

THIS DAY IN JEWISH HISTORY

By David B. Green

HAARETZ

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November 4 / Mobster who made White Sox throw Series (maybe) is shot
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November 7 / Hard-drinking, 'sell-out' 'Wizard of Oz' screenwriter is born
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November 10 / The 'first English Jew' dies
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December 2 / Inventor of the LP is born
December 3 / First heart transplant patient goes under the knife
December 4 / The Maggid, untrained successor to Baal Shem Tov, dies
December 5 / One of Bollywood's leading ladies is born
December 6 / Odd man out in Zabar's troika dies
December 7 / Satmar Hasidism founder is saved
December 8 / The death of an Australian who set out to 'heal his country'
December 9 / All but one of Shabbetai Zvi's devotees are excommunicated
December 10 / The man who discovered retroviral RNA is born
December 11 / An artist who painted wonderfully in hiding from the Nazis is born
December 12 / America gets first (unofficial) female rabbi
December 13 / A false messiah burns at the stake
December 14 / Alfred Dreyfus's widow dies
December 15 / The Portuguese burn a converso backslider
December 16 / Maker of yogurt for 'happy digestion' is born

December 17 / A great Zionist mind dies young
December 18 / A soldier who revived Judaism in north Portugal is born
December 19 / 'Uganda plan' prompts shooting of Zionist leader
December 20 / A writer and champion of Kafka dies
December 21 / Plot to bomb Nazi HQ foiled
December 22 / Finnish citizenship for 'Mosaic Confessors'
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December 31 / The man who told Jews it was okay to engage with modern society dies

January

January 1 / Ellis Island festively opens to take in the tired and poor
January 2 / The founder of modern Jewish literature is born
January 3 / Zionists and Arabs ink first accord
January 4 / British barrister breaks glass ceiling
January 5 / Maryland Jews get the vote
January 6 / First Soviet yeshiva in 20 years opens in Moscow
January 7 / Hebrew's reviver is born
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January 10 / Producer who brought R&B to white America is born
January 11 / A future French premier is born
January 12 / Jews of Sicily expelled by Spanish rulers
January 13 / A Stalin-sanctioned murder staged to look like an accident
January 14 / Jews' Lane in Frankfurt burns to the ground, again
January 15 / A crime boss cashes in his chips
January 16 / House of Converts opens in London
January 17 / French Jew executed for 'ritual murder' of Christian child
January 18 / A kabbalah legend dies
January 19 / Hedy Lamarr, actress and inventor of torpedo anti-jamming technology, dies
January 20 / A Nazi parley
January 21 / Czech woman who drew fellow Auschwitz inmates is born
January 22 / Birth of a salesman

January 23 / A very stubborn pioneer of science is born
January 24 / Brian Epstein signs the Beatles
January 25 / An anti-pope of Jewish descent dies
January 26 / Acclaimed Russian-Jewish writer Isaac Babel sentenced to death in Moscow
January 27 / Nine Jewish 'spies' are hanged in Baghdad
January 28 / Translator of Yiddish Medieval romance dies
January 29 / 'Dr. Strangelove' premieres
January 30 / Hitler makes first call for Jews' 'annihilation'
January 31 / The Theodosian Code is published, spelling bad news for Jews

February

February 1 / The first rabbi in the New World is born
February 2 / Pioneer of Texas Jewish community dies
February 3 / A U.S. Army chaplain makes the ultimate sacrifice
February 4 / A controversial financier hangs
February 5 / World Jewry responds to French-instigated blood libel in Damascus
February 6 / The false messiah who founded Frankism is arrested in Warsaw
February 7 / Hungarian Jews receive protection
February 8 / Philosopher Martin Buber is born
February 9 / The Sanhedrin of Paris convenes at the behest of Napoleon
February 10 / A teacher and renouncer of Spinoza dies
February 11 / A heavyweight boxing champ is born
February 12 / The premiere of 'Rhapsody in Blue'
February 13 / A profound Zionist and Hadassah founder dies
February 14 / A Valentine's Day massacre in Alsace
February 15 / Birthday of graphic artist Art Spiegelman
February 16 / 'Midnight Cowboy' director John Schlesinger is born
February 17 / Congress gets its first Jewish lady
February 18 / Robert Oppenheimer, a father of the Bomb, dies
February 19 / Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique' is published
February 20 / He would save the Jews by saving the world: A human rights warrior dies
February 21 / Regensburg's Jews are driven out of the city
February 22 / Rashi is born
February 23 / Soviet spy Leopold Trepper is born
February 24 / A New Zealand premier is born
February 25 / Aleinu prayer prohibited in Castile
February 26 / Levi Strauss, blue jeans pioneer, is born
February 27 / A German Jewish feminist is born
February 28 / Author known for novel on anti-Semitism in U.S. dies

March

- March 1 / Extra, Extra! Yiddish newspaper prints!
- March 2 / Controversial French singer Serge Gainsbourg dies
- March 3 / Birth of an Orthodox rabbi who let the 20th century in
- March 4 / Owner of Egypt's grandest store brutally murdered in Cairo
- March 5 / Religious Zionist Mizrachi movement is founded
- March 6 / Julius and Ethel Rosenberg go on trial for espionage
- March 7 / CIA dirty trickster dies
- March 8 / A self-taught nuclear physicist is born
- March 9 / The 'father of public relations' dies
- March 10 / Gur Hasidic dynasty founder dies in Poland
- March 11 / An artist who saw minority children is born
- March 12 / Nazi Germany annexes Austria
- March 13 / Mad cartoonist Al Jaffee is born
- March 14 / First Jewish member of House of Representatives dies in hospital for insane
- March 15 / Anti-Jewish rioting begins in Seville
- March 16 / Pogrom in York wipes out Jewish community
- March 17 / A visionary architect dies
- March 18 / Jews struggle to settle in the New World
- March 19 / Persian Jews given choice: Convert or die
- March 20 / Jews start boycott of Nazi Germany
- March 21 / The rebbe who met with Freud
- March 22 / The officer who made waves in the Navy
- March 23 / Boy goes missing in Italy sparking blood libel
- March 24 / Death of great halakhic scholar Rabbi Joseph Caro
- March 25 / Fire breaks out at New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory
- March 26 / The first Jew to serve on Canada's top court dies
- March 27 / Elizabeth Taylor converts to Judaism
- March 28 / An alternative Jewish homeland is founded, almost
- March 29 / The founder of Reform Judaism is born
- March 30 / Sephardi chief rabbi recognizes 'lost' tribe of Indian Jews
- March 31 / The Spanish monarchy turns on the Jews

April

- April 1 / 'Madame' Helena (born Chaya) Rubinstein dies
- April 2 / The man nobody remembers who coined 'Zionism' dies
- April 3 / Death of a musical genius
- April 4 / An inventor sets up shop in Canada
- April 5 / A flawed U.S. Supreme Court justice dies

April 6 / Ottoman authority orders Jews to evacuate Tel Aviv
April 7 / Escape from Auschwitz takes shape
April 8 / The first synagogue in the U.S. is consecrated in New York City
April 9 / France's first Jewish prime minister is born
April 10 / A Russian farming school for Jewish boys is founded in America
April 11 / Violent public penance for secret Spanish Jews
April 12 / A modest Torah teacher who invented interactive study dies
April 13 / Birth of a brain behind 'Singin in the Rain'
April 14 / Jews of Antwerp are attacked
April 15 / An esteemed Jewish couple goes down with the Titanic
April 16 / A pioneer of DNA research dies
April 17 / An early donation for Brown University
April 18 / A founding father of economics born in London
April 19 / Daring escape from an Auschwitz-bound train
April 20 / In Germany, the start of a wave of massacres
April 21 / A great Jewish philanthropist dies
April 22 / U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opens in Washington
April 23 / Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital dies
April 24 / Bob Dylan lays down his first track
April 25 / U.S. recalls Jewish consul from Tunisia
April 26 / Expulsion from Brazil
April 27 / Founder of first Reform synagogue in England dies
April 28 / The first photojournalist is born
April 29 / Serenity now! Comic Jerry Seinfeld is born
April 30 / Theodor Herzl finishes his novel 'Old-New Land'

May

May 1 / American Jewish World Service is established
May 2 / An anti-Zionist rabbi dies in Jerusalem
May 3 / Allied forces' catastrophic attack
May 4 / 4 shot dead by National Guard in Vietnam war protest
May 5 / The poet who called out T.S. Eliot's anti-Semitism is born
May 6 / An aspiring banker marries up
May 7 / Dramatist who created role of 'good Jew' dies
May 8 / The first Mishna is printed
May 9 / An execution in Iran
May 10 / Lest we destroy earth: The first green philosopher is born
May 11 / Phil Silvers, funnyman who played scheming Sgt. Bilko, is born
May 12 / A Polish suicide to protest Allied indifference to the Jews' fate

May 13 / Harry Schwarz, South African lawyer who fought apartheid, is born
May 14 / An under-appreciated composer dies
May 15 / May Laws punish Russia's Jews
May 16 / Sammy Davis Jr. dies
May 17 / A 14th-century neighborhood watch begins
May 18 / Hundreds of Jews choose baptism over exile from French town
May 19 / Famed German salon hostess, deeply conflicted about her Judaism, is born
May 20 / Fans say goodbye to comic Gilda Radner
May 21 / Two teens kidnap and murder their neighbor
May 22 / Harvey Milk, U.S.'s first openly gay elected official, is born
May 23 / The Rambam comes to Israel
May 24 / A founder of Reform Judaism is born
May 25 / First pro baseball player born in New York
May 26 / 'The world's greatest entertainer' is born
May 27 / Hurva Synagogue reduced to rubble
May 28 / Jefferson's call to put Judaism 'on equal footing'
May 29 / Hungary enacts first anti-Jewish law
May 30 / Father of, and advocate against, the atomic bomb
May 31 / A historian who didn't support the invasion of Iraq is born

June

June 1 / Birthday of legendary Yiddish performer Molly Picon
June 2 / The beginning of the end of Iraq's Jewish community
June 3 / Shoah survivors found a 'kibbutz' in Germany
June 4 / A radical theater founder is born
June 5 / Canada's Jews get civil rights
June 6 / The Socialist congressman who defeated Tammany Hall dies
June 7 / A queen's doctor is executed for treason
June 8 / Anti-Jewish rioting in Morocco leaves 44 dead
June 10 / Maurice Sendak, creator of 'Where the Wild Things Are,' is born
June 11 / The first Jewish aviator dies in a plane crash
June 12 / Empowering the 'have-nots'
June 13 / A writer who celebrated the American dream is born
June 14 / The Germans take Paris, but Curious George's creators escape
June 15 / Refuseniks try to hijack plane in attempt to flee U.S.S.R.
June 16 / Romania's first postwar chief rabbi elected
June 17 / Paris is burning...Talmuds
June 18 / The British army officer with a Zionist heart dies
June 19 / Nobel-winning penicillin researcher is born

June 20 / Cairo bomb blast kills 22 Jews
June 21 / KKK kills three activists during Freedom Summer
June 22 / Filmmaker extraordinaire Billy Wilder is born
June 23 / Catholic Church 'kidnaps' 6-year-old Jewish Italian boy
June 24 / Polish lawyer who coined the word 'genocide' is born
June 25 / Annie 'Londonberry' begins her bicycle journey around the world
June 26 / Polish ghetto stages last-ditch revolt
June 27 / N.Y. Jews riot over rumor of school pogrom
June 28 / An archaeologist who brought Israel's history to life, dies
June 29 / An anti-Jewish Jewish-born polemicist is baptized
June 30 / Zionism's first political assassination

July

July 1 / First group of Jewish immigrants docks in Texas
July 2 / The first Jewish cleric in the U.S. dies
July 3 / First volume of Hebrew work printed
July 4 / The most popular living playwright in U.S. is born
July 5 / A British heavyweight champion is born
July 6 / Members of proto-Zionist group Bilu land in Palestine
July 7 / Harold Abrahams wins Olympic gold
July 8 / A founder of Gestalt therapy is born
July 9 / A future AIDS warrior enters the world
July 10 / Polish neighbors slaughter the Jews of Jedwabne
July 11 / The shellfish that ushered in a movement
July 12 / This day in Jewish history / Hamilton dies after duel with Burr
July 13 / A Quaker convert to Judaism and early Zionist is born
July 14 / Pope Paul IV orders Jews to live in a ghetto
July 15 / Crusaders break through defenses and conquer Jerusalem
July 16 / A Jewish Miss America who scandalized the press is born
July 17 / Officer refuses to expel Nazareth Arabs
July 18 / Civil War hero, Washington governor dies
July 19 / The father of Betty Boop is born
July 20 / A ship carrying 152 Jews who had fled Spain sails to South America
July 21 / Reuters' founder is born
July 22 / The Polish pediatrician who went to the end with his children was born
July 23 / Author of 'The Chosen' dies, aged 73
July 24 / Intel co-founder and self-described Luddite is born
July 25 / Bob Dylan goes electric and the crowd goes something or other
July 26 / The world gets its first taste of Esperanto

July 27 / 58 dead after El Al plane shot down over Bulgaria

July 28 / The mysterious murder of one of New York's wealthiest Jews

July 29 / Prototypical vamp of silent film is born

July 30 / The Jew who would sue Goebbels is born

July 31 / A trailblazing Canadian athlete wins silver

August

August 1 / 'Network' dramatist whose career began with a land mine dies

August 2 / A trusted confidant of Turkish sultans dies

August 3 / Author who told the story of Israel to the world is born

August 4 / Print puts the Zohar in reach of the masses

August 5 / Goodbye, Norma Jeane

August 6 / Harry Houdini survives 91 minutes underwater

August 7 / A man who studied the being of rock is born

August 8 / Jewish tailor ordered to stop disturbing church

August 9 / Three Jews establish Pinsk community

August 10 / 'Son of Sam' caught; asks 'What took so long?'

August 11 / Leading union organizer and women's rights advocate dies

August 12 / Man whose sky charts saved Columbus is born

August 13 / A maverick social activist is born

August 14 / A Jewish sports legend is born

August 15 / A brilliant but slovenly bachelor who drafted the New Deal dies

August 16 / A convert to Judaism celebrates her bat mitzvah - at age 61

August 17 / Suriname's Jews win autonomy unmatched until Israel's founding

August 18 / Greek Jewish community withers following fire

August 19 / Israel enacts Holocaust commemoration law

August 20 / Padua attacks its 'Turk-friendly' Jews

August 21 / The Jew who would become France's top Catholic is baptized

August 22 / The man who traced humanity's ascent - and descent - dies

August 23 / The 1929 massacre of Hebron's Jews

August 24 / Cologne Jews massacred

August 25 / A WWII survivor who built Hong Kong dies

August 26 / The man who gave us a painless polio vaccine is born

August 27 / Pioneering philanthropist and educator dies

August 28 / A rabbi learns of the Final Solution

August 29 / Rabbi turned archbishop and Jew hater dies

August 30 / Nearly blind female revolutionary arrested for shooting Lenin

August 31 / Death of zigzagging Soviet-Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg

Introduction

Jewish history hasn't just been a vale of tears, although sometimes it can seem that the need to hate and persecute Jews is hard-wired into humanity. It's probably fair to say, however, that if the Children of Israel didn't have such an extraordinary history of thought and achievement, they wouldn't have ended up as a universal punching bag.

So, when picking an event or a life for each day of the year, to tell an idiosyncratic, in-no-way-cohesive or comprehensive – but hopefully telling – tale about the panorama of Jewish history, one can't - and shouldn't try to - avoid recounting the pogroms, gassings, burnings and blood libels. As long as we also pay attention to the endless creativity, curiosity, ingenuity, humanity and humor that Jews have brought to the world.

Thus, as you travel through the coming year with this calendar, you will receive a daily dose of information about something or somebody with a Jewish connection – whether it's the woman who invented the bra, the man who sold the Beatles to the world, the expulsion that sent the first Jews to Manhattan island, the birth of the first pro-baseball player, the founding of a kibbutz in post-Holocaust Germany, the day that an IDF officer said no the expulsion of the Arabs of Nazareth or the bizarre tale of an English lord who converted to Judaism, and ended life behind bars.

I hope you find encountering these events and personalities as surprising, edifying and even entertaining as I did in writing about them. And offer my wishes for the coming year to be "less-than-interesting times" for the Jewish people and Israel.

David B. Green

September 1 / Fascist Italy announces its first anti-Jewish laws

After February 1938, the Mussolini regime turned on the Jews, apparently as expediency rather than ideology. The Italian people, however, didn't cooperate.



In this May 12, 1943 file photo, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini has finished saying goodbye to German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, unseen, as the train leaves a station in Germany. Photo by AP

September 1, 1938, was the day that the first of Italy's anti-Jewish racial laws were announced.

The introduction of regulations and policies that led to the expulsion of Jews from almost every sector of Italian public life marked a dramatic and radical turnabout by Benito Mussolini's Fascist government. As recently as February of that same year, the Italian Foreign Office had declared that "a specific Jewish problem does not exist in Italy" and that "the Fascist Government has no intention whatsoever of taking political, economic or moral measures against Jews."

These sentiments were consonant with statements made over the years by Mussolini, whose party was even open to Jews as members until 1938.

By July of 1938, however, the regime began laying the ground for the practical measures that followed.

First, on July 1, the government prohibited publication of translated books written by foreign Jews in other languages. A little later, a government-appointed committee of academics released a study meant to prove that the country's 70,000 Jews were racially different from Italians and other Aryans. The study's authors declared – as a

prescriptive, not a confession – that “It is time that the Italians frankly proclaimed themselves to be racists.”

On August 31, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported how in recent days, the Italian press had been full of articles claiming that the country’s Jews were disproportionately represented in its economic, educational and public life.

On September 1, the other shoe dropped. The first measure announced was that all Jews who had settled in Italy or its colonies (other than Ethiopia) since 1919 were now subject to expulsion. That immediately affected some 15,000 people, one-third of whom were refugees from Germany and Austria, at a time, of course, when it was becoming increasingly difficult for stateless persons to find a country that would take them in.

Not only that, but because currency exportation laws prohibited them from taking more than the equivalent of \$130 out of the country, these Jews would have to leave penniless.

The following day, all Jewish students and teachers were expelled from Italian schools and universities, effective October 16, 1938. The only exception to be made was for locally born Jewish university students, who were to be permitted to finish their studies.

The state did offer to bear the cost of the extra Jewish schools that would need to be established to accommodate those who had been removed from their regular study frameworks. Of course, any textbooks with Jewish authors, or that were deemed to have been “influenced by a Jewish trend of thought,” were also banned from Italian schools.

The decree of November 10 prohibited the employment of Jews in most nearly every imaginable economic sector, leading to the immediate unemployment of some 15,000 people, and it prohibited Jews from owning businesses or real estate beyond a certain size. And because Jews had already been prohibited from selling property, the government now expropriated an estimated 70 percent of Jewish-owned property, recompensing their owners with non-transferable, low-interest government bonds.

There is little sense that the Duce was responding to significant public anti-Jewish sentiment in suddenly introducing these laws. Rather, Mussolini seemed to be acceding to demands from Nazi Germany, though he denied this, and even though Italy would not formally become an Axis power until 1939. Removing Jews from Italy’s economic life was also meant to partly solve a serious unemployment problem, opening up public-sector jobs, for example, to out-of-work party members.

The arrest and deportation of Italy’s Jews, including those in territories occupied by Italian forces, had to wait until after September 1943, when Germany occupied the northern part of the country. Thanks to the refusal of large parts of the Italian population, and of Italian security officials to cooperate with the Germans, the final number of Jews who were murdered in Italy was approximately 7,000, with more than 40,000 surviving the war.

September 2 / The Hungarian immigrant behind Intel is born

Andy 'Only the Paranoid Survive' Grove evaded the Nazis with his mother and was instrumental in policy shifts that lifted Intel to a market cap of \$200 billion.

Andy Grove, the Hungarian-born chemical engineer who helped turn chip maker Intel into one of the world's most profitable and respected companies was born on September 2, 1936 in Budapest.

Andras Istvan Grof, as he was called at birth, was the son of Maria, a bookkeeper, and George, who owned a dairy. Andris, as he was known, suffered traumas in childhood and as a young adult. When he was four he had scarlet fever, which nearly killed him and left him with permanent hearing loss. During the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, he and his mother were taken in by non-Jewish friends, who supplied them with false identities, while his father was imprisoned as a forced laborer. The three survived and were reunited after the war. Finally, there was the Soviet crackdown on the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which brought Russian tanks into Budapest.

Andris was one of 200,000 Hungarians to flee for the West. In 1956 he escaped across the border into Austria, and in 1957 he went to New York, where he was taken in by an aunt and uncle in Brooklyn.

Changing his name to Andrew Stephen Grove, the young refugee resumed the chemical engineering studies he had begun in Hungary; he graduated at the top of his class from the City College of New York in 1960. Three years later he was awarded a doctorate in chemical engineering from the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1957, while working as a waiter for the summer at a New York hotel, he met a fellow Hungarian refugee, Eva Kasten; the two married the following year. They have two daughters.

Pass the chips

It was at Fairchild Semiconductor, where Grove worked from 1963 to 1968 — he was assistant director of development when he left — that he met Robert Noyce and Gordon E. Moore. When they founded Intel, in 1968, he was their first hire. Grove stayed at Intel for 36 years, helping it to become one of the biggest corporations in the world and the biggest manufacturer of microprocessors. Grove served Intel as president, chairman and CEO.

At the time of his retirement, in 2004, the firm's market capitalization was \$197 billion.

It was Grove, as Intel's head of engineering in 1976, who made the strategic decision to move from memory chips to microprocessors, and it was he who negotiated with

IBM to have that company's personal computers, introduced in the 1980s, operate on Intel processors exclusively.

Grove's gruff and competitive management style (his motto was "only the paranoid survive," which also served as the title of a book he wrote on management) were well-known, together with his modest lifestyle: he worked in a small cubicle no larger than that of other Intel office workers. He was also known for his policy of "constructive confrontation," by which anyone in the company, including him, could be challenged by colleagues about their ideas.

In 1995, after being diagnosed with prostate cancer, Grove became deeply involved in studying the treatment of the disease, from which he recovered. That approach continued five years later, after he learned he was suffering from Parkinson's disease, a progressive neurological disorder. In both cases, he was very public about what he learned (he also opened up about his childhood in Hungary, in a 2001 memoir, "Swimming Across"). He has taken a leadership role in funding research into Parkinson's and in pushing for structural changes in the way medical research is done in general.

Speaking before a Wired magazine conference on health care, in December 2012, for example, Grove's difficulty with movement and speech is pronounced, but his comments are as sharp and provocative as ever.

Frustrated with the slow rate of progress in Parkinson's research as well as diagnosis and treatment of the disease, Grove became a scientific advisor to the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, and pledged a large part of his estate to its work. He also gave a \$26 million gift to the City College of New York, in 2006, which renamed its engineering school in his honor.

September 3 / The Jews rise up in Lachwa Ghetto

On September 3, 1942, the residents of the Lachwa Ghetto began what may have been the first armed uprising by a Jewish population against the Nazis.

On this day in 1942, the residents of the Lachwa Ghetto, in what is today Belarus, began what may have been the first armed uprising by a Jewish ghetto population against the Germans.

The Jewish community in Lakhwa, originally in Poland, had its origins in the 17th century; by the start of World War II, Jews comprised some 2,300 of the village's 3,800 residents. Initially, the town was occupied by Soviet forces, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Despite Soviet restrictions on Jewish life there, Jews fleeing the Nazi occupation of lands to the west began to pour into Lakhva, increasing its Jewish population by some 40 percent. German forces invaded the USSR in 1941, and occupied the expanded Lakhva on July 8 of that year.

The ghetto was established the following April, but even before that, resistance cells began to organize, the first of them under the leadership of Isaac Rozhyn of the Betar youth movement. In contrast to other ghettos where there was resistance to the Germans, the underground coordinated with the local Judenrat, headed by Dov Lopatin, who had headed Lachwa's Zionist organization.

When the Germans entered the ghetto on September 3, 1942, they were met with armed opposition, which succeeded in killing six Germans and eight of their Belorussian gendarmes. In total, 1,500 Jews were killed, either in the fighting or in killing pits that had been prepared outside the town. An estimated 1,000 residents escaped from the ghetto, though only 600 survived long enough to make their way into the surrounding forest. At war's end, only 90 of the Jews of Lachwa were still alive.

September 4 / When Jewish women 'trod on each other's toes'

The men grimaced but Hannah Solomon saw a need: Thus was the National Council of Jewish Women born.



**Court of Honor and Grand Basin of the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition (Chicago, Illinois)
Photo by Wikipedia**

On September 4, 1893 the Jewish Women's Congress, a four-day, first national conclave of Jewish women, opened in Chicago, Illinois. The event, which took place within the context of that year's World Columbian Exposition, led to the establishment of the National Council of Jewish Women.

The driving force behind the congress was Hannah Greenebaum Solomon. Solomon (1858-1942), born in Chicago, was deeply involved in Jewish and general communal life. She and her sister, Henrietta Frank, had been the first Jews admitted to the Chicago Woman's Club, an influential educational and reform organization.

The Columbian Exposition, a world's fair that ran from May to October of 1893, had a Board of Lady Managers, which organized events tailored for women. But a conference for Jewish women alone was not something to be taken for granted.

The men frowned, but the women came

For one thing, Solomon recounted years later, the male leaders of the Jewish community didn't approve of the idea. It also was not obvious who should be invited.

At the time, she told *The American Hebrew* in 1920, "Emma Lazarus, Julia Richman and Henrietta Szold were perhaps the only nationally known Jewesses in the country," and only two synagogues had sisterhoods. Perhaps it's no surprise that just

assembling an organizing committee, which she did with fellow congregants from the city's Reform Temple Sinai, took Solomon a year.

When the congress opened, however, a full roster of 25 women were lined up to give talks, all on the subjects of religion, education or philanthropy. And, in terms of an audience, the event must have answered a need.

Reporting on the September 4 opening, a correspondent for The American Israelite took pleasure in describing how "women elbowed, trod on each others toes, and did everything else they could without violating the proprieties to gain the advantage of standing edgewise in a hall heavy with the fragrance of roses. ... By 10 o'clock the aisles were all filled, 10 minutes later there was an impossible jam at the doors that reached far down the corridor. Few men were present. They were thrust into the background into the remotest corners."

On the final day of congress, Sadie American, another Chicagoan who had been involved in the planning, presented the closing address in which she proposed the establishment of a permanent national women's organization. A formal proposal was presented by Julia Richman, the noted New York educator, and, according to Solomon, "every woman present at the congress pledged herself to support any organization that might be formed."

Thus was born the National Council of Jewish Women – with none other than Hannah Greenebaum Solomon elected its first president and Sadie American its corresponding secretary. Within three years, the NCJW had 3,300 members, and by the end of Solomon's 12-year tenure at its head its membership had reached 10,000.

During those initial years, it sponsored a number of educational initiatives – vocational training, Hebrew schools for communities without synagogues, adult study circles – and also worked with the settlement house movement for new immigrants, among other programs for weaker members of the Jewish community.

According to its website, today the NCJW has some 90,000 members, and it is dedicated to advancing a progressive agenda that includes working for children's welfare, reproductive rights and equal rights for women.

September 5 / France recruits 'science' to help 'spot the Jew'

The 'Jew and France' exhibit had one major snag: While purporting to highlight unique 'Jewish features,' it claimed they were insidiously 'passing' as Frenchmen.



'The Jew and France' exhibition in Paris, 1941. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 5, 1941, the exhibition “La Juif et la France” (The Jew and France) opened to the Parisian public. The pseudoscientific show, which took up two floors at the Palais Berlitz, was meant to educate the French about the nature of the enemy among them, in anticipation of the disappearance of that enemy from France and Europe in general.

Northern France, including Paris, had been occupied by the Germans for more than a year, since June 1940. Southern and eastern France remained technically unoccupied, but was ruled by the collaborationist Vichy regime.

In both regions, statutes and decrees were implemented that had the effect of removing the Jews from public life, confiscating their property and interning the more than half of the 350,000 of them who were foreign aliens. Deportations to the east began in 1942.

“The Jew and France” exhibition can be seen as preparing the ground for those deportations.

Officially, it was organized by the Institute for the Study of Jewish Affairs, a local body, but the initiative for the show came from Berlin, just as the institute itself was controlled by the Gestapo.

‘French? No!! Jew!’

The show was promoted by newsreels screened in the days before its opening, and by posters depicting a bird of prey with a Star of David around its neck poised over a body, with a text that read, “Frenchmen, help!” Loudspeakers on the boulevards between the Opera and the Place de la Republique urged pedestrians to visit the show. As they entered the Palais Berlitz – so called because it held a branch of the Berlitz language school – visitors were handed a leaflet explaining that they were about to become informed about “the whole extent of the peril posed by Jews for [their] country and for the world.”

As French historian Raymond Bach has pointed out, the paradox of the exhibition – which included plaster casts, as well as measurement charts, of “Jewish” noses, eyes, ears and lips, and posters of Jewish politicians Léon Blum and Pierre Mendès-France (printed on the latter were the words “French? No!! Jew!”) – is that it purveyed two contradictory messages. On the one hand, it purported to tell viewers how they could identify Jews, who, having successfully infiltrated French society, posed an invisible menace. On the other hand, a large part of the show was devoted to describing the supposedly characteristic physiognomy of the Jew, which, according to a French newsreel, was “the result of interbreeding between Aryans, Mongols and Negroes that occurred several thousand years ago,” with the result that, today, “the Jew’s face, body, bearing and gestures are peculiar to him.”

As historian Alice Conklin noted in her book “In the Museum of Man,” “The point of the exhibit, of course, was to create (or reinforce) in the public mind the stereotypical Jew who needed to be eliminated, not to identify ‘real’ ones. The Paris Préfecture de Police had already taken care of this, since its files contained the names and addresses of some 200,000 Jews in February 1941.”

“The Jew and France” was open through the first half of January 1942, during which time it drew some 276,000 guests, most of whom paid three francs (equivalent to about one euro today) for the experience. They included not a small number of Jews, reported Israeli historian Renée Poznanski, who doubtless were trying to understand what was happening to their society.

One indication of the answer came a month into the exhibition. On the night between October 2 and 3, following Yom Kippur, seven Paris synagogues were hit by bomb attacks and sustained significant physical damage. By the end of World War II, of the estimated prewar population of 350,000 Jews, about 77,000 were dead.

September 6 / The Roman siege of Jerusalem ends

On this day in 70 C.E., rebel forces in the city were vanquished. The conquest of Jerusalem was the climax of the Great Revolt, which began four years earlier with a number of attacks by Jewish rebels in the Land of Israel against Roman authorities.



Jerusalem Photo by Daniel Bar-On

On this day in 70 C.E., the Roman siege of Jerusalem ended as rebel forces in the city were vanquished. The siege and conquest of Jerusalem was the climax of the Great Revolt, which began four years earlier with a number of attacks by Jewish rebels in the Land of Israel against Roman authorities. After Syrian-based legionnaires failed to put down the unrest, responsibility for quelling the rebellion fell to the Roman general Vespasian, accompanied by his son Titus. They slowly made their way south from the Galilee beginning in 67 C.E., conquering town after town. When Vespasian returned to Rome to become emperor in 69 C.E., Titus took over the leadership of the counter-offensive.

Titus began his assault on Jerusalem in March of 70 C.E. with the help of four Roman legions who trapped between 600,000 (according to Tacitus) and 1 million people (the estimate of Josephus) in the city. The residents' situation was significantly worsened by the fact that the Jewish extremist group, the Sicarii, burned the Jewish population's stocks of food as part of a strategy meant to force them to fight the Romans rather than negotiate surrender.

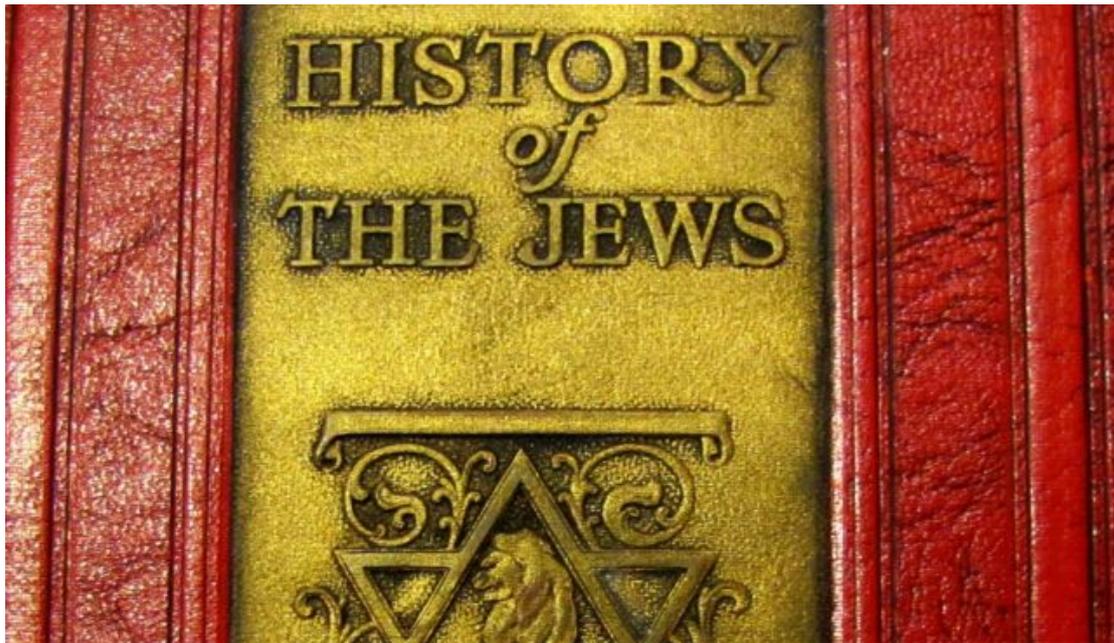
Following the destruction of the Third Wall and the Antonia Fortress, the Romans set themselves to conquering the Temple. Titus supposedly intended to leave the grand structure – just built in the preceding century by Herod the Great – intact to turn it into a temple to Jupiter, but a Roman soldier threw a torch into it and burned it to the ground famously on the 9th of Av. By this point in late August of 70 C.E., many Jews

fled the city and others moved to the upper city to make a final stand. The upper city fell on September 7 (although some sources say it happened September 26).

According to Josephus, the former Jewish general who defected to the Romans and became the great historian of the “Jewish Wars,” Titus killed most of the residents of the city, and ordered the razing of all but its tallest structures. Titus went on to succeed his father as emperor when Vespasian died in 79 C.E. His conquest of Jerusalem is commemorated by and dramatically depicted in the Arch of Titus, which tourists can visit today in Rome. (On another historical note, Titus also had a love affair with the Jewish Queen Berenice, daughter of Herod Agrippa I, who joined him in Rome during Vespasian’s rule.)

September 7 / Death of historian who compiled seminal book on Jews

Heinrich Graetz's book 'History of the Jews from Oldest Times to the Present' was the first of its kind, and continues to be read.



Heinrich Graetz's 'History of the Jews.'

On September 7, 1891, the man who wrote the first standard history of the Jewish people died. Heinrich Graetz had a vast and comprehensive knowledge of Jewish texts and was a master of narrative prose, so that even those who disagreed with his conclusions – and there were many – were obligated to pay attention to him. To this day, his work still serves as a measure of comparison for people in the field.

Tzvi Hirsh Graetz was born on October 31, 1817, in the small town of Xions (today called Ksiaz Wielkopolski, Poland). His father was a butcher. Graetz had a firm grounding in religious subjects, studying both in Zerkov and at a yeshiva in Wolstein,

while at the same time pursuing his own program of secular studies. This was at a time when Jews in Europe were contending with the challenge of reconciling their tradition with the world of Western science and thought that was opening up to them on the Continent.

In Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Graetz found a figure who could serve as a guide in negotiating the space between the two worlds. Hirsch invited him to live and study with him at his home in Oldenburg.

Ultimately, Hirsch became disappointed in Graetz's openness to the critical approach to Jewish texts then on the ascent, even though Graetz remained punctilious about Jewish observance throughout his life, and even though he never questioned the traditional view of the authorship of the Five Books of Moses.

Graetz left Oldenburg in 1840, and two years later was accepted for study at Breslau University, though as a Jew he could not receive his doctorate there. That was instead granted by the University of Jena, in central Germany.

