the Ages*, was published the following year, in 1953. During his ministry, his father-in-law, Eliahu Ze'ev Lewin-Epstein, had urged him to record his sermons on a dictaphone. Unfortunately, being uncomfortable with any kind of mechanical device, he had resisted the suggestion. As a result, he was obliged to reconstruct most of his sermons and addresses from notes.

Father's ineptness with things mechanical affected not only the recording of his sermons but matters of profound concern to his family. In the 1920's, his grateful congregation presented him with a Dodge sedan to ease his crowded schedule and allow for some leisurely family outings. Driving,



Rabbi Hershman at the third annual Jewish Book Fair at the Jewish Community Center, December, 1954, standing before a display featuring the second volume of his sermons, *Religion of the Age and the Ages*. Standing beside him is Samuel Feldstein.

however, proved a burden to him, and the family began to suspect that he escaped from the pressure by composing some of his best sermons behind the wheel. Great was the relief of relatives and friends when the car was stolen by some unwitting Samaritan and wrecked beyond repair on the highway.

Shortly after *Israel's Fate and Faith* was published in 1952, one reviewer commended "the rabbi's Jewish learning, eloquence, mastery of the word and imaginative understanding," which enabled him "to bring the treasures of the Jewish spirit into the living human situations today." Many of the sermons, the reviewer added, "reveal Dr. Hershman the controversialist, dedicated to liberal and great human causes."¹⁹

Not only his sermons, but many of the stands he took in the community, as well as in the synagogue, underline the aptness of the above characterization. In the 1930's, when professional workers were attempting to organize into unions to protect their interests, board members of the Jewish Social Service Bureau were reluctant to blaze a trail by recognizing the right of the agency's social workers to unionize. Father's reaction was: "Since when have Jews taken a back seat in paving the way for social progress? I would rather have Jews *condemned* for doing what is right than *commended* for doing what is wrong."

Other instances of his forward-looking attitudes are not hard to find: his early espousal of the Jewish day school, as previously indicated; his stress upon formal education—Jewish and secular—for women; his preference for liberal political candidates and social measures; his opposition to the

then-prevalent melting-pot concept as a mark of true Americanism. It is interesting to note that his viewpoint on the melting-pot idea has been gaining currency in recent years.

In 1953, *Genesis*, the first volume of Talmudist Menahem M. Kasher's *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, appeared. The book bears the following inscription:

The publication of this volume has been made possible by the friends and admirers of Rabbi Dr. Abraham M. Hershman, Rabbi, Congregation Shaarey Zedek, Detroit, Michigan, as a token of honor to this scholar and sage, beloved teacher and devoted community leader, whose beneficent influence has inspired and ennobled a generation of men and women, in grateful appreciation of his consecrated devotion to God and tireless service to the community.

In 1955, at Shaarey Zedek's Hanuka dinner, a portrait of Father in rabbinic cap and gown was unveiled. The artist who had been commissioned by the congregation to paint this portrait took as her model for his facial expression a photograph showing him seemingly prepared to slice a birthday cake at a party given in his honor in the home of friends several years earlier. The suggestion of a benign smile on his face reflected the amusement which this uncharacteristic pose evoked in those present. The portrait now hangs in the present Shaarey Zedek synagogue in Southfield, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit.

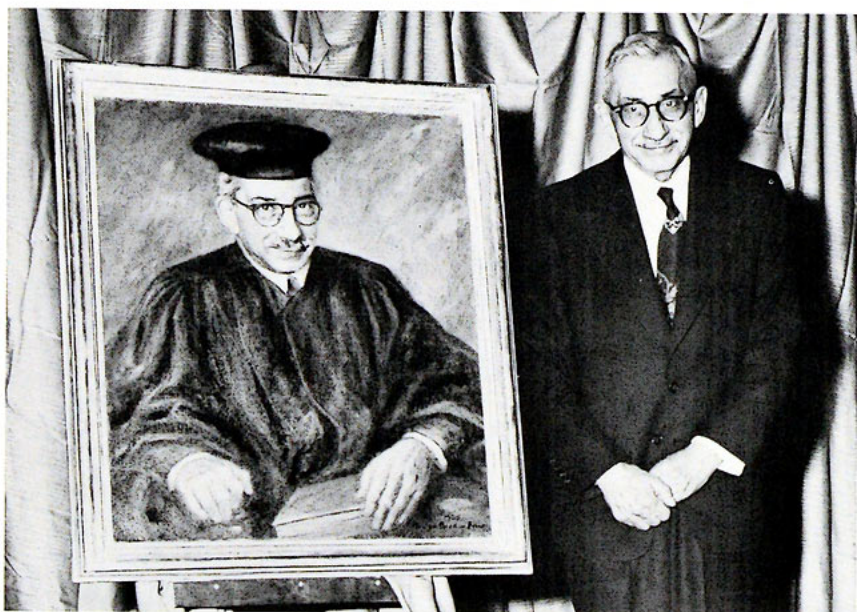
During the active years of his ministry, before retirement, the crowded schedule of a rabbi's life took Father out of the home more often than his family would have liked. The hours that he was able to spend with them, however, had ample rewards. The dinner table was more often than not the center of stimulating conversation and animated discussion. Varying points of view on many subjects were debated.

