

Jews and Leftist Politics in Philadelphia

An Oral History Collection

Background

This oral history collection grew out of the collaboration between the Arts in Community Program at the Tyler School of Art and the Myer and Rosaline Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University. Throughout the 2011-2012 academic year, the Feinstein Center created a set of programs exploring “The Art of Being Jewish in the City.” In the fall of 2011, as part of that program, the National Museum of American Jewish History hosted a week-long residency devoted to exploring leftist politics and culture and supporting the work of playwright and Temple University professor Billy Yalowitz. At the end of the week, Yalowitz presented a staged reading of his play *East Towards Home*, a play about three generations of leftist politics that incorporated some of the narrative material from the oral history collection.

Collection Description

Jews and Leftist Politics in Philadelphia is a collection of lifestories gathered from individuals active in Jewish left-wing politics, broadly defined, in the middle of the twentieth century in Philadelphia. These individuals played significant roles in the labor movement, civil rights activism, and the Jewish working-class Yiddish-socialist subculture in Philadelphia. Their interviews describe historically Jewish neighborhoods, such as South Philadelphia, Strawberry Mansion, Parkside, and West Philadelphia, as they were in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The oral histories also provide windows into historically significant Jewish organizations, including the folkshuls, Workmen’s Circle, Jewish People’s Fraternal Order, and the Jewish Labor Committee.

Changes in American society, specifically the upward mobility of American Jews, the expansion of the middle class, and the growth of suburbs after World War II, tended to diminish the institutional presence of leftist organizations in Jewish life. These shifts, along with the aging of the activists and the dearth of attention given to leftist politics in Philadelphia, lent urgency to the task of collecting the stories of Jews involved in leftist politics.

Contents

Interviews: There are 27 interviews in this collection. They may be accessed at:

Special Collections Research Center

Temple University Libraries

Paley Library

1210 Polett Walk

Philadelphia, PA 19122

215-204-8257

scrc@temple.edu

<http://library.temple.edu/collections/scrc>

Thematic Overview and Interview Synopses

Catalog of Leftist Jewish Organizations in Philadelphia in the Twentieth Century and Bibliography

Lenoff, Aviva. (2010). "From Politics to Community: The Evolution of Jewish Socialism in Philadelphia, 1930-1960." Unpublished senior history thesis, Temple University.

Interviewers, Researchers, and Project Coordinators

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Supervisors: Lila Corwin Berman and Billy Yalowitz

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The Feinstein Center for American Jewish History at Temple University funded the project.

Jews and Leftist Politics in Philadelphia Oral History Collection

An Overview of Themes in the Interview Collection

This collection contains 26 interviews, 12 women and 14 men. They range in age from 45 years old to 92 years old. Most of the interviewees lived in Philadelphia at the time of the interview; 2 lived in New York City. All of them spent most of their childhood in Philadelphia.

Similar themes appeared in many of the interviews. The six most prevalent themes were:

1. The importance of parental influences on interviewees' political views and values: Some of the interviewees' parents were blacklisted for Communist beliefs. Others noted that their parents' political involvement shaped their career choices and their own political commitments.
2. The significance of neighborhood in shaping identity and values: Many of the interviewees lived in the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood. They described a world that no longer exists where Yiddish culture and language flourished and shaped their Jewish identity. Attendance in the local *shuls* was common; synagogue attendance infrequent though many interviewees participated in seders.
3. A commitment to helping the poor and those facing discrimination, often reflected in career choices: When examining the types of careers that the interviewees engaged in, all connected their careers to their political beliefs and involvement. Teaching, social work, the law, community organization work, and psychology were some of the career choices. When discussing their occupations, many of the interviewees described how their careers reflected their commitment to helping the poor and working against discrimination and injustice.
4. Involvement in progressive politics: The interviews contain stories that reflected progressive political activism, including: the creation of black radio in Philadelphia; involvement in labor politics; advocacy to help abolish the death sentence; working with special needs children; participation in the civil rights movement and the anti-war movement.
5. Work with specifically secular Jewish organizations in Philadelphia: The interviews recount successes and challenges of organizations such as the Jewish Labor Committee, the Sholom Aleichem club, the Workmen's Circle, folkshuls, the Kehilla, Camp Kinderland, and other secular Jewish institutions.
6. Secular Jewish camps oriented to Yiddish culture. Interviewees noted that the camps played a role in shaping their secular Jewish identity. Participation in camps, such as Camp Kinderland, strengthened and reinforced the secular Jewish identity of the interviewees not only by teaching them Yiddish and other related topics but also by providing them with an environment of other likeminded young people with which to associate.

Interview Descriptions

Wynne Alexander: Date of Interview: 10-18-11. Date of birth: not given. Occupation: archivist, writer, historian.