Eventually, Graetz – who was very critical of the nascent Reform Judaism – found his place at the Jewish Theological Seminary founded by Rabbi Zechariah Frankel in Breslau, which was something of a progenitor of the Conservative movement. He began teaching there in 1853, and remained at Breslau until the end of his life. That's also the year Graetz published the first of the volumes of his "History of the Jews from Oldest Times to the Present." It was actually volume four of what would eventually be 11 volumes in German, but Graetz only completed the first three volumes, which dealt with the biblical and Second Temple periods – after he visited the Land of Israel – in 1872.

On his return from Palestine, Graetz joined the proto-Zionist Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) movement, and also took a great interest in other organizations, such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle, that were dealing with educational and social problems facing Jews in the Diaspora. For these sins, he was perceived as a Jewish nationalist, and attacked for it, both by German anti-Semites and other Jews.

Graetz was both intellectually bold and opinionated. He speculated freely about the authorship of the Prophets and the Writings; he rejected the idea of a personal messiah, instead seeing the Jews as a people with a messianic mission for humanity. He dismissed Jewish mysticism, partly because he had successfully proved that the Zohar, the central text of kabbala, was written much later than the time when Shimon bar Yochai, its traditional author, lived. He also allowed himself literary license that historians would not permit themselves today: for example, in the opening line of his History's first volume: "On a bright morning in spring, nomadic tribes penetrated into Israel."

It was Graetz whom Salo W. Baron, one of the great general Jewish historians of the 20th century, criticized for his "lachrymose conception of Jewish history." But Graetz was the pioneer, and his contribution to what was then a new field of study was undeniably seminal. And his "History of the Jews" was translated into many languages and continues to be read.

Heinrich Graetz died while visiting his son Leo, a physicist who lived in Munich. He was buried in Breslau.

September 8 / Kalisz Statute gives Polish Jews landmark civil rights protections

Charter issued in 1264 has been described as one of the first attempts at delineating 'human rights' in the modern sense of the phrase.



Great Synagogue in Kalisz known as Wielka Synagoga, 1914 Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 8, 1264, Boleslau the Pious, duke of Greater Poland, issued the General Charter of Jewish Liberties. Better known as the Kalisz Statute, the charter contained a set of 36 conditions mandating the rights and privileges of the Jewish community of Poland.

Boleslau (born about 1224, died 1279), was the son of Wladyslaw Odonic, who, together with his brother Przmesyl, gradually reconquered the lands lost by their father, and between 1257 and 1273 was the duke of Greater Poland and Poznan. During his reign, parts of Poland were invaded – and despoiled – by the Mongols. The duke invited Jews and others from Germany to Poland to help rebuild it. His charter can be seen as part of an effort to make the Jews feel welcome and secure, at a time when such forces as the church were looking to limit their ability to integrate into society.

Nonetheless, the Kalisz Statute was far-reaching in the guarantees it offered the Jews, and has even been described as one of the first attempts at delineating “human rights” in the modern sense of the phrase.

Although based on similar charters that had been issued in the recent past in Austria (1244) and Bohemia (1254), the Kalisz Statute was the most far-reaching. Its 36 points, presented in Latin, guaranteed Jews the right to govern their own internal affairs, and to adjudicate matters in Jewish courts, except in cases that involved Christians and Jews, which were to be heard in a royal tribunal rather than an

ecclesiastical court. Someone who murdered a Jew would be subject to “the proper sentence,” plus confiscation of all his property, and “wherever a Jew shall pass through our territory, no one shall offer any hindrance to him or molest or trouble him.”

Not only that, but Christians were forbidden from vandalizing synagogues or Jewish cemeteries, and faced punishment if they did. And if a Jew were to cry out for help in the night, and his Christian neighbors failed to come to his aid, “or heed the cry, every neighboring Christian shall be responsible to pay thirty shillings.”

‘Refrain from the blood’

Other clauses dealt with the conditions under which Jews could make loans, and the measures they could take when a loan went unredeemed. Another forbade Christians, “According to the ordinances of the pope, in the name of our Holy Father,” from accusing Jews of killing Christian children for their blood, “since according to the precept of their law, all Jews refrain from any blood.” Anybody who did wish to make such an accusation was obligated to produce three Christian witnesses and three Jewish witnesses to the crime for it to be proven.

The terms of the Kalisz Statute were confirmed by subsequent Polish kings into the 16th century, and served as a basis for Jewish privileges in Poland and Lithuania until the end of the 18th century. They also led to backlash by church officials, who in various periods and towns tried to impose different restrictions – e.g., segregated housing, wearing of identifying clothing or symbols, prohibition on the holding of public office – but generally with limited success.

In the 1920s, the artist Arthur Szyk, a proud Polish Jew, created a series of illuminated miniature paintings depicting Jewish life in Poland, accompanied by the text of the Kalisz Statute, in seven languages. Today, the originals of the miniatures are in the collection of the Jewish Museum, New York.

September 9 / Italy bombs Tel Aviv during WWII

The air raid that killed 137 was not the only one on British-controlled Palestine, but caused the greatest loss of human life.



Memorial for the victims of the Italian bombing. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 9, 1940, the Italian air force bombed Tel Aviv, killing 137 people. It was not the only air raid by Axis forces on British-controlled Palestine during World War II, but it was by far the most destructive in terms of loss of human life.

Italy had joined the Axis war effort on June 10, 1940, declaring war on France and the United Kingdom. Two weeks later, it and France signed an armistice, leaving the Italians, with bases in Ethiopia and in the Dodecanese Islands in the Mediterranean, free to attack British targets in the region. In Mandatory Palestine, Haifa was the principal strategic target of the Regio Aeronautica, with a dozen sorties setting out from Rhodes during the summer of 1940 for bombing raids over Haifa.

The British were aware that Palestine could serve as an object of air raids, with either bombs or gas, and pamphlets about how to respond to such raids were distributed as early as 1938, with occasional air-raid drills taking place too. But the Mandatory authorities did not allow Jewish citizens to bear arms, and there were no anti-aircraft defenses in place.

The September 9 raid took place at 4:58 P.M., and lasted three minutes, during which time 32 bombs were dropped, from 10 Italian Cant Z1007bis bombers. What was strange about the attack was that all of the bombs fell on residential areas, principally in the region of Bograshov and Trumpeldor streets, with none hitting the port of Jaffa, the natural target. (This didn't stop the Italians from releasing a statement declaring that "during the raid on Jaffa, port installations were hit and large fires started.")

According to Italian historian Alberto Rosselli, the original target of the bombers was in fact Haifa, with its port and refineries, but the Italian planes were intercepted by British aircraft. The Italians were then ordered to drop their loads on the Tel Aviv port before returning to base, and the fact that their bombs hit residential targets was simply a mistake. Also hit was the Palestinian village of Sumail, which stood in what is today Ramat Aviv. Seven of the victims of the bombing, five of them children, were from there.

Local residents as well as Australian soldiers based in Tel Aviv took part in the evacuation of victims, with the most seriously injured being taken to Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, because of a lack of medical facilities in Tel Aviv. By the morning of September 10, a Tuesday, 100 bodies had been recovered; 53 of the victims were children. In the coming days and weeks, another 30 Tel Aviv residents died of their injuries.

Bodies were taken to the Balfour School, where families came to identify them. Funerals for 65 victims began shortly after noon on that Tuesday, with burials taking place at Nahalat Yitzhak cemetery. Later in the day, another 25 bodies were interred.

Condemnations of the bombing came in from Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, and from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. That same week, by coincidence, the British began to recruit Jewish residents of the country to undergo military training, and fight with the Allies. Several days after the Tel Aviv attack, British planes made retaliatory raids against the Italian bases in Rhodes and Leros.

The Tel Aviv air raid was the worst to hit Mandatory Palestine during World War II, although another bombing raid the following spring – by French planes based in Syria – killed another 13 residents of Tel Aviv, on June 12, 1941. A number of other raids were directed against Haifa.

September 10 / Poet who wrote about Armenian genocide (and wed an anti-Semite) is born

Franz Werfel's work 'The Forty Days of Musa Dagh' was widely seen as a warning about the Nazi rise to power.



A sketch of Franz Werfel by Erich Büttner, 1915. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

September 10, 1890 is the birthdate of Franz Werfel, the Prague-born Jewish poet, dramatist and novelist, whose most acclaimed work, the 1933 “The Forty Days of Musa Dagh,” about the Armenian genocide, was widely read as a warning about the Nazi rise to power and the murderous threat it posed to the Jews.

Franz Werfel was the first of three children of Rudolf Werfel and the former Albine Kussi. Rudolf owned a successful glove manufacturing firm in the Bohemian capital. Franz was largely raised by a Catholic governess called Barbara, who took him to visit both church and synagogue. Franz developed an early affinity to Catholicism, setting up his own altar at home while still a child, and in general was fascinated by the religious experience.

Werfel attended a school run by the ecumenically minded Catholic Piarist order, where a rabbi was invited in to give Jewish boys instruction for their bar mitzvah. That was followed by gymnasium in Prague, during which time he already befriended Franz Kafka and Max Brod, hanging out with them and other German-language writers at the Arco Cafe.

In 1911, at age 21, Werfel published his first book, a poetry collection called “Weltfreund” (The World Lover), which included such open-hearted lines as “My only wish is to be related to you, O Man!” That same year, he began his period of obligatory service in the Austro-Hungarian army.

After the army, Werfel moved to Leipzig, where he began working as an editor of avant-garde literature for the German publisher Kurt Wolff. He now became acquainted with such writers as Martin Buber, Else Lasker-Schuller and Rainer-Maria Rilke, and was involved in organizing pacifist activities.

Pacifist or not, Werfel was called up to service in World War I, and was sent to the Russian front as a telephone operator, which left him with ample time for writing. In 1917, the army transferred him to its press bureau, recalling him to Vienna.

‘Bow-legged Jew with bulging lips’

It was in 1918 that Werfel met Alma Mahler, the femme-fatale widow of composer Gustav Mahler and former lover of painter Oskar Kokoschka. At the time she was married to architect Walter Gropius, who was off in the war.

Mahler, who was 11 years Werfel’s senior, was quite openly anti-Semitic, referring to him as a “fat, bow-legged Jew with bulging lips,” but she was also in love with him, and their relationship continued for the rest of Werfel’s life.

When Mahler became pregnant with Werfel’s child, Gropius granted her a divorce. She had the baby but it died within a year of birth, due to Werfel’s “degenerate seed,” as Mahler had it. She refused to marry him until 1929, and then only after he had appeared before a state clerk and “resigned” from the Jewish community, though he never converted.

Werfel was introduced to the Armenian saga by a chance meeting in Damascus, and the result was a best-selling novel about the Turks’ 1915 campaign against the Armenians. He described the book to audiences as telling how “one of the oldest and most venerable peoples of the world has been destroyed, murdered, almost exterminated ... by their own countrymen.”

Not surprisingly, “The Forty Days” was one of the first books consigned to the bonfires by the Nazis, and Werfel’s application to join the Third Reich’s Organization of German Authors was rejected. Werfel and Mahler fled Austria after the Anschluss, in 1938, and after being given shelter briefly at the Catholic Sanctuary in Lourdes, they were smuggled out of Europe with other writers by the American journalist-rescuer Varian Fry.

Resettled in Southern California, Werfel made good on a promise to write about St. Bernadette of Lourdes if he escaped from Europe alive, producing the novel “The Song of Bernadette” in 1941, which was remade as a hit film two years later.

Werfel’s last years were taken up with writing a number of works dealing with religion, in particular the tension that existed until his death between his Jewish background and his spiritual affinity for Catholicism. Much to the frustration of his wife, he never did convert.

Franz Werfel died on August 26, 1945, at the age of 54. Alma Mahler passed away in 1964.

September 11 / Ponderosa patriarch Lorne Greene dies

Scion of Russian Jewry, called Chaim growing up, seemed very much at home on the expansive Nevada flatlands. And on the Battleship Galactica.



Lorne Greene from episode of "Bonanza."

On September 11, 1987, actor Lorne Greene, the iconic paterfamilias of the Cartwright clan on the long-running TV series “Bonanza,” died at the age of 72.

Ben Cartwright may have seemed very much at home in the expansive Nevada flatlands of the Ponderosa ranch, but the actor who filled his boots was the son of Russian Jews who immigrated to Ottawa, Ontario early in the 20th century.

His original name was Lyon Himan Green, and he was born on February 15, 1915, the son of Daniel and Dora Green, he from Vitebsk, she from outside Minsk, both in current-day Belarus. The couple had met and married in the old country. Once Daniel had set himself up in Ontario, he called for Dora to join, shortly before the birth of their second son. (Lyon had an older brother who died in 1918 at age 5 of influenza.)

Daniel owned a shoe-repair shop behind the family home in The Flats section of Ottawa, near the Canadian houses of parliament. He specialized in making orthopedic shoes, and did good business. In her memoir about Lorne Greene, Linda Greene Bennett, his daughter, says her father recalled being set up with a shoeshine stand by his father in the center of town at age 11 or 12.

Both his parents were Zionists, and Lorne, who was called Chaim at home, grew up speaking Yiddish.

Although he began Queen's University in Ontario as a chemical engineering student, Greene (who meanwhile added the "e" to the surname) switched to being a language major, and spent his free time acting and working at the campus radio station.

The Voice of Canada

With his sonorous voice, he was a natural for radio, and after graduation Greene was hired by the Canadian Broadcasting Company as a news reader. By World War II, which Canada entered in 1939, Greene was the leading national news broadcaster for the CBC, which dubbed him "The Voice of Canada." (So grave did he sound at times that he also picked up the epithet "The Voice of Doom.")

Greene created a stopwatch for broadcasters that showed time remaining, rather than time elapsed, and during a 1953 trip to New York to market the timepiece, he met a producer at the CBS-TV drama program "Studio One," who offered him work. That quickly led to several roles on Broadway, then film work in the United States. His movie debut was in 1954 as the Apostle Peter in "The Silver Chalice."

Finally, in 1959 he won a starring role in NBC's "Bonanza," playing the sagacious, thrice-widowed father of three grown men who together run the family's 600,000-acre Nevada ranch, sharing each other's challenges, triumphs and griefs.

Greene said that he based his portrayal of Ben Cartwright – combining "authority with kindness" – on his memories of his father. Interestingly, the creator of "Bonanza," Daniel Dortort, told journalist Ruth Ellen Gruber that he named the character for his own Russian-immigrant father, who was called Ben, and that "essentially, the values I put into 'Bonanza' are Jewish values that I learned in my home, from my father."

"Bonanza" was the first one-hour TV series broadcast in color, and ran 14 seasons, from 1959 to 1973. At its peak, Greene was said to be earning \$32,000 an episode, and he so identified with his character that he built himself a replica of the Cartwrights' Ponderosa ranch house.

Greene was married twice and had three daughters. He also had a career on the side as recording artist, with songs half-spoken, half-sung. After "Bonanza" was canceled, he continued working in both TV and film, most notably in the sci-fi movie and series "Battlestar Galactica," playing Commander Adama. He was also involved in conservation work, hosting a TV nature series, and founded a Toronto school of radio arts.

Shortly before his death, he signed a contract to appear in a TV movie sequel, "Bonanza: The Next Generation," but died of pneumonia, following abdominal surgery before filming began, and the screenplay was rewritten without his character.

September 12 / An artist who painted his politics is born

Ben Shahn's social realism focused on social injustices, the Great Depression, and Jewish themes like the Passover story.

September 12, 1898, was the birthdate of Ben Shahn, the highly topical painter, printmaker and photographer whose works still serve as a running commentary on the historical trends of 20th-century American history. Shahn's highly accessible style and clear political sentiments meant that his work was both extremely popular and recognizable, but also led to his being dismissed as a mere "illustrator," sometimes by those who didn't share his opinions.

Ben Shahn was born in Kovno (today, Kaunas), Lithuania, then part of Russia. He was the oldest of Joshua Hessel Shahn and Gittel (nee Lieberman) Shahn's three children. In 1906, after Joshua, a socialist and outspoken opponent of the czar, had been exiled to Siberia, Gittel and the children made their way to the United States, where they eventually were reunited with the father.

The family settled in Brooklyn, New York, where Joshua, originally a woodcarver, began working as a carpenter. Back in Russia, Ben had been educated at a Talmud Torah, and inculcated in the stories of the Hebrew Bible, and in the U.S., he was encouraged by his parents to read widely. In his teens, he also served as an apprentice to an uncle who had a lithography shop. He received his high school degree through night study at the Educational Alliance, but then followed that with biology studies at New York University, and later art at City College and the National Academy of Design.

Beginning in 1924, Shahn spent two years traveling in Europe and North Africa with Tillie Goldstein, who had become his wife two years earlier. In 1927, he left for another two years of travel. His exposure to the Parisian art world convinced him of what he didn't want to be, but he was still unsure about which direction pursue. In her 1993 book about Shahn, Frances Pohl quotes from something the artist later wrote about that period:

"I didn't know where I stood when I came back to America in 1929. I had seen all the right pictures and read all the right books – Vollard, Meier-Graffe, David Hume. But still it didn't add up to anything. Here I am, I said to myself, [31] years old, the son of a carpenter. I like stories and people. The French school is not for me. Vollard is wrong for me. If I am to be a painter I must show the world how it looks through my eyes, not theirs."

What emerged from Shahn's unsettled feeling was his own form of social realism: Its earliest and strongest expression was a series of 23 gouaches he produced and exhibited in 1932 about the trial and execution of Ferdinando Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, the two Italian immigrant anarchists who were electrocuted in 1927 for a robbery-killing on the basis of highly suspect evidence.

Following that, Shahn served as an assistant to Mexican muralist Diego Rivera in his ill-fated 1933 project in Rockefeller Center, a work called "Man at the Crossroads" that was destroyed by the Rockefellers before it was ever seen by the public. (Rivera had included some highly provocative political images in the work, as well as taking a visual poke at John D. Rockefeller himself.) Other public murals Shahn created during the 1930s include 13 works done at a Bronx post office based on Walt Whitman's poem "I Hear America Singing," and a fresco mural for the planned New Jersey town of Jersey Homesteads, later renamed Roosevelt, telling the story of the largely Jewish immigrant community. Thematically, the mural follows the narrative pattern of the Passover Haggadah, of slavery, deliverance and redemption. (Shahn and his second wife, Bernarda Bryson, also moved to Homesteads in 1938, and lived there until the end of his life.)

In the mid-1930s, Shahn was hired by the Farm Security Administration, a New Deal body, to travel the American South and photograph its residents. In this he joined Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, creating some of the best-known photographic images of the Great Depression.

During World War II, the Office of War Information employed him to create posters, but most of what he produced was not enthusiastically patriotic enough to be distributed. He captured the brutality and destruction of war, themes that weren't deemed appropriate for public propaganda.

From 1947 until 1959, Shahn did extensive graphic work for the Columbia Broadcasting System, including promotional work but also, for example, images commissioned by the TV documentary unit run by Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly. These included a series of sketches and paintings of Louis Armstrong for a 1956 profile of the musician. He also did commissioned work for such magazines as Time and Fortune, and was successful enough that he could accept only jobs that matched his political beliefs.

One of Shahn's most well-known Jewish works was a 1965 Haggadah, which incorporated watercolor images he had created three decades earlier. It also includes his distinctive form of Hebrew lettering.

Shahn represented the U.S. at the Venice Biennale in 1954, and was invited to deliver the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard University in 1956-7. But he was also called in for questioning by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1950s, and was rejected artistically by formalist critics like Clement Greenberg. Yet the same year he was questioned by the HUAC, Shahn also was the subject of a 10-page spread in a State Department magazine distributed in the Soviet Union. According to The New York Times, "the Russians did not like what they saw and declared that his paintings and sketches reflected abstract decadence."

Ben Shahn died of a heart attack following surgery in New York, on March 14, 1969. He was 70 years old.

September 13 / Prominent American Jew 'Sir Oracle' is born

Cyrus Adler was behind most important American Jewish institutions, for all that he didn't command much contemporary respect.



Cyrus Adler

September 13, 1863, is the birthdate of Cyrus Adler, the scholar and official who seems to have had a hand in the creation of most every American Jewish institution one could think of – and a few others as well. In addition, Adler had the distinction of being the first person to receive his Ph.D. in the field of Semitic studies in the United States.

Despite his many accomplishments, Adler had a reputation for self-importance and for dilettantism that have – perhaps unfairly – dogged his legacy.

Cyrus Adler was born in Van Buren, Arkansas, the third of the four children of Samuel Adler and the former Sarah Sulzberger. Samuel managed a nearby cotton plantation and also was a merchant. Soon after the birth of Cyrus, at the height of the U.S. Civil War, the family moved north, eventually settling, after the father's death, in 1867, in Philadelphia, where his mother's brother lived.

While his uncle David Sulzberger pushed him to train for the law, a cousin, Mayer Sulzberger, introduced Cyrus to the family's fine library, sparking an early interest in scholarly studies. Already as a high school student, Cyrus volunteered to catalog the library of the Philadelphia rabbi and educator Isaac Lesser. Graduating in 1878, Cyrus delivered his class' commencement address, on the subject of "Eccentricities of Great Men."

A question mark of a man

Adler received his undergraduate and master's degrees at the University of Pennsylvania, and then his doctorate, in Assyriology, at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore, in 1887. As historian Jonathan Sarna noted, in a 1989 article in the journal *American Jewish History* examining Adler and his reputation - Adler was a diligent student, and this he may well have been conscious of the fact that hard work could make up for a lack of authentic genius.

As for his college classmates, they depicted him in their yearbook as a question mark, while offering following mock epigraph for him, "I am Sir Oracle, when I ope my lips let no dog bark."

Sarna tells us that Adler was very proud of his Ph.D., and always insisted on being referred to as "doctor," if possible, with the word spelled out in full. But to be fair, his achievement was a significant one. He was the first native-born Jew to receive a doctoral degree at home in a field that was as close as possible at the time to Jewish studies.

For several years, he taught in the Semitics department at Johns Hopkins, and until 1908, when he moved back to Philadelphia, he also held various appointments at the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington. There, he organized the United States exhibitions that would appear at several expositions in American cities, and also served as a curator of Semitics and archaeology.

It was in this capacity that Adler discovered what has been called the "Jefferson Bible," a version of the New Testament edited by America's third president, who cut and pasted the Christian Bible in order to assemble a book that delivered what he understood to be the doctrine of Jesus. The volume was notable for Jefferson's having elided all the references to Jesus' divine attributes or any miracles.

In 1905, Adler married Racie Friedenwald, of Baltimore, and three years later, he resigned from the Smithsonian to become the first president of the newly established Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, in Philadelphia (which today is the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies, at the University of Pennsylvania). This marked a move away from scholarly studies in the direction of the administrative work that marked the rest of his career, during which he helped to establish many institutions that are still active today.

These included the Jewish Publication Society of America, where he also chaired the committee that undertook the first Jewish translation of the Hebrew Bible; the United Synagogue of America, the lay organization that oversees the Conservative movement; the Jewish Welfare Board; the American Jewish Committee, which he represented at the Paris Peace Conference, in 1919. Although Adler was ambivalent about the nascent Zionist movement, he was also on the board of the Jewish Agency, which was founded in 1929.

Americanizing Jewish scholarship

Adler also edited the American Jewish Yearbook during its first seven years, was an editor of the Jewish Encyclopedia, and edited the Jewish Quarterly Review.

From Sarna's point of view, Adler helped bring about both the professionalization and Americanization of Jewish scholarship in the United States. Even if Adler's dream of the establishment of a "Jewish Academy of America" never came to fruition, he was responsible for the creation or leadership of numerous less comprehensive institutions that together could be the component parts of such a body

"Had Adler done no more than develop, Americanize, and professionalize Jewish scholarship," writes Sarna, "his place in American Jewish history would certainly have been secure," before going on to point to the communal organizations he also helped to establish. He was "American Jewry's first great 'scholar-doer,'" concludes Sarna, himself one of the most visible Jewish academics in the United States today.

Cyrus Adler died on April 7, 1940, seven years after poor health forced him to largely retire from public life. He and his wife Racie had one child, Sarah.

September 14 / Hank Greenberg at bat

Baseball Hall-of-famer Hank Greenberg, the first Jew to be named Most Valuable Player, started his major league career on this day in 1930 with the Detroit Tigers.



Hank Greenberg. Photo by Youtube

On this day in 1930, baseball player Hank Greenberg made his first appearance in the major leagues. Greenberg is remembered as the first Jewish player to make the ranks of baseball superstars – he was the first to be named Most Valuable Player in either the American or National leagues – as well as for his decision not to play on Yom .Kippur

Born Henry Benjamin Greenberg in 1911, the future Detroit Tigers first baseman grew up in the Bronx. In 1929, he turned down a contract from the New York Yankees because the team already had the legendary Lou Gehrig playing first base, but after a year at university, Greenberg signed with the Tigers. By 1934, Greenberg was batting .339 and played a key role in making the Tigers contenders for the .American League pennant

As the High Holidays approached that year, he initially announced that he would not play on Rosh Hashanah, but after a public outcry and a consultation with a (Reform) rabbi, Greenberg revised his decision, leading a local paper to state in a headline: “Talmud clears Greenberg for holiday play.” In the game, against the Boston Red Sox, Greenberg hit two home runs, leading the Tigers to a 2-1 victory and eliciting a front page banner headline in the Detroit Free Press with Hebrew letters spelling out “Happy New Year.” Ten days later, however, on Yom Kippur – after it was clear that

his team had clinched the American League title – Greenberg chose to spend the holiday in synagogue rather than on the field. The poet Edgar A. Guest responded with a verse that ended: “We shall miss him on the infield and / shall miss him at the bat / But he’s true to his religion – and I honor / him for that.” Nonetheless, the Tigers lost that game to the Yankees and, later in the World Series, they went down to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games

Hank Greenberg served 45 months in the U.S. Air Force during World War II and returned to the Tigers mid-season in 1945. He retired in 1947 and was elected to the Hall of Fame in 1956. In a relatively brief major league career of 1,394 games, Greenberg’s overall batting average was an impressive .313. He hit 331 homeruns and 1,276 RBIs over his career. Hank Greenberg died in 1986.

September 15 / A refuge for persecuted Jews is founded – almost

The colony of Ararat never materialized, but the story behind it remains one of the more curious blips in American-Jewish history.



Detail of a map of where Ararat would have been.

On September 15, 1825, a ceremony was held in Buffalo, New York, marking the founding of Ararat, a colony meant to serve as a refuge for persecuted Jews from around the world, and that was to be situated north of the city on an island in the Niagara River. The colony never did materialize, but the story behind it remains one of the more curious blips in American-Jewish history.

The man behind Ararat – the name, of course, comes from the mountaintop where Noah’s Ark rested while waiting for the flood waters to recede – was Mordecai Manuel Noah (1785-1851), a Philadelphia-born Jew whose career included public service as a U.S. diplomat in Tunis (from which he was recalled by Secretary of State James Monroe, who decided that Noah’s Jewishness was as a disability) and as sheriff of New York, playwright and journalist.

Noah’s vision of a shelter for the world’s endangered Jews was accompanied by his perception of himself as their savior. Yet his outlook also included an element of proto-Zionism. As early as 1818, Noah had determined that, "Never were prospects for the restoration of the Jewish nation to their ancient rights and dominion more brilliant than they are at present." The world’s 7 million Jews, he averred, possessed "more wealth, activity, influence, and talents, than any body of people of their number on earth," and he foresaw a time when they would "march in triumphant numbers, and possess themselves once more of [Palestine], and take their rank among the governments of the earth."

Noah's concern for his people's welfare, however, was prompted in part by a more self-serving belief that the creation of Ararat on Grand Island would present a real-estate bonanza for himself and the investors he hoped to attract. A year earlier, he had written to Peter B. Porter, a New York politician and businessman (and later U.S. secretary of war), who was one of the planners of the Erie Canal and at the time was buying up land along its course. (The canal, which opened a month after the public presentation of the Ararat idea, cut across almost the entire width of New York State, making it possible to navigate by water from the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.)

Noah, writing to Porter on August 17, 1824, described his hopes for Ararat, and explained how a "small investment" of \$10,000 by his correspondent could yield "immense profit" for the two of them.

"In laying off a City to contain 1,000 acres, divided into 1,000 building Lots, I shall have no difficulty in disposing of these 1,000 Lots, free of taxes for five years, at \$100 each lot. And such will be the pressure and anxiety in Europe to obtain a lot of undisputed

title that the whole Island can be disposed of with ease ... thus offering a happy & safe asylum to our people, and at the same time -- by & with their approbation & consent --realising a princely fortune."

In the same letter, Noah acknowledged that there were those among his co-religionists who would scoff at his idea, principally out of fear that the arrival of Jews from Europe on American shores would bring those already there into disrepute. But Noah was convinced, he wrote, that "no man is a prophet in his own Country," and that his own reputation in American life would help to sell the idea in Europe.

September 15, 1825, the day after Rosh Hashanah, was meant to be the moment of Ararat's launching. Since there were not enough boats available to take all who were interested to a ceremony Grand Island, Noah rented St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Buffalo – the town's only house of worship – to which he marched in the center of a procession of dignitaries, clergymen and Masons, from Buffalo's Masonic lodge. (He was dressed in the supposed garb of a "Judge of Israel," which was, in fact, a costume, complete with gold medallion, borrowed from a nearby theater where it was worn by the character of Richard III.)

In a non-denominational service at the church, Noah proclaimed the plan for a "City of Refuge" to be built on Grand Island, which he explained would be a halfway home, intended for a "period of regeneration." In America, "under the influence of perfect freedom," the Jews could prepare themselves for a future time when they could return to Zion. As historian Jonathan Sarna describes it in his book "American Judaism," Ararat was to be a "temporary resting place between tribulation and redemption."

Peter Porter did not respond to Mordecai M. Noah's correspondence in a timely fashion -- nor did the downtrodden Jews of Europe. The idea was ridiculed both at home and abroad (including by the grand rabbi of Paris), and by the end of 1825, Noah himself was advising friends not to invest in Ararat. The land that had been intended for the colony was soon sold off to a timber investor.

What remains of Ararat, aside from the tale itself, is a 136-kg cornerstone, inscribed in Hebrew with the Shema prayer, that had been unveiled at the St. Paul's ceremony, and that spent most of the next century and a half moving from place to place – including the front lawn of Peter Porter's home, for some time. Today it is on display at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

Visitors to the area, which is adjacent to Niagara Falls, who want to explore the Ararat concept more deeply, can avail themselves of a walking tour of the virtual colony on Grand Island, created by a Canadian-American academic team calling itself "[Mapping Ararat](#): An Imaginary Jewish Homelands Project."

September 16 / A luxury car's namesake is born

The nickname of Adrienne Manuela Ramona Jellinek, the granddaughter of a highly distinguished rabbinic scholar, later became associated with the Nazis' auto of choice.



Emil Jellinek driving his Daimler Phoenix. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

September 16, 1889, is the birthdate of “Mercedes” Adrienne Manuela Ramona Jellinek, the namesake of Mercedes-Benz cars. Even though her father’s involvement with the car’s manufacturer, Daimler, ended before World War I, the company maintained the name for its line of cars. Thus, the quintessential German car, whose 770 luxury model was the auto of choice for the very pinnacle of the Nazi hierarchy, bore the name of the granddaughter of one of the most distinguished rabbinic scholars and preachers of late-19th century Vienna.

Adrienne Manuela Ramona Jellinek was the third child, and first daughter, of Emil Jellinek (1853-1918) and the former Rachel Goggman Cenrobert (1854-1893). Emil’s father was Rabbi Adolf Aharon Jellinek, was not only probably the best-known rabbinic orator of his day in Vienna, but also a scholar of midrashic and mystical literature. It was Adolf Jellinek who postulated that the Zohar, the principal text of Kabbala, was written by the 13th-century Moses de Leon, although de Leon attributed the work to Shimon bar Yochai.

Two of Adolf Jellinek’s three sons, Georg and Max were university professors, the former of law, the latter of philology. It was the middle son, Emil, however, who had the more dashing career as racing-car owner and Austrian diplomat. Not an intellectual or even a good student, Emil was sent to Morocco in the early 1870s when a friend of his father’s arranged a job for him in the diplomatic corps. That was followed by consular jobs in Algeria, where he met and later married Rachel

Goggman Cenrobert, an Algerian Jew. For some time, Emil worked with Rachel's father in exporting Algerian tobacco to Europe.

The family moved back to Austria, and Emil began working for an insurance company, while living the life of a bon vivant. When he and Rachel had a daughter, born in Vienna in 1889, they named her Adrienne Manuela Ramona, but called her by the nickname Mercedes, meaning "mercies" in Spanish. Rachel died when her daughter was four years old.

Emil spent the winters in Nice, on the French Riviera, where he liked to race cars, calling his team by his daughter's nickname. He became his country's consul general in the town, and he also began selling automobiles to the rich and famous of Europe who also had vacation homes in Nice. One of the companies he represented was Daimler Motoren Gesellschaft. He visited the company's designers, Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach, in Stuttgart, and sent them frequent notes with suggestions (and complaints) about their products.

In April 1900, Jellinek and Daimler agreed that the company would design a new engine, which would be called "Daimler-Mercedes." Jellinek had the power to make a demand of that nature. Within weeks, he ordered 36 units of the new model, with its 35-horsepower engine, at a price of 550,000 Marks, the equivalent of 3 million euros in today's currency. Several weeks later, he ordered another three dozen Daimler cars with a standard 8-horsepower engine.

The first car with the new Mercedes engine, the 35-hp racing model developed by Wilhelm Maybach, came out at the end of that year. The first unit arrived at the Nice train station on December 22, 1900, and delivered to its purchaser, Baron Henri de Rothschild. By Nice Week, in March 1901, when a week of racing events took place, Jellinek entered the Mercedes in every different racing event – each of which it won. Paul Meyan, the director of the French Automobile Club, declared, "We have entered the Mercedes Era."

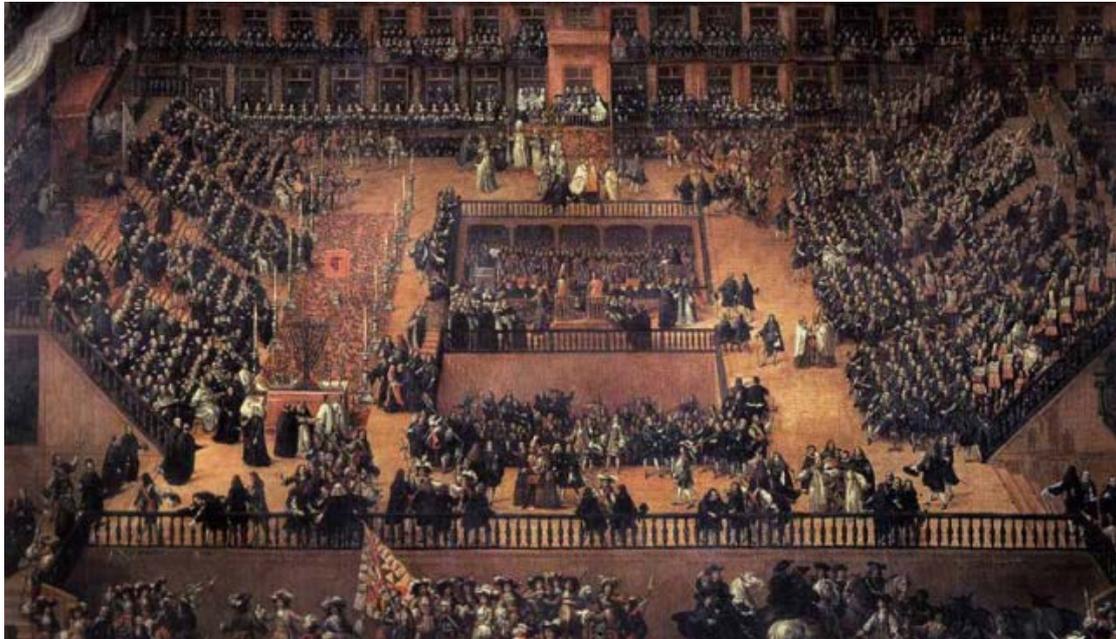
By 1903, Emil Jellinek had legally changed his surname to Jellinek-Mercedes. He continued representing Daimler in France, but by the end of the decade, he had fallen out with the firm, and stopped selling autos. Instead he concentrated on his diplomatic work. During World War I, he found himself in trouble with both Austrian and French authorities. His property was confiscated by France, and found himself and his second wife accused of espionage – one by the French, the other by Austria. He died on January 21, 1918, in France.