Father's strongly-held opinions had a great impact on us as we were growing up, and our thoughts were shaped to a great extent by his ideas. Although in later years there may have been differences of opinion, our conversations were never dull. Friday nights, Saturdays and holidays were particularly lively with discussion. These occasions were further enhanced by the frequent presence of guests.

We have memories of many interesting personalities who made their way to the Hershman home over the years. On one memorable night in our early years we were awakened from sleep by a strong sweet voice emanating from somewhere in the house. The door to the bedroom was opened so that we might hear the renowned Cantor Yossele Rosenblatt singing in our living room for a group that had gathered there to enjoy an impromptu concert.

Among the many other personalities whom we recall was Henrietta Szold, who was a guest at our dinner table. We remember, too, Golda Meir addressing a gathering in our living room when she came to the United States to sell shares for the newly-opened Tel Aviv port. Shortly thereafter Moshe Smilansky of Rehovot, founder and for many years head of the Palestine Farmers' Association, who also wrote tales about Arab life under the pseudonym "Kwaja Musa," was a guest at the Sabbath table in our home.

These guests and others provided Father with an opportunity to engage in one of his favorite pastimes—good conversation. There were other diver-



Rabbi Hershman standing beside a portrait of himself unveiled at the Shaarey Zedek Hanuka dinner, 1955.

sions as well. Not only was he a scholar in Judaica, but he was a devoted reader of classical world literature and was much at home with the outstanding essayists, poets, novelists, philosophers and historians. His interest in general contemporary affairs was reflected in publications of a varied nature which, added to floor-to-ceiling book shelves, overflowed his study at home.

The same logic and absorption with which he approached his scholarly pursuits were applied to his several hobbies. The game of chess, which he gave up during his student days because of the inroads it made on his studies, continued to fascinate him. Whenever he found time and a ready partner, he would sit in perfect contentment and lose himself in the challenge of the chess board, becoming oblivious to time, place and the people around him.

An interest which he developed in the last twenty-five years of his life and which never failed to amuse family and friends was the sport of baseball. Again, in his usual analytical way, sitting in front of radio or television, he became an armchair strategist; even though excited when a crucial point was reached in the game, he was always the logician. He learned the batting averages of players, knew their strong and weak points, criticized and corrected the strategy of team managers and in general brought his mind as well as his emotions to bear on the game. His conversation with family and friends on communal matters, world affairs, Zionism, Israel, books was interspersed with exchanges on the progress of the baseball season.

The pattern of Father's life was irreparably altered in 1955—a year which brought tragedy to the Hershman family. The death of his wife, Miriam, deprived Father of his beloved companion of forty-six years. For some time

before her death they had been planning their first trip to Israel since its establishment as a state. In 1956 Father set out for Israel alone, in fulfillment of a promise he had made to her before she died.

In 1957 he went to New York to spend the Passover holiday with his daughters, who had moved there some years earlier, drawn by the many opportunities the city had to offer. Ruth worked for the American Jewish Conference, where she was involved in research, and edited several volumes of the proceedings of its annual sessions; she was also connected with the American Zionist Council, again doing research, editing and writing, and later was in charge of the New York office of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the Washington-based lobby for Israel. After working as a campaign correspondent for the United Jewish Appeal, Eiga wrote promotional material and translated lyrics for the Palestine Art Corporation, which put out albums of Israeli songs. Later, as a member of the staff of the National Jewish Welfare Board, she served its Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy in an administrative capacity and for a number of years edited the Commission's publication, *The Jewish Chaplain*. Their brother, David, had remained in Detroit, where he entered the real estate business after serving in the Army during World War II.

While Father was in New York for Passover, his daughters persuaded him to remain with them because of the state of his health. The golden anniversary of his affiliation with Shaarey Zedek was observed by the congregation on November 6, 1957, and he returned to Detroit for this occasion. In a warm and affectionate tribute he was hailed by one of his devoted congregants, speaking on behalf of the congregation, as "a seer, a scholar, ...a teacher and a friend."²⁰ In honor of this occasion the students of the Shaarey Zedek religious schools planted a forest of 10,000 trees in Israel. In a letter thanking them for this expression of their esteem, the rabbi wrote: "I can think of no tribute from the School which could have been more meaningful to me. It brings home to me forcefully the fact that the love for Zionism and Israel which was instilled in the hearts of the parents and grandparents of many of the present pupils in the School during my many years as rabbi of Congregation Shaarey Zedek has found an echo in the hearts of the new generation."

On April 6, 1959, shortly before his 79th birthday, Father passed away in New York. He was survived by his three children and four grandchildren. The funeral services were held in the main sanctuary of Shaarey Zedek, which had reverberated for so many years with the fervency of his words. His death evoked an outpouring of admiration and affection.