Topics in Interview: Why Max Leon, her grandfather, immigrated to the US. How her parents, Bob Klein and Sonia Leon (daughter of Max) met. Max's candy business (Wholesum) and his work with Breyers ice cream company. Max's acquisition of the Philadelphia pops orchestra. Her family's involvement with black radio: WDAS purchased from William Goldman; the change from white programming to black and the impact on the black community; how black radio was received by others in the Philadelphia media market and by the white community. Her father's and grandfather's underlying values and experiences that propelled them to support civil rights and a black radio station. Wynne Alexander's reasons for maintaining their legacy.

Noyma Appelbaum: Date of Interview: 4-12-12. Date of birth: 1928. Occupation: journalist, skilled manufacturing worker, teacher, principal.

Topics in Interview: Protégé of Walter Lowenfels. Description of Communist Club and involvement with communist movement since childhood. Influence of parents on political beliefs. Non-religious upbringing. Discussion of political beliefs and investment in Communism. Involvement in labor politics from 1930s-1950s.

Peter Berson: Date of Interview: 9-27-11. Date of Birth: 7-2-1956. Occupation: Assistant District Attorney, City of Philadelphia.

Topics in the Interview: Description of Philadelphia neighborhoods in the mid twentieth century. Crosstown Expressway issue. Local politics and politicians in the 1960s and 1970s. Food Stamp fraud. Influence of parents in his life. Role of secular Judaism in his life. Current Jewish practices and beliefs; affiliation with the Reconstructionist movement.

Etsy Brownstein: Date of Interview: 3-8-12. Date of Birth: 1937. Occupation: retired teacher and guidance counselor, public school system.

Topics in Interview: Discussion of parents' involvement with: Russian War Relief efforts; Jewish Peoples' Fraternal Order; Jewish folkshuls; and other political issues. Impact of McCarthy era on their family. Her involvement with Camp Kinderland and its impact on her political beliefs. Discussion of Workman's Circle in the 1950s.

Rachel Falcove: Date of Interview: 3-12-13. Date of Birth: 1950. Occupation: Not given.

Topics in Interview: Description of her parents' values, Communist background and political experiences, impact of father on blacklist on her childhood. Her experiences with Akiba, Camp Galil, and Germantown Jewish Center while a teenager. How she met her husband, Michael Masch, at college orientation. Interview ends abruptly and was not completed.

Harvey Finkel: Date of Interview: 10-19-11. Date of Birth: 1934. Occupation: social worker and photographer.

Topics in Interview: Description of prewar Oxford Circle neighborhood. Discussion of childhood religious practices. Depression-era childhood with parents who were Roosevelt Democrats. Influences on his political beliefs and on becoming a photographer. Involvement with People for Human Rights and People Against Racism. Founded Bread and Roses. Photographed Disability in Action, Kensington Welfare Rights, Project Home, Holocaust

survivors. Impact of having two deaf children and involvement in deaf institutions. Advocacy work to abolish death sentence in PA. Discussion of his views on immigration issue. Discussion of Stiffel Center, its activities, why it closed. His decision to live in Center City. Description of the Little Shtiebl.

Barry Fireman: Date of Interview: 8-22-12. Date of Birth: 10-28-1940. Occupation: Businessman.

Topics in the Interview: Description of growing up in Wynnefield and attending Camp Kinderland. In the army reserves during the civil rights movement and Vietnam War. Discussion of influence of parents on his values.

Robert Freedman: Date of Interview: 7-25-12. Date of Birth: 8-1929. Occupation: lawyer.

Topics in the Interview: Attended the folkshul and the Farband (Mittlshul). Antisemitism encountered in Upper Darby as a teenager. Discussion of his law career: how he started, practiced, encountered antisemitism. Active in the Folks-Bina, the longest running Yiddish repertoire theater in the world. Discussion of the Jewish music archive at Penn that he collected and curates. Information about the Yiddish camps he attended as a child and as an adult.

Molly Freedman: Date of Interview: 7-25-12. Date of Birth: 6-19-1935. Occupation: social worker.

Topics in Interview: Description of Yiddish camps and her work with Russian Jews through HIAS and Jewish Family and Children Services. Discussion of Penn's Jewish music archive.

Doris Kaplan: Date of Interview: 7-08-12. Date of Birth: 1921. Occupation: Occupational Therapist.

Topics in the Interview: Grew up in Crown Heights and then Siberia as a child. Participation in EKOR, a Jewish cultural organization supporting the USSR. Influence of living in USSR for one and a half years. Father was a conscientious objector in WWI, a union electrician. Mother was a nurse. Family was anti-religious with cultural Jewish identity. Involvement with Rand School and the American Labor Party. Value of education in her family. Discussion of being investigated in 1950 for communist associations and influence of the McCarthy Era. Involvement in the IWO youth groups; the Fair Housing Group in Doylestown, PA. Experience at Camp Kinderland. Involvement in the Sholom Aleichem club from the late 1960s until now.