In the meantime, Mercedes had married an Austrian baron, with whom she had two children. The couple was wiped out financially during World War I, and she was reduced to begging in the streets. After leaving her husband, she married again, to a Baron Rudolf von Weigl, who had a noble name, but no money. Mercedes died on February 23, 1929, of bone cancer, at the age of 39.

Although the Daimler company merged with the Benz company, in 1926, it has continued to this day to call its automobiles Mercedes-Benz.

September 17 / A prominent Spanish inquisitor is stabbed

Father Pedro Arbues, the chief inquisitor of the kingdom of Aragon, was attacked at a cathedral altar, allegedly by Conversos.



An auto-da-fe, or public ceremony of penance and punishment for heretics, in Madrid. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 17, 1485, Father Pedro Arbues, the chief inquisitor of the kingdom of Aragon, died, two days after having been stabbed at the steps to the altar at the cathedral of Zaragoza during prayers.

Arbues was born circa 1441 in the region of Zaragoza, and became a priest in 1474. A short time later, Ferdinand and Isabella, the king and queen of the newly united kingdom of Aragon and Castile, got permission from the pope to establish an inquisition, to root out heresy in their domain. Among the prime targets of the Inquisition, of course, were Conversos, newly baptized Jews, who were secretly continuing to practice their ancestral religion.

Tomas de Torquemada, the grand inquisitor for Castile, appointed Arbues to be the provincial inquisitor for Aragon in 1484. The Inquisition in general was not warmly received in Aragon, and Arbues, its chief symbol, was especially hated. Contributing to that sentiment was the fact that he conducted two autos-da-fe, public ceremonies of penance and punishment for heretics, during his first months in office. As such, Father Arbues did not travel in public without bodyguards, and the night he was attacked, he was said to have been wearing chain mail and a helmet.

One historian, John Edward Longhurst, quoting a contemporary source, describes with obvious relish the moment when Arbues, kneeling in prayer was confronted: "... a professional assassin by the name of Durango stepped up behind him and struck him

in the neck with a sword, 'splitting him open from his cervix to his beard' ... Arbues lurched about briefly while two other assassins stabbed him repeatedly through the body until he was dead." (Actually, Arbues took another two days to expire.)

"Retribution was even more terrible than the deed," reports Longhurst. And, indeed, the arrests that followed the killing zeroed in on a number of prominent Converso families in Zaragoza. Yet if the attack on the inquisitor aimed to discourage the actions of his office, it had the opposite effect. The Inquisition in Aragon actually became energized by the murder.

Members of the Sanchez, Montesa, Paternoy and Santangel families were implicated in the plot. Gabriel Sanchez, whose father had been the first to convert to Christianity, was the treasurer of the kingdom of Aragon, and three of his brothers were accused of involvement in the plot to kill Arbues. One was convicted and executed, a second escaped into Navarre, and a third was allowed to repent for his crime. The father-in-law of Gabriel Sanchez, one Luis de Santangel was also convicted for involvement in the conspiracy and drawn and quartered before being burned. Jaime de Montesa was the deputy chief justice of the Zaragoza municipality; he was arrested as the mastermind of the plot and executed in 1487.

Longhurst recounts in gruesome detail some of the executions of those convicted in the assassination of Father Arbues. Durango, for example, the man he says was the chief attacker, "was hauled out to the great square; his hands were cut off and nailed to the door of the House of Deputies, while he was allowed to bleed to death. His body was then carted off to the market place where the head was detached, the trunk pulled apart by horses, and the pieces hung in the streets."

According to one account, 13 were eventually burned at the stake for involvement in the plot, while another two suspects killed themselves before they could be put to death.

As for Pedro Arbues, he was canonized as a saint in 1867 by Pope Pius IX. In the document accompanying the sanctification, the pope explained that, "The divine wisdom has arranged that in these sad days, when Jews help the enemies of the church with their books and money, this decree of sanctity has been brought to fulfillment."

September 18/ The U.S. Army gets its first Jewish chaplain

Rabbi Jacob Frankel was assigned to a hospital in Philadelphia after President Abraham Lincoln intervened.



Union soldiers during the Civil War. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 18, 1862, Rabbi Jacob Frankel, of Philadelphia, was appointed the first Jewish chaplain in the U.S. Army. The selection of Frankel, who at the time was cantor of Congregation Rodeph Shalom, in that city, resulted from an impassioned campaign on the part of American Jewry to have the sectarian needs of its soldiers in the Union army tended to. Only by engaging the help of President Abraham Lincoln did they succeed.

The military chaplaincy law of 1861 stipulated that any clergymen serving as chaplain to Union forces in the Civil War must be a “regular ordained minister of some Christian denomination.” An effort by an Ohio congressman, Clement Vallandigham, to have the wording be made more inclusive – he argued in the House of Representatives that “There is a large body of men in this country, and one growing continually, of the Hebrew faith ... whose adherents are as good citizens and as true patriots as any in the country” – was shot down by his colleagues, and so the law went into effect on July 22, 1861.

Over the course of the Civil War, some 7,000 Jews served with the Northern forces against the Confederates, whose chaplaincy law, by the way, required only that one be a “minister of religion.” (The total Jewish population of the country at the time was

some 250,000.)

Several days before President Lincoln signed the chaplaincy law, the 65th Regiment of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry appointed a Jewish businessman from Philadelphia, Michael Allen, to be its chaplain. As historian Karen Abbott noted in an article in the New York Times in 2011, it's likely that the regiment acted without knowledge of the pending new law. In any case, Allen, who was not an ordained rabbi, spent several months tending in a non-denominational manner to the spiritual needs of soldiers both Jewish and non-Jewish. In September 1861, however, when the news of Allen's commission reached the adjutant general's office, the liquor salesman from Philadelphia was forced to resign, citing "poor health".

The 65th Regiment, whose commander was named Max Friedman, was not about to back down, however. It soon elected Rabbi Dr. Arnold Fischel, the minister of New York's Shearith Israel congregation, to replace Allen. There was no question as to Fischel's academic credentials, and when the War Department turned down the request for his commission, he and the Board of Delegates of American Israelites were ready to wage their own mini-military campaign on Washington.

Rabbi Fischel showed up at the White House on the morning of December 11, 1861, and requested to meet the president. He was told that was not likely to happen, but he decided to take his chances, and joined the line of several hundred waiting in the hope of exchanging a word with Lincoln, some of them having been there for as long as three days, according to Abbott.

In fact, when Lincoln learned of Fischel's presence, he had him admitted immediately, receiving him, noted Fischel, with "marked courtesy." The rabbi came armed with letters of recommendation from several Republican politicians (the president's party) and also petitions from a variety of communities around the country, signed by both non-Jews and Jews, arguing that the existing law was unconstitutional and unfair.

Lincoln told Fischel he had not known about the discrimination against Jewish clergy, and several days after their meeting, he sent the rabbi a letter in which he promised to urge the Congress to pass "a new law broad enough to cover what is desired by you in behalf of the Israelites".

Despite fervent opposition from some Protestant groups (one evangelical newspaper warned that a change in the law might lead to "Mormon debauchees, Chinese priests and Indian conjurers" requesting recognition as chaplains), and back-handed support from some Jewish leaders (who argued that they supported the reform of the law, but denied the right of the Board of Delegates, in whose name Fischel had visited the White House, to speak on behalf of U.S. Jewry), Congress was convinced of the rightness of Fischel's argument. On July 17, 1862, it sent Lincoln an amendment to

the law, stipulating that chaplains needed to be ordained only by “some religious denomination”.

Lincoln himself signed Rabbi Frankel’s commission on September 18. The Bavarian-born Frankel (1808-1887) was assigned to a hospital in Philadelphia, in response to a request from the Board of Ministers of the Hebrew Congregations of that city. The request followed the deaths of two Jewish soldiers there, without their being afforded the attentions of clergy of their faith.

Two other Jewish clergymen served with Northern forces during the Civil War. Arnold Fischel, however, was not one of them. Although the Board of Delegates requested he be assigned to tend to Jewish soldiers in Washington, D.C., hospitals, the army surgeon-general reckoned that there weren’t enough Jews in the area’s hospitals to warrant the commission. In October 1862, Fischel left the U.S. for his native Netherlands, and never came back. He died in 1894.

September 19 / An Estonian Jewish revival begins

After nearly disappearing in the Holocaust, the Estonian Jewish community took a big step in rebuilding itself when, on this day in 2005, the cornerstone was laid for its first synagogue since World War II.

On this day in 2005, the Jewish community of Estonia laid the cornerstone for its first synagogue since the end of World War II, in Tallinn, the capital. The occasion, which was witnessed by then-Israeli President Moshe Katsav, symbolized the rebirth of a community that had appeared to be extinct for more than half a century.

Prior to the war, approximately 4,400 Jews lived in Estonia. The origins of the organized community went back only about 100 years, though the Jewish presence in this Baltic land dates to the 14th century. Most of Estonia's Jews fled either during the brief period of Soviet occupation (1939-40) or the following year, as the Germans invaded so that only 1,000-1,500 Jews remained for the Nazis to murder. Together with an additional 20,000 Jews deported to Estonia from other parts of Europe, particularly Lithuania, they were transported to death camps in the country. Only some 100 Jews survived the Holocaust in Estonia. The country's two synagogues, in Tallinn and Tartu, both dating to the 19th century, were destroyed.

A number of Jews returned to Estonia after World War II, but because it was now a Soviet satellite state, they were unable to revive the community's religious and cultural life. Beginning just prior to the fall of the USSR and accelerating with Estonia's renewed independence in 1991, Jewish organizations – both religious and secular – began to establish themselves in a number of towns. In September 2005, when Katsav made his state visit, he laid a wreath at a memorial at the site of the Klooga concentration camp, west of Tallinn. Two years later, in May 2007, the synagogue whose groundbreaking Katsav attended opened. Beit Bella, as it is called, was established by Chabad and funded in part by the Rohr family of New York; it seats 180 worshippers. In that year, Estonia's Jewish community numbered approximately 1,900.

September 20 / U.K.'s oldest synagogue is dedicated

After being expelled from the U.K. in 1290 and again from Spain during the Inquisition, Spanish-Portugese Jews finally returned to London where, on this day in 1701, they dedicated the still-active Bevis Marks Synagogue.

On this day in 1701, the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London was dedicated by the city's Spanish-Portugese community. Named for the street where it stands, it is the United Kingdom's oldest functioning synagogue.

Jews had been expelled from the kingdom by King Edward I in 1290. By 1655, Marrano Jews, whose ancestors had been expelled from Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition, petitioned Oliver Cromwell to officially readmit the Jews to England. Permission was only granted the following year, after the start of the English-Spanish War. When the property of Spanish citizens living in England was seized, crypto-Jews residing there claimed that they had become Spaniards under duress, and were actually Jews. By 1690, 400 Jews had resettled in England.

A synagogue for the Sephardi community was established in an upper floor of a building on Creechurch Lane in 1657. Its congregants acquired a piece of land on nearby Bevis Marks St. in 1699 to build a permanent home, which was constructed by Joseph Avis, a Quaker who is said to have refused any profit from the project. The festive opening of the new synagogue took place on Elul 27, the eve of Rosh Hashana, 5462.

By the 1960s, the movement of Jews out of the East End and central London meant the congregation was struggling, at one point contemplating selling or closing its Bevis Marks home. But the expansion and development of London as a world financial center brought many observant Jews to the area who attended midweek morning services. Soon the synagogue was thriving again. Today, it is one of three Spanish-Portuguese synagogues in London, holding services both on weekdays and Shabbat.

September 21 / First steps to the Final Solution

On September 21, 1939, Reinhard Heydrich, the infamous Nazi leader, sent out a memo to begin rounding up Jews, the start of his plan for the Final Solution.



Reinhard Heydrich Photo by Wikipedia

On this day in 1939, Reinhard Heydrich, head of the Reich Security Main Office (which included the SS, Security Service), sent out a *Schnellbrief* (express letter) to members of the Einsatzgruppen death squads, in which he included his first instructions for the rounding up of Jews into ghettos. Nazi Germany had invaded Poland just three weeks earlier. Now, Heydrich, who had been authorized earlier in the year by Hermann Goering to come up with a solution to the “Jewish question,” confronted the fact that Germany now occupied a country with some three million Jewish residents.

Over a long period of time, Heydrich developed his ideas about the need to eliminate all Jewish influences from the Third Reich. Although there never was an overall order regarding the creation of ghettos (whose establishment was left to the discretion of regional commanders), Heydrich explained that concentrating Jews in urban centers would ease their later deportation. The September 21 communiqué also offered instructions about the organization of Jewish councils and expropriation of Jewish property and businesses.

By July 31, 1941, 11 days after Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Goering extended Heydrich’s mission, authorizing him to develop “a total solution of the Jewish Question in the area of German influence in Europe.” As the Einsatzgruppen entered the newly occupied lands, in many cases, they simply murdered Jews on the spot.

On January 20, 1942, Heydrich ran the notorious Wannsee Conference in Berlin, at which he presented his plan for the Final Solution for Europe's 11 million Jews. Those Jews who didn't "fall away" while serving as forced labor for the Reich would, he explained, would "be given special treatment." That May, Heydrich himself was attacked while visiting Prague by a team representing the Czechoslovak government in exile. Wounded, he died on June 4. But the implementation of his program for the Jews proceeded as planned, and the establishment of the Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor death camps was named "Operation Reinhard," in his memory.

September 22 / 'Fiddler on the Roof' premieres on Broadway

Its first critics panned it, but the play inspired by a Chagall painting went on to win 9 Tonys.



Nathan Datner plays Teyve in an Israeli version of 'Fiddler on the Roof'. Photo by Sharon Bokov

On September 22, 1964, “Fiddler on the Roof” had its premiere on Broadway, at the Imperial Theater. That original production went on to run for 3,242 performances, a record that held until being shattered by “Grease.”

"Fiddler" subsequently underwent four Broadway revivals, the most recent of which, in 2004, played 781 times. The play has been staged countless times on both professional, amateur and school stages around the world during the past 49 years. It also was adapted successfully for the screen in 1971, a production that was awarded three Oscars.

“Fiddler on the Roof” is of course based on a series of Yiddish stories about “Tevye and His Daughters,” by Sholem Aleichem.

The origins of “Fiddler on the Roof,” according to historian Philip Lambert, go back to 1960, when composer Jerry Bock reported in his diary that “Sheldon gave me a novel called ‘Wandering Star,’” by Sholem Aleichem. “Sheldon” was lyricist Sheldon Harnick, with whom Bock had already collaborated on the 1959 production “Fiorello!,” which won not only the Tony for best musical, but also the Pulitzer Prize.

Together with writer Joseph Stein, Harnick and Bock began to consider adapting the Sholem Aleichem novel, which was about a traveling Yiddish theatrical troupe. By August 1961, the trio had put aside “Wandering Star,” and decided instead that the Tevye stories would make an appropriate vehicle for a musical.

According to Lambert, writing in “To Broadway, to Life!: The Musical Theater of Bock and Harnick,” by early 1962, the three had already begun work on both libretto and songs by early 1962, when they approached producer Harold Prince. He was interested, but suggested waiting for choreographer and director Jerome Robbins to become available before proceeding. That didn’t happen until the summer of the following year, when Robbins finished directing “Funny Girl”.

A choreographer falls in love

Harnick, Bock and Stein met with Robbins, who was already legendary both for his work on the ballet stage and also for such musical theater as “On the Town” and “West Side Story.” On August 29, 1963, Robbins sent a telegram to a longtime colleague, Ruth Mitchell stating, “I’M GOING TO DO A MUSICAL OF SOLEM ALEICHEM STORIES WITH HARNICK AND BOCK STOP I’M IN LOVE WITH IT IT’S OUR PEOPLE”.

It was Robbins who thought of approaching Marc Chagall, to design the set of “Fiddler,” and when he was unavailable (“REGRETTE TROP OCCUPE,” he cabled the director), who turned to the Kiev-born Boris Aronson. But it was still Chagall’s 1912-13 painting “The Fiddler,” depicting a violinist perched precariously on a slanted roof, that provided a visual element that runs through the entire play, as well as the inspiration for the show’s title.

“Fiddler on the Roof” is the story of Tevye the milkman and his family. The year is 1905, the place is the fictional town of Anatevka, a Jewish shtetl. In the original stories, Tevye and his sharp-tongued wife, Golde, have seven daughters; the play reduces the number to five, and focuses on the three eldest.

While tradition calls for children to enter into arranged marriages, Tevye and Golde’s daughters demand the right to choose their own partners, on the basis of romantic love.

The first, Tzeitel, wants to marry an impoverished tailor; the next, Hodel, falls for a non-observant socialist; and the third Chava decides she will wed a non-Jew. The third compromise is one that Tevye cannot make, and he tells Chava that if she marries out of the faith, the family will treat her as if she is dead.

A mystical presence

At the same time that Tevye, a decent, God-fearing but modest and uneducated man, must contend with these challenges of modernity, he and his fellow Jews also face the pogroms of czarist Russia. After a violent riot disturbs Hodel’s wedding party, at the

end of Act I, by the end of the second, the residents of Anatevka are told they have three days to leave the town. Tevye, Golde and their two younger daughters depart, destined to sail to America. They are followed from the village by the ubiquitous fiddler, who has been a non-speaking and somewhat mystical presence through the entire production.

The first preview of “Fiddler” was in Detroit, on July 29, 1964. Audiences did not respond enthusiastically, and a critic from *Variety* determined that “There are no memorable songs in this musical.” Austin Pendleton, who played Motel, the tailor who becomes Tzeitel’s husband, told Robbins’ biographer Amanda Vaill that word preceded the play to New York “that the show was a disaster”.

We know now that “Fiddler on the Roof” was anything but a disaster, but it still is worth noting that initial reactions to the play were far from unanimous. Critic and director Robert Brustein declared that the play bore “about the same relation to its source [Sholem Aleichem] as unleavened cocktail wafers do to Passover matzoth.” (Come to think of it, is that such an inappropriate description of matzos?) Irving Howe found it “disheartening” and full of “sentimentalism and exploitativeness”.

Yet the play was nominated for 10 Tony Awards, and won nine of them, including for Best Musical, and best direction and choreography. Both Zero Mostel – Tevye – and Maria Karnilova, who played Golde, also won Best Actor Tonys. Although Mostel is remembered to this day for his performance and identified for many as the quintessential Tevye, so irritating was he to the show’s producers for his insistence on constant ad-libbing when his contract expired, the following year, they replaced him with Herschel Bernardi (he also was passed over in favor of Chaim Topol for the film version, seven years later.)

The original production of “Fiddler on the Roof” closed on July 2, 1972. According to theater historians Michael Kantor and Laurence Maslon, it earned its backers \$1,574 for every dollar invested in it.

September 23 / An iconic sculptor is born

American Jewish sculptor Louise Nevelson's work and personality stood out even against the massive backdrop of Manhattan.



Louise Nevelson and her granddaughter Neith, circa 1965. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On this date in 1899, Leah Berliawsky – who became a world-recognized sculptor under the name Louise Nevelson – was born in Perislav, Ukraine. In 1905, she moved with her family to the United States. She grew up speaking Yiddish in Rockland, Maine, where her parents helped establish an Orthodox synagogue. Later in her life, Nevelson often spoke of the prejudice she faced in her community as an Eastern European immigrant among Americans and as an Orthodox Jew among less observant Jews.

In 1929, she began studying art at New York's Art Students League. By that time, she was married to Charles Nevelson, scion of a wealthy Jewish shipping family. But the couple separated in 1931, and Louise went off to Munich to study painting with Hans Hofmann. Two years later, back in New York, she worked as an apprentice to (and had an affair with) Mexican artist Diego Rivera, who was then working on his notorious Rockefeller Center mural (which his patrons had destroyed before it was finished because of its radical political content).

Nevelson originally studied drawing and painting, but in the 1940s she came into her own as a sculptor. Her first solo show was in 1941 at New York's Nierendorf Gallery. She is best known for her large wooden works, which combine elements of Cubism and Abstract Expressionism. They consist of boxes filled with collages of found wooden objects she picked up on the streets of Manhattan: picture frames, toilet seats, driftwood, etc. Some of her sculptures were room-size, such as the 1964 "Homage to Six Million I," a 70-meter long curved installation comprised of dozens of self-contained boxes that may allude to the countless individual lives destroyed in the Holocaust.

Only in the 1970s, when she was in her 70s, did Nevelson begin constructing large outdoor sculptures from metal, seven of which can be seen in Louise Nevelson Plaza in Lower Manhattan. Nevelson died in 1988.

September 24 / Operation Magic Carpet touches down

The final two flights of a massive exodus of Yemenite Jews land in Israel, bringing a slew of new immigrants to the Jewish state and marking the end of a once-flourishing Diaspora community.



The Yemenite exodus is better known by its nickname, 'Operation Magic Carpet.' Photo by Wikicommons

On September 24, 1950, the final two planes carrying Jews from Yemen to Israel as part of "Operation Kanfei Nesharim" ("On Wings of Eagles") touched down at Lod airport with 177 new immigrants. Although most of the remaining Jews in Yemen continued to trickle out up through 1962 (when civil war in North Yemen led to the closing of the gates), it was between 1948 and 1950 that the vast majority of the nation's 48,818 Jews departed the country. They piled aboard 430 flights for the young Jewish state, prompted by a lethal pogrom in Aden that followed the 1947 UN vote on the partition of Palestine.

Today, there are estimated to be fewer than 400 Jews still living in Yemen.

The Yemenite exodus is better known by its nickname, "Operation Magic Carpet," but though that epithet evokes a speedy and efficient rescue, recent scholarly work on Yemenite immigration suggests otherwise.

The Jews of Yemen and Aden were widely dispersed around the country, and nearly a thousand of them died during the operation, either on the border between Yemen and Aden, or while waiting to depart a transit camp in the port city of Aden. In a recent book on the topic, researcher Esther Meir-Glitzstein places blame for poor planning and worse on Yemeni and British authorities, but also, principally, on the Joint

Distribution Committee, which had been entrusted by Israel with overseeing the immigration operation.

Once in Israel, there was a high mortality rate among the newly arrived children, and rumors about the kidnapping of Yemenite babies by authorities circulated for decades. An official inquiry, which reported its findings in 2001 after a seven-year investigation, rejected the claims of any criminal activity, and was able to establish the fate of 972 of 1,033 children who were reported as missing during these early years. Some died and were buried without their parents being properly informed, the report said, but a large number were apparently adopted by veteran families, in decisions made at the local level by social workers.

September 25 / A father of biblical archaeology in Israel is born

Nahman Avigad, one of the first biblical archaeologists in modern Israel, revealed much of the history of the Jewish Quarter of the Second Temple and Byzantine periods.

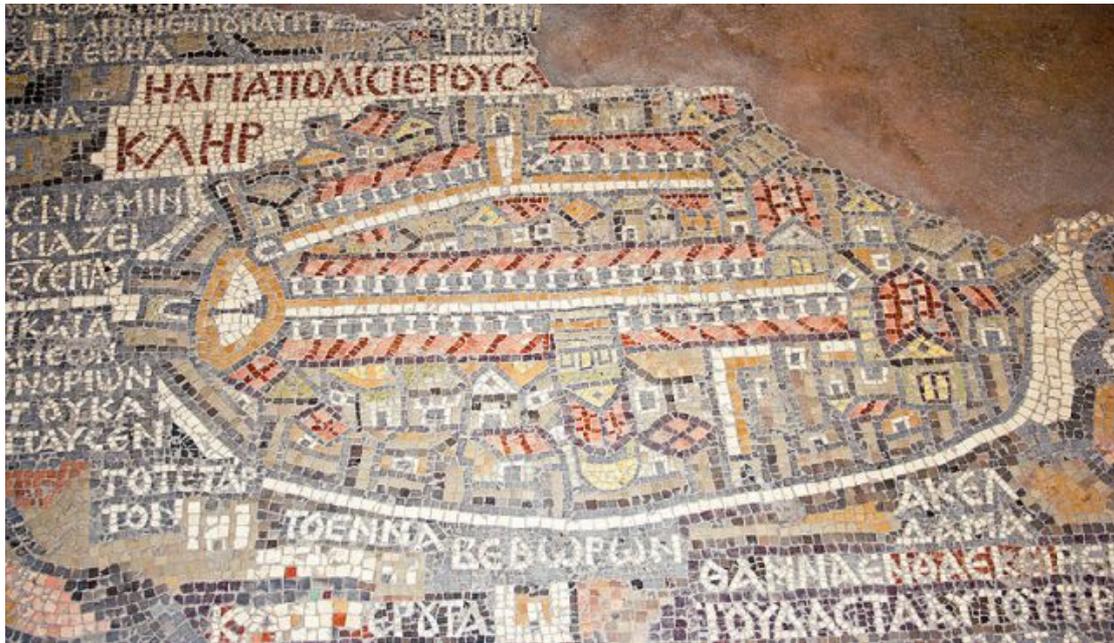


Photo of the Madaba Map, Jordan, depicting the Cardo in Jerusalem. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

September 25, 1905, is the birthdate of Nahman Avigad, one of the leading members of the first generation of biblical archaeologists in modern Israel. Avigad's excavations in Jerusalem following the Six-Day War revealed much of the history of the Jewish Quarter of the Second Temple and Byzantine periods; he also interpreted one of the Dead Sea Scrolls and dug at Masada and Beit She'arim, among other places.

Avigad was born Nahman Reiss in Zawalow, Austria – today Zavaliv, Ukraine. After receiving a degree in architecture at a university in Brno, Czechoslovakia, he emigrated to Mandatory Palestine, in 1925. In a commemorative article written about him after his death in 1992, Eric Myers recounted how Avigad had told him that his interest in archaeology had been kindled by his participation as a youth group leader after his arrival in the country: “He recalled an unforgettable hike down the Wadi Qelt to the site of what is today known as ‘Old Testament’ Jericho... Avigad’s youth group camped out by the site and his guide told stories about events of biblical and Jewish history that were believed to have happened in that very location. After that evening Avigad knew he would spend the rest of his life uncovering the details of the history of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel.”

Avigad studied archaeology at the Hebrew University, earning his master's degree in 1949, and his Ph.D. three years later, writing his thesis on the epigraphy of graves found in the Kidron Valley, east of the Old City of Jerusalem.

Early excavations in which Avigad participated were at the catacombs in Beit She'arim (near Nazareth), where he identified what he concluded was the family tomb of Judah Hanasi, the 2nd-century C.E. rabbi and chief editor of the Mishna, and at the Hammat Gader synagogue, in the southern Golan Heights.

Working together with Yigael Yadin – son of his former mentor E.L. Sukenik – at the Hebrew University, Avigad published his interpretation of the last of the seven major Dead Sea Scrolls, called the Genesis Apocryphon, which tells of the time Abraham spent in Egypt. Eric Myers describes Avigad as “without peer in the general field of epigraphy and palaeography.” Also with Yadin, he excavated at Masada, in the 1950s.

But it is for his work in the Old City of Jerusalem, where he excavated between 1969 and 1983, that Avigad is best remembered. When the task of finding the Herodian “Upper City” was offered to him, two years after East Jerusalem came under Israeli sovereignty, Avigad was already contemplating retirement. He dug up the Cardo, the Byzantine-era road that linked the Church of the Holy Sepulchre with the Nea Church, and that was previously known by its depiction in the Madaba Map mosaic; the “Broad Wall,” constructed after the return from the Babylonian Exile; and the Iron Age (prior to the 6th century B.C.E.) Israelite Tower. Avigad also found and dug up the so-called Burnt House.

The latter was a Second Temple-period private residence that was destroyed shortly after the Temple itself. Its remains, which included a mikveh (Jewish ritual bath) and coins not only of Roman mintage but also others produced by Jewish rebels during the period of 67-69 C.E., were found under a layer of ash, confirming the written descriptions of historian Flavius Josephus of the Romans' destruction of the city. Avigad and his colleagues also uncovered a wall featuring an engraved image of the menorah that had burned in the Temple.

Archaeological work proceeded at the same time that the commercial and residential development of the Jewish Quarter was under way, and dictated the pace of that development. As a consequence, however, today there is an archaeological museum underneath Yeshivat Hakotel, which serves as an excellent introduction to life in Second Temple-era Jewish Jerusalem, and a number of other historical sites that can be visited, and that are integrated into the Quarter, among its shops and homes.

Avigad's publications include the scholarly “Corpus of Northwest Semitic Seals,” published only after his death, and his popular “Discovering Jerusalem,” about his excavations in the Jewish Quarter.

Nahman Avigad, who is remembered also for his gentle disposition and his tendency to keep political considerations out of his scholarly work, died in Jerusalem on January 28, 1992.

September 26 / West Side Story premiers on Broadway – without the Jewish storyline

In its original draft, the modern-day Romeo and Juliet was to be the story of a Holocaust survivor girl and an Irish-Catholic boy on New York's East Side.

On September 26, 1957, “West Side Story,” one of the most popular and critically acclaimed shows in the history of musical theater, had its world premiere, at Broadway’s Winter Garden Theater.

It was not a fluke that “West Side Story” was as good as audiences and critics alike believed it was: The creative talents (all of them Jews) who came together to produce it were the best in the business – Arthur Laurents (book), Leonard Bernstein (music), Stephen Sondheim (lyrics) and perhaps most significantly, Jerome Robbins, whose choreography included “the most savage, restless, electrifying dance patterns we’ve been exposed to in a dozen seasons,” as an awestruck Walter Kerr commented the morning after [ck] the premiere in the New York Herald Tribune.

“West Side Story” had a long gestation period. Not because its fundamental plot was based on Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet” (1597). Rather, Robbins came to Laurents and Bernstein to begin work on the idea in 1949. The original concept, however, was for a play about the ill-fated love between a Jewish girl (a Holocaust survivor who has arrived in the United States by way of Israel) and an Irish-Catholic boy, who live and meet in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. And yes, the trio intended to call their play, which was to reach its tragic narrative climax during the week of Passover and Easter, “East Side Story.”

After Arthur Laurents wrote a first draft of the play, he realized that it bore more than a slight resemblance to the supremely successful 1922 play “Abie’s Irish Rose,” which after five years on Broadway, had been adapted twice for the screen. He, Robbins and Bernstein, agreed to put the idea aside.

Six years later, Laurents and Bernstein met up – poolside at the Hotel Chateau Marmont -- when both were working in Los Angeles. Gang warfare was in the news that day, and the two began discussing the possibility of making that the theme of their “Romeo and Juliet” update, not between Mexicans in Southern California, but rather in New York, between Puerto Rican and whites.

The team resumed work, but still needed a lyricist, when Laurents ran into the young Stephen Sondheim, who had yet to see anything substantial he had written performed on Broadway, at a party in New York. Sondheim was reluctant to write lyrics for someone else’s music, but at the urging of his mentor, Oscar Hammerstein II, agreed to take on “West Side Story.”

Yet, even after the play was written, and rehearsals were about to commence, the project nearly died, after a backers' audition in the spring of 1957 failed to attract any additional producers besides the one already on board, and she announced she was backing out. At that point, Sondheim was in touch with his friend Harold Prince, who, together with his business partner Robert E. Griffith, agreed to attend a run-through of the music at Bernstein's apartment. Prince later recalled that, "About halfway through the audition, I started to sing along with the material....At the end of the whole thing, Bobby and I looked at each other, and we said, without hesitation, 'We'll do it!'"

Rehearsals got under way that summer, with eight weeks, rather than the usual four, allotted for the dancers, who took the place of a chorus, to learn their complex parts. Robbins worked the performers mercilessly (he also forbade members of the Sharks, the Hispanic characters, to interact offstage with the dancers portraying the Jets, the white gang), and by the night of the New York premiere, neither Laurents, Bernstein nor Sondheim were speaking with him.

But by Friday morning, September 27, 1957, it was clear that theater history had been made the night before. "West Side Story" ran for 732 performances, before heading off on tour, and was nominated for six Tony Awards, although it won only two (for choreography and scenic design). Four years later, a film version was released (10 Oscars, including Best Picture), and the play has been running on stages around the world ever since.

September 27 / An Italian chief rabbi sees Jesus on Yom Kippur

Israel Zolli, chief rabbi of Rome, had a religious epiphany that led him to convert to Christianity and take the name Eugenio Maria Zolli, after Pope Pius XII.



Great Synagogue of Rome. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On September 27, 1944, while leading Yom Kippur services in Rome, Israel Zolli, the chief rabbi of that city, is said to have had the religious epiphany that led him to convert to Christianity – though it was a move he had been considering for years. Several months later, in February of 1945, both he and his wife were baptized, and Zolli was christened as Eugenio Maria Zolli, after Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XII.

Zolli was also born on September 27 (1881), as Israel Anton Zoller, in the town of Brody, Galicia, then part of Austria. His father had owned a silk factory in Lodz, Poland, but lost his business and all his assets when the czarist government nationalized foreign-owned industries. His mother came from a long line of rabbis, and growing up, Israel was groomed to become one himself.

Zolli earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Florence, and studied for the rabbinate at the same time. In 1913, he became deputy rabbi of the city of Trieste, which at the time was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Five years later, he became the town's principal rabbi, and changed his name to the more Italian-sounding Zolli as the city was in Italian hands following World War I.

Zolli held that position until 1939, and during the same period, he also taught Hebrew at the University of Padua. Independently, he also began studying the New Testament. His interest in Christianity was in part demonstrated by his publication in 1938 of a

book about Jesus, “The Nazarene.” It looked at Jesus as a Jew, and at early Christianity as an outgrowth of Judaism.

Rome gets an arrogant chief rabbi

In 1939, Zolli was appointed chief rabbi of Rome, after the combination of Fascist Italy’s Racial Laws and the Jewish community’s anti-Zionist tendencies led his predecessor, Rabbi David Prato, to emigrate to Palestine. From the beginning of his tenure, Zolli had problems with the lay leadership of the city’s Jewish community, and generally seems to have been perceived more as a scholar – and an arrogant one, at that -- than as a pastoral figure who possessed the human touch.

In their 1992 book, “The Chief Rabbi, the Pope and the Holocaust,” Robert G. Weisbord and Wallace P. Sillanpoa quote a contemporary account that cited Zolli as telling a meeting of the Rome Jewish council in 1942 that, “I consider it an honor for the community of Rome to have me as Chief Rabbi and I do not consider it an honor for me to be Chief Rabbi of the Community.”

To this day, Zolli’s conduct during the German occupation of Rome, which lasted from October 1943 to June 1944, is a subject of controversy. He always claimed that it was clear to him from the start that the Nazis intended to arrest and deport the city’s 8,000 Jews, as they were doing in the country’s north. He urged the heads of the Jewish community to close their offices, and to encourage their fellow Jews to go into hiding. He also called on the community to destroy all of its records, so as to make it more difficult for the Germans to undertake a roundup. For the most part, Zolli’s lay counterparts did not take his warnings seriously.

On September 26, 1943, the head of the German security police in Rome, issued a demand to the Jewish community: Either pay a ransom of 50 kilograms of gold (worth about \$56,000 at the time) within three days, or a list of Jewish men from the city would face deportation.

The Jews began hurriedly collecting gold, both among its own members and from non-Jews. Yet when it became clear they would not have the needed amount by the deadline, feelers were also put out to the Vatican – both by Zolli and, separately, by two other members of the Jewish community -- for a loan of gold. Zolli visited the Vatican, where he met with the Church’s treasurer, Monsignor Nogara, who promised a loan of the needed quantity, but within a short time, it became clear the loan would not be required. The gold had been collected, and it was soon delivered to the German occupiers.

Temporarily, the anti-Jewish measures that were in place in Rome were suspended, but any appearance that the ransom payment had saved the Jewish community was an illusion. On October 16, the Germans surrounded the Ghetto, and, armed with lists of Jewish community members, they began rounding up people. Fortunately, they found and arrested only 1,259 Jews: The remainder had already been taken in by non-Jews, including in churches and monasteries in the countryside. The Italian police also refused to cooperate with the German action.

Visions of Jesus

At the urging of the Roman police, Zolli went into hiding among members of the Italian resistance (not in the Vatican, as has often been claimed), and he remained out of view until the city's liberation, the following June. He later claimed that his colleagues in the lay leadership knew how to reach him; they claimed that he had abandoned his post.