Shortly after his death, Congregation Shaarey Zedek established the Rabbi Hershman Library Fund as a memorial to him.

In recognition of his contribution to Jewish life and learning, the Detroit friends of Bar-Ilan University raised funds for a chair in his memory at the university, located in Ramat Gan, Israel. As a result of these efforts the A.M. Hershman Chair in Hebrew and World Literature was established in 1960.

Not long after Father's death, *The National Cyclopedia of American Biography* notified the family of its decision to include his biography in an upcoming volume. This biography appeared in 1962. As the preface to the

encyclopedia indicates, since its inception in 1888 its purpose has been to record "American history through the medium of biography." Accordingly it represents, in the words of the editor, "a record of the achievements of distinguished Americans in every field of endeavor."

The many posthumous tributes that were paid to him can perhaps be summed up by the following excerpt from an editorial in *The Detroit News*:

"It was given to Rabbi A.M. Hershman to live and work in a time of growth, both for the city to which he came as a promising young clergyman fifty-two years ago, and for Congregation Shaarey Zedek, which he served for so many years.

"His time called for leadership, and Rabbi Hershman richly met that call in matters spiritual and scholastic, and in the need for practical community organization as well. Under his ministry a small east side congregation became one of the largest and most influential in Conservative Judaism, a movement which itself owes much to Rabbi Hershman's vigor. Yet what he did, he did with gentleness; a successful organizer and leader, he was still the shy and quiet scholar and historian, beloved of his congregation."²¹

NOTES

¹ Abraham M. Hershman, *Israel's Fate and Faith* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 323-325.

² "Rabbi Hershman Installed," *The Jewish American*, Detroit, August 30, 1907.

³ "History of Congregation Shaarey Zedek" (manuscript prepared by Dr. Eli Grad, 1961), p. 52.

⁴ *Israel's Fate and Faith*, p. 259.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁶ Abraham M. Hershman, *Religion of the Age and of the Ages* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1953), p. 89.

⁷ Irving I. Katz, "Rabbi Hershman Retires," *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, November 1, 1946.

⁸ "History of Shaarey Zedek," p. 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰ *Israel's Fate and Faith*, pp. 222, 227.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 312-313.

¹⁴ *Historia Judaica* (New York: Published by Historia Judaica), April 1945, p. 83.

¹⁵ *Religion of the Age and of the Ages*, pp. 101-103.

¹⁶ *The Jewish News*, Detroit, December 2, 1949.

¹⁷ Abraham M. Hershman, "Textual Problems of Book Fourteen of the Mishne Torah," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (Philadelphia: The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning), April 1950, pp. 401-412.

¹⁸ Abraham M. Hershman, "Eruv Parshiot," *Hadoar* (New York: Hadoar Association, Inc.), February 15, 1952, pp. 289-290.

¹⁹ "In Jewish Bookland," *JWB Circle* (New York: National Jewish Welfare Board), December 1952.

²⁰ Address by Judge Theodore Levin on 50th anniversary of Rabbi A.M. Hershman's ministry at Shaarey Zedek.

²¹ *The Detroit News*, April 7, 1959.

MICHIGAN JEWISH GENEALOGICAL INDEX

In response to the many requests we have received over the years for genealogical information, the Historical Society is proud to announce the formation of a new resource which should prove to be of tremendous help to those engaged in family research: the Michigan Jewish Genealogical Index. The Index, consisting of a card file, will attempt to incorporate the birth and death records of all of Michigan's Jewish communities.

We will draw on a number of sources for the information including newspapers, synagogue and community records, and burial lists. Thus far, the Index contains over one thousand entries. We have been fortunate enough to have recently acquired the burial records of the three Bay City Jewish cemeteries, birth records from Congregation Beth Israel of Flint, and a burial list of the Beth Olem Cemetery in Hamtramck, Michigan. Many more records, however, are required.

The Index is housed in the library of the Midrasha College of Jewish Studies (part of the United Hebrew Schools complex) in Southfield, Michigan.

Volunteer help is requested, and those who are able to assist should get in touch with the project coordinator, Phillip Applebaum, 24680 Rensselaer, Oak Park, Michigan 48237, 548-9176.

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We warmly welcome our new members with the hope that their association with us will be fruitful and rewarding.

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Betty Starkman

Miriam Zussman

CORRECTIONS

Note the following corrections for the January, 1981 issue of *Michigan Jewish History*, Volume 21, Number 1:

The date on page 1 should be: January, 1981.

Page 9, footnote 4 should read: See "The Jews of Iosco County, Michigan" by Phillip Applebaum, *Michigan Jewish History* (January, 1976), pp. 27-28.

Page 14, paragraph 3, the name of the law firm should be Levin, Levin, Garvett and Dill.

Page 14, paragraph 4, the name should read: Judge Wise.

Page 15, paragraph 5 should read: "...along with Martin L. Butzel (son of Leo M. Butzel)..."

[Editor's note: The above two errors were not the fault of the author.]

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