Robert Kleiner: Date of Interview: 10-13-11. Date of Birth: 1925. Occupation: PhD in Social Psychology, Professor at Temple.

Topics in the Interview: Family influences on his leftist political thinking. How his political philosophy influenced his career and career choices. Antisemitism encountered in the army in WWII. Involvement with Sholom Aleichem club, Jewish Children's School and the Kehilla. Discussion on change in the Workmen's Circle from the 50s to now. His views on Israeli political scene. Discussion about the influences of HaShomer Hatzair and the Bund on the new state of Israel and on education in the Jewish Children's School. His organizing work with the

faculty union at Temple University. Influences on his Jewish identity. His definition of a secular Jew.

Frances Kleiner: Date of Interview: 11-15-11. Birth date: 11-1926. Occupation: social work.

Topics in the Interview: Involvement with Jewish camps (Kinderland, Wel-Met, HES). Description of Brownsville neighborhood in Brooklyn and of Hebrew school education. Parents' religious observance and their left leaning political influence on him. Description of Strawberry Mansion Jewish neighborhood (1950s). Involvement in Philadelphia Jewish institutions: director of Stiffel Center, member of Sholom Aleichim club, Folkshul, Community for Secular Jewish Organizations, future of secular Jewish community in Philadelphia.

Pauline Labovitz: Date of Interview: 4-22-12. Birth Date: 1920. Occupation: volunteer in leftwing activities.

Topics in the Interview: Values from parents, her involvement with First Pioneer member, Jewish schuls, participation in the IWO. Discussion of atheists' beliefs and lack of religious involvement. Impact of family illness and death in childhood and as young adult. Participation in Young Communist League. Husband's arrest on charges related to communist activities. Participation in the Sholom Aleichem club. Comments on changes in the left-wing political community in Philadelphia.

Sherman Labovitz: Date of Interview: 1-5-12. Birth Date: 1924. Occupation: Social Worker.

Topics in the Interview: Growing up during the Depression. Influence of siblings on his political views and introduction to the Communist Party. Description of Jewish identity and education. His role in the Communist Party. Impact of party membership on his WWII army service. Description of arrest because of party activities and why arrested. Member of Sholom Aleichem club and description of club.

Julie Levitt: Date of Interview: 8-8-12, 9-24-12. Birth Date: 1943. Occupation: Psychologist.

Topics in the Interview: Description of social activism of parents and other relatives in the early 1900s. Motivation for becoming a psychologist and peace activist. Her youth activism, including Young Judea, civil rights, peace movement. Involvement with the Division 48 of the American Psychological Association, which is the peace psychology division, of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict and War. Father's role in: starting the Jewish Labor Committee; in bringing Soviet Jews to the US; starting an HMO; activities with the Jewish Community Relations Counsel (JCRC); and the Negro Trade Union Leadership Council. Discussion of grandfather's history as progressive factory owner in Woodbine and connection to Baron de Hirsch Fund. Description of Unity House in the Poconos. Mention of Jewish Labor Committee Haggadah. Description of Israel in 1961. Her involvement with the JCRC and American Friends Service. Description of the Clara projects.

Nora Lichtash: Date of Interview: 11-8-11. Birth Date: 1951. Occupation: founder of community revitalization organization.

Topics in the Interview: Description of antisemitism in Drexel Hills in the 1950s and in her parents' work places. Discussion of father's political behavior, which included union activities, Veterans Against the Korean War, the Progressive Party, blacklisted during the McCarthy era. Description of her own and parents' Jewish identity and political philosophies.

Michael Masch: Date of Interview: 3-12-12. Birth Date: 1950. Occupation: education administration.

Topics in the Interview: Description of Southwest Philadelphia and other Philadelphia Jewish neighborhoods in the 1950s-1960s. Views on religious identification of parents and on Conservative Judaism of the 50s and 60s. Experiences at Golden Slipper Camp. Description of his experiences with Jewish education and USY movement in the 50s. Involvement with antiwar movement. Description of Na'aseh, a radical Jewish fellowship for action. Columnist for the *Jewish Exponent* during college. Life at Talmidei Aron, a Jewish communal house, and other alternative Jewish projects including the Jewish Free University, Makom Jewish Community Coffee House, Hayom, the Philadelphia Jewish Union in the 70s. Interview not finished.

Melvin Metelits: Date of Interview: 11-4-11. Birth Date: 1933. Occupation: teacher.

Topics in the Interview: Description of South Philadelphia neighborhoods in early twentieth century and definition of term "householder Jew." Affiliation with Habonim. Experience of discrimination because of his political positions, active in the Communist Party and also the teachers' union. Disillusionment with Communist Party and his return to a more active Jewish identity.

Jackie Nermoff: Date of Interview: 6-6-12. Birth Date: 3-19-1937. Occupation: Human Services.