After the liberation, the Allied forces saw to it that Zolli resumed his position as chief rabbi, despite the fact that he now was held in disrepute by many of his fellow Roman Jews. While Zolli sought to turn his position into a lifetime appointment, he also began scouting around for an academic position. In December 1944, he confidentially told the new head of the Jewish community that he was in poor health, and would be resigning his position as chief rabbi.

Later, it turned out that he had decided to convert. Recalling his Yom Kippur vision, some years later, Zolli wrote that while he was praying on September 27, 1944, "Suddenly, I saw, with the eyes of the mind, a large prairie, and standing in the middle of the green grass was Jesus, dressed in a white robe... At the sight of this, I felt a great interior peace, and, from the depths of my heart, I heard these words: 'You are here for the last time. From now on, you will follow Me'."

That same day, Zolli recounted, both his wife and his daughter reported to him that they too had had visions of Jesus. "I wished them both a good night," he wrote, "and, without feeling at all ill at ease, I continued to think about the extraordinary sequence of events."

On February 13, 1945, Zolli, together with his wife, Emma, underwent baptism, at the Santa Maria degli Angeli church, in Rome.

In an August 1945 article in a Catholic newspaper, Israel Klyber, himself a Jewish convert to Christianity, quoted Zolli as saying that, "I was a Catholic at heart before the war broke out, and I promised God in 1943 that I should become a Christian if I survived the war."

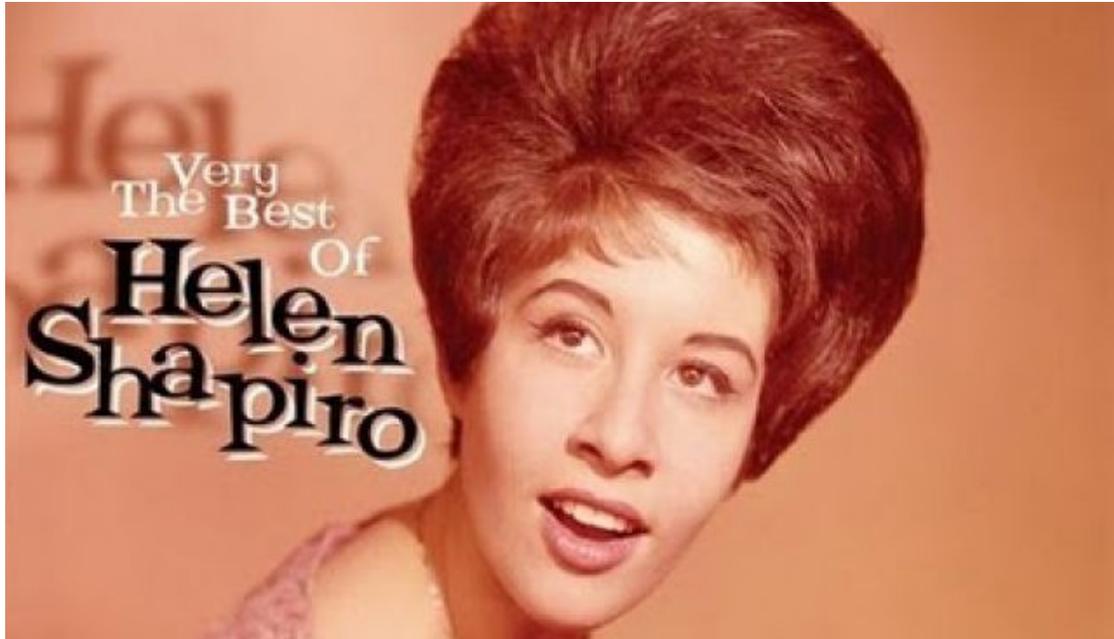
Zolli also claimed that he had not left the Jewish people. "Did Peter, James, John, Matthew, Paul and hundreds of Hebrews like them cease to be Jews when they followed the Messiah and became Christians?" he asked rhetorically, according to Klyber. "Emphatically, no."

The Jewish community of course did not see things quite that way. News of Zolli's conversion was greeted with a period of mourning in the Roman community, and he was condemned by Jewish figures internationally, who portrayed him as a traitor to his people. In the meantime, Rabbi Prato was called back from Palestine to resume his former position as chief rabbi.

In the remaining years of his life, Eugenio Zolli, as he now called himself, held academic positions at both the Pontifical Biblical Institute and at the State University in Rome. He also wrote a memoir, "Before the Dawn," in which he described his conversion. It was republished in English translation in 2008. Zolli died on March 2, 1956.

September 28 / Songbird Helen Shapiro is born

A Jewish singer who reached the height of her fame before she was out of her teens and later saw the light.



Jewish songbird Helen Shapiro reached the height of her fame in her teens, and became Christian later in life.

On September 28, 1946, singer and actress Helen Shapiro was born in London. Shapiro probably reached the height of her success and fame in 1961, at the age of 14, when her first single, fittingly titled “Don’t Treat Me Like a Child,” hit # 3 on the U.K pop charts.

Later that same year, her songs “You Don’t Know” and “Walkin’ Back to Happiness” reached #1, and she soon was voted the “Top Female Singer” in the country. When she and her beehive hairdo toured the U.K. in early 1963, as the headliner of an eight-act bill, the show’s final act was the Beatles, then participating in their first national tour. (During the tour, John Lennon and Paul McCartney wrote the song “Misery” for Shapiro, but she never recorded it.)

Helen Shapiro, the granddaughter of Russian Jewish immigrants, grew up in Clapton (where the family attended the Lea Bridge Road Synagogue) and later Hackney. Her parents both worked in the garment industry. By the age of 10, Helen was singing with a school band called Susie and the Hula Hoops, whose guitarist was a boy named Mark Feld, who later performed under the name Mark Bolan (guitarist and singer of T-Rex, who died in 1977). Her last Top-10 hit came in 1963 (“Little Miss Lonely”), and by 1972, she announced she was giving up touring. Thereafter, Shapiro focused on an acting career, and she performed both on the stage and on TV soap operas.

On her website, Shapiro writes with affection about her Jewish upbringing, and explains how it was almost natural for her to become interested in Jesus, particularly after her Christian manager gave her a book by a Jewish man whose daughter had

converted to Christianity, and who himself, in his attempt to understand how such a disaster had occurred, became a believer in Jesus himself.

Shapiro writes that she finally accepted Jesus in 1987, and urges all of her readers to “search the Scriptures and find out for yourself.”

September 29 / Man who taught U.S. about migrants is born

Oscar Handlin eventually put the spotlight on the epic role of immigration in America.



Oscar Handlin in the 1940s. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

September 29, 1915, is the birthdate of Oscar Handlin, the prolific historian who was one of the first to attempt to systematically study the effect of immigration on the development of the United States. It was Handlin who wrote, in his 1952 book “The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People,” how, “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.”

Oscar Handlin was born in Brooklyn, New York, and was the oldest child of Joseph and Ida (nee Yanowitz) Handlin, both of them Jewish immigrants from the Russian empire. His father owned a grocery store.

Handlin received his B.A. from Brooklyn College in 1934, and a year later earned a master’s degree in history from Harvard University. He then taught for two years at Brooklyn College, while working on his Ph.D. at Harvard, which he completed in 1940. The latter institution is also where Handlin spent the rest of his academic career, from which he retired in 1984.

In addition to teaching history – which included overseeing the doctoral work of more than 80 students over the years – Handlin also served as director of the university library and acting director of the Harvard University Press. He also published over 30 books.

Handlin's doctoral adviser at Harvard was the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the university's pioneer in immigration studies. According to a biographical essay by Mary Elizabeth Brown, the day that Handlin came to Schlesinger's office to discuss a topic for his thesis, his teacher showed him a letter he had just received from another student, announcing his decision not to continue work on a planned dissertation on "a racial history of Boston."

Handlin took the topic on, and the result was a dissertation that was published in book form in 1941 as "Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation." In it, Handlin employed census data and other records gathered in the United Kingdom and the Vatican, as well as the archives of immigrant newspapers and modern sociological theory, to examine the impact of both native-born "Yankees" and Irish Catholic immigrants on the city's development. That book, which was described by the *American Journal of Sociology* as "the first historical case study of the impact of immigrants upon a particular society and the adjustment of the immigrants to that society," won Handlin a prestigious prize from the American Historical Society.

"The Uprooted," too, employed newspaper archives and personal letters and memoirs in looking at immigration's impact on the United States as a whole, but it was intended for a general audience, and concealed its scholarly underpinnings (for example, it had no footnotes). It looked at the entire process of immigration, beginning in the old country, and then, according to Mary Elizabeth Brown, zeroed in on the theme of alienation in looking at the process undergone in the adoptive home. Immigrants felt alienation both from their work – having only a minimal connection to what they produced, while receiving pay based on the amount of competition for the job – and from the dominant surrounding culture. The first generation of immigrants, he postulated, was unsuccessful both in recreating their native culture in their new home and in assimilating into the new culture they encountered. "The Uprooted" won Handlin the Pulitzer Prize for History for 1952.

Handlin's theories have to a large extent been supplanted by the work of later researchers, but the impact of his having put the immigration experience at the center of American history remains essential. His testimony before Congress in 1965 played a key role in the passage of legislation that eliminated the discriminatory quota system that had been in place since the 1920s.

Like many other liberal intellectuals, many of them also of Jewish background, in the 1960s, Handlin moved to the right in his response to the Vietnam War. While American campuses became the hotbed of opposition, both among students and younger faculty to the war, Handlin believed that American withdrawal from Vietnam would be disastrous for its foreign policy and that the war could and should be won. Even as late as 1981, in his book "The Distortion of America," Handlin was arguing that Vietnam was a just cause and that American intellectuals did not understand the threat that their country faced from communism.

Handlin died on September 20, 2011, at age 95. Shortly after his death, the Henry Adams Club, an organization for history graduate students at Harvard, posthumously named Handlin as an honorary vice president. This was intended to rectify the wrong done him more than seven decades earlier, when the club refused him the position because he was Jewish. His daughter Joanna accepted the award on her late father's

behalf, but said at the time, according to the Harvard student newspaper, that she was amazed that “never did I ever hear my father mention anti-Semitism, or even mention the Adams Club for that matter.”

September 30 / Nazis massacre Jews at Babi Yar

September 30, 1941, was the second and final day of the mass killing of 33,771 Jews that took place in a Kiev ravine.



A Jewish choir performs at the monument at the Babi Yar, scene of Nazi massacres. Many Ukrainians wish that more Jews had been sent there. Photo by AP

September 30, 1941, was the second and final day of the notorious Babi Yar massacre of Jews, one of a series of mass killings undertaken by the Germans in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev during World War II. Babi Yar is the name of a ravine in the northern part of the city.

Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, and took control of Kiev on September 19 of that year. In the first days of the occupation, two large explosions took place: One destroyed the German command post, and the other hit the city center. The attacks were used as a pretext by the Germans for the roundup of Jews, although they had been carried out by Soviet forces.

At the time, some 60,000 Jews remained in Kiev, as some 100,000 had fled in advance of the approaching Nazi forces. On September 28, an order was posted instructing all “Yids” to appear at the corner of Melnikova and Doktorivska streets by 8 A.M. the following day. They were told to bring warm clothes and essential valuables.

The official report of Einsatzgruppe C, the mobile killing squad entrusted with operations in the Kiev area, noted that although only a fraction of the city’s remaining Jews had been expected to show up on September 29, in fact, more than 30,000 came. According to the account, “until the very moment of their execution, [they] still believed in their resettlement, thanks to an extremely clever organization.”

Over a 36-hour period, the Jews were marched to the Babi Yar ravine and killed. After being ordered to remove all of their clothes and valuables, and place the items in separate piles, the victims were driven in groups of 10 through a corridor of soldiers on both sides, into the ravine. There they were instructed to lie down on the piles of bodies of those who had already been murdered, and were then shot to death by police marksmen.

On the evening of September 30, the walls of the ravine were undermined, so that they collapsed inward, burying the dead under a layer of earth. According to the Einsatzgruppe report, the death toll numbered 33,771 Jews. Although measures had been taken to confirm the deaths of all those who were in the ravine, at least 29 victims are known to have survived.

During the months that followed, Babi Yar was the site of a number of other mass murders, most of them of civilians of other ethnic minorities, including a large number of Roma (Gypsies). A rough estimate of the total killed at the ravine by the Germans is 100,000, but the figure could be far higher.

Later, before retreating from Kiev, in 1944, the Germans went to pains to exhume and burn the bodies buried in Babi Yar. They then scattered the ashes around the region.

It was not until 1976 that the Soviet Union, which regained control of Ukraine following defeat of the Third Reich, would allow any sort of memorial at the site at all. And when commemoration was permitted, in the form of the Monument to Soviet Citizens and POWs, no reference was made to the fact that the Jews were singled out for victimization. The first monument that did acknowledge the fate of the Jews – a seven-branched menorah – was installed only after the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1991.

This past July, the World Forum of Russian-Speaking Jews announced its plan to [construct a memorial museum and synagogue](#) at the site in the coming years.

October 1 / A grumpy old man is born

Walter Matthau built a half-century long career by combining irascibility with irresistible lovability.



Walter Matthau, left, and Art Carney in the Broadway version of 'The Odd Couple' in 1965.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 1, 1920, is the birthdate of the comic actor Walter Matthau, he of the basset hound eyes, the sourpuss mouth and a sardonic delivery that could make recitation of the phone book sound disdainful. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, he starred in over a dozen plays and more than 60 movies.

Walter John Matthrow was born in New York's Lower East Side. Some sources – including The New York Times, in its obituary for him – suggest that Matthau's original surname was “Matuschanskayasky,” but the latter was only a gag name he used in the credits of a movie in which he provided a cameo appearance.

Be that as it may, his father was Milton Matthrow, a Russian-born electrician, later a process server, who left the family when his younger son was three (there was also an older brother, Henry). His mother was the former Rose Berolsky, an immigrant from Lithuania who worked as a sweatshop seamstress.

He once told an interviewer that growing up poor during the Great Depression was a “dreadful, horrible, stinking nightmare.”

Matthau's theater career started off modestly, when, at age 11, he began selling snacks in a Yiddish theater on Manhattan's Second Avenue; later, he was offered bit parts in some of the shows. After graduating Seward Park High School, and doing odd jobs as a forester in Montana and working as a boxing and basketball coach in New York, Matthau enlisted in the Army Air Corps, serving in Europe during World War II as a cryptographer and radio operator.

Back home in New York after the war, Matthau used his GI benefits to study acting at the Dramatic Workshop of the New School. His first Broadway appearance came in 1948, playing a candelabra carrier (and understudy to Rex Harrison) in “Anne of the Thousand Days.” Over the next two decades, he went on to perform in 16 plays, including “Once More with Feeling” (1958, for which he earned a Tony nomination) and “A Shot in the Dark” (1961) and “The Odd Couple” (1965), both of which won him Tonys.

Three years later, Matthau got to reprise his performance as Oscar Madison in the screen version of “The Odd Couple,” written, like the play, by Neil Simon. Oscar is a slobbish, perpetually tardy, cigar-chomping sportswriter who, in order to cover his rent, is forced to take in his friend Felix Unger (played by Art Carney on Broadway). Felix has been thrown out by his wife, who became exasperated by his compulsiveness about cleanliness, punctuality and most everything else.

Making the worst movie ever

In the screen version of “The Odd Couple,” Matthau played opposite Jack Lemmon. It was their second performance in tandem, after the 1966 Billy Wilder comedy “The Fortune Cookie,” which earned Matthau his only Academy Award. In that movie, he played William “Whiplash Willie” Gingrich, an ambulance-chasing lawyer who cooks up a scheme to earn his friend Harry Hinkle, a TV cameraman – and himself – millions, after Hinkle, played by Lemmon, is mildly injured while covering a football game.

In total, Matthau and Lemmon played opposite one another in 10 movies, 11 if you count Lemmon’s cameo appearance as a sleeping bus passenger in the one movie he directed, “Kotch,” in 1971.

Matthau had starring roles in dozens of other films, including “Hello, Dolly,” “Plaza Suite,” “The Bad News Bears,” “Grumpy Old Men” and “Dennis the Menace,” based on the comic strip, in which he portrayed Dennis’ neighbor and nemesis, Mr. Wilson. The roles varied widely, but to each of them he brought something that was uniquely him: a seemingly contradictory blend of sarcasm-laced indifference and irresistible lovability.

Matthau’s final role came in 2000, in “Hanging Up,” written by Delia Ephron and Nora Ephron and directed by Diane Keaton, in which he played a curmudgeonly father whose three daughters are waiting for him to depart this world.

He himself directed one film, “Gangster Story,” in 1960, which he later told an interviewer was “one of the worst films ever made.” Always able to laugh at himself, Matthau at another point described his screen image as that of “a Ukrainian Cary Grant.”

He was married twice, the second time, from 1959 until his death, to Carol Grace Marcus, an actress and writer, who Truman Capote supposedly claimed was the inspiration for the character Holly Golightly in his “Breakfast at Tiffany’s.” She and Matthau each brought two children to their marriage, and also had one son together, Charles Matthau, a filmmaker who directed his father in two movies.

Walter Matthau died of a heart attack on July 1, 2000. He was buried, in a traditional Jewish ceremony (“a simple burial in a plain pine casket,” said his son), at the Pierce Brothers Westwood Memorial Park, in Los Angeles.

October 2 / First Sephardi congregation established in Amsterdam

A group of Jews who had been expelled from their native Portugal held a Yom Kippur service at the home of the Jewish Moroccan ambassador to the Netherlands.



Jodenburt (1889), a painting of Amsterdam's Jewish quarter. Photo by Eduard Alexander Hilverdink

On October 2, 1596, according to tradition, the first congregation of Sephardi Jews in Amsterdam had its first service. It was on that day, Yom Kippur of Hebrew year 5357, that – at least according to legend - community dignitaries Manuel Lopez Pereira, Maria Nunez and Miguel Lopez met for prayers in the home of Don Samuel Palache, together with 13 other Jews.

For most of the first century after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Jewish refugees had not been permitted to settle in the Low Countries. It was only after the Netherlands gained independence from Spain, in 1581, when it joined the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, that relative religious freedom was allowed, making it possible for Jews, among others, to settle there.

Tradition says that Manuel Lopez Pereira and Maria Nunez, a brother and sister, and their uncle, Miguel Lopez, were Portuguese Conversos who set forth from their birthplace in 1593 in search of a place where they could live as Jews. With them on their ship was a large group of other Jews. En route to the Netherlands, they were stopped by a British ship and brought to shore as captives. There, according to the legend, a nobleman saw the beautiful Maria and asked to marry her. Hearing about this, Queen Elizabeth asked to meet the young Jewish woman, and also captivated by her beauty, ordered the release of her and her fellow passengers, together with their ship.

The group continued on to Amsterdam, where, in 1596 (some sources date the event to 1603), they were introduced to Samuel Palache, who was the Moroccan ambassador to the Netherlands, and a Jew. It was at his home that, on Yom Kippur of that year, they met for prayers. The gathering, however, drew the attention of legal authorities, who took the entire group in for questioning, on suspicion of being Catholics. Fortunately, one of group, Jacob Tirado, spoke Latin and was able to explain that he and his colleagues belonged to the persecuted, not the persecutors responsible for the Inquisition. They were released, and permitted to complete their prayers.

Some time later, they moved into a prayer house of their own, which they named Beth Jacob, in honor of the same Jacob Tirado, consecrating it on Rosh Hashanah of the following year.

In 1608, a group of Jewish migrants from North Africa, centered around Samuel Palache, opened another synagogue, which they called Neveh Shalom. Together with another Sephardi synagogue, all three merged back into a single united congregation in 1639, called Talmud Torah. In 1615, the Amsterdam Jewish community was officially recognized, and given permission to operate freely, with the only restrictions being a prohibition on intermarrying with Christians or from publicly criticizing Christianity.

By the end of the 17th century, according to the Dutch-Jewish historian Edward van Voolen, there were as many as 7,500 Jews in Amsterdam, both Sephardi and Ashkenazi, the latter coming from Germany and later from Poland. They were heavily involved in commerce and trade (at one point Jews controlled one-quarter of the shares of the Dutch East India Company), but also medicine, academia, and most other walks of life. British Historian Cecil Roth even suggests that “the greatest period of Dutch prosperity coincided with the period of the Marrano immigration and activity.”

October 3 / Vichy regime clamps down on Jews

French government passed 'Statute on Jews,' which defined who is a Jew and severely restricted the jobs available to them.



French Police registering new inmates at the Pithiviers camp Photo by Wikicommons

On October 3, 1940, the French government led by Marshal Philippe Petain passed the “Statute on Jews,” which defined the terms for who was to be considered a Jew (someone with three Jewish grandparents), and placed severe restrictions on the jobs that Jews could hold in French society. They were, for example, no longer permitted to serve in the army officer corps or in senior government jobs. A second Jewish law, enacted in June 1941, deprived Jews of the right to work in business or industry, as well as in the liberal professions.

The Vichy regime had come into power less than two months earlier, on July 10, 1940, and although its base was in the southern city of Vichy, it actually maintained administrative control of civil affairs both in the unoccupied south and in the occupied north. And the decision to pass the statute, and the alacrity with which it was done, was a French initiative entirely. As Petain’s chief of staff, Henri du Moulin de la Barthète, put it proudly, “Germany was not at the origin of the anti-Jewish legislation of Vichy. That legislation was spontaneous and autonomous.”

Already in July 1940, the Vichy regime set up a commission to review the naturalizations of all those who had become citizens of France since 1927; starting in 1943, 15,000 people, most of them Jews, were stripped of their citizenship. Internment camps were set up and quickly became transit camps, from which Jews and other undesirables who were rounded up were sent east to Nazi concentration and death camps. The first deportation took place from Drancy on March 27, 1942. During the next two years, Vichy officials assisted in the arrest and expulsion of some 76,000 Jews, of whom only 2,500 survived.

Vichy initially resisted the German demand for the expulsion, not out of any sympathy for the Jews, but because acquiescence would give the lie to the fiction that the regime made policy independently. Prime Minister Pierre Laval suggested a compromise, by which the Vichy government would expel some 10,000 Jewish non-citizens from the non-occupied zone in exchange for the sparing of Jews of French nationality. In the end, the 75,000-80,000 Jewish residents of France who died in the Holocaust constituted about one-quarter of the country's pre-war Jewish population of 330,000.

October 4 / Reform rabbinical school is in session

The first class of the Hebrew Union College convened in Cincinnati, Ohio.



The basement classroom where the first class took place. Photo by americanjewisharchives.org

On October 4, 1875, the first class of the Hebrew Union College, the first Reform rabbinical school – and the first successful rabbinical seminary of any denomination -- convened in the United States, in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The founder of the college was Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900), the German-born rabbi who arrived in the United States in 1846. In 1850, Wise got into a fistfight – on Rosh Hashanah, no less – with the president of the Albany, New York, synagogue where he was then presiding. Four years later, he took up a position at a Cincinnati synaogogue. Cincinnati had been the first city founded in the United States following the American Revolution, and at the time, it was the biggest city, with the largest Jewish population, west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Using the city as his base, Wise began creating the institutions -- a prayerbook, a weekly newspaper, a rabbinical assembly -- that were to constitute the foundations of American Reform Judaism. Most significantly, these institutions also included the umbrella organization of Reform synagogues, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which Wise founded in 1873 with 28 member congregations.

With a rabbinical conference and a union of congregations, it was obvious that the Reform movement now required a training college. Henry Adler, a Cincinnati Jew, helped the cause by offering Wise a challenge grant of \$10,000 if he could raise the same amount on his own for the college.

The “campus” of the college on that October 1875 day was a single room in the basement of Cincinnati’s Mound Street Temple (the home of Congregation Bene

Israel). According to most sources, there were 14 students present. The youngest was 11 years old, which considering that the other students were of high school age (David Philipson, for example, was 13), was not completely bizarre. What is surprising is that she was a girl, named Julia Ettlinger. She wasn't intended to become a rabbi – it would be another century before even the Reform movement began ordaining women – but according to scholar Gary Zola, quoting another, unnamed researcher, for reasons of institutional dignity, “the Hebrew Union College had to be drummed up” in the size of its student body.

That first class had three teachers – Wise, Rabbi Max Lilienthal and Solomon Eppinger, who, according to David Philipson, who later became a leading rabbi in the Cincinnati community, was the grandfather of Julia Ettlinger. According to Philipson, the boys resented the presence of girls in their class (there was a second one, a niece of Isaac Mayer Wise), and so one day, “one of their number hid the books of Julia Ettlinger... When the matter came to attention of Mr. Eppinger,” wrote Philipson in a reminiscence seven decades later, “he flew into a rage. He reported the matter to Dr. Wise, who threatened to dismiss the class unless the books were returned. The culprit, thoroughly frightened, managed to get the books to Julia without betraying his identity, and the matter became a closed incident.”

Six years later, in 1881, the school moved into its own quarters, a mansion on West Sixth Street, in downtown Cincinnati. By 1912, a new, 18-acre campus was inaugurated in the suburb of Clifton, near the University of Cincinnati.

Initially, the program at the college took eight years to complete. Entering as teenagers, the students would spend their mornings at their secular schools – four years in high school and four at the college level. Their HUC classes took place in the afternoons over that same eight-year period. Eventually, a ninth year was added, whose entirety was devoted to final studies and preparations for rabbinical ordination.

The graduation, in 1883, of the first class of HUC has gone down in the annals of American Jewish history for the celebratory banquet that accompanied the event. The menu for that legendary “Treyfa Banquet” included not only a mixture of dairy and meat dishes, but also shellfish (littleneck clams, according to scholar Lance R. Sussman) – sending a message about the relationship of Reform to Jewish tradition, and, some say, leading indirectly to the opening of a Conservative seminary.

October 5 / Anne Frank's diary premieres on Broadway

On this day in 1955, the play 'The Diary of Anne Frank' had its Broadway premiere at the Cort Theater.



Anne Frank Photo by Getty

On this day in 1955, the play “The Diary of Anne Frank” had its Broadway premiere at the Cort Theater. Written by Frances Goodrich and Alfred Hackett, the play was based on the worldwide best-selling “Diary of a Young Girl,” an abridged version of the diary kept by the German-Dutch Holocaust victim Anne Frank, who died at Bergen-Belsen camp in March 1945, a few months short of her 16th birthday.

The play, directed by Garson Kanin, met with immediate success. It won both a Tony Award and the Pulitzer Prize, was adapted for the screen in 1959 and continues to be staged regularly around the world. But it has also been the source of significant controversy over the years.

Most famously, the novelist Meyer Levin, who had helped to arrange for the original United States publication of "Diary of a Young Girl," waged war on the Goodrich-Hackett version. In his 1973 memoir, “The Obsession,” he said his failed attempt to have his own adaptation of the diary made into a play had essentially ruined his life. Levin alleged his script had been done in by a veritable conspiracy by Anne's father, Otto Frank, playwright Lillian Hellman and producer Kermit Bloomgarden, all assimilated Jews, along with the Gentile playwright-couple Goodrich and Hackett.

While Levin’s personal charges may have been exaggerated, if not partly imagined, he was correct in suggesting that the “Diary” that opened on Broadway presented a deracinated, “universal” version of Anne Frank’s story at the expense of the very Jewish nature of the Holocaust. Whether the play’s makeover was a conspiracy

perpetrated by self-denying Jews or merely reflected the commercial considerations of 1950s theater professionals is open to debate.

The final line of the play - "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart" - is taken from the actual diary, but is hardly the book's concluding sentence. Though it certainly gives the play an optimistic finale, it casts doubt upon whether it should be seen as a quintessential work of art about the Holocaust.

October 6 / Baseball legend refuses to pitch on Yom Kippur

For Jews, Sandy Koufax's decision to refrain from leading the Los Angeles Dodgers in an important championship game encapsulated a moment of pride, sacrifice and commitment.



Sandy Koufax Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Yom Kippur in 1965 fell on October 6, a Wednesday. That's also the day that the first game of the World Series, the best-out-of-seven championship game between the winning teams of Major League Baseball's American and National Leagues, fell that year. In 1965, those teams were the Minnesota Twins, who had won the American League pennant, and the National League's Los Angeles Dodgers.

Often, game one of the World Series sets the tone for the rest of the championship match-up, and both teams usually start with their best pitcher. For the Dodgers, that pitcher would have been Sandy Koufax, the 29-year-old southpaw (left-handed) who had become a pitching legend since the start of his major league career in 1955. On October 6, 1965, he also became a Jewish-American legend, because of his decision not to pitch in the opening game of the World Series.

Sandy Koufax was born Sanford Braun on December 30, 1935, Brooklyn, New York. When he was three, his parents, Jack Braun and the former Evelyn Lichtenstein, divorced; when Evelyn remarried, six years later, to Irving Koufax, Sandy took his stepfather's surname.

Koufax attended Lafayette High School, in Bensonhurst, New York, where, in his senior year, he was captain of the basketball team. Baseball was his second sport. When he entered the University of Cincinnati, in the fall of 1953, it was without a sports scholarship, and when he showed up for basketball tryouts, he was

unannounced. He played a single season on the school's baseball team before his prodigious pitching arm was discovered by professional scouts and he was offered a contract with the Dodgers, then still based in Brooklyn.

During his first season, in 1955, Koufax played in only 12 games, only two of which were wins. With his strong but wild arm, he gave up almost as many walks as he gained strikeouts. In fact, it was only in the 1961 season, by which point the team had moved to Los Angeles, that Koufax really came into his own. That year, he led the league in strikeouts (269), and he was chosen for the season's two All-Star Games. In 1962, he pitched his first no-hitter, and in the following season he led the league in win, strikeouts and earned-run average (the number of runs given up per nine innings pitched). That year, the Dodgers beat the Yankees in the World Series in four games, and Koufax pitched both games 1 and 4.

In 1964, Koufax had 19 wins before he was diagnosed with traumatic arthritis in his left arm, and he was forced to retire for the season in August. By the following spring, he was limited to one game a week, and each outing was accompanied by pain-killers, an anti-inflammatory drug, Caspolin balm, and a soaking of his left elbow in ice after the game.

Every appearance was painful for Koufax, but he had the best record in the league that year, and he led the team to another pennant. Then came the World Series.

Koufax was not religiously observant, and he was known to be seen eating ham sandwiches while on the road. But for him, it was a no-brainer that he wouldn't pitch on Yom Kippur. After all, it was the first game of the series, not the seventh, and he knew that he could pitch the following day. But it was a big story, and for Jews both young and old, it encapsulated a moment of pride, sacrifice and commitment, in an era when most of them did not wear their ethnic identity on their sleeves (or pitching elbows).

The St. Paul Pioneer Press carried a story before the game in Metropolitan Stadium, in Bloomington, Minnesota, explaining how Koufax had left the team's hotel on Tuesday evening, before the start of Yom Kippur: "He planned to attend services today and rejoin the team tonight for his starting assignment in Thursday's second game of the world series. He was asked whether he would view today's game on television or listen to radio accounts. 'No,' he said. 'I don't think that's possible.'"

On Yom Kippur afternoon, Rabbi Bernard Raskas, at the Temple of Aaron, in St. Paul, the synagogue closest to the stadium, informed congregants that Koufax had been in the sanctuary for services that morning. Raskas had not wanted to encroach on the pitcher's privacy on that holy day by introducing him to the congregation, but he said that he and Koufax had nodded to each other.

Jane Leavy, who describes the rabbi's account in her 2003 biography of Koufax, says that, in fact, "Koufax did not attend services there that day or anywhere else... [F]riends say he chose to stay alone in his hotel room."

Don Drysdale pitched for the Dodgers in that first game – and the team lost 2-0. When Koufax pitched the next day, they lost 5-1. Back at Dodger Stadium, the team

won three straight, with game number five being pitched by Koufax, 7-0. Back in Minnesota, however, on October 13, the Dodgers were again defeated, forcing a final, seventh game in the series.

Koufax agreed to pitch, although it would be his third outing in eight days. He lasted the entire game, and the team won, 2-0. After it was over, in the locker room, broadcaster Vin Scully asked Koufax how he felt, noting that after game five, Koufax had said that he felt like he was 100 years old. “Well, Vinnie, I feel like I’m a hundred and one. I’m just glad it’s over and I don’t have to do this again for four whole months.”

The next season, 1966, was Koufax’s final one as a major league player. He and fellow pitcher Don Drysdale negotiated jointly with the team, after seeing that the Dodgers were trying to play each of them off against the other in contract talks before the season. They didn’t show up until the final week of spring training, and only after they were awarded contracts of \$125,000 and \$110,000 each, for Koufax and Drysdale respectively. That year, the Dodgers made it to the World Series again, but were defeated in four games by the Baltimore Orioles. That’s when Koufax announced his retirement.

Koufax was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1972, making him the youngest player ever chosen. In the years that followed his retirement, he worked as a baseball commentator for NBC Television, and as a minor league pitching coach for the Dodgers for more than a decade. He has been married and divorced twice. He published a ghost-written autobiography in 1966, but mainly, he has kept out the limelight, maintaining his dignity with gentlemanly grace. He rarely comments on public stories about him, and he famously doesn’t read them.

When President Barack Obama introduced Koufax at the White House in 2010, at a reception honoring the start of Jewish American Heritage Month, he said that he had “something in common” with him: “He can’t pitch on Yom Kippur. I can’t pitch.”

Jane Leavy wrote about Koufax in her book, “Sandy Koufax: A Lefty’s Legacy”: “To the extent that he removed himself from public view, it was not so much because he believed there are no second acts in American life, as because he was determined to have one. He does not disavow who he was or what he accomplished. He is proud of it.”

October 7 / Nobel-winning physicist Niels Bohr is born

Niels Bohr not only took part in advances in nuclear physics, he saved Denmark's Jews during WWII and was an early opponent of nukes.



Niels Bohr Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 7, 1885, is the birthdate of the Danish physicist Niels Bohr, who had a part in nearly every advance in nuclear physics in the first half of the 20th century; played an important role as both educator and public intellectual, one who understood early on the dangers of nuclear weapons to humanity; and who was involved in encouraging King Gustav V of Sweden to offer asylum to Denmark's more than 7,000 Jews during World War II.

Niels Henrik David Bohr was born in Copenhagen, the second of three children of Christian Bohr, a physiologist, and Ellen Adler Bohr, who came from a wealthy and influential Jewish family. Both Niels and his younger brother, Harald, were skilled and enthusiastic soccer players; Harald, who later became an accomplished mathematician, played with the Danish team at the 1908 Olympics.

Bohr earned his undergraduate, master's and, in 1911, doctoral degrees in physics, all at the University of Copenhagen, which, when he started out, had only one physics professor and no lab. (Niels used his father's physiology lab for some of his experimental work.)

Bohr's graduate work concerned the structure of the atom, and, specifically, a theory regarding the magnetism of metal atoms and their electrons. Following a months-long visit in the United Kingdom – where he worked with J.J. Thomson and Ernest Rutherford, who became an important mentor – Bohr returned to Denmark. In 1912,

he married Margrethe Norlund, with whom he had six sons (four of whom survived to adulthood), and began teaching. In 1913, he published his celebrated trilogy of papers on atomic structure. His theory on the connection between the changing orbit levels of the electrons circumnavigating the nucleus and the electromagnetic radiation emitted during those shifts formed the basis of “old” quantum mechanics theory, and led to Bohr’s being awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922.

A Nobel and beer on tap

In the meantime, Bohr had succeeded in convincing the University of Copenhagen to establish an institute of physics. It opened its doors in 1921, with Bohr as its director (today it bears his name), and he and his family settled into an apartment on the first floor of its building. Soon after, when Bohr won the Nobel Prize, the Carlsberg Brewery invited the family to move into a house next door to its plant. One notable feature was the line that ran from the brewery to the residence, making beer available on-tap at all times.

The work being done in the 1920s and '30s by Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Wolfgang Pauli and many others – and the cooperation between the scientists, much of its facilitated by the Bohr’s graciousness and openness – was responsible for the quantum leap made during this period in understanding atomic behavior. It was Bohr who immediately understood the importance of the discovery of nuclear fission by Lise Meitner and Otto Hahn, and who explained why it was that only the uranium-235 isotope, as opposed to most uranium, was fissile – an important step in the race that soon began toward the development of nuclear weapons.

Nazi Germany occupied Denmark in April 1940. During the 1930s, Bohr had offered German refugee scientists places at the institute in Copenhagen, and later worked with the Rockefeller Foundation to bring a number of them, many among them Jews, to the United States, and support them and their work there. Bohr himself had been christened in the Lutheran Church, but having a Jewish mother meant he would not be safe when the Germans turned to deport Denmark’s Jews, in late 1943.