Topics in the Interview: Description of the shul in Strawberry Mansion in the 40s. Parents' left-wing political activities. Political involvement as teenager and young adult in civil rights movement, Communist Party, anti-Vietnam war movement. Experiences with antisemitism.

Burt Siegel: Date of Interview: 10-11-11. Birth Date: 1943. Occupation: Jewish communal professional.

Topics in the Interview: Influence of parents' liberal politics on him. Description of his career as Jewish communal professional, especially with American Jewish Committee and Jewish Community Relations Council. Discussion of his involvement with Israel through the JCRC. Anti-war sentiment in the Jewish community in Philadelphia and his involvement. Civil rights activism. Involvement with Jewish Labor Council and the 1974 Farah Pants Company boycott.

Paul Shane: Date of Interview: 11-10-11. Birth Date: 1935. Occupation: Professor of Social Work.

Topics in the Interview: Revolutionary activities of maternal grandparents. Progressive thinking in the family and experience growing up in Jewish secular environment. Childhood in

ethnically mixed neighborhood of Sunnyside, New York and in a cooperative summer community near Lake Mohegan. Parents' political affiliations and opinions. His political views: patriotism; civil rights activism; value of education in the family; how political beliefs influenced career; impressions when visiting cousins in Kiev. Raising his children in Philadelphia. Discussion of secular Jewish organizations: Jewish Children's Folkshul; Philadelphia Secular Jewish Organization; relationships between the various secular organizations; involvement in a havurah. Perspective on exclusionary tendencies in the Jewish community. Opinions on the Jewish Federation of Philadelphia. Holocaust experiences of wife's family. Views on Israel. Discussion of Camp Galil.

Stan Shapiro: Date of Interview: 12-29-11. Birth Date: 7-13-1945. Occupation: lawyer.

Topics in the Interview: Description of growing up in New York City. Description of family background, family religious observance, influences on his political values from his parents. Description of his political involvement prior to law school regarding the civil rights movement and how it changed post law school. Description of his experiences with Citywide Tenant Council and Northwest Tenant's Organization (Northwest Tenant's Legal Services). Work as head of the Philadelphia City Council legal staff and policy initiatives and programs he worked on from 1982-2003. His role with the Progressive Roundtable. Description of Mount Airy. His influence on his children and their involvement with the Philadelphia Student Union. Current liberal religious beliefs and practices and his work with Neighborhood Networks.

Label Shulman: Date of Interview: 4-4-12. Birth Date: 2-9-1935. Occupation: Social Worker.

Topics in the Interview: Description of family background including the journey to the US from Siberia, growing up in West Philadelphia. Importance of Yiddish language and culture in his childhood. Parents: members of Communist Party in the 1930s; father wrote for the Yiddish newspapers and lectured on political and literary issues, and eventually was blacklisted. Description of Wynnefield in the 40s and 50s. Discussion of his feelings about Camp Kinderland. Dance career and educational choices. Involvement in left wing politics, and his work, including some with AIDS patients. Problems with the FBI in his childhood and early adulthood. Impact of dancing and his social work career on others.

Dolores Korman Sloviter: Date of Interview: 10-24-12. Birth Date: 1932. Occupation: Judge.

Topics in the Interview: Several interviews that cover Judge Sloviter's legal career and were conducted by a Drexel law student are included in this collection. Interview focused on the political and Jewish aspects of her life. Description of Strawberry Mansion neighborhood and growing up in a secular left-wing Jewish environment in the 40s and 50s. Parents' influences on her Jewish identity, with focus on her mother and the Yiddish culture around her. Discrimination she faced in her profession as a Jew and a woman and its impact on her. Political activities in law school and in the Center City Reform Democrats.

Gloria Smith: Date of Interview: 10-5-11. Birth Date: 1932. Occupation: dancer/special education teacher.

Topics in the Interview: Description of Kensington neighborhood in the 30s and Strawberry Mansion. Impact of Depression on her family. Description of father's political activities as a communist; mother was a Yiddishist. Dancing in NYC in the 1950s with the New Dance Group and living in the Coops. Influence of Yiddish culture on NYC dance scene. Discussion of Camp Kinderland, Woodland, Webatuck. Influence of her political activities on her children.

Arthur Waskow: Date of Interview: 2-22-12, 5-12-12. Birth Date: 1933. Occupation: Rabbi.

Topics in the Interview: Discussion of his grandparents' and parents' political involvement and his encounter with the politics of segregation in Baltimore when he was in high school. Jewish identity in his childhood neighborhood in Baltimore and of his family's religious practice. Impact of King's assassination on him. Discussion of first freedom Seder (1969). Leading alternative service on Yom Kippur in 1969 and the beginning of Farbrengen, which led to the newsletter called *Menorah, Sparks of Jewish Renewal*. Relationship with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in the 1980s. Creation of the Shalom Center and Aleph. Definition of transformative Judaism and his worldview, why he became a rabbi. Relationship with Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Description of living in Mount Airy. Other topics mentioned include: his interfaith work, Soviet Jewry advocacy efforts, civil rights movement participation.

A Partial Catalog of Leftist Jewish Organizations in Philadelphia in the Twentieth Century

Compiled and written by Aviva Lenoff, with Dr. Nancy Isserman

Clubs and Fraternal Organizations

SHOLEM ALEICHEM CLUB

www.sholomaleichemclub.org

I. Historical Background – see the website

II. Philadelphia Presence

The Sholom Aleichem Club is an organization unique to Philadelphia. Founded in 1954 by Max Rosenfeld, it met for many years in the homes of its members. Max Rosenfeld, a teacher, printer and writer, was also the director of the Jewish Children's School of Philadelphia from 1962 to 1976. The club was created as a secular Jewish organization dedicated to the continuity of the Jewish people and culture and met monthly to address topics of interest and concern. In recent years, the club's membership has been comprised of predominantly older people. It is primarily a cultural institution, with emphasis on Yiddishism and its preservation, but it also involves itself with community and current social issues. Members of the Club helped to establish the Jewish Children's Folkshul, a still-thriving secular Jewish Sunday school. Over the years members have participated in, and supported the school as parents, teachers, directors, advisors and contributors.

WORKMEN'S CIRCLE (ARBEITER RING)

1900-Present (Information from the website of the Balch Institute, http://www2.hsp.org/collections/Balch%20manuscript_guide/html/workmenscircle.html as well as Aviva Lenoff's Temple University senior thesis for the History department, "From Politics to Community: The Evolution of Jewish Socialism in Philadelphia, 1930-1960.")

I. Historical Background

The Workmen's Circle is a Jewish fraternal organization, founded in New York City in 1892 and federated as a national organization in 1900. Its early members were immigrants from the Russian Pale of Settlement, Yiddish-speaking working class people with strong Socialist, trade unionist, and secular Jewish identification. Organized in local branches (chapters) which often followed *landsmanshaftn* (hometown) or workplace social groupings, the Workmen's Circle provided both insurance benefits and a variety of cultural activities. Over the years, its benefits came to include life insurance, sick benefits, funeral and burial benefits, local medical services, homes for the aged, and sanitarium facilities for tubercular members. Today the insurance benefit programs are administered through national departments; the medical services and residential programs, through regional district offices and governing committees.

Workmen's Circle historically was comprised of strong autonomous branches, which sent representatives to district governing committees and delegates to national policymaking conventions. The national and district offices, run by professional staff, coordinated organizational activity. Workmen's Circle has been and continues to be a crucial advocate for the preservation of Yiddish language and culture in the United States through its adult lecture programs, its secular Jewish children's schools and camp programs, and its dramatic and choral organizations.

Historically, the Workmen's Circle defined itself also through its political activism. In the early to mid-twentieth century, Workmen's Circle members were active in: the Socialist Party battles against the Communist Party; the opposition to territorial Zionism; and the American trade union movement. Like much of the Jewish labor movement, Workmen's Circle moved away from the Socialist Party to support Roosevelt's New Deal policies, as well as the United States' entry into World War II. It also worked actively against the rise of antisemitism and fascism during the 1930s, and it helped found the Jewish Labor Committee. Workmen's Circle joined many humanitarian relief efforts, and supported many Jewish charities outside its own circle.

II. Philadelphia Presence

The Workmen's Circle, Philadelphia District was one of the larger centers of the organization's activity. Unfortunately, no records of its earliest activities are known to exist today. Later records and interviews (see Aviva Lenoff, History honors thesis 2010) indicate that the first Philadelphia chapter was the Gershuny Branch 12, chartered in 1904. At least ten branches, with at least twenty-five members each, existed before World War I. The branches were named after *shtetl* villages (Bialystoker, Rovner) or after contemporary Yiddish socialist leaders (Morris Sigman, Vladimir Medem). Organization activity took place in the 505 Reed Street building in South Philadelphia. The Reed Street building had a general assembly hall and a meeting room for each branch. The United Hebrew Trades and City Socialist Party organization shared the building.

Philadelphia branches were independent of each other, but planned similar events, such as anniversary celebrations, lectures, and dances. Members pledged their solidarity to the labor movement and their loyalty to the Socialist Party ticket and were active in its campaigns. Philadelphia Workmen's Circle before World War I could offer few material benefits beyond the national life insurance and death benefit programs, but each branch took an active interest in the physical and economic welfare of its members. In 1914, the district took its first step toward a local benefit program when it purchased a section of Montefiore Cemetery. It acquired land in Har Judah Cemetery the following year.