He fled to Sweden via fishing boat in September of that year. Although the Swedes had been requested by the United States to get him out of the country immediately, and send him to the U.S. to work on the Manhattan Project, Bohr refused to leave Sweden until he had had an opportunity to meet with King Gustav V, whom he helped persuade to make public Sweden’s willingness to provide a refuge to Danish Jews. Soon after, in early October 1943, the great exodus of 7,800 Jews across the Oresund Sea took place.

After a flight in a Mosquito bomber to England, in which he had to lie in the plane’s bomb bay, and during which he lost consciousness from lack of oxygen, Bohr soon traveled on to Washington. He remained in the U.S. until the end of World War II, serving as an advisor to the Manhattan Project, some of that time in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

An early opponent of nukes

Early on, Bohr recognized that nuclear weapons would change the face of international power relations. (The topic had been broached in a long-mysterious meeting with Werner Heisenberg in Copenhagen in September 1941. Heisenberg was then overseeing the Nazi nuclear-research program, and he apparently wanted to discuss the future of nuclear energy after a German victory in the war. There is also evidence that Heisenberg tried to enlist Bohr in efforts to mediate a truce between Germany and the United Kingdom. Bohr ended the conversation very quickly.) He met with both Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, in an attempt to persuade them to publicly announce that science had mastered the use of nuclear fission, and to cooperate with the Soviet Union in the field, so as to prevent proliferation. Both leaders rejected Bohr's suggestions, and even ordered their security services to keep an eye on him. Churchill, for example, wrote: "It seems to me Bohr ought to be confined or at any rate made to see that he is very near the edge of mortal crimes."

Bohr returned to Denmark in August 1945, where he resumed his work at the Institute of Physics. He was a key player in the creation of CERN, the European scientific research agency, and he continued his efforts to foster international cooperation on nuclear controls. In 1950, he wrote to the United Nations of his conviction that, "Humanity will be confronted with dangers of unprecedented character unless, in due time, measures can be taken to forestall a disastrous competition in such formidable armaments and to establish an international control of the manufacture and use of powerful materials." For his efforts, he was the recipient of the first U.S. Atoms for Peace Award, in 1957.

Niels Bohr died on November 18, 1962, at the age of 77.

October 8 / The sultan orders transfer of Safed Jews

The Ottoman ruler wanted to move Jews from Safed to recently conquered Cyprus, but carrying out the order was another matter.



Sultan Murad III Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On October 8, 1576, the Ottoman sultan, Murad III, issued an order to the governor of Safed instructing him to carry out the transfer of 1,000 Jews from the region to Cyprus. The move was not intended as a punishment for the Jews, nor was it an especially unusual occurrence. Such population transfers, called “surgun” in Turkish, were, rather, expressions of a policy intended to encourage the economic development – and political stability – of what were often newly acquired territories of the empire by bringing in more well-off individuals.

The October 8 order, for example, which historian Bernard Lewis, in his 1995 book “Cultures in Conflict: Christians, Muslims, and Jews in the Age of Discovery,” describes having come across by chance in an Ottoman-era archive, called upon the governor of Safed to select “one thousand rich and prosperous Jews and send them, with their property and effects, and with their families, under an appropriate escort,” to Famagusta, on the island of Cyprus.

Cyprus, Lewis, explains, had been conquered by the Ottomans in 1571, and in the years that followed, there were frequent instructions to regional rulers to make similar transfers of “reliable elements,” as Lewis puts it, to the newly acquired territory. In other cases, criminals and other undesirables were the objects of population transfer. If possible, the action was to be done with the cooperation of the transferees; if not, it was to be carried out by force. (For some historical perspective, although the context is very different, one can also point to the transfer of up to 120,000 Turkish settlers into Northern Cyprus, after its conquest by Turkey in 1974.)

Just because the order was given for someone to be moved to another part of the empire, however, did not necessarily mean that the move was successful, or even that it took place at all. Since Muslim law forbids such forced immigration, Ottoman officials were instructed to carry out the transfers with delicacy, and there were no active punishments for disobeying the orders. Historian Ronald Jennings, for example, suggests that the worst that could happen for someone who avoided banishment, or escaped from his new home, would be to have the order re-executed. “No corporal punishment was administered, nor criminal charges brought, nor even fines levied,” he writes in the 1993 book “Christians and Muslims in Ottoman Cyprus and the Mediterranean World, 1571-1640.”

A year after the 1576 order, Murad III issued another instruction, this one to the qadis (judges) of two towns on the road from Safed to Damascus, mandating the transfer of “500 Jewish families from among the rich and wealthy of the Jews of Safed” – again, to Cyprus. In this case, however, the Jews of Safed, who constituted a major source of revenues for the city, succeeded in convincing the Porte to rescind the order. In countermanding the original order, the authorities in Constantinople wrote that carrying it out would have meant that “the town of Safed will be on the verge of ruin.”

Lewis understands all of these imperial decisions as being motivated by economic and political interests, rather than sentiment. Jews had been welcomed into the Ottoman Empire following their expulsion from Spain, in 1492, and Portugal, five years later. Although the invitation extended to the Jews may have been couched in language that made it sound like the offer was based on compassion, that sentiment, writes Lewis, “does not suffice as the explanation of a state policy pursued over a long period by successive generations of rulers and administrators.” For the officials of the Ottoman Empire, the Jews were an asset, bringing with them wealth and skills that could only benefit the realm.

But in an era before the concept of human rights was widely understood or accepted, the individual’s fate was in the hands of the ruler. When the Ottomans conquered part of Hungary, earlier in the 16th century, writes Bernard Lewis, “they brought their Jews with them and invited Hungarian Jews to go to Turkey. Then when they left in 1686, they took their Jews away with them. There are records of imperial orders to protect them, ensure their safe departure, and resettle them in suitable places in the Ottoman lands after the withdrawal from Hungary.”

October 9 / A homo-erotic artist scorned by his generation is born

Simeon Solomon ended his days in penury and isolation, which is when, some say, he did his 'most honest' works.



Simeon Solomon, an artist not appreciated in his time, 1837-1887. Photo by David Wynfield, Wikimedia Commons

October 9, 1840, is the birthdate of Simeon Solomon, the prolific but, until recently, long-forgotten English artist whose work often incorporated both Jewish themes and homo-erotic ones.

Solomon – who worked in oil, watercolor and engravings, and later charcoal and chalk – was an extremely popular and well-regarded artist, until, at age 32, he was arrested while engaging in sex with another man in public. From then on, until his death at age 64, he became persona non grata in English society. He also became increasingly destitute, even as he continued to turn out copious quantities of art that has in recent decades become the subject of study and of rising prices.

Simeon was the youngest of the eight children of Michael (or Meyer) Solomon and the former Katherine Levy. His father was a prosperous manufacturer, the first Jew to be named a freeman in the City of London - a status that at the time afforded the holder certain economic privileges. His mother was a painter of artistic miniatures. The family lived in Bishopsgate, in London's East End.

Simeon's brother Abraham and sister Rebecca were also artists. Abraham was the one who taught Simeon studio drawing, while Rebecca gave him his Jewish training, which included extensive knowledge of the Bible. At age 15, Simeon was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools. It was there that he made the acquaintance of members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of artists, which included Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Edward Burne-Jones.

Through them, he later also became friends with the poet Algernon Charles Swynburne, whose erotic novel “Lesbia Brandon” he illustrated in 1865.

From biblical motifs to 'drowsy eroticism'

The Pre-Raphaelites took their name from their desire to hark back to the less formal and mechanistic, and more naturalistic and sincere, manner of painting that they associated with artists from before the Renaissance, that is, preceding Raphael and others. In the case of Solomon, he specialized first in biblical and later in classical motifs.

In the earlier phase, his works concerned such subjects as “Abram and Malkizedek” and “Ruth, Naomi and Obed,” as well as Jewish rituals, including circumcision, the marriage canopy, or the 1867 “Carrying the Scrolls of the Law.” Later, he abandoned religious themes and began reworking familiar classical set pieces. Now, his work came to evince what one source calls a “drowsy eroticism,” with frequent depictions of androgynous youths and edgy, suggestive situations.

In February 1873, the 33-year-old Solomon was arrested, together with a 60-year-old stableman named George Roberts, after the two were found in a compromising position in a public lavatory in St. Christopher’s Place, London. After being convicted of indecent exposure and an attempt to commit “buggery,” each was fined 100 pounds and sentenced to 18 months at hard labor.

Through the intervention of a relation Solomon had his prison sentence reduced to probation. But a year later, he was arrested on similar grounds in Paris; this time he spent three months in jail.

Descent into solitude

On his return to England, Solomon began a slow descent into alcoholism and penury that accompanied the rest of his life. For the most, galleries, patrons and friends shunned him. For his part, he refused to accept assistance from his family, and he sometimes sold matches on the street to survive, while living for his last two decades at the St. Giles workhouse.

Solomon did not attempt to “reform” himself and was not apologetic for his behavior. He told friends that he preferred living in a shelter because its location was “so central.” And he did not stop working.

Not able to afford canvases or oil paints, Solomon worked more with charcoal or chalk, and paper, and at times even created his works on sidewalk when necessary. His subjects became less literary and his style simpler and darker.

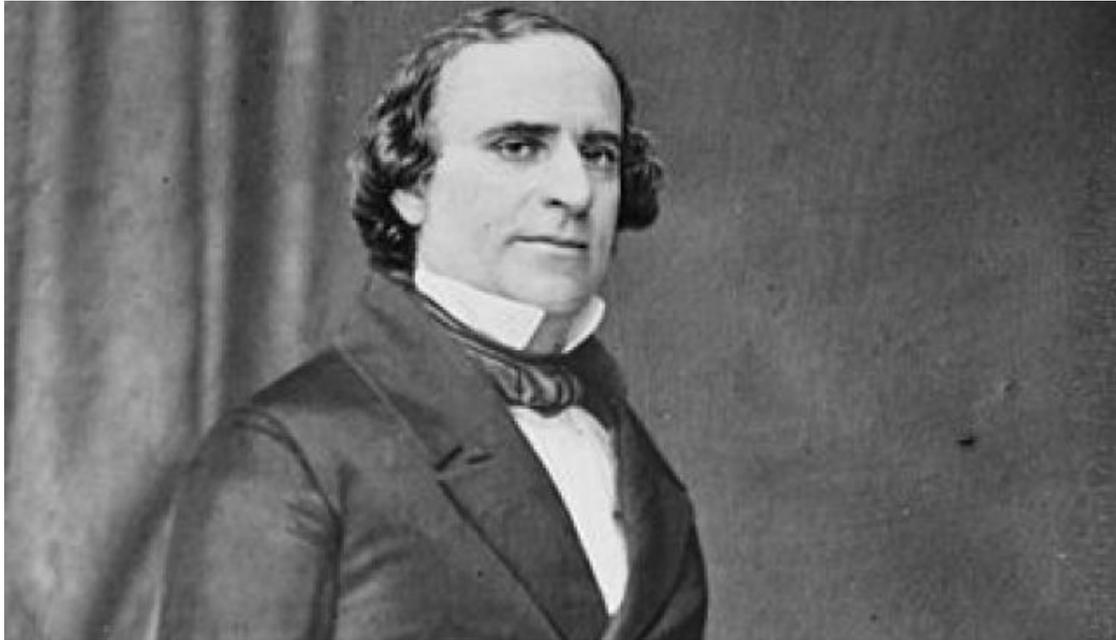
But, at least according to critic Neil Bartlett, this only led to more honest creations. Writing in *The Guardian* in 2005, Bartlett suggests that in his later work, in which Solomon returned over and over to “a handful of simple, dream-like images ... either a pair of faces, gazing either at each other, or a single visage gazing deep inside itself,” the artist encountered “his true subject -- the introspective mind.... [and] something else emerges besides beauty. What matters here is scrutiny; the inward

gaze of conscience.... By the end, the faces are not just androgynous, they are sexless, impersonal, living in a lonely realm of shame and hunger, of desire and dreams.”

Simeon Solomon died on August 14, 1905, at St. Giles, and he was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Willesden, London. In the years immediately following his demise, his work appeared at several exhibitions in London, before being largely forgotten for the next century. In the more tolerant atmosphere of the 1990s, with the development of gender and queer studies, Solomon was rediscovered by scholars, and in 2005-2006, a major retrospective exhibition of his work was on display in Birmingham and then at the Ben Uri Gallery, in London. A comprehensive [website devoted to the study of his work](#) is maintained by the art historians Roberto C. Ferrari and Carolyn Conroy: www.simeonsolomon.com.

October 10 / Controversy-beset first Jewish U.S. senator dies

America frowned on the senator zig-zagging on the Confederacy: 'It was because his Jew heart did not get all it craved that he urged the secession of Florida.'



The media frowned on David Levy Yulee's flip-flopping on secession, comparing him with Judas. Photo by Brady-Handy Photograph Collection, Wikimedia Commons

On October 10, 1886, David Levy Yulee, the first Jew elected to the United States Senate and the man considered the “Father of Florida’s railroads,” died, at the age of 76.

Yulee was born as David Levy on June 10, 1810, on the island of St. Thomas, then part of the Danish West Indies. His father, Moses Elias Levy, was a Sephardi Jew who had been born in Morocco to a man who had had a position in the court of the Moroccan emperor (although Moses liked to tell people his father had been no less than grand vizier). David’s mother, Hannah Abendanone, was also of Sephardi descent, although by way of England.

Realizing that Florida, then a Spanish possession, was likely to become part of the United States, Moses Levy bought a large parcel of land – 50,000 acres – stretching from the area of St. Augustine, on Florida’s northern Atlantic coast, inland to Alachua County. His intention, it is said, was to turn it into a haven for European Jews, to be called New Pilgrimage.

The Levy family relocated to Micanopy, Florida, in 1820, and David was sent north to Virginia to attend Norfolk Academy, a prestigious boarding school. He was forced to leave school in the wake of a conflict with his father, and he returned to Florida.

Although Levy worked for some time on the family plantation, he was set on becoming a lawyer, and moved to St. Augustine, where he studied the field under the guidance of Judge Robert Raymond Reid, who later became Florida's territorial governor.

Levy was admitted to the bar in 1832, and five years later was elected to the territorial legislature. He was a delegate to the convention that wrote Florida's constitution, and in 1841 was elected as a territorial delegate to the U.S. Congress. After Florida gained statehood -- a move that he pushed hard for, against some opposition in the territory -- in 1845, he was elected its first senator, which coincidentally made him the body's first Jewish member.

Did the 'Wickliffe Madonna' cringe at being a Levy?

Levy married Nancy Wickliffe, the daughter of a former governor of Kentucky, in 1845. He accepted Presbyterian Christianity, and in December of 1845, he had the Florida legislature pass an act officially changing his surname to "Yulee."

There are several explanations given for this move, all or none of which may be true. One is that Nancy, a great beauty known among her contemporaries as the "Wickliffe Madonna," was reluctant to marry a man with a Jewish surname, so he willingly changed it. Another version says that "Yulee" had actually been his father's original family name, and that Moses Levy had replaced it years before with his mother's maiden name. After David and Moses quarreled, the spiteful son was happy to go back to the surname dropped by his father in his youth.

In the Senate, the man now called Yulee was a strong supporter of states' rights and of slavery: He was a slaveholder himself, owning a 5,000-acre sugar-cane plantation. From early on, he pushed for Southern secession from the union.

After a single six-year term, Yulee was denied reelection to the Senate. He used his newly freed time to advance the cause of railroads in his state.

Taking advantage of new legislation to apply for both state and federal grants, he oversaw the purchase of land and the construction of a railroad from the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic, using slave labor to cut a swathe across the state. Work began in 1855, and the line began running on March 1, 1861, mere weeks before the opening shots of the Civil War. Yulee also bought his own line of steamships to link up with the rail line.

In the meantime, Yulee was reelected to the Senate, taking office in March 1855 and resigning in January 1861, when Florida withdrew from the Union. Ironically, he had softened some of his radical stances regarding states' rights in the intervening years, and pushed for a compromise between North and South until it became clear that secession was unavoidable. Then he again became a vociferous spokesman for the Confederate cause.

'Like the base Judean'

History has not dealt kindly with him regarding this zigzagging on such a cardinal issue, and nor did the press at the time. The New York Times, for example, suggested that Yulee's final change of heart was a matter of personal interest rather than principle, writing that, "it is well known that it was because his Jew heart did not get all it craved that he urged the secession of Florida – and like the base Judean threw away a pearl richer than all his tribe."

During the Civil War, Yulee tended to business rather than acceding to suggestions that he serve in the Confederate government or legislature. He took advantage of the opportunity provided by the conflict to wrest control of his railroads from Northern shareholders, but was less successful in convincing the Southern army to allocate troops to protect the actual rail lines.

First, Union troops tried to disable his lines, and later the Confederacy undertook to dismantle his tracks for the iron. Yulee fought tooth and nail against the latter expropriations in the Florida courts, which led to his being perceived widely as disloyal to the Southern cause.

Historian Robert N. Rosen, however, proposes exercising greater understanding for him.

"Preservation of the Florida Railroad Company and its rails was not just a matter of money to Yulee," he writes in his book "The Jewish Confederates" (2000). "He had dedicated his adult life to bringing Florida into the modern world, first by bringing it into the Union, and then by joining Florida to the Union by rail."

After the war, Yulee was arrested by federal forces and was held for a number of months in Fort Pulaski, in Georgia. He was eventually released and returned home to Florida, where he tended to rebuilding both his plantation, destroyed during the war, and his damaged railroad. By 1870, he was able to host President Ulysses Grant at his home in Fernandina, Florida.

In 1880, having sold his railroad shares, Yulee and his wife moved to Washington, D.C., where she had family. Nancy Yulee died a short time later, but David survived until 1886. Visiting his grandchildren in Maine, he contracted a cold, and he died on October 10 in New York, after it had turned into pneumonia.

Both Levy County and the town of Yulee, Florida, are named for David Levy Yulee.

October 11 / First minyan forms in Chicago, promptly splits

They also formed what wasn't actually the first synagogue in the midwest, Kehilath Anshe Maarav.



Jews in Chicago: the boys are carrying pots of food for the Sabbath. Published in Chicago Daily News, October 20, 1903. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 11, 1845, is the day noted by history as the first time a minyan (Jewish prayer quorum of 10) convened in Chicago. Within two years, the group that met that Yom Kippur day had organized themselves into the city's first synagogue, and three years after that, the congregation had - as befits any self-respecting Jewish organization - split into two.

So fast was the growth of Chicago that, on the eve of World War II, its Jewish population had reached 270,000, making it the city with the third-highest number of Jews in the world, after New York and Warsaw.

Chicago, on the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan and bisected by the river that shares its name, had received its first European settlers in the late 17th century, although it was not incorporated as a municipality until 1833. Its first Jewish immigrants apparently arrived during that first decade, from Bavaria.

Records show 20 Jews arriving in the town, some after brief stays on the East Coast, between 1840 and 1844, which was a period of anti-Semitic persecution in Germany.

By 1845, ten men are recorded to have met for Yom Kippur services in a room situated above a store on the corner of Wells and Lake Streets, just south of the river, inside today's main business district, the Loop. Those men were: Benedict Shubert, Jacob Rosenberg, S. Friedheim, the brothers Julius, Abraham, Morris and Mayer

Kohn, Harry Benjamin, Philip Newburgh and Mayer Klein. Newburgh and Klein led the services.

The same group gathered again a year later for the same purpose, before, on November 3, 1847, they declared the opening of Kehilath Anshe Maarav (Congregation of the Men of the West), which claims to be the first synagogue in the Midwest of the United States – certainly not the case if you consider Ohio to be part of the Midwest – and which is certainly Chicago’s first. It too convened in the same location, in the dry-goods store owned by Jacob Rosenberg and Levi Rosenfeld.

In 1846, the group purchased, for \$46, six-sevenths of an acre within the existing City Cemetery, for Jewish burials. By 1849, KAM had hired its own shohet (ritual slaughterer) and Torah reader, and two years after that, in 1851, it opened its first permanent home, on Clark Street, at what is today the location of the Kluczynski Federal Building.

A school followed, in 1853. A year later, more religiously observant members of KAM split off and established the city’s second synagogue, Kehillas Bnai Shalom.

Come the Reform

After additional splits and mergers, the current-day heir to those two congregations is KAM Isaiah Israel, a large Reform synagogue, designed in Byzantine style, situated in the Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood. (The synagogue’s website explains to potential visitors that it is “delighted to work with the United States Secret Service who provide security for President Obama's Chicago home,” and asks them to arrive with a government-issued photo ID.)

Many of the records of Kehilath Anshe Maarab were lost in the Great Fire of 1871, having been stored in the Cook County courthouse, which was destroyed. Another fire in 1874 destroyed its physical home as well.

The arrival of Eastern European Jews, mainly from Poland and Russia, in Chicago began in the late 1870s. Eventually, they constituted the majority of the city’s Jewish population. They settled initially in the Near Westside, in the area around Maxwell Street. The open-air market named for Maxwell Street remains popular to this day as a bazaar for second-hand items; during its heyday as a Jewish neighborhood, it had some 40 synagogues.

October 12 / Bombing of Reform temple in Atlanta

In this day in 1958, a congregation in Atlanta, Georgia, was bombed by white supremacists, part of a series of synagogue attacks of Jewish communities, many of which supported the civil rights struggles of the era.

On this day in 1958, a bomb rocked the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple, a Reform synagogue in Atlanta, Georgia. The blast, caused by the explosion of 50 sticks of dynamite, took place at 3:30 A.M. on a Sunday morning, and no one was hurt. Shortly thereafter, a local wire-service office received a call from someone identifying himself as “General Gordon of the Confederate Underground,” claiming responsibility for the attack and promising that “this is the last empty building we will bomb.... Negroes and Jews are hereby declared aliens.” The Temple bombing was one of eight such attacks or attempted attacks on synagogues, mostly in the South, between November 1957 and October 14, 1958, when Anshei Emeth Temple in Peoria, Illinois, was terrorized.

Only four years earlier, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, had ruled segregation unconstitutional. To many white racists at the time, Jews and Communists (who were somewhat interchangeable to them) were responsible for the travesty of desegregation. The Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, established in 1860 by German Jewish immigrants, was (and remains) Atlanta’s oldest and most affluent synagogue, and thus an obvious target for militant racists. Additionally, its rabbi, Jacob Rothschild, was an outspoken advocate for civil rights who gave numerous sermons on the subject, sometimes to congregants’ consternation, and later worked with and supported Martin Luther King, Jr.

Five men, members of the white-supremacist National States’ Rights Party were quickly arrested and tried for the Atlanta bombing and all were acquitted – twice. But the attack nonetheless served to draw significant public sympathy for the synagogue and condemnation of the attack, including a statement from President Dwight D. Eisenhower. A group of black inmates at a local prison even took up a collection for the synagogue’s building fund and sent it to Rabbi Rothschild by way of their prison chaplain. At the same time, there was widespread resentment among many blacks at the wide disparity between the official responses to the synagogue bombing and similar attacks on African-African institutions.

No one was ever convicted of the Temple bombing. Jacob Rothschild remained rabbi of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation until his death in 1973, and continued his involvement in civil rights activities. Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., he was outspoken in criticizing the increasingly militant tactics of some black activists, which strained relations with some of them. Nevertheless, he continued speaking his mind until the end of his life.

October 13 / Taboo-trampling comic Lenny Bruce is born

He began with impersonations, then pushed the boundaries of good taste - and the law.



Lenny Bruce getting arrested in 1961. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 13, 1925, is the birthdate of Lenny Bruce, the provocative, often scatological comic who pushed the boundaries of both perceived good taste and the law in the 1950s and '60s, and who died at age 40 of a drug overdose.

Leonard Alfred Schneider was born in Mineola, a town on Long Island, New York. His parents, Myron (Mickey) Schneider, a British-born shoe salesman who later became a podiatrist, and Sadie Kitchenberg Schneider, a performer who went by the stage name of Sally Marr, divorced when Lenny was 5. He grew up mostly with his mother and with other relatives on Long Island, attending Wellington C. Mepham High School, in Bellmore.

After leaving home at age 16, Schneider (he changed his name to “Bruce” in 1947, after he started performing professionally) worked for some time on a Long Island farm, and in 1942 joined the U.S. Navy. He spent World War II as a shell carrier off the coasts of Italy, France and North Africa. After he performed in drag for his fellow sailors, and confessed to the medical officer of the USS Brooklyn that he was experiencing homosexual urges, he received a discharge in 1946 “under honorable conditions ... by reason of unsuitability for the naval service.”

Lenny Bruce’s early years in comedy were slow, as he began making semi-professional appearances in clubs in New York. A first-place performance in 1948 on the national radio show “Arthur Godfrey’s Talent Scouts” (he played the role of a Bavarian mimic doing imitations of such American movie stars as Humphrey Bogart

and Edward G. Robinson) led to bookings at classier clubs, such as New York's The Strand and the Tick Tock, in Milwaukee. By 1949, he was making a decent \$450 a week.

Marries a stripper, sets up dubious charity

As Bruce moved from comedic impersonations into more personal comic routines, though, he found it harder to maintain well-paying bookings. In 1951, after marrying Honey Harlow, a stripper he met in Baltimore, he set up a semi-fake charity in New York called the Brother Mathias Foundation, which was dedicated to providing financial assistance to a leper colony in British Guiana (today Guyana). Wearing a stolen priest's shirt and collar, he solicited funds – according to his own account in his not entirely reliable autobiography, “How to Talk Dirty and Influence People” – from wealthy widows in Miami. Over the course of three weeks, Bruce raised \$8,000. He actually did transfer \$2,500 to the leper colony, but kept the rest.

After an arrest in Miami for impersonating a priest, with charges later reduced to panhandling, Bruce and Harlow moved to Pittsburgh, and then to California. They often appeared together at strip clubs, where Bruce acted as master of ceremonies, and Harlow strutted her stuff. But her continued work as a stripper was a cause of great distress for her husband, and of conflict between them. By 1957, they divorced, after the birth of their daughter, Brandy Kathleen, known as Kitty.

Finding freedom in strip clubs

According to Bruce's biographer, Albert Goldman, however, it was his work at strip clubs in the San Fernando Valley that allowed Lenny Bruce to find himself as a comedian. In Goldman's words, it was "precisely at the moment when he sank to the bottom of the barrel and started working the places that were the lowest of the low" that Bruce “began to blow with a spontaneous freedom and resourcefulness that resembled the style and inspiration of his new friends and admirers, the jazz musicians of the modernist school." As Bruce began to give freer reign to his comedy, often entering into a zone of free-association riffs where it almost seemed as if he was giving unfiltered expression to his imagination, he began running into regular trouble with the law over the content of his routines.

Bruce was an iconoclast who talked about all the subjects that polite society considered taboo, long before American comedy had become a venue in which “anything goes." Along with making people laugh, he also took pokes at such powerful institutions as the Catholic Church (he talked about the positive trend of people “leaving the church and going back to God”), and at what he saw as people's hypocrisy on matters of race and sexual mores. He talked about gays, about the true meaning of “obscenity,” and about America as a racist society. He peppered it all with doses of Yiddish, and many references to Jewish culture.

One legendary routine talked about people being either “Jewish” or “goyisch,” not necessarily based on their religious identity, but more as a state of mind: “If you're from Butte, Montana and you're Jewish, you're still goyisch. The Air Force is Jewish, the Marine Corps dangerous goyisch. Rye Bread is Jewish, instant potatoes, scary

goyisch. Eddie Cantor is goyisch, George Jessel is goyisch, Coleman Hawkins is Jewish.”

In one show, he spoke about the separate existences experienced by blacks and whites in America, and his own lack of personal contact with African Americans: "I was just thinking this morning that I'd never slept over at a colored person's house. I've never had dinner in a Negro home. There's a big foreign country in my country that I know very little about. And more than that, when whites talk about [urban] riots, we really lose our perspective completely. A man from Mars could see what's really happening -- convicts rioting in a corrupt prison."

Since the ideas, although sometimes highly provocative, were not illegal, he was busted, in town after town, for the use of obscene language. His arrests then became the subject of much of his comedy, and, during what was relatively brief career, he entered into a pattern by which he almost goaded the local police to arrest him, and as he did so, his national notoriety grew.

Social satirist, not sick comic

Bruce resented being called a “sick comic,” and a statement signed by close to 100 artists and public intellectuals, who included Lionel Trilling, Robert Lowell and Reinhold Niebuhr, that was submitted in his defense in a New York trial for obscenity, claimed that he was a social satirist "in the tradition of Swift, Rabelais and Twain."

But that New York case resulted in Bruce’s conviction (he was sentenced to time in a workhouse, but died before his appeal was heard), and he also found himself arrested and often tried in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago. He also was arrested separately, but on multiple occasions, on charges of drug possession. He was actually banned from performing in several cities, and most American nightclubs refused to book him. After traveling to Australia in 1962, and opening his show in Sydney with the words, “What a wonderful fucking audience,” he was arrested, and then banned from appearing in the country. Later, he was refused admission to the United Kingdom as well.

All this while, he was releasing albums, so that much of his comedy remains preserved and available today. But the steady legal problems took a toll, he suffered frequent serious illnesses, and his dependence on drugs increased.

On July 24 and 25, Bruce appeared at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, together with Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention. Promoter Bill Graham, the owner of Fillmore, later described him as being “whacked out on amphetamines.”

A week later, on August 3, 1966, Lenny Bruce was found dead in his home in Hollywood Hills, California, shortly after having shot up with morphine. An autopsy ruled his death an accidental overdose.

In 2007, then-governor George Pataki, of New York, gave Bruce a posthumous pardon for his 1964 obscenity conviction.

October 14 / Uprising at Sobibor

The rebels, led by Polish-Jewish prisoner Leon Feldhendler and Soviet-Jewish POW Alexander Perchesky, killed about 12 Germans and local guards, and some 300 escaped from the camp.

On this day in 1943, an uprising by prisoners took place at the Sobibor death camp, in German-occupied east Poland.

Sobibor was established as a killing center, and its gas chamber began operating in May 1942. (John Demjanjuk, in his final trial in Germany, was provisionally convicted in 2011 of being an accomplice to the murder of 28,000 Jews at Sobibor. He died before he could appeal the conviction, which was then nullified.) Prisoners included Jews from Poland, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany and the Netherlands, as well as Soviet prisoners of war, many of them also Jews.

The only prisoners not sent immediately to their deaths on arrival at the camp were those used as laborers to keep the camp running. These included the Sonderkommandos, who were employed in the actual murder operations.

By the spring of 1943, it became clear to the prisoners that the camp was going to be phased out of operation – and they would be murdered – and, together with newly arrived Soviet prisoners of war, they organized a resistance group. On October 14, at which point there were only 600 prisoners remaining in Sobibor, an uprising began. The rebels, led by Polish-Jewish prisoner Leon Feldhendler and Soviet-Jewish POW Alexander Perchesky, killed about 12 Germans and local guards, and some 300 escaped from the camp. About 100 of them were quickly captured or killed, with the remainder escaping into the surrounding forests. Only 50 or 60 of those who avoided recapture survived until the end of the war.

Within days of the uprising, one of only two successful revolts at a Nazi camp, Sobibor was closed, dismantled, and planted over with trees. During the less than year and a half that it was in operation, up to 250,000 Jews were murdered there.

October 15 / First Jewish minister appointed into Canada's cabinet

On this day in 1969, Canadian Jew Herbert Gray made history in the country's parliament. Ultimately serving for four decades, Gray, known for his love of rock music, was also Canada's longest serving MP.



In 1969, Canada got its first Jewish MP. Photo by AP

On this day in 1969, Herbert Gray was appointed minister without portfolio in the Liberal government of Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, becoming the country's first Jewish cabinet minister. His parliamentary career spanned from 1962 to 2002, making him Canada's longest-serving MP.

Herbert Eser Gray, known as Herb, was born in 1931 in Windsor, Ontario, to two Belarusian-born parents. He was educated as a lawyer, and worked in the field from 1956 until his first bid for parliament, in the Windsor riding district of Essex West, later called Windsor West, to which he was reelected a subsequent 12 times. His cabinet positions (held under prime ministers Trudeau, John Turner and Jean Chretien) included minister of national revenue, minister of industry, trade and commerce, solicitor-general (a position responsible for internal security), and, from 1997 to 2002, deputy prime minister, under Chretien. When the liberals were in opposition, he served as opposition house leader and later, briefly in 1990, as head of the opposition.

Though well-liked for his integrity and intelligence, Gray always had a reputation for a certain blandness, earning the nickname "Gray Herb." Yet, he is also well known in Canada for his great knowledge and love of rock music: particularly his partiality to Bruce Springsteen, Bob Seger and Fine Young Cannibals.

Following his retirement from Parliament in 2002, Gray was appointed Canadian chair of the International Joint Commission, a Canadian-American organization dealing with air and water rights between the two countries. In 2008, he became chancellor of Carleton University in Ottawa, a position he held until last year.

October 16 / 'Children of the Ghetto' premieres in New York, gets skewered

Previews of very Jewish universalist's play went great, which made the critics' savage take all the more surprising.



Israel Zangwill, writer and playwright. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On October 16, 1899, the play “Children of the Ghetto,” by Israel Zangwill, had its New York premiere performance. The play, an adaptation of Zangwill’s 1892 novel of the same name, tells the story of immigrant Jews living in the crowded ghetto of London’s East End earlier in the 19th century. It is based on Zangwill’s own childhood there and was the author’s first full-length stage play, the first of three he wrote on Jewish themes.

Israel Zangwill (1864-1926) was one of the most popular and successful writers of his era, and also an important figure in Jewish communal life. As a universalist who was also proudly open about his Jewish background, he became a medium for interpreting the story of his people to the Gentile world. (He was also involved early on in the Zionist movement, and later founded the Jewish Territorialist Organization.) As one admirer wrote about Zangwill’s role in English society at the time of his death: “when a Jewish question was taken up by the press, or a Jewish question was discussed in Parliament, or anything Jewish appeared on the surface, the English world would not listen to Rothschild, the head of the Jewish community, nor to the Board of Deputies, nor to the Chief Rabbi, but to Israel Zangwill, because he was considered the authoritative Jewish spokesman and the unofficial ambassador of the Jewish people at the Court of St. James.”

A very Jewish universalist

Zangwill wrote frequently about non-Jewish topics, and certainly wanted to be regarded as a writer for the general audience, but there is no doubt he is best known for his work on Jewish themes, about which he wrote with great vividness, based on personal experience. In addition to “Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People,” as the original novel was called, his Jewish works included the 1909 play “The Melting Pot,” which Theodore Roosevelt, writing to Zangwill in 1912, described as “among the very strong and real influences upon my thought and my life.” Zangwill also wrote the novel “King of the Schnorrers” and “Dreamers of the Ghetto,” a series of short biographical portraits of influential Jewish thinkers.

Although “Children of the Ghetto” introduces readers to a wide array of characters living in the East End, in the stage version, Zangwill focused on the doomed romance between Hannah Jacobs and David Brandon.

Hannah is the daughter of Reb Shmuel, and she and David, a jeweler, are in love with one another. But because David is a kohen, a descendant of the priestly tribe, and Hannah is technically a divorcee (after having been involved in a mock marriage), Jewish law forbids them from marrying. Initially, Hannah argues for dispensing with archaic Jewish law, and considers eloping with David and fleeing to America, but in the end, she holds fast to Jewish law and gives up on her desire.

In her book about the play, “From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot,” scholar Edna Nahshon suggests that the character of Hannah “serves as a mouthpiece for Zangwill,” who was himself secular in his Jewishness and married to a non-Jew, but who nonetheless “could not embrace Reform Judaism as a viable alternative to the traditional Judaism he loved but could not practice. . . . The monumental tragedy of modern Jewish life, Zangwill seems to be saying, is that the alternative to the authentic Jewishness of the ghetto is total abandonment of tradition and full submersion in a secular though essentially Gentile world.”

The press turn savage

For director of the stage adaptation of “Children of the Ghetto,” Zangwill turned to James A. Herne, a playwright and actor. The play previewed in Washington, D.C., opening there on September 18, 1899. It was a big event, one that grabbed the attention of the Jewish community, both in the U.S. and in London. Richard Gottheil, a well-known Jewish intellectual, wrote for a London newspaper at the time, that, for American Jewry, this was “Zangwill month,” and that the local newspapers had been “full of Zangwill, of the Ghetto, and of its children; but chiefly of Zangwill.”