After World War I, the Philadelphia District grew and developed new programs. By the 1920s, it had opened children's schools. The curriculum included Yiddish language and literature, Jewish history, and socialist principles. A small number of professional teachers staffed the schools. Eventually its educational program had expanded to include over ten schools. Camp Hofnung in Bucks County offered youth and adult recreation. Local benefit plans improved, and the Cemetery Department was formally chartered in 1933. Furthermore, a Medical Department offering convenient family medical services began in 1935. (It closed only when the federal Medicare program began in 1966.)

By 1924, the Philadelphia Workmen's Circle had seventeen branches and it soon moved its headquarters to the Music Fund Hall, 810 Locust Street, which it had purchased with several other socialist and labor groups. In 1934, the financial burden of this large hall proved too much for the organizations to sustain and they moved into smaller quarters with the Philadelphia edition of the *Jewish Daily Forward* and several other Jewish socialist organizations at 415 South 19th Street.

The events of the late 1930s and World War II compelled the Philadelphia Workmen's Circle to participate in war and refugee relief work, war bond drives, and later in campaigns to aid the state of Israel. Its political and cultural activity emphasized Jewish identity and fought against fascist threats. The Workmen's Circle outspoken anti-Communism developed into an active concern for Soviet Jewry.

During the postwar period, the organization adapted its social programs again to meet the needs of its aging membership, while working to attract younger members. In 1950, the Philadelphia district opened the Workmen's Circle Home for the Eastern Region in Media, Pennsylvania to serve the elderly. It was designed to house one hundred elderly residents in the familiar atmosphere of Yiddish culture. In 1954, a membership drive resulted in the organization of several new branches, among them the Albert Einstein branch and the April 19th, whose members were Holocaust survivors resettled in Philadelphia.

As of the first decade of the 2000s, Philadelphia's Workmen's Circles activities included support for the Home for the elderly in Media, sponsorship of Jewish cultural events, holiday observances interpreting Jewish history in the traditionally secular Workmen's Circle spirit, and resettlement work among Soviet Jews in Northeast Philadelphia. Its close relationship with the Jewish labor movement continued through its participation in the Jewish Labor Committee. The Workmen's Circle counted itself as a member organization in the Kehilla for Secular Jews in Philadelphia.

Schools

JEWISH CHILDREN'S FOLKSHUL

www.folkshul.org.

I. Historical Background

Children's folkshuls were one of the key elements of the Workmen's Circle experience. Often children could be enrolled in a shul while their parents may not have been Workmen's Circle members. Calls for inviting these parents to join were issued over the years, especially as declining membership in all facets of Workmen's Circle life came to be a pressing concern.

II. Philadelphia Presence

By the early 2000s, Philadelphia's Children's Folkshul was the sole successor to the numerous folkshuls that once existed in the area, and it was one of eight remaining in the country. The Children's Folkshul was created out of a merger in the 1980s between the Workmen's Circle, the Labor Zionist, and Jewish People's Fraternal Order groups. It emerged from a desire to consolidate and thus strengthen the remaining groups, which on their own were dwindling. The Children's Folkshul focused its energies on secular facets of Jewish identity, culture, and tradition, history, Yiddish, and social justice.

SETTLEMENT MUSIC SCHOOL

www.smsmusic.org/home.php

Historical Background and Philadelphia Presence

The Settlement Music School is one of Philadelphia's most noteworthy and successful examples of an egalitarian, democratic educational institution. Founded in 1908 by Blanche Wolf and Janette Selig, volunteers at the College Settlement, who saw the need for music instruction among the arts courses already offered. It initially sprang from and was influenced by the Jewish immigrant experience (founders, key participants, etc. were Jewish) and the ideals of social justice where equality and opportunity were concerned surrounding that experience. It was very closely tied to the settlement movement which worked to bring the classes closer together and to alleviate problems facing the large communities of new immigrants. Jews were particularly involved in this progressive program.

The first three directors were: Johann Grolle, Arthur Cohn, and Sol Schoenbach. Members of the Philadelphia Orchestra (as teachers, volunteers, etc.) participated in Settlement activities, and instructors came from Temple University and other local universities.. Courses offered span instruments, voice, dance, and acting. Funding, endowments, scholarships helped to make the program more affordable. Johann Grolle noted that Settlement House was "a school where the influence of music is used for the development of a higher type of citizenship."

A 50th anniversary (1958) brochure explained that students come from "the immediate neighborhood of the school and from such distant places as Atlantic City and Chester....they are of all races, creeds, and color and they range in age from four-year-olds to adults...some students pay the full cost of their instruction and some, on partial or full scholarships, pay nothing at all or as little as twenty-five cents. No student need be deprived of instruction because of inability to pay- this has always been the policy of the school."