Audiences in Washington responded with great enthusiasm to the play. And when it opened in New York, at the Herald Square Theater, a month later, expectations were high, and the atmosphere at the premiere performance highly celebratory. Which is why the negative critical responses came as a surprise to many.

Although the actors were largely praised, Nahshon says that the playwright was savaged by the local press. Abraham Cahan called it “a piece of art,” but he was in the minority. More typical was Clement Scott, a London critic who had been banished to New York for bad behavior, who began his review in the New York Herald in the following way: “As I write after an evening of boredom and astonishment, the

Zangwill play seems to me one fine dramatic moment sandwiched between a somewhat silly farce and an occasionally blasphemous pantomime.”

Two days after its opening, The New York Times actually ran an editorial accusing Zangwill of holding the Jews up to mockery, and of therefore being “disloyal” to them. It suggested that, if Zangwill, “in the effort to display his talents or genius, and to win the rewards, monetary and other, of such display... passes the wavering limits of taste and decency, his offense is a grave one.” The clear intent was that he had done just that.

The controversy over the play and the question of whether it was “good for the Jews” became quite heated in the Jewish press, but the attention did not help the ticket sales of “Children of the Ghetto.” The play held its own for only 49 performances, and closed in December 1899. A London production that same month ran for even less time.

Zangwill went on to have many other plays produced in both London and New York, and “Children of the Ghetto” had both a Yiddish production in New York, in 1904, and also was the basis for a 1915 silent film, with the action transferred from the East End to New York’s Lower East Side.

October 17 / This day in Jewish history / Superman's father is born, only to repudiate his child

The first effort of high school buddies Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster was a mad scientist. The ensuing Man of Steel was rather more benign, yet his disillusioned creators came to loathe him in the end.



The cover of the very first Action Comics, 1 (June 1938, publisher: DC Comics). Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 17, 1914, is the birthdate of Jerry Siegel, who together with partner Joe Shuster, created the Man of Steel – no, not Joseph Stalin – Superman.

The two met while they were high-school students in Cleveland, Ohio, and teamed up on a number of projects, including one centered on a mad scientist (bald, of course) called “The Superman”. Then came a sleepless night in 1934, when Siegel, the writer in the team, had an inspiration.

Thus was born the rather more benign character who devoted his extraordinary powers to the benefit of humankind. It took them another four years before they found a publisher willing to help them tell their story.

'Girls would notice man leaping over building'

Jerome Siegel was born in Cleveland, the youngest of the six children of Mitchell Siegel and the former Sarah Fine. The family had emigrated from Lithuania after the birth of their first two children, daughters.

Mitchell owned a shop for men’s clothing accessories, and it was there that he died during a robbery in 1932, apparently of a heart attack.

Several years ago, novelist Brad Meltzer wrote a novel based on his study of Jerry Siegel's life, in which he suggested that the traumatic death of Siegel's father was at least partly behind his invention of an immortal superhero.

"Think about it," Meltzer told USA Today in 2008: "Your father dies in a robbery, and you invent a bulletproof man who becomes the world's greatest hero. I'm sorry, but there's a story there."

In fact, Siegel's first drawings for the evil version of The Superman were made only weeks after his father's death.

Of course, there were also more prosaic forces at work behind the inspiration for Superman. As Siegel reported many years later, "I had crushes on several attractive girls who either didn't know I existed or didn't care I existed," he said. "It occurred to me: what if I had something going for me, like jumping over buildings or throwing cars around or something like that?"

Siegel met Joe Shuster, who had been born in Toronto, Ontario, but who moved with his family to Cleveland at the age of 9 or 10, when the two were studying at Glenville High School there. Both were, by all accounts, shy and somewhat awkward, and they bonded easily. "When Joe and I first met, it was like the right chemicals coming together," Siegel later recounted.

As an avid reader of science fiction, Jerry Siegel produced his own fanzine, with original stories based on the literature he loved, called "Cosmic Stories," in 1929. It was a new idea at the time, and he followed it up with similar projects in the coming years, including, in 1932, one created together with Shuster that included a story called "Reign of the Superman" – about the eponymous scientist bent on global domination.

Kal-El is born

They soon decided to turn Superman into a comic character and a force for good, after the concept came to Siegel lay tossing and turning in bed on a summer night in 1934. They were encouraged to submit their prototype for a Superman comic book to Consolidated Book Publishing. Unfortunately, the company promptly went out of business and a discouraged Shuster burnt the pages of that first comic book. Jerry Siegel was able to save only the cover from destruction.

It wasn't until April 1938 (in a magazine cover-dated June) that Superman – born Kal-El on the planet of Krypton, sent into space as a baby by his parents when they learned that their world was doomed, and rescued by a childless couple in Kansas, where he is renamed Clark Kent – that Action Comics 1 appeared, marking the debut of the Superman that we know today. It was immediately successful, leading to the introduction of a self-titled Superman series the following year.

Shuster's eyesight soon began to deteriorate, and by 1940, he had assembled a studio of artists who helped execute the artwork for the comic books and a newspaper comic strip that was launched in 1939.

Yet Superman couldn't save his creators

As has now been recounted many times, Siegel and Shuster signed a contract with National Allied Publications in which they sold the rights to their character for \$130. By 1940, it was reported that their annual fees for their work were \$75,000 each – a reasonable salary at the time, but a fraction of what “Superman” was worth.

In 1948, when their first 10-year contract expired, the pair sued National to regain ownership of the rights – and National fired them.

Thus began a legal odyssey for the two that dragged on for decades, until, finally, in 1975, and after press reports that both Siegel and Shuster were living at a near-poverty level, Warner Communications, by then the owner of DC Comics, agreed to pay them both an annual royalty of \$20,000, plus supply them with health insurance. Warner also agreed to restore the men’s names to the Superman product, having removed their credit as creators back in 1948 when the ownership dispute began.

Nonetheless, the legal battle over the future of the copyright continued until earlier this year, when a Federal circuit court in California ruled that DC Comics would retain sole ownership of the rights.

By the early 1950s, Siegel and Shuster were no longer working together, and Siegel had taken a position as comics-art director for the publisher Ziff-Davis. For some years, he also returned to DC to write Superman stories -- without credit – but that ended when the legal battle heated up again in 1967.

By the time Siegel began receiving the small annual stipend from DC, he understandably told a reporter that he was fed up with his creation: "I can't stand to look at a Superman comic book. It makes my physically ill. I love Superman, and yet to me he has become an alien thing."

Over the years, Siegel did write for a number of other comic-book firms, including Marvel and Archie Comics. He also had a job as a clerk typist at one point. He and Shuster both ended up living in Los Angeles, several blocks from each other.

Shuster, completely blind by the end of his life, died in 1992.

Jerry Siegel died on January 28, 1996. He was survived by his wife, the former Joanne Carter, who had served as the model for Joe Shuster when he first drew Lois Lane, Clark Kent’s love interest. She and Siegel had become reacquainted a decade later in New York. By then both had been married and divorced. They married in 1948, and had a daughter, Laura. Jerry also was survived by a son, Michael, from his earlier marriage.

October 18 / Birthday of Fannie Hurst, storyteller with a conscience who went against the grain

Hurst, born in 1889, got paid \$70,000 to serialize one of her novels in *Cosmopolitan* and her death garnered a front-page story in *The New York Times*; she was a feminist, and dealt openly with issues like homosexuality and 'negro matters'.



Fannie Hurst, in a portrait by Carl Van Vechten. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 18, 1889, is the birthdate of Fannie Hurst. Although her name may not mean much to readers today, she was one of the most popular writers of her day, in a career as novelist and short-story author that spanned nearly six decades. In addition to her 18 novels, many of which became best-sellers, her work spawned some 30 film adaptations.

Fannie Hurst was born in Hamilton, Ohio, the only surviving child of Samuel Hurst, a shoe manufacturer, and the former Rose Koppel, both of them American-born Jews of German descent. A younger sister died at the age of 3. Soon after Fannie's birth, the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where she grew up and attended Washington University in St. Louis, graduating in 1909.

Fannie's family was not religiously observant, and both of her parents shared an anxiety about being identified as Jews. For her mother, it extended to letting her daughter know that she was not to marry a "kike" – by which she apparently meant a Jew of Eastern European origin. Her father apparently threatened to send their daughter to Hebrew school, but there is no evidence that that happened.

After college, Hurst moved to New York, to fulfill her destiny as a writer. It was there, in 1915, that she became engaged to Jacques Danielson, a Jewish émigré pianist from Russia, whom she had met at a Michigan spa. When she told her parents that the

two planned to wed, they mounted a campaign to discourage her from doing so. In the end, they did marry, but they continued to maintain separate apartments, and kept their union a secret from the public for five years.

To give an idea of how popular Fannie Hurst was: Not only was her death, in 1968, cause for a front-page story in *The New York Times*, but the very fact of her revelation of her marriage to Danielson, in 1920, yielded a page-one story in the same paper. There, she explained to a reporter that the two had decided to “sail into matrimony on a bark of their own designing.” She listed a number of resolutions that had accompanied their decision to wed, including the fact that she would retain her own name, rather than follow the “antediluvian” custom of taking his surname; their belief that “seven breakfasts a week opposite to one another might prove irksome” (she said they averaged two); and that they would make appointments when they wanted to meet. The two remained married until Danielson’s death, in 1952, although they had no children.

A 'corny artist' becomes the highest-paid short-story writer

Hurst published her first story professionally, “Ain’t Life Wonderful,” in 1908, in the journal *Reedy’s Mirror*, when she was junior in college. After moving to New York, she supported herself with jobs as a waitress and a Macy’s salesgirl, and spent her free time wandering the city, in particular venue like the Lower East Side and Ellis Island, to soak up atmosphere for her writing. Her professional career took off after she published her first story in the *Saturday Evening Post*, in 1915. Suddenly magazines that had rejected her work began requesting the privilege to publish the same stories they had earlier turned down.

She was often said to be the highest-paid short-story writer in the country, although she herself said she thought this was unlikely. What is known is that *Cosmopolitan* magazine paid her \$70,000 for the serial rights to her novel “Back Street,” which then went on to be adapted for the screen three separate times.

Hurst herself had few pretensions about the lasting literary value of her work, and late in her career, her own editor commented that she was “basically a corny artist,” before he went on to note that, “We all know people who write beautifully and can’t tell a story worth a damn. She is a really wonderful storyteller.”

Hurst’s ability to tell a story was accompanied by an interest in exploring – and a genuine concern for -- social issues that others were still reluctant to take on. (On her desk, she kept a folder marked “Negro matters.”) Although some saw her friendships with black artists as patronizing in nature, the fact is that she helped a number of African American writers, in particular Zora Neale Hurston. The two women were friends, but Hurst also employed Hurston, when she was a student, as her driver and secretary, and the latter at some point described Hurst with some irony as a “Negrotarian,” a white woman dedicated to bettering the black race. It was during a long drive to Canada, in 1931, when Hurst was on her way to meet with her lover, the Arctic explorer Vilhajmur Stefansson, and Hurston was at the wheel, that Fannie Hurst developed the idea for writing “*Imitation of Life*,” her melodramatic 1933 novel that deals with the unequal relationship of a white woman and the black woman she employs to help her raise her daughter, the concept of “passing for white,” scribes the

unequal relationship between a wealthy white actress and the black woman. That book was adapted for the screen twice.

Fannie Hurst struggled with being overweight her entire life, and was constantly seeking the perfect diet, a theme that served as the subject of a 1935 memoir, "No Food With My Meals." As the host of a New York radio show, she dealt openly with the subject of homosexuality, inviting guests who were themselves gay to appear, as opposed to simply "experts" who would relate to the topic as a problem.

As a friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor, she was an occasional guest at the White House. Once, in 1932, she was invited to stay with the Roosevelts in Washington, shortly after she had finished a particular diet. Arriving at the White House, she arranged with the president's secretary to be admitted to his office, so she could present herself to FDR with her new figure. After Hurst did a turn for him, Roosevelt supposedly commented that, "The Hurst may have changed, but it's the same old fanny."

Hurst was an active campaigner for animal's rights, for civil rights and for workers' rights, and she raised money for Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany in the 1930s. Her philanthropy included large gifts to Hadassah, to the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies, and to Yeshiva University's Albert Einstein medical school, which she aided with a donation of \$350,000 for heart research, after the death of her husband. And although early in her life, she was critical of Zionism, she was said to have become a supporter of Israel in the 1950s.

Fannie Hurst died on February 23, 1968, at the age of 78.

October 19 / A professor and his student make antibiotic history

On this day in 1943, a major breakthrough against tuberculosis took place in a lab at Rutgers University where a professor and his grad student made antibiotic history.



Selman Waksman, co-father of streptomycin. Photo by Wikipedia

On this day in 1943, the antibiotic streptomycin was first identified in the Rutgers University laboratory of Selman Abraham Waksman, in Piscataway, New Jersey. Streptomycin was the first antibiotic to be effective against tuberculosis, which throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries was one of the most significant health threats in the world.

Although Waksman received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1952 for “his discovery of streptomycin,” the work was shared by graduate student Albert Schatz. When only Waksman was publicly credited for the discovery, Schatz sued for recognition as a co-discover and for a share of the royalties from the patent of the drug. In an out-of-court settlement, he received 3 percent of the royalties. Schatz received his Ph.D. in 1945, writing his thesis on streptomycin’s discovery.

Both Waksman (1888-1973) and Schatzman (1920-2005) were Jews of Eastern European extraction: Waksman was born in what is today Ukraine and arrived in the United States in 1910; Schatz was born in Norwich, Connecticut to parents of Russian and English birth. It was Waksman who coined the term “antibiotics” – referring to microorganisms that can be used to fight other microorganisms -- and he was involved in the development of 15 different antibiotic medications, including neomycin, used in topical antibiotics and antibacterials like Neosporin. Although Waksman had been working for years with *Streptomyces griseus*, the species of

bacteria from which streptomycin was derived, it was Schatz who actually isolated the streptomycin bactericidal antibiotic.

Streptomycin began its assault on TB in 1952, when an oral application of the drug, Isoniazid, was developed. In fact, an effective immunization (as opposed to mere therapy) was created in France in 1906, called Bacille Calmette-Guerin, but it only began to be used with large population groups after World War II. BCG is still used in the United States today, but has been found to have varying rates of success in different countries.

October 20 / Ben-Gurion visits a wizened Torah sage

The leader of secular Israel met with Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz to hammer out a deal for religious girls' national service.



David Ben-Gurion speaking at the Knesset, 1957 Photo by Wikimedia Commons

October 20, 1952, is the date that Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion came to the home of the Hazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, for what he hoped would be a “summit meeting” between the leader of secular Israel and the man who was then perhaps the country’s most respected arbiter of Torah Judaism.

More specifically, it was reported that the prime minister traveled to Bnei Brak to discuss with the rabbi the matter of national service for religious girls, a proposal that was being bitterly debated at the time. The very fact of the meeting between the 66-year-old founding father of the state and the wizened, 73-year-old sage of Lithuanian Orthodoxy was the subject of great interest among the press, but only one other was actually present in the room with the two. Nonetheless, there have been a variety of accounts regarding what was really said.

Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (1878-1953) was born and raised in the Brest province of what is today Belarus. He earned the sobriquet of “Hazon Ish” in recognition of his highly regarded 1911 work on the Shulhan Arukh code of Jewish law. In 1933, Karelitz immigrated to Eretz Israel, where he devoted nearly all his time to Torah study. Although he held no official position, his reputation for having an encyclopedic knowledge of Jewish law made his home a focus of pilgrimage. Because the Hazon Ish had studied a number of fields of secular science, he became an expert in coming up with practical solutions to problems raised by the clash between halakha and life in a modern Jewish state (for example, the milking of cows on the Sabbath.)

At the time of Ben-Gurion’s visit, both political and rabbinical Israel were preoccupied with a proposal to require girls from religiously observant families, who

were exempt from army service, to perform some sort of alternate national service. The very discussion of the idea in the Knesset had led to a shaking up of the government coalition and bitter opposition from the country's Chief Rabbinate. It was presumed that the premier's journey to the rabbi would afford an opportunity not only to discuss this particular issue, but to further sharpen the definition of the "status quo," the compromise regarding the place of Jewish law in public life, on which Ben-Gurion had already made significant concessions – including the non-conscription of yeshiva students and the closing of businesses on Shabbat.

'No zealot's anger'

Ben-Gurion recorded his impressions of the meeting in his diary, where he described Rabbi Karelitz as possessing the "face and eyes of a spiritual man." He noted that the rabbi spoke through the entire encounter "in a good spirit and with much laughter, lacking in a zealot's anger, even though there is definitely something of the zealot about him, although it's hidden from view."

From his notes, it is clear that Ben-Gurion was hoping to find common ground with Karelitz, and that he made several attempts to broach the question of how it might be possible to reach a better form of coexistence between the Torah-observant and those with lesser levels of religious observance. The topic of national service, however, doesn't seem to have come up at all.

"There's the question of existence, of preserving human life," Ben-Gurion recounted saying to the Hazon Ish. "Shouldn't love of [the People of] Israel take precedence over everything?"

The Hazon Ish responded that, although love of Israel and love of Torah may seem like two separate things, they're not, because "there is no Torah without Israel, and no Israel without Torah."

What has become the part of the conversation most recounted to this day is left out altogether from Ben-Gurion's account.

Aside from the Hazon Ish and the prime minister, the only other person present in the modest room, was Yitzhak Navon, at the time the premier's secretary, later a Labor minister and Israel's president. Navon, writing sometime later about the meeting, recounted how Rabbi Karelitz, responding to Ben-Gurion's query regarding "how can we live together," described a scene from the Talmud in which, when "two camels meet on a path, and one of the camels is weighed down with a load, and the other camel is not, the one not carrying the burden must give way to the one who is." The moral of the parable, suggested Karelitz, was that, "We, the religious Jews, are analogous to the camel with the load – we carry a burden of hundreds of commandments. You" – secular Israel – "have to give way."

Ben-Gurion, according to Navon, attempted to mount a counter-argument. "And the [second] camel isn't weighed down with the burden of commandments?" he asked rhetorically. "The commandment to settle the land isn't a burden?... And the commandments to defending life aren't mitzvot? And what those boys whom you are so opposed to do, sitting on the borders and protecting you, that's not a mitzvah?"

Karelitz was not even able to agree, according to Navon, that the learners' lives were protected by those serving in the army. Rather, he insisted that, "It is only thanks to the fact that we learn Torah that they [the soldiers] are able to exist."

A parable of camels – or wagons?

The conversation went on for some 50 minutes, after which the two men examined the rabbi's bookshelves together. Following that, Ben-Gurion left Karelitz and traveled on to a gathering at Bnei Brak's city hall. In the days that followed, the encounter was described extensively in the press, with different accounts emerging of what had been said. It became commonplace, for example, that the Hazon Ish's parable had been about two wagons, one heavily laden, one empty, approaching each other on the road, not camels.

Navon also described one writer, Aharon Mirsky, whom he had briefed on the conversation. Mirsky had gone on to write up an account of the meeting that included a number of remarks that Navon had specifically told him had not been uttered. Mirsky even acknowledged that Navon had denied that the remarks had been made, but added that he "apparently didn't understand, because they were speaking Yiddish."

Navon went on to write: "I have two things to say about that: First, they didn't speak a word of Yiddish, only Hebrew. And second, if they had spoken Yiddish, I would have been fine with that," since the future president, a Jerusalem-born descendant of two long lines of Sephardi Jews, was conversant in the language.

October 21 / Red Sox manager who removed 'curse of the Bambino' moves on

Theo Epstein led the Sox to their first World Series win in 86 years, and later took on a bigger challenge: to do the same with the Chicago Cubs.



Chicago's Wrigley Field. Photo by Wikimedia

On October 21, 2011, Theo Epstein - the man who in 2002 made the baseball record books by becoming the youngest general manager in the history of the game, and who two years later led the Boston Red Sox to their first World Series win in 86 years - announced his resignation from the team. It soon became apparent that Epstein had accepted an offer to become president of the Chicago Cubs, probably the only Major League team with a worse curse hanging over it than the one Epstein had helped the Red Sox shake.

In a rare interview, the publicity-shy Epstein told journalist Mark Leibovich, who profiled him last year in the book "Jewish Jocks," that he had long felt some guilt over working in sports instead of doing something "more worthwhile." His twin brother, Paul, for example, is a social worker, and Theo told Leibovich that he serves as his "moral compass."

When he decided to end his contract with Boston a year early, in fact, he was considering leaving baseball altogether, and maybe, for example, going to work for a group lobbying for handgun control (this was in the wake of the January 2011 shooting of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords, in which she was severely injured and six others killed). In the end, however, the position with the Cubs had opened up - and a five-year contract worth more than \$18 million for Epstein - and he decided to stick with the not-so-worthwhile life.

Theo Nathan Epstein was born December 29, 1973, the youngest (by 60 seconds, after Paul, his fraternal twin) of the three children of Leslie and Ilene Epstein. Ilene is the co-owner of a women's clothing store, The Studio, in Brookline, Massachusetts, the town where Theo grew up and his parents still live. Leslie is a novelist and the head of the creative writing program at Boston University. Leslie's father was Philip Epstein, who, together with his brother, Julius, wrote – and won the Oscar for – the screenplay of “Casablanca,” in 1942.

Theo Epstein attended Brookline High School (he was a pitcher on the school's baseball team) in the prosperous, largely Jewish Boston suburb of the same name, although he has said that he was raised with very minimal exposure to Jewish practice or education – no brit and no bar mitzvah, according to Leibovich. This is a little surprising, if only because his father is so strongly identified as a writer who deals with Jewish themes, including in, most famously, his 1978 novel “King of the Jews,” about a Judenrat head in a Polish ghetto during the Holocaust, loosely based on the real-life figure of Chaim Rumkowski, who ruled over the Jewish ghetto in Lodz.

Paul Epstein told Mark Leibovich that, because he and his siblings (there is also an older sister, Anya, a television screenwriter) were not interested in Hebrew school, their father had them read books by Jewish writers. “Sort of a homeschooling attempt,” he's quoted as saying in “Jewish Jocks.” “We had to memorize an Isaac Bashevis Singer passage or some s[---] like that.”

Theo was educated at Yale University, and he attended, and received a law degree from, the University of San Diego. He studied law, full-time, while he was working at the San Diego Padres, the city's National League team, where he started doing publicity and soon became director of baseball operations, a position that has responsibility for contract negotiations with players.

When Padres president Larry Lucchino was hired as CEO and president of the Red Sox, in November 2002, he invited Epstein, then 28 years old, to join him as general manager of the team. Within two years, the team had won the World Series, breaking the so-called “Curse of the Bambino” – referring to the fact that the team had not won a championship since shortly before it traded Babe Ruth (to the New York Yankees, no less), in 1919. Understandably, Boston fans had developed some fairly severe psychological issues in the near-century that ensued, and the World Series victory served as a major breakthrough for the city.

The frustration of Boston fans was in large part due to the fact that their team was overall a strong one, and that there were many seasons where the Red Sox allowed defeat to be snatched from the jaws of victory.

Taking on the challenge of the Cubs was something else entirely. The team, founded in 1870, has not won a World Series since 1908. The Cubs haven't even competed in the World Series since 1945. That was the year that the owner of the Billy Goat Tavern placed a curse on the team, after he and his pet goat were asked to leave a series game. Specifically, what Billy Sianis said was, “Them Cubs, they ain't gonna win no more.”

As of October 2013, the curse is still in full force; the Cubs ended the season with the worst record in the National League Central Division, with 66 wins and 96 defeats. On September 30, a day after their final game – a 4-0 loss to the Cardinals, winners of this year’s NL pennant – the team fired Dale Sveum, the general manager brought in by Epstein two years earlier. Epstein’s rebuilding work with the team continues.

In the meantime, while Epstein continues to dabble in baseball, he also oversees a charitable foundation, together with his brother, Paul: The Foundation to Be Named Later (the name is a play on the phrase frequently heard in baseball transactions, when a trade between teams includes a “player to be named later”). It raises money for programs aimed to help disadvantaged youth in the Boston area.

Theo Epstein married Marie Whitney, a Roman Catholic, in 2007. They have a 5-year-old son.

October 22 / Sarah Bernhardt, mother of all drama queens, is born

The French-Jewish actress who used to sleep in a coffin (because it helped her prepare for tragic roles) was virtually the world's first international celebrity.



Sarah Bernhardt as Cleopatra. Photo by Library of Congress

October 22 (or 23), 1844, is the birthdate of Sarah Bernhardt, the outstanding French actress who was ahead of herself in almost every way, including perhaps in being the world's first international celebrity, whose expertise at self-promotion was only equaled by the artistic talent she had to promote.

She was born as Rosine Bernard, the daughter of Julie Bernard and an unknown father. Julie (1821-1876) was the daughter of a Dutch oculist and small-time crook named Moritz Baruch Bernardt, who after the death of Julie's mother, Sara, remarried and soon after abandoned his second wife and the six children he had had with Sara. Julie took herself to Paris, where she survived as a courtesan. and where Sarah was born

Julie sent Sarah away, first to an Augustine convent near Versailles, and then, at age 13, to the drama school at the Paris Conservatoire. Sarah's thought had been to become a nun, but it was her mother's then-lover, Charles Duc de Morny, the illegitimate half-brother of Napoleon III, who decided that she should be trained as an actress. At the Conservatoire, she learned about the acting tradition of an earlier student, the great Jewish actress Rachel (Eliza Rachel Felix, 1821-1858). Bernhardt always kept in her dressing room a portrait of Rachel.

In 1862, de Morny arranged for Sarah to be accepted on probation to the Comedie Francaise, the national acting company. Her debut performances there made little

impression, but her slapping the face of a senior actress of the company, when the latter shoved her sister, did: Sarah was promptly expelled from the Comedie.

A period of uncertainty led to Bernhardt's travel to Belgium, where she became the lover of Henri, Prince of Ligne. He was the father of her one child, Maurice, born in 1864, and although Henri wanted to marry Bernhardt, his family was opposed, and convinced her to decline his offer.

Throughout her life, Bernhardt, who was notoriously creative about her own biography, was always very forthright about the fact that her son was illegitimate. Similarly, she never tried to conceal or deny her Jewish origins, but instead expressed pride in them. Although she had been baptized as a Catholic, and declared herself an atheist, she was the frequent object of anti-Semitic comments and even literary caricatures. When, after the Franco-Prussian War, she was accused of being German and Jewish in the press, she was reported to have responded, "Jewish most certainly, but German, no." And a biographer of Bernhardt's quoted a letter she wrote addressing these same accusations: "If I have a foreign accent - which I much regret - it is cosmopolitan, but not Teutonic. I am a daughter of the great Jewish race, and my somewhat uncultivated language is the outcome of our enforced wanderings."

By 1866, Bernhardt had returned to Paris, where she began acting at the Odeon Theater. She stayed there for six years, and had a number of successes, the most notable of which was probably in 1869, as the wandering male minstrel Zanetto in the one-act verse play "The Passerby," by Francois Coppee.

In 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War, the Odeon was shut for performances, and Bernhardt converted its building into a hospital, where she herself helped care for wounded soldiers.

Two years later, she had her return to the Comedie Francaise. She played in roles by Victor Hugo, who also became her lover, and in the title role in Jean Racine's Phedre. Bringing the latter role to London in 1879 was the beginning of an international career for Bernhardt. After starting her own theater company, in 1880, she began touring, not only around Europe, but also to the United States (in 1906, she performed in a tent in Waco, Texas, before an audience of 5,000), and eventually to South America and Australia. She always traveled with the coffin that she slept in (she said that it helped her prepare for tragic roles), and at times with an alligator she called Ali-Gaga.

In 1905, after jumping from a balcony during the final scene of "La Tosca," in a performance in Rio de Janeiro, Bernhardt injured her right leg. A decade later, when it became gangrenous, she was required to have it amputated. But this did not stop her from acting, appearing with an artificial limb. She even came to the front to perform during World War I. She played men - including Hamlet and also, in Edmond Rostand's L'Aiglon, the 21-year-old son of Napoleon, when she herself was 55.

She owned and managed her own theater, the Theatre Sarah Bernhardt, which was renamed during the German occupation of Paris, during World War II. And she performed in some very early motion pictures. She also wrote a novel, a memoir and a book called "The Art of the Theater." She also took to painting and sculpture.

Bernhardt was married once, to Greek actor Aristides Damala, who died young from his addiction to morphine. Her many love affairs apparently included a relationship with the future King Edward VII, when he was still Prince of Wales.

Sarah Bernhardt lived to the age of 78. She died on March 26, 1923, after suffering kidney failure.

October 23 / Envious Barbadian colonists enact 'Jewish laws'

Jews flocked to Barbados with the island's conquest by the English, who promptly accused them of underhanded practices.



The ancient Jewish cemetery at the Nidhe Israel Synagogue, Bridgetown, Barbados. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On October 23, 1668, the Jews of Barbadoes were subjected to “Jewish laws,” which constrained where they could reside and their ability to engage in commerce.

The laws, enacted by British colonists on the island, who resented the Jews’ success in foreign trade and believed they were engaging in underhanded business practices, remained in effect until 1802.

Barbados, an island in the Lesser Antilles group, in the Caribbean Sea, was settled by the British in 1627, three years after a force from the United Kingdom took possession of it in the name of King James I. Within a year, Jews - from Dutch Brazil, Suriname, Cayenne, Germany and Italy, in addition to England – had joined them.

In 1654, when Portugal regained control of Brazil from the Netherlands, a group of refugees arrived from that South American country, settling in Bridgetown, the island’s capital.

Jews brought with them a variety of skills and experience that were useful to the development of the island’s economy. This included expertise in the cultivation of sugar, a crop perfectly suited to the climate and soil, but of which British settlers had no knowledge.

Sugar and slaves

According to historian David Brion Davis, author of “Inhuman Bondage,” a history of slavery in the New World, the opening of sugar plantations transformed the economy and demography of Barbados. By 1680, within the course of a single generation, the island had 175 major plantation owners, 1,000 small planters – and some 40,000 slaves.

By 1680, Bridgetown counted 54 Jewish families among its residents. They had established a synagogue in 1654, Nidhei Israel, with a cemetery. The other major Jewish community was in what came to be called Speightstown, in the island’s northwest corner. Its synagogue was called Tzemah David.

There were a small number of Jews who owned land and operated plantations, where they grew sugar and coffee. Most, however, were urban, and supported themselves through export and import business.

The knowledge of Spanish that many brought with them to Barbados made it easy to do business with Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and in South America. But Jews were accused of trading extensively with Dutch businesses too, a privilege that was denied British colonists, who therefore viewed it as a sign of disloyalty.

Swearing on the Christian bible

With the legislation of October 1668, however, Jews were forbidden from owning more than one slave, or employing Christians. Henceforth, they were limited to living in the towns, since the law basically prevented them from running a plantation.

They were subjected to new taxes, payable as a community rather than on an individual basis, and prohibited from participating in retail trade. Records from 1679, for example, note the payment of taxes "in pounds of Muscovado Sugar on the Hebrew Nation Inhabitants in and about Bridgetown toward defraying the charges of the Parish," yielding 13,299 pounds of sugar.

Although in theory, Jews were free to practice their religion, their testimony was inadmissible in Barbadian courts, because of their insistence on swearing their oath over a Hebrew Bible. Eventually, the law was amended so that they were permitted to testify in cases related to trade and business, but it was some years before they could testify in all cases.

It was only in 1802 that the colonial government of Barbados, followed in 1820 by Parliament in London, repealed all of the legislation that discriminated against Jews. By then, however, the Jews had largely, if slowly, abandoned the island. An attack on the Tzemah David synagogue in Speightstown, in 1739, for example, had led to the departure of the Jewish community from that town. By 1929, it is thought that the last descendant of the original Jewish settlers on Barbados left, although the community was renewed with the arrival of European Jewish refugees during the Holocaust.

October 24 / Jewish Theological Seminary admits women rabbis

A leading Conservative rabbi appointed a committee to discuss women's ordination 1977, but it took another six years until the decision was made to admit them to rabbinical school.

On October 24, 1983, the faculty senate of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York voted to admit women to the rabbinical school there.

The road to full equality for women in the Conservative Movement was a long one. It began in the mid-1950s with mixed seating being adopted by most movement synagogues, and made important strides in 1973, when the decision was made movement-wide to allow women to be counted in a minyan (prayer quorum) and to be eligible to be called to the Torah. But a 1972 call by “Ezrat Nashim,” a group of female Conservative activists, for complete equality for women in both opportunities and responsibilities – something that would have included the right to become rabbis and cantors – would have to wait another decade to move closer to realization. (The Reform movement began ordaining women in 1972, and the Reconstructionist movement two years after that.)

In 1977, Rabbi Gerson Cohen, chancellor of JTS, appointed a committee to study the subject of ordination of women. Its final report came out in favor, but the JTS faculty was still divided on the issue, and the rabbis’ organization, the Rabbinical Council of America, did not want to act before the seminary did. In anticipation of the eventual policy change, women began taking classes in the seminary’s rabbinical school even before they were formally admitted. Finally, on October 24, 1983, the faculty voted on the issue, with 34 in favor and 8 opposed. The halakhic justification was provided by a responsum written by Rabbi Joel Roth, which said that women could become rabbis if they committed themselves to the same level of observance that men were obligated to.

The timing of the vote was not coincidental: The seminary had waited until after the death of Rabbi Saul Lieberman, one of its most respected scholars of Talmud, on March 23, 1983. Lieberman had a conservative (with a small “c”) view of halakha, and resisted all efforts to equalize the roles of women in Conservative Judaism with those of men. After the vote, a number of Lieberman’s former students and followers, led by Rabbi David Weiss Halivni, withdrew from the seminary and formed the Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, which later dropped the word “Conservative” from its name.

In September 1984, the seminary accepted its first women – 23 of them – as rabbinical students. The first woman to be ordained and admitted to the Rabbinical Council was Amy Eilberg, in 1985, who was followed into the RCA by two women who had received their ordination at the Hebrew Union College, Beverly Magidson and Jan Kaufman.

Women were only admitted to the cantors' program at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1990. Conservative synagogues in the U.S. have the option to make their services fully egalitarian, but are not obligated to do so. Today, some 80 percent of congregations count women in a minyan.

October 25 / U.K. reels from 'Communist conspiracy'

The so-called Zinoviev letter, in which a Bolshevik leader supposedly urged the British Communist Party to continue its subversive work, was published by a pro-Conservative newspaper four days ahead of a general election that led to the defeat of the country's first ever Labor government.



Grigory Zinoviev. Photo by Wikipedia

On October 25, 1924, the so-called Zinoviev Letter was published in the United Kingdom, which was then in the midst of a snap general election campaign. The letter, which was purportedly signed by Grigory Zinoviev, the head of the Moscow-based executive committee of the Communist International, and a Jew, was addressed to the British Communist Party. It urged the party to continue its subversive work in the United Kingdom, so as hasten the day when the working class there would be primed to participate in a class war.

The letter, which was published in the conservative-leaning Daily Mail, appeared there four days before the election, which had been called following an October 8 parliamentary vote of no-confidence in the Labor government of Ramsay MacDonald. That first Labor-led government had been formed only months earlier, and it fell when it lost the support of the Liberal Party. That happened after accusations were made against MacDonald's cabinet that it had interfered in the investigation of an English Communist paper suspected of publishing an article encouraging insurrection among British troops. Charges had been brought against the paper and then dropped, leading Liberals and Conservatives in Parliament to accuse MacDonald's government of political meddling in the case.

All of the fear of Communist sabotage came against the background of the MacDonald government's decision to recognize the Soviet Union in February 1924.

That was followed by an announcement that Britain would negotiate treaties with the Bolshevik government in Moscow with the goal of normalizing trade between the countries. Both the Liberals and the Conservatives were opposed to these moves, and highly suspicious of Communist intentions vis-a-vis the United Kingdom.

Grigory Zinoviev, the son of a Jewish-Ukrainian dairy farmer, had been a member of the Bolshevik party, and a close associate of Vladimir Lenin since the party was founded in 1903. On October 27, two days after the publication of the letter that was attributed to him, he issued a statement insisting that it was a forgery. He pointed out that he had been on vacation when the letter was supposedly written, and that the reference it made to the Comintern, which he headed, had used the wrong full name for the body. He said that the letter had even erred in the title it ascribed to him, under his signature.

In fact, two historical studies of the letter, both undertaken by the Foreign Office, one in 1967, the other in 1998, concluded that it was indeed a forgery, although neither could determine conclusively who was behind it. In 1924, however, the letter caused quite a scandal, and a government investigation undertaken at the time concluded that it was genuine. The government that ordered that investigation, however, was led Stanley Baldwin's Conservatives who had won the election of October 29.

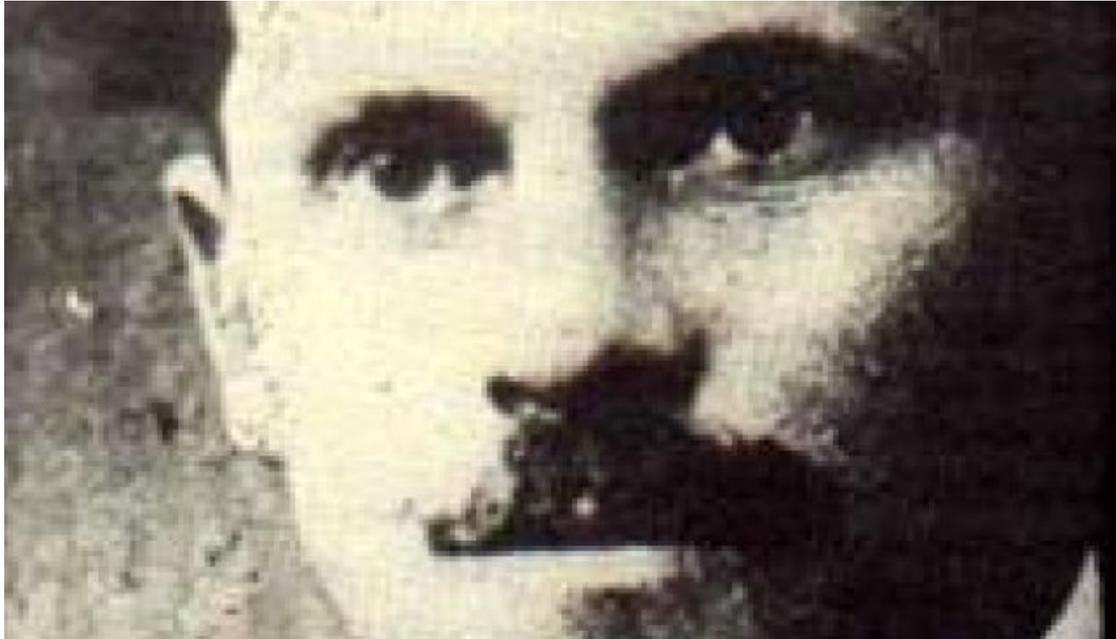
Although Labor politicians long blamed the Zinoviev Letter for their defeat, the truth is that they drew more votes in the election than they had in the election of January 1924; the Conservative gains were almost all at the expense of the Liberal party.

As for Zinoviev, who had been born as Ovsei-Gershon Aronovich Radomyslsky Apfelbaum in 1883, the remainder of his career was dramatic. In 1924, following the death of Lenin, he had been part of a triumvirate, together with Stalin and Lev Kamenev, that joined forces to eliminate the challenge of Trotsky and take power. Stalin soon began maneuvering to eliminate Zinoviev and Kamenev, and part of his plan was to push them into the arms of Trotsky, so that he could portray the three Jews as the enemy of the party.

In 1935, Zinoviev was sentenced to 10 years in prison after admitting his "moral complicity" in the murder of Leningrad Communist leader Sergei Kirov. By the following summer, he was arrested again, and this time charged with being part of a conspiracy to kill Stalin and other treasonous crimes. Stalin promised to spare him the death penalty if he pleaded guilty, and in what was the first of the Moscow Show Trials, Zinoviev and his fellow defendants (who also included Kamenev) were convicted of espionage, sabotage and other crimes. That same night, on August 25, 1936, he was executed. It was another four years before Stalin succeeded in having Trotsky killed.

October 26 / A sensational murder trial ends

Sholom Schwarzbard, a Jewish ex-pat from Ukraine, was accused of killing the head of the exiled Ukrainian government in retribution for the deaths of his family. On this day in 1927, the verdict was handed down.



Sholom Schwarzbard Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On this day in 1927, the sensational murder trial of Sholom Schwarzbard came to an end in Paris, with a jury taking half an hour to acquit the Ukrainian Jewish immigrant of the murder of the head of the Ukrainian government-in-exile, Symon Petlura.

Petlura had been the head of the revolutionary government, the Directorate, that took control of the newly independent Ukraine in 1918. In the years that followed, a variety of forces, including the Bolsheviks and White Russians, fought over Ukraine, resulting in the division of the country between Poland and the newly formed Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Petlura became a wanted man by the Soviets, so he fled, finding exile in Paris in 1924.

The exact role of Petlura in anti-Jewish pogroms during the period of 1919-1920 remains a source of debate today, but what is not in doubt is that up to 50,000 Jews were killed during the civil war, when the Directorate was sovereign in the region. Among the victims were 14 members of the family of Schwarzbard, born in 1886 in Bessarabia. Schwarzbard, a poet, Communist revolutionary and watchmaker, had fought on the Soviet side in the Ukrainian civil war, before taking refuge in Paris in 1920, where he was active in anarchist causes. It was there that he heard of the death of his family in the pogroms.

When Schwarzbard learned of Petlura's presence in the French capital, he resolved to kill him, holding him responsible for his personal loss. He did so on the Rue Racine,

in the Latin Quarter, on May 25, 1926, shooting Petlura seven times. When police arrived on the scene, Schwarzbard admitted to the killing, reportedly saying "I have killed a great assassin."

That was his defense -- punishing the perpetrator of racial murders -- and it was what he presented in his trial the following year. His lawyer was Henri Torres, known for defending clients accused of politically related crimes. The joint criminal and civil prosecution argued that Schwarzbard had been acting as an agent of the USSR, bringing evidence that he had met with representatives of the Soviet secret police in Paris, and that Petlura did not bear personal responsibility for the Ukrainian pogroms that took place under his government.

The jury deliberated for 35 minutes before finding Schwarzbard not guilty, although it did award damages of 1 franc each to Petlura's widow and brother.

The following year Sholom Schwarzbard tried to immigrate to Palestine, but was refused entry by authorities of the British Mandate. Eventually, he moved to South Africa, where he worked on production of a Yiddish-language encyclopedia. He died in Cape Town in 1938. His body was reinterred in Israel in 1967, at Moshav Avihayil, and today there are streets named for him in Jerusalem and Be'er Sheva.

October 27 / A physicist silenced by politics dies

David Bohm's doctoral work was so secret that his results were classified; he couldn't even write, let alone defend, his thesis.



Subatomic particles, as envisioned by artist Josef Kristofletti: The painting hangs at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN). Photo by AP

October 27, 1992, is the date on which David J. Bohm, the U.S.-born physicist and philosopher, died, at age 74, in London. Although he is considered by some to be one of the most creative and intellectually profound scientists of the 20th century, Bohm is relatively unknown. That is partly because his ideas regarding the connectedness of everything didn't quite fit into standard scientific disciplines, and partly because politics got in the way of his having a typical academic career, and instead sent him on a global odyssey during what should have been his productive years.

David Joseph Bohm was born on December 20, 1917, in Wilkes-Barre, a mining town in northeastern Pennsylvania. His father, Samuel (or Shalom) Bohm, an immigrant from the Hungarian town of Munkacs, whose original family name was "Dum," owned a local furniture store and also was the assistant to the local rabbi. His mother, the former Frieda Popky, was Lithuanian-born, and her psychological problems meant that she was not able to function fully as a mother or homemaker.

Bohm graduated from Pennsylvania State College (today Pennsylvania State University), in 1939, and following that, studied at California Institute of Technology for a year, before moving to University of California, Berkeley, to complete his doctorate in theoretical physics with J. Robert Oppenheimer, in 1943. Oppenheimer had asked Bohm to join the team working on building an atomic bomb, in Los Alamos, New Mexico, but Bohm was denied security clearance. He was considered suspect because he had been affiliated with several different Communist organizations in Berkeley, and also because a close friend of his there had been under investigation for suspected espionage.

Bizarrely, some of the calculations carried out by Bohm in his doctoral work, which had to do with collisions of sub-atomic particles, were considered relevant to the Manhattan Project, and so his work was immediately classified. As a result, not only was Bohm not permitted to defend his Ph.D. thesis -- he wasn't even allowed to write it.

In the end, Bohm received his degree only after Oppenheimer had vouched that he had done the research he claimed to have done. He later did research at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory that was applicable to the enrichment of uranium that was used in the first atomic bomb.

The wanderings begin

Following World War II, Bohm became an assistant professor at Princeton University, where he worked closely with Albert Einstein. (Einstein called Bohm's first book, "Quantum Theory," from 1951, the clearest explanation of the subject he knew.) But, in May 1949, Bohm was called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities about his supposed Communist connections. When he refused to give evidence either about himself, pleading the Fifth Amendment, or any of his friends or colleagues, he was arrested and charged with contempt. A federal district court acquitted him, in May 1951, but Princeton, which had suspended him in the meantime, refused to reinstate him.

Bohm then traveled to Brazil, where, with the recommendations of both Einstein and Oppenheimer, he was appointed a professor of physics at the University of Sao Paolo.

Once in Brazil, he was forced to give up his American passport, and was limited in the travel he could do, so that he could meet with colleagues only when they visited him, which many did.

In 1955, Bohm moved again, this time to Haifa, where he began working at the Technion – Israel Institute of Technology. It was also then that he met and married Sarah Woolfson, an artist. His colleague in his research in Israel was Yakir Aharonov, today a professor at Chapman University, in California, and winner of the Wolf Prize for his work in theoretical physics.

Bohm remained in Israel for only two years; in 1957, he moved to the United Kingdom, where, after two years at Bristol University, he became a professor at the University of London's Birkbeck College, remaining there until his retirement in 1983.

Even while he was writing "Quantum Theory," Bohm had felt uncomfortable with the approach taken by Niels Bohr in the "old" quantum theory he was now explicating; it seemed to lack a holistic understanding of particle motion. This connected to a much broader feeling developing in him that science tended to break down its observations and subsequent theories into parts that lacked an appreciation for the continuum of all existence.

If this sounds almost spiritual, that's because it is. Bohm found himself drawn to the work of the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti, and the two carried on a long

dialogue. As physicist Will Keepin wrote in an essay about him, for Bohm, “there really is no such thing as a thing; all objects are dynamic processes rather than static.” Bohm even warned that “thought,” the manner in which human beings understand reality, was an illusion, and that it serves to control us, rather than the opposite. “Thought is creating divisions out of itself and then saying that they are there naturally,” he wrote.

As B.J. Hiley, a student and colleague of Bohm’s at Birkbeck, wrote about his own work with him, in an obituary in *The Independent*, “The search for new concepts led us to look ... into language structure, the nature of thought, the mind-matter question and, ultimately, into the nature of consciousness.”

Bohm continued working at Birkbeck College even after his retirement, up to the very day he died, when he was there putting finishing touches on his final book, “*The Undivided Universe*,” published in 1993.

October 28 / Father of the first successful polio vaccine is born

Jonas Salk wanted to pursue law, but his mother drove him toward medicine; his vaccine has helped eradicate polio worldwide.



Jonas Salk. Photo by Yousuf Karsh

October 28, 1914, is the birthdate of Jonas Salk, the medical researcher who became an international hero in 1955, when he announced the successful development of a vaccine that could inoculate humans against the polio virus. In early-1950s United States, poliomyelitis was feared at least as much as Communism, as annual epidemics took thousands of lives, and left tens of thousands of victims – generally children – paralyzed to varying degrees.

Jonas Edward Salk was the eldest of the three sons of Daniel B. Salk and the former Dora Press, who had emigrated from Eastern Europe. Daniel worked in the garment business, designing collars and cuffs. Jonas was born in the East Harlem neighborhood of New York, and grew up in the Bronx. There he attended Townsend Harris High School, a public school for gifted students; that was followed by City College of New York, to which he was admitted at age 15.

In the 1930s and '40s, City College, a public university that was not especially well endowed, was filled with a disproportionate number of ambitious young Jewish men and women, the children of immigrants, who were driven by an extraordinary desire to excel. In those years, according to historian David Oshinsky, the college turned out more future Nobel Prize winners – eight – and scholars who would earn Ph.Ds than any other American public university, with the exception of the University of California, Berkeley.

Mom encourages Salk to pursue medicine

Although Salk had planned to pursue law, his mother pushed him to take the pre-medical curriculum instead, and so he followed CCNY with New York University Medical School, from which he graduated in 1939. Already in medical school, he knew that he wanted to devote his career to research, rather than to clinical work, and he even took off a year to study biochemistry. Later in life, he explained to an interviewer that he had an ambition from early on “to be of some help to humankind, so to speak, in a larger sense than just on a one-to-one basis.”

During medical school, Salk did an internship in the viral laboratory of Dr. Thomas Francis, Jr., who became a mentor, and helped Salk in the research he did in the 1950s that led to the breakthrough with the polio vaccine. This was Salk’s introduction to the field of virus research. Francis, who discovered the Type B influenza virus, had taken the controversial step of exposing mental patients in Michigan to influenza virus, something that even then was ethically questionable.

Salk did his medical internship at New York’s Mount Sinai Hospital, where, after the start of World War II, he led his Jewish colleagues in defying hospital administrators by wearing badges to show their support for the Allies.

From there, he went to work again with Thomas Francis, who was now at the University of Michigan, assisting him in developing a flu vaccine. By 1947, Salk was ready to head his own virology laboratory, at the University of Pittsburgh. There he turned his attention from influenza to polio. In both cases, Salk had the idea of basing the vaccine on a killed version of the virus, which could not infect the person inoculated, but would cause them to develop the antibodies to fight the disease.

Americans mobilize to wipe out polio

Poliomyelitis was known to strike people in the ancient world, but it began to take on monstrous proportions in the U.S. in the decade following the war. There had been efforts in the U.S. prior to World War II to discover a vaccine to prevent people from contracting the deadly virus, but they had resulted in fatalities among some of those on whom they were tested. In 1952, when the epidemic took its highest annual toll, nearly 58,000 people contracted polio, and more than 3,000 died from it.

Salk was approached by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (another name for poliomyelitis), which later became the March of Dimes, to undertake a study that would determine how many types of polio existed. The foundation was the brainchild of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had contracted a paralytic disease in 1921, at age 39. At the time, it was assumed to be polio, although recent analyses of his symptoms and medical history have concluded that his condition, which left him paralyzed from the waist down, was likely a result of Guillain-Barre syndrome. Starting in 1938, the March of Dimes asked citizens via radio advertisements to send 10 cents each into the White House. Within a matter of days, more than 2.6 million letters were received at the executive mansion.

The study Salk carried out concluded that an effective vaccine would need to inoculate people against three different main strains of polio. Research done by John Enders, at Harvard University, pioneered a method for growing the viruses artificially

in laboratory conditions, something that was necessary if the vaccine was to be based on killed virus.

From the beginning, there were researchers who thought it was a mistake to try to base the vaccine on the inactivated virus, and that a more effective vaccine would incorporate a live virus, which would have been modified in the lab to make it non-lethal. That model, in fact, served as the basis for the vaccine developed by Albert Sabin, and to the end of their days, the two scientists were openly contemptuous of each other and of their respective medical beliefs. (Both the Salk and the Sabin vaccines were in use for most of the past 60 years, but the latter is now being phased out completely internationally.)

Once Salk had found a way to reproduce the killed virus, and had made a vaccine out of it, it was necessary to undertake a trial. This was in 1954, and it entailed an effort that was carried out by 20,000 physicians and public health officers, and more than 1.8 million schoolchildren participating. This was in addition to the 100 million-plus Americans who had contributed to the March of Dimes over the years. According to writer Paul Offit, “more Americans ... participated in the funding, development, and testing of the polio vaccine than had participated in the nomination and election of the president.”

On April 12, 1955, 10 years to the day after the death of President Roosevelt, Salk’s colleague Thomas Francis, Jr., announced at a news conference that the trial had been successful. Not only were 500 people present at the conference, but it was broadcast by closed-circuit to 54,000 doctors in movie theaters across the country.

The reaction in America was akin to the celebration of a national holiday. According to historian William O’Neill, “people observed moments of silence, rang bells, honked horns ... drank toasts, hugged children, attended church, smiled at strangers, and forgave enemies.”

Salk was hailed nationally and globally, and won countless awards, although he refused the offer of the City of New York to host a ticker-tape parade in his honor.

Inoculation and eradication

By 1957, 100 million doses of the Salk vaccine had been administered in the U.S., with very few complications resulting. In countries where the vaccine was not yet in use, the epidemic continued to spread. Today, the disease has been largely eradicated internationally, except in parts of countries like Pakistan, where the Taliban have barred the vaccine. Israel’s recent outbreak of polio – a disease that is spread by feces, usually in the water supply – can be partially attributed to the refusal of parents to have their children inoculated.

In 1963, Jonas Salk opened up the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, in La Jolla, California. He described it in 1966 as being “a kind of [Socratic](#) academy where the supposedly alienated two cultures of science and humanism will have a favorable atmosphere for cross-fertilization.”

Salk spoke about a science called “biophilosophy,” which was intended to use scientific methods to explore ethical, cultural and psychological problems. He also said he believed the universe was unfolding according to certain uniform rules, and that a few highly evolved human beings – among whom he numbered himself – were qualified to being able to understand the direction in which evolution was moving, and help expedite it.

In a 1990 interview Salk explained that, “I have come to recognize evolution not only as an active process that I am experiencing all the time but as something I can guide by the choices I make, by the experiments I design,” he said. "I have always sensed this as the next evolutionary step. It's not something of which a great many are capable, but some are."

Jonas Salk died at the age of 80 on June 23, 1995, in La Jolla, California. At the time of his death, he was married to his second wife, Françoise Gilot, the former mistress of Pablo Picasso.

October 29 / Ovadia goes to Jerusalem, discovers shocking state of the Jews

To his shock, he found an impoverished, irreligious people, and then did his best to better everyone's lot.



Jerusalem. Photo by Daniel Bar-On

October 29, 1486, is the date on which the rabbinical scholar Ovadia ben Avraham departed on the journey that took him from his native Italy to Jerusalem.

Ovadia of Bertinoro, as he is best known, arrived in the holy city a year and a half later, on March 25, 1488. There he quickly became the acknowledged leader of the small and ailing Jewish community.

The three letters he wrote and sent back to Italy serve as important historical documents regarding the communities he passed through on his way to Palestine, and on the state in which he found the Jews of Jerusalem.

The best-known of Ovadia's writings, however, is the commentary he wrote on the Mishna, which was first published only after his death, in 1548, in Venice. His commentary, which incorporates elements from both Rashi and Maimonides, is now a standard part of most editions of the Mishna.

The family of Ovadia (c. 1445-c. 1515) apparently had its roots in Bertinoro, in the northeastern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. He himself seems to have been a resident of Cita di Castella, in Umbria, to the south. Although tradition says that Ovadia set out in 1486 for the purpose of reaching Jerusalem, according to historian Elliott Horowitz, he left Cita di Castella in a hurry.

He speculates that Ovadia, who was not married, was involved in a scandal – either sexual or financial – and that his actual goal was saving his skin.

Ill manners in Palermo

Ovadia's travels took him through the length of Italy, to Italy and to Egypt, before his arrival in Eretz Israel. It was only after he arrived in Jerusalem that he composed the letters that he sent back to Italy – one to his father, one to a brother, and the third to an unidentified person.

His letters were written in response to his having been “commanded,” as Ovadia described it, by his father to “describe the manners and customs of the Jews in all the places in which my foot has trod, as well as their intercourse with the gentiles among whom they live” (translation by Elliott Horowitz).

His descriptive skills – prized for their objectivity and non-judgmental quality – were put to great use once he arrived in Palermo, Sicily. Ovadia was surprised by the relative poverty of that city's Jews, as well as their laxness in matters of Jewish practice, for example, with regard to the laws of family purity, as compared with what he was accustomed to in the north.

He also was taken aback by the frequency with which Jews were willing to inform on their brethren, and even level false accusations at them when they wanted to settle scores.

Other locations visited by Ovadia during his lengthy journey to Jerusalem included Messina, Rhodes and Alexandria, and, once he was in the Holy Land, Hebron and Bethlehem. His descriptions of the Karaites and Samaritans of Egypt offer valuable historical testimony about those two special communities.

The Mamluk whip

Palestine at the time was under the rule of the Mamluks, the slave-based Muslim sultanate that had its capital in Cairo. Jerusalem was a heterogeneous city, but far from prosperous and the Jews, though tolerated as a religious minority, were subject to frequent and harsh tax levies from the Mamluk rulers, to finance their military campaigns.

In his 1488 letter, Ovadia estimated that overall, Jerusalem's population numbered some 4,000 families. Among them, he wrote, only 70 were Jewish families, “of the poorest class.”

In fact, he observed, “there is scarcely a family that is not in want of the commonest necessities; one who has bread all year round is regarded as rich... In my opinion, an intelligent man versed in political science might easily raise himself to be chief of the Jews as well as Arabs, for among all the inhabitants there is not a sensible man who knows how to deal kindly with his fellow-men.”

With the help of the *nagid* (the governor of the Jewish community) of Egypt, Natan Hacohen Ibn Shulal, Ovadia got to work reorganizing the Jewish community of

Jerusalem. So poor were their conditions initially that Ovadia himself was forced to dig the grave of someone who had died, for lack of a burial society.

Under his leadership, that and a number of other self-help organizations – medical, financial and the like – began operating. He intervened with the Mamluk authorities to have the tax burden eased. At the same time, he served as the community's chief authority on questions of Jewish law. It is even said that Muslim residents of Jerusalem would come to him to decide legal disputes.

Following 1492, Jerusalem became a destination for Jews who had been expelled from Spain. They looked to Ovadia for religious guidance, and they provided him with the support for the construction of a yeshiva. He is believed to have passed away in or about 1515, in Jerusalem.

October 30 / Jewish-American composer's signature piece premieres

'Appalachian Spring,' the third in Aaron Copland's 'Americana' ballet pieces, has become one of the most beloved and performed pieces in the American repertory.



Aaron Copland in 1962. Photo by Wikipedia

On October 30, 1944, the ballet “Appalachian Spring,” choreographed by Martha Graham to music by Aaron Copland, premiered at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Copland’s score, which won him the Pulitzer Prize the following year, also went on, in its various versions, to become one of the most beloved and performed pieces in the American repertory.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) was the youngest of the five children of Harris Morris Copland (who had changed the family name from “Kaplan”) and the former Sarah Mittenthal, both of them Jewish immigrants to the United States from Russia. The family lived in Brooklyn, above the general store that it owned and ran in the Prospect Heights neighborhood. The family was active in the Conservative synagogue Baith Israel Anshe Emes, where Aaron celebrated his bar mitzvah.

Copland graduated from the Boys High School, in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Like all his siblings, he began studying music and playing piano as a child. He began composing at the age of 11, and by the age of 15 had resolved on that as his profession.

Instead of attending college, Copland, with the support of his mother, decided to travel to France for a year to pursue his music education. Although he had never heard of Nadia Boulanger when he arrived in Paris, when they met, they were mutually impressed, and he became her student, in the end remaining there for three years. At

the time, Boulanger was only 34, but she went on to become one of the most important composition teachers of the 20th century, and a composer and performer in her own right.

Upon his return to New York, in 1924, Copland began working fulltime writing music. His career received a large boost in February of that year, when the conductor Serge Koussevitzky led the Boston Symphony in Copland's "Symphony for Organ and Orchestra," with Nadia Boulanger as soloist. When the same piece had its earliest performance premiere a month earlier, by the New York Symphony Society, the conductor, Walter Damrosch, turned to the audience after finishing and said, "If a young man can write a piece like that at the age of 24, in five years he will be ready to commit murder!"

During the 1920s and '30s, Copland consciously set out to develop what he later characterized as "a naturally American strain of so-called serious music." This included incorporating jazz themes and folk melodies into his works. "Appalachian Spring" is perhaps the best example of one of these compositions.

"Appalachian Spring" was the third of Copland's "Americana" dance pieces, having been preceded by "Billy the Kid," choreographed by Eugene Loring (1938), and "Rodeo," for Agnes de Mille (1942). He and Martha Graham had discussed working together as early as 1941, and Graham had proposed a script based in 19th-century New England. It was only after Copland received a commission from the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, in 1943, that she came back to him with an idea for a piece based among the Shakers, a monastic Protestant sect, with origins in England, that based itself in New York and New England in the late 18th century.

Graham (1894-1991) described her vision to Copland as taking place on the frontier: "a new town ... the framework of a doorway... a Shaker rocking chair with its exquisite bonelike simplicity, and a small fence that should signify what a fence means in a new country." The dance's final section, she suggested, might have the feeling of "a Shaker meeting."

Copland had the idea of incorporating a song that had also provided the title to the book from which he learned about it: "The Gift to Be Simple: Songs, Dances and Rituals of the American Shakers," by Edward Deming Andrews. Today, largely thanks to Copland, the song "Simple Gifts," by Joseph Brackett, with its opening lines of "'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free / 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be, / And when we find ourselves in the place just right, / 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight," is known and sung by every American schoolchild.

Copland's working title for the composition was "Ballet for Martha." Martha Graham decided to affix to it a phrase she had encountered in a poem called "The Dance," by the American writer Hart Crane: "O Appalachian Spring! I gained the ledge; / Steep, inaccessible smile that eastward bends / And northward reaches in that violet wedge / Of Adirondacks!" Although Crane's use of the word "spring" is a reference to water, in the dance, it is an illusion to the season.

Because the ballet – which in the end depicts a frontier community raising the roof of a family home - was to be performed in the small auditorium at the Library of

Congress named for Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge's foundation, there was room for only a chamber orchestra of 13 pieces. Its spare set was designed by Isamu Noguchi. Martha Graham danced the lead role of "The Wife," Erick Hawkins was "The Husbandman" and Merce Cunningham performed "The Revivalist."

"Appalachian Spring," which was accompanied at its premiere on October 30 with two other dances, met immediately with a warm reception. Writing in *The New York Times*, critic John Martin described it as "shining and joyous.... a kind of testimony to the simple fineness of the human spirit."

The following year, Copland rearranged "Appalachian Spring" as a somewhat shorter orchestral suite, which is the way it is most frequently performed today. Other orchestral versions have included some of the music that Copland left out of the 1945 version. The composer also incorporated the "Simple Gifts" melody into his 1950 piece "Old American Songs," for voice and piano.

October 31 / Founder of Shakespeare in the Park dies

Joseph Papp, the founder of New York's Public Theater, brought plays like 'Hair' and 'A Chorus line to' New York and worked with top-notch talents.



Shakespeare in the Park in New York.

On October 31, 1991, producer Joseph Papp, the founder and longtime director of New York's Public Theater, died, at the age of 70. Armed with vision, a flare for publicity and sheer force of personality, Papp took a program he began for performing Shakespeare in a Lower East Side church basement uptown to Central Park, turning it into one of the city's most celebrated cultural institutions. At the same time, he established a non-profit theater company downtown that brought plays like "Hair" and "A Chorus Line" to New York and the world.

Josef Papirofsky was born June 22, 1921, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. His parents, Samuel Papirofsky, a trunk maker, and the former Yetta Miritch, a seamstress, were both recent Jewish immigrants from what would become Poland and Lithuania, respectively. The family was extremely poor, and, often unable to pay the rent, they found themselves moving several times a year. Yosl, as he was called as a child, grew up speaking Yiddish.

Papp (he shortened his name when he began working as a stagehand for CBS, claiming later, according to one version, that his full name wouldn't fit on the TV screen when the credits ran) attributed his precision with language to the African-American playwright Eulalie Spence, who taught him English in high school, and his love of Shakespeare to his school days. He told a reporter from the Associated Press, in 1985: "I had no idea of the legitimate theater until my last term in high school. They took a lot of poor kids to see two productions of 'Hamlet' in one week. One starred John Gielgud, the other that movie actor Leslie Howard. Both were playing on Broadway in 1938."

In 1942, Papp enlisted in the U.S. Navy, and he spent much of World War II staging performances for the sailors aboard an aircraft carrier. After the war, with the help of the G.I. Bill, he began to study acting and directing in Los Angeles, and he worked with the Actors Laboratory Theater, an experimental company.

Back in New York, between 1952 and 1960, he worked as a television stage manager with CBS and also on Broadway. In 1958, Papp was called to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities for his alleged Communist affiliations. He refused to answer some of the questions, invoking his Fifth Amendment rights, and in response, CBS fired him. He insisted on an arbitration hearing, and the network was forced to hire him back.

Staging Shakespeare outdoors

It was in 1953 that Papp organized the Elizabethan Workshop, which began presenting Shakespeare plays in the basement of the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, in the Lower East Side. Somehow, he had convinced the church's pastor that its basement meeting hall resembled London's Globe Theater. Three years later, he received permission from the city to produce a free outdoor performance of "Julius Caesar" at the East River Park Amphitheater. His budget was \$250, and an audience of 2,000 showed up. When a later production that summer, of "The Taming of the Shrew," with Colleen Dewhurst in the title role, was praised in The New York Times by critic Brooks Atkinson – he called it "one of the pleasantest episodes in the outdoor night life of New York during the summer" – Papp was off and running.

A mobile theater company, which traveled with Shakespeare through the five boroughs of New York, followed, until it settled in Central Park. It was there, in 1961, that a permanent outdoor stage was constructed, but that only happened after the parks department, then headed by the powerful Robert Moses, attempted to evict Papp's company. In his biography of Moses, historian Robert Caro explained that an aide, offended that a leftist like Papp had refused to testify before the HUAC, convinced Moses that the company had to begin charging fees for tickets to its plays, so that it could reimburse the city for damage to the park facilities. That was a point on which Papp was unwilling to compromise, and so the performances were shut down. That too ended up in legal litigation, and again Papp was ultimately victorious. And the publicity helped elicit a donation from publisher George Delacorte for the construction of a permanent theater.

In 1966, Papp took over the abandoned Astor Library, on Lafayette Street downtown, where he eventually established a complex with six stages. He renamed it the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater. It was there that "Hair" premiered, in 1967, and that "A Chorus Line" was originally produced in a theater workshop, in 1974. Papp wasn't especially fond of the play, which cost \$1.1 million to organize, but when it moved to Broadway, it stayed for 15 years. The nearly \$150 million it grossed went a long way to guaranteeing the future for the Public Theater for the decades that followed.

Playwrights who worked with Papp included David Rabe ("Streamers") and Sam Shepard (both of whom famously had bitter disputes with the temperamental producer), Ntozake Shange ("For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When

the Rainbow Is Enuf”), Jason Miller (“That Championship Season”), Larry Kramer (“Normal Heart”), David Henry Hwang (“The Dance and the Railroad”) and Miguel Pinero (“Short Eyes”) – and many, many more.

Actors associated with Papp included Meryl Streep, Kevin Kline, Raul Julia and Mandy Patinkin.

Papp also had many failures – including three marriages that ended in divorce before he married the woman who survived him, Gail Merrifield. An attempt to run the theater at Lincoln Center ended after three years. And toward the end of his life, Papp was unable to groom a successor to take over the management of the huge institution he had fostered. Nonetheless, the Public Theater is still operating today, 22 years after its founder's death, and offers numerous educational programs in addition to the plays it produces for adult audiences.

Although Joseph Papp steered clear of Jewish culture early in his career, later in life – biographer Helen Epstein attributed it to the staging of “The Merchant of Venice,” with George C. Scott, in 1962 – he became more open to Jewish causes and to his identity. He tried a short-lived Yiddish theater; he loaned his name to a children's fund operated by Chabad for programs in Ukraine; and together with Rabbi Arthur Schneier, he founded the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, which works to foster better relations between Jews and blacks, in 1989.

In 1987, Papp was diagnosed with prostate cancer, and although he was given a terminal prognosis, he held on until 1991. He died on this date, three weeks after his son Tony, an artist, died of AIDS, at age 29.

November 1 / A Yiddish writer who ruffled Jews' feathers is born

Sholem Asch, the Polish-born Yiddish novelist, ran afoul of Jewish sensibilities with his writings on Christianity.



Sholem Asch. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

November 1, 1880, is the birthdate of Sholem Asch, the Polish-born Yiddish novelist whose books were best-sellers in their day, but who ran afoul of Jewish sensibilities when he began writing about early Christianity.

Szolem Asz (the original spelling) was born in Kutno, in the very center of contemporary Poland, then part of Russia. He was one of 10 children of Moszek Asz, a livestock merchant and innkeeper, and the former Frajda Malka Widawska. He received a traditional Jewish education, but when he began to pursue secular studies, including the study of German, he had to move in with relatives in a nearby town, as his parents did not approve. He supported himself, first as a Torah teacher, and later as a letter-writer for illiterate neighbors.

In 1900, Asch moved to Warsaw, where he began writing stories. Although he initially wrote in Hebrew, at the encouragement of the great Yiddish writer I.L. Peretz, he began to write exclusively in that language. In 1902 and 1903, respectively, he published collections of stories in Hebrew and Yiddish. Also, in 1903, he married Mathilde Shapiro, the daughter of a successful teacher and poet, Menahem Mendel Shapiro.

Promoting Yiddish – and provoking audiences

Although Asch's first novel, "A Shtetl," published in installments in the Yiddish paper *Der Fraynd*, was a cheery portrayal of Hasidic life, with a central character

modeled in part on his own father, he soon began to write plays with more edgy themes. In particular, his 1907 play “God of Vengeance” dealt with a brothel owner whose daughter embarks on a sexual relationship with one of his prostitutes.

Asch’s mentor, Peretz, advised him to burn the play. He didn’t, and it was performed in Berlin in a German version directed by Max Reinhardt. That was followed by stagings in other European cities, after the play had been translated into more than a half-dozen languages. In 1923, “God of Vengeance” was staged on Broadway, and its producer and lead actor were arrested on obscenity charges. Thereafter, Asch withdrew the play from additional performances.

A 1908 play dealing with the false messiah Shabtai Zevi and his promotion of sexual profligacy never made it to the stage, and also about this time, he attacked the practice of ritual circumcision in print. Clearly, Sholem Asch had a need to provoke, if not shock.

Asch participated in the 1908 Czernowitz Yiddish Conference, and he made good on his proposal there to have more Hebrew classics translated into Yiddish by rendering the Book of Ruth into that tongue. Later, he and several colleagues traveled around Eastern Europe trying to promote the cause of Yiddish as the Jewish national language.

Asch moved to New York in 1914, at the start of World War I. There, he began publishing stories regularly in the popular Yiddish daily *The Forward*, a professional relationship that went on for a quarter of a century. He began writing dark and ironic stories about shtetl life, and then about Jewish immigrant life in New York. His 1919 novel “Kiddush Hashem” (Sanctification of God’s Name), dealt with the 17th-century Khmelnitsky massacres in the Ukraine, although it was clearly inspired by the pogroms that followed the end of World War I.

Although Asch returned to Europe after the war, he returned to New York on the eve of World War II. By the 1920s, he had become a very popular writer. In 1920, a 12-volume collection of his stories was published in New York, and in 1932, he was elected honorary president of the Yiddish section of PEN, the international professional organization of “poets, essayists and novelists.” Between 1929 and ’31, he published his great trilogy “Three Cities” (called “After the Flood” in the Yiddish original), about early 20th-century life in Warsaw, St. Petersburg and Moscow. Writing about the series in *The New York Times*, critic Louis Kronenberger described it as “One of the most absorbing, one of the most vital, one of the most richly creative works of fiction that have appeared in our day.”

'Reclaiming Jesus' at a price

Asch’s career -- or at least his reputation among his fellow Jews -- hit a brick wall, however, with his publication, in 1939, of “The Nazarene.” Framing his tale around a modern-day German scholar who claims to be the reincarnation of a Roman commander in Second Temple-era Jerusalem, the book and its two successors, “The Apostle” and “Mary,” gave Asch an opportunity to look at the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a Jew, to “reclaim Jesus,” as the novelist Ellen Umansky wrote several years ago in *Nextbook* (now called *Tablet*).

When Asch sent the first chapter of “The Nazarene” to Abraham Cahan, his longtime editor at *The Forward*, Cahan told him to destroy it. Again, this was advice that Asch disregarded, and Cahan not only refused to publish it, he also ended his paper’s relationship with the author, and embarked on a campaign to blacken his name. Other Yiddish periodicals followed suit, so that, writes Umansky, only the Communist paper *Freiheit* would run his fiction. Asch insisted on accompanying his stories there with a note clarifying that he himself was not a Communist.