Camps

CAMP GALIL

www.campgalil.org

I. Historical Background

Camp Galil was founded in 1946 by Habonim (later Habonim Dror), a labor Zionist youth movement. It currently resides at its original location in northern Ottsville, PA, about 30 miles north of Philadelphia where it runs for seven weeks during the summer and hosts several seminars during the year. From its inception it has aimed to foster a cooperative, non-denominational, kibbutz atmosphere.

II. Philadelphia Presence – see the website

CAMP HOFNUNG

A digital photo collection of Camp Hofnung is housed at

<http://digital.library.temple.edu/cdm/search/searchterm/Camp%20Hofnung/mode/exact>

Historical Background and Philadelphia Presence

Begun in the 1925, this was the camp of the Workmen's Circle. Located near Pipersville in Bucks County, PA, it held summer sessions for children as well as for families. The camp ceased operating in 1967 and its camp grounds were sold. While it operated, weekends at the camp were often organized to entice new members to join Workmen's Circle. Camp activities centered on furthering the goals and ideologies of the Workmen's Circle in a more natural setting. Activities included sports, Yiddish study, assorted arts, including dramatic, etc.

In the words of one of its participants, “Camp Hofnung, which opened its doors in 1925 to a small handful of children whose parents were members of the Workmen’s Circle, became host, over its 40 odd years of existence, to many thousands of children from all walks of life, who enjoyed a respite from city life with a spectacular two weeks in the country. During those years we graduated from outdoor washrooms to bathroom facilities inside each bunk, from older children sleeping in tents to enough bungalows to house all of our campers, from swimming in the creek to a real Olympic size swimming pool, and many other long forgotten improvements. Toward the final days of our camp’s existence, we even had Camp Hofnung t-shirts—the closest we ever came to uniforms. But all of these changes never affected the spirit of Camp Hofnung—one for all, and all for one...a home away from home where Jewish Culture and the Yiddish language would be fostered—this in addition to the usual camp activities: sports of all kinds, arts and crafts, music, drama, and dance.” (ACC 2544, Workmen’s Circle, Camp Hofnung, 1998, 1997)

CAMP KINDERLAND

www.campkinderland.org

I. Historical Background

The Workmen’s Circle founded the camp in 1923 as a retreat for children from the tenements of New York City. Camp Kinderland, along with the rest of the left wing of the Workmen's Circle, split off in 1930, created the International Workers Order (IWO), and became the official summer camp of the Jewish section of the IWO. The camp's left-wing politics made it a comfortable place for many red diaper babies to attend, which caused it to be investigated during the McCarthy era. In 1954, the IWO was shut down and its assets liquidated by the government, which had determined that it was a Communist organization. At that time, Camp Kinderland became an independent corporation. Many Jews with connections to the Philadelphia leftist movement attended the camp.

II. Current Presence

Camp Kinderland is located in Tolland, Massachusetts. The camp is for boys and girls aged nine through sixteen.. The main topics of the curriculum are: equality, peace, community, social justice, activism, civil rights, Yiddishkeit, and friendship. While the registration process does not discriminate in favor of Jews, a large majority of campers are Jewish.

Political Organizations

Philadelphia had a substantial number of politically-focused leftist groups, and even those that were purely secular tended to have a large Jewish membership. The following organizations were mentioned in the interviews in this oral history collection.

JEWISH LABOR BUND ORGANIZATION OF PHILADELPHIA

The Jewish Labor Bund, affiliated with the national Jewish Labor Bund located in New York City, was one of several organizations that founded the Jewish Labor Committee in Philadelphia in 1934. Documentation on the Philadelphia chapter is scarce.

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS ORDER (Communist benefit association)

www.marxisthistory.org/subject/usa/eam/iwo.html

Historical Background

The International Workers Order began as a left wing breakaway organization from the Workmen's Circle. Founded 1930, it actively promoted the Communist Party's program and policies to its members. However, most members joined because it provided benefits to its members that were similar to those provided by the Workmen's Circle; sick benefits, insurance, and cultural activities in Philadelphia. The IWO also ran a Jewish summer camp, Camp Kinderland. Additionally the IWO owned and operated cemeteries throughout the US and Canada, a common practice among left wing Jewish mutual-aid organizations like the Farband and the Workmen's Circle. The IWO was made up of a total of 15 sections, the largest section of which was the Jewish section representing one-third of the membership of the IWO. In 1944 the Jewish section was renamed the Jewish People's Fraternal Order (JPFO).

The U.S. Attorney General placed the IWO on its list of subversive organizations in 1947. The New York State Insurance Department contended that as a consequence of the political activities of the IWO, which were prohibited to insurance organizations, the IWO's members' insurance benefits were in jeopardy. Even though the insurance part of the IWO was financially solvent and conservatively managed, the pressure from government bodies ultimately led to the IWO liquidation in 1954. Following the demise of the IWO, Camp Kinderland became an independent entity (see above) and the Jewish People's Fraternal Order reconstituted itself as the Jewish Cultural Clubs and Societies without the mutual benefit component of the JPFO.

JEWISH LABOR COMMITTEE

www.jewishlabor.org/

I. Historical Background

Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), headquartered in NYC with branch locations throughout the US, was founded in 1934, as a response to the rise of fascism in Europe. The group's goal was to insure good relations between the American Jewish community and the trade movement in America. An excellent general history of the JLC can be found here:

http://www.jewishlabor.org/JLC_Basic_History.pdf

II. Philadelphia Presence

In Philadelphia, JLC was one of the member organizations of the Labor Educational Centre, a network which included the major leftist and labor-oriented Jewish groups in the city. The Workmen's Circle and JLC had strong ties to one another. JLC continues to exist and work for union and labor rights both within and outside of the Jewish community. The Philadelphia Jewish Labor Committee rallied on behalf of the collective bargaining rights of workers in Wisconsin during February of 2011 and against the Irish Teacher Union's academic boycott of Israel in April 2013.

Actions specifically taken by the Philadelphia organization included:

- Lobbying for support of Israel and Soviet Jewry among unions, politicians, and the overall community
- Advocacy for the Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill
- Activities through JOINT, a coalition of the Jewish Labor Committee and the Negro Trade Union Leadership Council

- Chartered busses for the 1963 Civil Rights March, and in 1965 to picket the Soviet Embassy against antisemitism
- A consistent presence within many multi-group conferences or committees regarding a host of issues, such as racial equality (within and outside of labor relations), fair union involvement, advancement of workers' rights
- Part of the Human Rights Committee established by the Philadelphia AFL-CIO in 1961, which included groups such as the AFL-CIO Dept. of Civil Rights, City Council, etc.

JOINT CONFERENCE OF LABOR AND SOCIALIST ORGANIZATIONS

The conference included the Workmen's Circle, trade unions, Jewish Socialist Branches, and the Labor Institute. The group participated in mass meetings held at the Academy of Music in order to lobby for a 30-hour work week. In 1933 they organized a boycott of German-made products in conjunction with the American League for Defense of Jewish Rights.

PHILADELPHIA LABOR LYCEUM/ LABOR EDUCATIONAL CENTRE

Information compiled from: Pennsylvania Historical Society, MSS 46, Labor Educational Centre Records, 1936-1974, Box 1 and MSS Workmen's Circle, Philadelphia District Records, 1931-1968

Historical Background and Philadelphia Presence

The Labor Educational Centre was a hub for many Jewish socialist/labor organizations in the Philadelphia region. It served as the headquarters for many organizations and also offered meeting space for many other groups. Yiddish-speaking Jewish leftists founded the Centre and many of the day-to-day materials of the group were written in Yiddish. The Workmen's Circle was particularly important to it. Still, many of the groups involved were not specifically Jewish and not all were ideologically aligned. (For example: funds were accepted from both the Socialist Verband and the Bund.) Mutual aid associations, including a few *landsmanshaften*, also rented space. According to records, the main affiliated institutions were: *The Jewish Daily Forward*; The Jewish Labor Committee; Workmen's Circle of Philadelphia; Workmen's Circle Region No. 3

The Labor Educational Centre was housed in three different locations during its lifetime. The second location was at 924 Walnut Street. On September 15, 1972 the Labor Educational Centre left these premises and moved to the 1211 Chestnut Street Building, in Suite 907. During the negotiations for the sale of the location at Walnut Street, an offer was made by the "Father Devine Group" to buy the building. Despite the spelling, this reference in the records almost certainly refers to the group founded by the well-known African-American leader, Father Divine. However, given the date of the third move (two decades later) it would seem that these negotiations did not go through.

The lifespan of the Labor Educational Centre is uncertain. The early years of the group are well-documented in the "History of the Labor Lyceum," written by a member of the board of directors. At its peak, the Labor Educational Centre had a board of directors and many associated organizations. Meeting minutes as far back as 1952 indicate waning participation in the Labor Educational Centre itself. However, this may not be a trend; other evidence suggests that beyond this point, there was still enough member and group participation to warrant gala events and conferences of considerable size.

The Philadelphia Labor Lyceum, founded in 1887 and incorporated in 1892, was a club where laborers gathered to organize against manufacturers. After a few years, the Philadelphia Labor Lyceum met at and eventually purchased the former home of Reform Temple Keneseth Israel, 809-817 North Sixth Street. In the twentieth century meetings were held at the Labor Educational Centre.

Religious Institutions

JEWISH RENEWAL MOVEMENT

www.pnaior-phil.org/renewal - see the website for historical and current information

P'NAI OR, a Jewish Renewal Congregation in Philadelphia

www.pnaior-phil.org/ - see the website for historical and current information

Bibliography

For a more extensive bibliography see Aviva Lenoff's history thesis.

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