In English translation, however, in the United States, “The Nazarene” was a big hit. Writing in the *New Republic*, Alfred Kazin suggested that, “Nothing, as it happens, could be more characteristically Yiddish or more imperative in its way than this Gospel according to Chaver Sholem.”

The book brought Asch financial security, but alienated him from his people. And successive installments in the trilogy were less popular among critics and the public; by the time he wrote “Mary,” his American translator, Maurice Samuel, refused to take on the project. There were rumors that he was planning to convert to Catholicism.

In 1953, after having moved several times, and after he was nearly attacked physically by a group of opponents, Sholem and Mathilde Asch left the United States. Their first stop was London, but in 1956, they resettled in Israel, in the coastal city of Bat Yam.

At the time of his move to England, Asch commented: “I am returning to England with a broken heart. Intolerance among my own race has been too much of a handicap for me to work.”

Sholem Asch died on July 10, 1957, while on a visit to London, where his daughter lived. His house in Bat Yam is now a museum, although most of his library, including many of his original manuscripts, is held by Yale University. He was survived by Mathilda and his children, three sons and a daughter. One of those sons, Moses “Moe” Asch (1905-1986), was the founder and head of Folkway Records.

November 2 / Emma Lazarus pens 'The New Colossus'

The words of the 'The New Colossus,' on the base of the Statue of Liberty, have welcomed generations of immigrants. On this day in 1883, Jewish poet Emma Lazarus penned the famous poem.



The Statue of Liberty Photo by Bloomberg

On November 2, 1883, poet and philanthropist Emma Lazarus wrote the verse “The New Colossus,” which, two decades later, in 1903, was engraved and installed at the base of the Statue of Liberty, in Manhattan Harbor.

Lazarus (1849-1887), was born into a New York Jewish family of Portuguese Sephardic descent; her father, Moses Lazarus, was a prosperous sugar merchant. Her artistic sensibility was cultivated by her family and by the age of 17, she had already published a book of poetry privately. Soon thereafter, she met writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, who remained a friend and mentor until his death in 1882.

Lazarus became involved in charitable work helping Jewish immigrants resettle in New York and was particularly affected by the suffering of Russian Jews in the pogroms. She volunteered at Wards Island, a station for immigrant absorption in New York Harbor, helped establish the Hebrew Technical Institute and assisted with the organization of Jewish agricultural colonies in other parts of the United States. She wrote frequently on Jewish topics (her 1882 book of poetry was called “Songs of a Semite: The Dance to Death and Other Poems”), and was an avid supporter of Zionism.

In the 1870s, the joint French-American project that became the Statue of Liberty got underway. The people of France offered to provide a statue to commemorate a century of friendship between the two nations and the United States pledged to provide the

site for the artwork as well as its pedestal. In fact, fundraising in earnest only began in 1882. The following year, Lazarus was asked to participate in an art and literary auction to raise money for the project, for which she wrote the sonnet “The New Colossus,” whose first stanza refers to the planned statue in the harbor as “*A mighty woman with a torch... her name/ Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand/ Glows world-wide welcome.*”

The poem was chosen to appear in the “Catalogue of the Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition at the National Academy of Design” that accompanied the auction and later was published in both the New York World and the New York Times. Yet when the Statute of Liberty was finally dedicated in 1886, “The New Colossus” did not appear at the site.

Only in 1901, 17 years after the death of Emma Lazarus, did a friend of hers, Georgina Schuyler, come upon the poem in a bookshop and proposed that it be integrated into the exhibition at Bedloe’s Island (today, Liberty Island). Two years later, a plate engraved with the poem was installed inside the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal, where it is still on display today.

The 14 lines of the poem give voice to the sentiments that the Statue of Liberty – and the moment of arrival in the United States in general – has inspired among tens of millions of people over more than a century. It reads as follows:

The New Colossus

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.*

*"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

November 3 / Nazis kill 43,000 in one-day Harvest Festival massacre

Perturbed by increasing Jewish resistance in the area, the Nazis executed some 43,000 Jews at Majdanek and two of its sub-camps in the Lublin district of Poland.



A 1944 photo of the mass grave at Majdanek.

On November 3, 1943, German forces in the Lublin district of Poland carried out the Holocaust's largest massacre of Jews over a 24-hour period. Dubbed Aktion Erntefest (Operation Harvest Festival), the Nazis oversaw the execution of some 43,000 people at Majdanek and two of its sub-camps, Trawniki and Poniatowa.

Operation Harvest Festival came toward the end of Operation Reinhard, the two-year effort by the Germans to murder all the Jews of what was called the General Government (namely, occupied Poland). Between October 1941 and November 1943, some two million Jews were killed in the context of Operation Reinhard.

By that November, however, the Germans were concerned by the expressions of resistance they were facing from Jews in areas near the Russian front. These had included, from August-October, uprisings in both the Vilna and Bialystok ghettos, and armed actions in both the Treblinka and Sobibor death camps. The decision was made to eliminate those Jews who remained alive - for the most part as slave laborers - in the Lublin district, in eastern Poland.

Stripped of illusions

In his 1992 book "Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland," historian Christopher R. Browning stated that, up through the spring of 1943, Jews continued to hold on to the hope of "salvation through labor," but that in

the months that followed, they were “gradually being stripped of their illusions.” From the point of view of SS leader Heinrich Himmler, their murder – which had always been part of the plan – would have to be carried out in one swift action, otherwise his men would face the possibility of further resistance from Jews who realized they had nothing left to lose.

In preparations for the massacre, prisoners were ordered to dig - in a zigzag pattern - what were purported to be antiaircraft trenches, but what would in fact become their own graves. At dawn on November 3, Majdanek and its two sub-camps were surrounded by SS troops and members of Reserve Police Unit 101. During the course of the day, prisoners were brought from the camps to the trenches and shot, one by one. At Majdanek, the number of murdered reached 18,400, while at Trawniki the casualty numbers reached between 6,000 and 10,000. Because of a lack of manpower, the killing at Poniatowa extended through to November 4.

At all three camps, prisoners were ordered to strip naked and clasp their hands behind their necks before they were led to the trenches, where they had to lie down on top of the bodies of the victims who had preceded them to their deaths. Their shootings were accompanied by a soundtrack of dance music played over loudspeakers, presumably to make it harder for neighbors of the camps to know what was happening. When prisoners in one of the barracks at Poniatowa demonstrated resistance, their building was set on fire. The total killed at that camp is estimated at 14,000.

Aktion Erntefest succeeded in its goal of ridding the Lublin district of its final surviving Jews.

November 4 / Mobster who made White Sox throw Series (maybe) is shot

Arnold Rothstein, scion of Orthodox but rabbi mainly to gangsters, is also renowned for pawning his newlywed's jewels on their wedding night.



Arnold Rothstein: Did he blacken the White Sox? Nobody knows that, or who murdered him.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 4, 1928, mobster Arnold Rothstein – gambler, racketeer, bootlegger and the man many believe was the mastermind who arranged for the Chicago White Sox to throw the 1919 World Series -- was shot at a New York hotel. He died two days later, at the Stuyvesant Polyclinic Hospital, in Manhattan, at the age of 46.

Arnold Rothstein was born January 17, 1882, to Abraham Elijah Rothstein and the former Esther Rothschild. Abraham (who was to outlive his son by nine years) was a prosperous, American-born garment merchant, and a philanthropist who served as chairman of the board of New York's Beth Israel Hospital.

While the family, which lived on the Upper West Side, was Orthodox in observance. Arnold - the second-oldest of six siblings - was, from a young age, interested mainly in gambling.

In 1921, in a rare moment of reflection, Rothstein, whom biographer Leo Katcher dubbed the "J.P. Morgan of the underworld," told an interviewer: "Maybe I gambled just to show my father he couldn't tell me what to do, but I don't think so. I think I gambled because I loved the excitement. When I gambled, nothing else mattered." Rothstein's determination to win at gambling meant that he was not beyond manipulating the results to insure victory.

Pawned bride's jewels on their wedding night

By 1909, when Rothstein married showgirl Carolyn Green, the daughter of a Jewish father and Irish-Catholic mother, he owned a casino in New York and was part-owner of a Maryland racetrack. (In her 1934 memoir, Carolyn described how her husband, short on cash, pawned her jewelry on their wedding night.) During the following decade, he bought additional casinos, invested in racehorses and Broadway productions, and was a heroin wholesaler, bookmaker and real-estate tycoon.

Rothstein's sophistication, regal living style and elegant manner of dress made him something of a mentor (or "rabbi," as biographer Nick Tosches has put it) to many up-and-coming gangsters: Meyer Lansky, Dutch Schultz, Louis "Lepke" Buchalter, Charles "Lucky" Luciano, among many others. In that regard, his depiction by actor Michael Stuhlbarg in the HBO TV series "Boardwalk Empire" is true to life.

Stuhlbarg's Rothstein is well-mannered and cultivated, and calmly ruthless. He also was known as a fixer, someone who could – for a fee – help resolve labor, political and business disputes. Tosches, writing in *Vanity Fair* in 2005, quotes labor leader David Dubinsky as crediting Rothstein with resolving, at the request of his father, a 19-week strike by garment workers in 1926.

Rothstein was also the inspiration for the character Meyer Wolfsheim in "The Great Gatsby," described by F. Scott Fitzgerald as a "small flat-nosed Jew" who wears cuff links made from human molars. When Gatsby tells narrator Nick Carraway that it was Wolfsheim who fixed the 1919 World Series, Nick muses to himself how "It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people —with the single mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe." Wolfsheim the Jew, that is, the nemesis of all that was good about America.

The truth about the Sox? Nobody knows

The truth is that so many people were involved in the machinations that led to members of the Chicago White Sox accepting bribes in order to deliberately lose the World Series to the Cincinnati Reds, that it is impossible to determine who the mastermind was. Nick Tosches noted that "Given the way the fixing of the 1919 Series unfolded, there was no need for [Rothstein] to do a thing, except to profit from the mistakes of others."

Although David Pietrusza's 2003 biography of Rothstein is subtitled, "The Life, Times and Murder of the Criminal Genius Who Fixed the 1919 World Series," he too writes that the plot was so complicated that Rothstein's role in it was "uncertain."

Eight players from the 1919 team that has ever since been referred to as the "Black Sox" were tried for the crime, and none of them was convicted – though all were banned for life from the Major Leagues. Rothstein took the stand at their trial, and acknowledged that he had been approached to participate in the scheme, but declared that "I was not in on it, would not have gone into it under any circumstances and did not bet a cent on the Series after I found out what was under way."

Rothstein, in fact, was never convicted of any crime.

On Sunday, November 4, 1928, while ensconced at his regular hangout, Lindy's restaurant, Rothstein received an invitation to a card game at the Park Central Hotel, on W. 56th Street. At the time, he still owed creditors more than \$300,000 from a three-day card-playing spree more than a month earlier.

That November night, a short time after the game began, Rothstein was shot. A little before 11 that night, a hotel detective found him hobbling in a staircase. Rothstein hung on to life through the following day, but died on the morning of November 6.

When police asked him, before he expired, if he could identify the shooter, he reportedly told them, "You stick to your trade. I'll stick to mine," although at another point, he told them that "me mudder did it."

Another gambler, George "Hump" McManus, was arrested and tried for the murder, but he was eventually acquitted. The murder of Arnold Rothstein remains unsolved to this day.

November 5 / Pogrom erupts in Tripoli, beginning of end for Libya Jewish community

More than 140 Jews killed in and around the city over the course of three days in 1945.



British troops in Tripoli after conquering the Libyan capital in 1943.

On November 5, 1945, anti-Jewish riots broke out in Tripoli, Libya, with more than 140 Jews killed in and around the city over the course of three days. The pogrom can be seen as a harbinger of the end of the Jewish community of Libya.

The history of Libya's modern Jewish community - there was a Jewish presence there in antiquity too - goes back to 1911, when the country became an Italian colony. Until Italy's Fascist regime introduced its anti-Jewish laws, the Jewish community thrived. By 1931, the country had an estimated Jewish population of 21,000 (Libya's total population was 550,000), a number that had risen to more than 30,000 by 1939. The majority lived in Tripoli, constituting as much as one-quarter of its population even as late as 1941.

With the introduction of the Jewish laws – enacted in 1938, but only implemented for real two years later -- Jews who worked in the civil service lost their jobs. Jewish children were no longer welcome in Italian schools, and marriages between “Aryans” and “non-Aryans” were outlawed. Jews were compelled to carry identity papers indicating their membership in the “Jewish race.”

Between 1940 and 1943, the British fought the Italians and Germans bitterly over Libya. Control of the country passed back and forth between Axis and Allies several times.

In 1942, German troops fighting in North Africa took over the Jewish quarter of Benghazi, and the Italians set up anti-aircraft guns there. Depending on what section of the country they lived in, and what citizenship they held, Jews were sent to labor camps and to concentration camps, whether in the Libyan desert or even to Bergen-Belsen in Europe.

According to historian Harvey Goldberg, author of “Jewish Life in Muslim Libya,” the war was actually a time of cooperation and mutual trust between Jews and Muslims. And liberation of the country by the British, on January 23, was accompanied by an initial optimism among all.

This was quickly replaced, however, by uncertainty regarding the country’s political future.

Timed attacks: Hardly a coincidence

There are various explanations for the start of the rioting in Tripoli on November 5, but reporting from within the Jewish community suggests that violence began in several different parts of the city simultaneously, which would give support to the theory that the attacks were planned, rather than spontaneous. Several days earlier, on November 2, the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, in 1917, there had been anti-Jewish rioting in both Cairo and Aleppo, but there doesn’t seem to have been a direct connection between these and the violence in Tripoli and environs.

Some historians suspect that the British instigated the violence, for their own political reasons. What is known is that British forces confiscated the weapons held by Jewish defense groups in Tripoli a few days before the riots, and that during the attacks they basically ignored requests from Jewish leaders for intervention.

In fact, other than imposing a curfew, the British did nothing to curtail the violence until the evening of November 6.

There were cases of Muslim offering help and shelter to Jews, but there were also reports of Jews finding their own neighbors among those who were attacking them. Many of the rioters were heard to shout the phrase “jihad fil-kuffar” – “war against the infidels.”

The rioting spread to other towns in the Tripolitania province. Nine synagogues - four of them in Tripoli - were burned to the ground, and 35 Torah scrolls were destroyed.

The exodus of Jews from Libya began a short time later.

Three years later, after the establishment of the State of Israel, another series of riots broke out against Jews, with 12 killed. From then until 1951, nearly 31,000 Libyan Jews emigrated to Israel. Another 7,000 departed (for Italy) after the Six-Day War. The last known Jew in Libya, the 80-year-old Rina Debach, left the country in 2003.

November 6 / Gottschalk family commits suicide rather than let Nazis split them apart

The Nazis ordered celebrated actor Joachim Gottschalk to divorce his Jewish wife, whose hand Goebbels had kissed. He refused.



Gravestone of the Gottschalk family. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 6, 1941, the German actor [Joachim Gottschalk](#) and his German-Jewish wife, Meta Wolff, killed themselves and their 8-year-old son, Michael, rather than have the family split up, with Meta and the half-Jewish Michael being sent to a concentration camp.

Both Gottschalk (born 1902) and Wolff (born 1904) were successful actors, she in the theater, he on the stage in Frankfurt and Leipzig, then as of 1938, in a number of popular movies. The couple married in 1930, and in 1933, Meta gave birth to a son, Michael.

Being married to a Jewish woman in Nazi Germany, Gottschalk made an effort to keep a low profile, and even turned down film roles for that reason. But in four films opposite film star Brigitte Horney (the daughter of psychoanalytical pioneer Karen Horney), he achieved a very high profile as a sympathetic leading man, compared by some to Leslie Howard and to Frederic March.

Perhaps Gottschalk and Horney's most celebrated film was their final one together, as well as the picture that indirectly led to his downfall: "The Swedish Nightingale" (1941), about the relationship between Hans Christian Andersen and the opera singer Jenny Lind.

Gottschalk had been urged by family and friends through the 1930s to leave Germany with his family, while it was still possible. But he was reluctant to do, and his film

studio, UFA, would not allow him to break his contract. Not only that, UFA even pressured him to divorce his wife.

‘Divorce her’

In April 1941, Meta Wolff accompanied her husband to a gala premiere of “The Swedish Nightingale” in Berlin. Also in attendance was Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels, who, according to the story, was charmed to meet Mrs. Gottschalk, even kissing her hand. Later, when it was revealed to him that she was Jewish, he was furious.

Several days later, Gottschalk was summoned to the Propaganda Ministry and informed that he would have to divorce Wolff. When he refused, he was told that he would be called up into the Wehrmacht, and his wife and son deported to the concentration camp Theresienstadt, in Czechoslovakia.

Gottschalk requested to accompany Meta and Michael to Theresienstadt, but was turned down. Minutes before the Gestapo arrived at their home – or so goes the legend – to arrest mother and son, Joachim and Meta sedated Michael and turned on the gas, killing all three.

The regime blocked any mention of the movie star’s death in the press, although word of his passing did become known by word of mouth.

Two years after the end of the war, the dramatic tale of the Gottschalks was the subject of an East German feature film called “Marriage in the Shadows” (Ehe im Schatten). The 1947 movie was directed by Kurt Maetzig, whose own mother, a Jew, had committed suicide rather than face deportation during the Holocaust. “Marriage in the Shadows,” although it changed some of the details in the story of Gottschalk and Wolff (in the movie, for example, they were childless), was a big hit in Communist Germany, selling nearly 13 million tickets. Paul Klinger, the actor who portrayed the Gottschalk-like character, is also the man who was called upon to take Gottschalk’s place, after his death, in the 1942 film “The Golden City,” directed by Veit Harlan, creator of the infamous anti-Semitic drama “Jew Sues.”

November 7 / Hard-drinking, 'sell-out' 'Wizard of Oz' screenwriter is born

Ex-U.S. Marine and reporter Herman Mankiewicz also co-wrote the script for the cult favorite 'Citizen Kane.'



Poster for the original "Wizard of Oz" movie, for which Herman Mankiewicz had some original ideas. Photo by AP

November 7, 1897, is the birthdate of Herman Mankiewicz, one of the most prolific and acclaimed American screenwriters of the 20th century.

Mankiewicz worked, sometimes without credit, on more than 70 different films during his career, including "Citizen Kane" (for which he shared the screenwriting Oscar with Orson Welles), "The Wizard of Oz," "Dinner at Eight" and "Pride of the Yankees."

Herman Jacob Mankiewicz was born in New York to Franz Mankiewicz and the former Johanna Blumenau, both of them German-born Jewish immigrants. Johanna was a dressmaker, and Franz an editor and teacher who moved the family to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, when he received a job editing a German-language newspaper there.

Herman's younger brother, Joseph, also an Oscar-winning screenwriter, and a sister, Erna, were both born there, before the family moved back to New York, in 1913.

Herman attended Columbia University, graduating in 1916. He worked briefly as managing editor of the American Jewish Chronicle before becoming a flying cadet with the U.S. Army, and then joining the Marines. By 1920, Mankiewicz was married, to Sara Aaronson, of Baltimore, and living in Berlin, where he worked as a reporter for the Chicago Tribune until 1922.

From then until 1926, when he left for Hollywood, Mankiewicz, hard-drinking and an inveterate gambler, served as deputy theater critic (to George S. Kaufman) at The New York Times, and as the first theater critic for The New Yorker. He also contributed frequently to many magazines, including the Saturday Evening Post and Vanity Fair, as well as co-authoring several plays.

Sell-out extraordinaire

When Paramount offered Mankiewicz a contract as a writer, he headed west. It was the end of the silent-film era, and his first job was writing titles. Even here, he was able to demonstrate the wit that led his friend and colleague Ben Hecht to call him the “Central Park West Voltaire,” turning out such title cards as “Derely Devore, the star, rose from the chorus because she was cool in an emergency - and warm in a taxi.”

Shortly after his arrival in Hollywood, Mankiewicz, according to Hecht, sent him a telegram in which he informed his friend that “Millions are to be grabbed out here, and your only competition is idiots,” adding the warning, “Don’t let this get around.” Hecht came, and so did Dorothy Parker, and Robert Benchley, and a number of other New Yorker colleagues and Algonquin Hotel drinking companions.

Pauline Kael, writing about Mankiewicz in The New Yorker in 1971, described him as “a giant of a man who mongered his own talent, a man who got a head start in the race to ‘sell out’ to Hollywood.” He became one of the highest-paid writers in the world because, suggested Kael, “he brought good-humored toughness to the movies and energy and astringency,” all of which were welcomed by a public that had become exasperated with the artistic pretensions of much of the silent fare available until then.

Mankiewicz turned them out at an incredible pace, and he could write movies of almost every genre. One rare exception was Westerns, and when a studio tried to force him to write a Rin Tin Tin screenplay, he came up with a script that began with the noble dog being frightened by a mouse and reached its peak with a house on fire, and Rin Tin Tin dragging a baby into the flames.

Enter Randolph Hearst

Though Mankiewicz received no screen credit for his work on “The Wizard of Oz,” as the first of 10 writers who had a hand in the film, in 1938, it was he who proposed expanding the Kansas sequence from the minor role it had in the original book by L. Frank Baum, as well as filming the film’s opening scenes there in black-and-white, before switching to color, after Dorothy lands in Oz.

Mankiewicz was a frequent weekend visitor to San Simeon, the home of William Randolph Hearst and his companion Marion Davies, and there’s no doubt that many of the things he saw there ended up in “Citizen Kane,” which he and Orson Welles began work on in 1939.

Hearst, clearly the model for Charles Foster Kane (though Welles denied it), did his best to prevent the film from ever being screened, and Welles did his best to take sole credit for the screenplay, but Mankiewicz went to the Screen Writers Guild, which

prevailed upon Welles not only to share the credit, but to give Mankiewicz top billing as writer. Although the film was nominated for Oscars in nine categories, the only Academy Award it actually won was for screenplay. (At the time of its release, in 1941, "Citizen Kane," despite the critical acclaim it received, did not remain long in the theaters, and didn't recoup its costs. Only in the 1950s was it revived in art houses and dubbed one of the great films of all time.)

Mankiewicz produced the 1932 comedy "Million Dollar Legs" (co-written by his brother, Joseph), which concerns the scheme of the president of the tiny and bankrupt country of Klopstokia, played by W.C. Fields, to win the Olympic weightlifting competition, as well as the Marx Brothers' "Horse Feathers" and "Monkey Business." In producing, he generally helped write the scripts, though without receiving credit.

Mankiewicz's self-destructive tendencies caught up with him on March 5, 1953 (the same day that Joseph Stalin died), when he died of uremic poisoning, caused by kidney failure. The last two films he wrote were "The Pride of St. Louis," about baseball player Dizzy Dean (not to be confused with his 1942 screenplay for "Pride of the Yankees," about Lou Gehrig), and "Enchanted Cottage," a romantic fantasy picture starring Robert Young and Dorothy McGuire.

November 8 / Father of Russian bomb dies

Ironically, the hydrogen bomb that could potentially kill millions saved Vitaly Ginzburg, whom had become suspect to the Kremlin.



Vitaly Ginzburg Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 8, 2009, Vitaly Ginzburg, the Russian physicist who played a key role in development of the Soviet Union's hydrogen bomb, and who won a Nobel Prize for his discoveries about superconductivity, died, at the age of 93.

Vitaly Lazarevich Ginzburg was born on October 4, 1916, in Moscow. His father, Lazar' Efimovich Ginzburg, was a water-purification engineer and his mother, the former Augusta Veniaminovna Vildauer, was a Latvian-born physician. She died of typhoid when Vitaly was a young child.

A variety of circumstances related to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 meant that Ginzburg attended school only between ages 11 and 15. In 1931, a family acquaintance helped him get a job as an assistant at an X-ray laboratory. It was there that he became interested in physics. When he decided he wanted to study the subject at Moscow State University, he had to make up the years of school he had missed, and crammed three years of studies into three months.

A questionable diagnosis of thyroid disorder saved Ginzburg from military service in World War II.; Instead he served in a civil capacity, while continuing graduate work at the Lebedev Physical Institute, which during the war was evacuated from Moscow to Kazan, Tatarstan. He completed his Ph.D. in 1940 and his D.Sc. two years later.

He also married in 1937; he and his wife had a daughter, Irina Dorman, who is herself a physicist too, before they divorced, in 1946. That same year, he married Nina Ermakova, who remained his wife until his death.

Ginzburg and Ermakova met when he was a visiting professor at the University of Gorki, the city to which she had been exiled after being convicted on trumped-up charges of participating in a plot to assassinate Stalin. Though she was released from labor camp after a year, Ermakova had to remain away from Moscow until 1953, the year of Stalin's death.

A radiant communist future

Ginzburg had become a member of the Communist Party in 1942, a decision he said later was based on naïve faith in communism, rather than any “careerist considerations.” In the fascinating autobiographical essay he wrote for the Nobel Prize committee, Ginzburg admitted that for some time, “I believed in ‘a radiant communist future,’ not understanding that here we had, in fact, a regime of a Nazi type, headed by a criminal no less mean and bloodthirsty than Hitler.”

After World War II, Ginzburg's mentor at Lebedev, Igor Tamm, recommended him for the team, which also included Andrei Sakharov, working on the Soviet hydrogen-bomb project. Ginzburg's contribution was the idea of using solid lithium-6 deuteride for the bomb's nuclear fuel.

Bizarrely, during the same years, Ginzburg became increasingly suspect to the regime, as a Jew, and as someone married to former political prisoner, and he writes that he was only “saved by the hydrogen bomb.” It also didn't hurt that Stalin died, on March 5, 1953. Ginzburg wrote in 2003 that he and his wife “have up till now been celebrating this day as a great festival.”

And then he won his Nobel for something completely different

Ginzburg's Nobel Prize in 2003, however, which was shared with the British-American scientist Anthony Leggett and the Russian-American Alexei Abrikosov, was not related to his research on nuclear fission, but rather on superconductors, materials that, when cooled to low temperatures, can conduct electricity with very low levels of resistance. His special contribution was related to superconductors that remained effective in the presence of magnetic fields. This work also led to his receiving the Israeli Wolf Prize in physics for 1994-95.

At the time he won the Nobel, he told an interviewer that he planned to give his share of the \$1.3 million prize to his great-grandsons. He told a reporter from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency that it seemed like a lot of money to him, as it would “to any Russian who is not a crook or a business magnate.”

Ginzburg was a lifelong atheist, and only a few years before his death, he openly criticized President Vladimir Putin for allowing growing involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church in state affairs (and also for not supporting science). At the same time, Ginzburg was very active in the rebuilding of the Jewish community in Russia after the fall of communism, in 1991. He was a charter member of the board of governors of the Russian Jewish Congress, and he was politically active in expressing support for Israel, even though in 2002, he objected, as an atheist, to local Jewish leaders showing their solidarity by adopting a prayer for the welfare of Israel. He died in Moscow from cardiac arrest and was buried in the Novodevichy Cemetery, the

final resting place of many Russia notables. As of 2003, he had a granddaughter living in Israel.

November 9 / Seventeenth Council of Toledo opens

The council was largely focused on the punishment and persecution of the kingdom's Jews.



The solution to the 'Jewish problem' was enslavement. Photo by AP

On November 9, 694 C.E., the Seventeenth Council of Toledo, one of a series of ecclesiastical assemblies convened in that city by the Visigoth rulers of Spain, opened its proceedings. Led by Egica, the Visigoth Catholic king of Hispania (roughly what we think of as the Iberian Peninsula) and Septimia (the southeastern corner of France), the records show that the council was largely focused on the punishment and persecution of the kingdom's Jews. Indeed, between the 16th Toledo Council, held just a year earlier and the 17th, the monarch's approach toward the kingdom's Jews seems to have gone from one that encouraged them to convert and integrate into society to an attitude of suspicion and fear. In his opening address to the council, Egica (who ruled from 687 to circa 701) accused the Jews of participating in an international plot to destroy the church; to this, the bishops added a resolution charging the Jews with planning to overthrow the king.

The solution to the Jewish problem was enslavement. According to the resolutions passed by the Council, any Christian slave who belonged to a Jew was freed of servitude, with the former owners now to be slaves themselves, the property of the crown. All of their property was also forfeited to the king, who was authorized to transfer it to the newly liberated slaves. The newly indentured Jews were then dispersed around the kingdom, and children over the age of 7 were to be taken from them and raised as Christians.

The only Jews who were excepted from these rules, at the king's request, were those from the territory of Gallia Narbonensis, on the French side of the Pyrenees; this was apparently because of a plague epidemic in that region, and a desire to isolate it and its residents from the rest of the kingdom.

Historians are divided about the basis for Egica's change of heart toward the Jews; what is clear is that the Visigoth kingdom was by then in decline, and that the invasion of the Moors that began in 711 C.E. led to its fall. There is little evidence that the measures legislated against the Jews were actually implemented much beyond the capital. Toledo so that when the Moors moved into the peninsula several decades later, they reported on encountering Jewish communities.

November 10 / The 'first English Jew' dies

Antonio Carvajal was so successful as a merchant that the English not only overlooked his religion: they let him bring back the Jews.



**The Bevis Marks Synagogue in London, built by Jews freshly allowed to return to England.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons, Avi Deror**

On November 10, 1659, Antonio Fernandez Carvajal – called by some “the first English Jew” – died.

Carvajal was one of those extraordinary figures whose financial, political and personal skills and acumen allowed him to become one of the most important merchants of his era. He also shared major responsibility for England reopening its gates to the Jews, 366 years after their expulsion by King Edward I, in the year 1290.

Carvajal, whose Hebrew name was Abraham Israel Fernandez Carvajal, was born around 1590, probably in the Portuguese town of Fundao. From there, possibly in reaction to the Portuguese Inquisition, he moved to the Canary Islands, which for a time offered Iberian Jews refuge from persecution, as well as ample business opportunities. There is evidence that he lived for a period in Rouen, France, too, before settling in London around 1632.

A time of war

The time was one of frequent wars -- over both trade and religion -- between Spain, England and Holland. Jews like Carvajal, with contacts in all three countries and in their colonies, and despite their uncertain civil status in all, were able to exploit their situations to make huge profits in commerce.

In Carvajal's case, his wide network of commercial partners and employees also put him in the position of being able to offer the English government, led by Oliver

Cromwell, valuable military and political intelligence gleaned from both Spain and Holland.

Officially, Jews were still not permitted to live in England in the first half of the 17th century, but by the 1650s, there were some 20 families living in London. Ostensibly, they were Roman Catholics, but their crypto-Jewish status was an open secret.

Antonio Fernandez Carvajal was the recognized leader of the community, due in part to his success in business. He owned his own fleet of ships, and traded with both the East and West Indies (India and South Asia, and the Caribbean islands, respectively), with the Levant, at different times trading in gunpowder and arms, silver bullion, wine and corn.

Jews are allowed back, albeit informally

At the start of the Anglo-Spanish War, in 1655, England seized all property belonging to Spaniards living in its territory. Carvajal had by then been “endenized” – gained effective citizenship – but when another Jew, Antonio Rodriguez Robles, found himself denounced and threatened with loss of all his property, Carvajal led the entire Sephardi community in appealing to Cromwell and the Council of State to recognize them as Jewish refugees, rather than as Catholic Spaniards.

At the same time, Menasseh ben Israel arrived in England from Amsterdam to press his request for the Jews to be allowed to return. In response, the Whitehall Conference ruled that “there was no law which forbade the Jews’ return to England.”

On May 16, 1656, the Council of State ruled that Robles should have his property restored to him. Cromwell intimated to the crypto-Jewish families of London that they were welcome to remain, even if no more formal declaration was forthcoming.

That December, the group began to rent a house in Cree Church Lane for religious services, nearby what later became the location of the Bevis-Marks synagogue. A few months later, Carvajal and another Sephardi Jew leased a site on Mile End Road, in the East End, to serve as the country’s first Jewish cemetery.

Carvajal died in London on November 10, 1659, while undergoing surgery for gallstones, and was buried in the Mile End cemetery. The St. Katherine Cree Church next door rang its bells in his memory and a month later, Samuel Pepys, a member of parliament and a Christian, who noted in his diary that he had been operated on successfully by the same surgeon as Carvajal, was moved to attend a memorial service for him at the Cree Church synagogue.

A copy of Carvajal’s gravestone is in the collection of the Ratsbibliothek in Leipzig, Germany. Part of the epitaph describes him as being, “generous to the needy and the poor. / His doings and his dealings with men were truth, / Truth was familiar in his mouth, his words ever pure.”

November 11 / The Jews of Casablanca celebrate Vichy overthrow, end of 'Hitler Purim'

'Megillat Hitler' tells how the Nazi plan to annihilate the Jews of North Africa was foiled at the last minute by the U.S.



**Casablanca. Buildings dating from the World War II era, renovated into a pedestrian street.
Photo by AP**

On this day in 1942, the Jewish community of Casablanca, Morocco, celebrated the liberation of that country from the control of Vichy France.

France's colonies in North Africa – Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria – had come under indirect German control, via the Vichy regime after the occupation of France in 1940. Hence, Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa by Allied forces, which had begun three days earlier, effectively saved the Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria from destruction by the Nazis. To commemorate the event, the Jews of Casablanca declared 2 Kislev (November 11) “Hitler Purim,” and commissioned the creation of a megilla in the style of the Scroll of Esther read on the holiday of Purim.

“Megillat Hitler” is today on display at Washington, D.C.'s U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Written in Hebrew, its text mimics the language of the original Scroll of Esther, as it describes the rise of “Hitler the painter,” who rose to become the ruler of all of Germany, and who decided, on the advice of his chamberlain Himmler, to destroy the Jews.

The author of the scroll, P. Hasine, a Hebrew teacher from Casablanca, tells how Hitler's plan to deport the Jews of North Africa was foiled at the last minute by the decision of President Roosevelt, “who could not sleep,” and so “commanded that these states be rescued and given protection.” Thus the feelings of the Jews “went from mourning into happiness because the Americans established their rule.” The

scroll declares that every year, on the 11th of November, “we are obligated to establish this day of rescue,” a “fixed and grand festival.”

Unfortunately, as historian Rafael Medoff has noted, the Allied liberation of North Africa in 1942 was not absolute. Despite despite the promises of President Roosevelt, and although the deportation of the Jews had been averted, the anti-Jewish measures that had been in place in places under Vichy control were not automatically canceled.

Specifically, the 1940 decision of Vichy France to cancel the application of the Cremieux Decree, by which Algerian Jews were offered full French citizenship, was not reversed. Not only did thousands of Jews continue to languish in forced-labor camps, but the Roosevelt administration, according to Medoff’s research, was loath to restore full rights to the Jews of North Africa for fear of stirring up the local Arab populations. General George Patton even warned General Eisenhower, supreme Allied commander in Europe, that steps taken to “favor the Jews” could “precipitate trouble and possibly civil war.”

Pressure from Jewish organizations in the U.S. mounted on the administration to insist on the elimination of French racial laws, but it was only in April 1943 that the labor camps were shut down, in May that Tunisia’s anti-Jewish racial laws abolished, and not until October 20 of that year that the Cremieux Decree was reinstated in Algeria.

November 12 / The man who translated the U.S. Constitution into Yiddish is born

J.D. Eisenstein loved his adopted home, the U.S., and translated both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution into Hebrew and Yiddish.



Americans take the constitution so seriously that they even named a battleship for it. Here: A reenactment of the War of 1812, with the USS Constitution. Photo by AP

November 12, 1854, is the birthdate of the American Hebraist J.D. Eisenstein, an autodidact who published more than 70 works in his 101 years, including a multivolume encyclopedia of Jewish laws and customs.

As an immigrant who arrived in the United States at age 18, he was proud of his adopted home, and translated both the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution into Hebrew and Yiddish.

Judah David Eisenstein was born in Miedzyrzec, in Polish Russia. When he was 10, his father immigrated to the United States, and he and his mother and siblings followed some eight years later, settling in New York.

A year later, at age 19, Eisenstein married. Initially, he was a businessman, first peddling handkerchiefs and suspenders and later manufacturing shirts. Some sources describe him as financially successful, others as a failure.

What is clear is that however much money he accumulated he sank in 1891 into an unrealized plan for Mizpah Colony, an 800-acre plot of land in Atlantic County, New Jersey, that was intended to provide an agricultural livelihood for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. He later wrote that he saw in his failure in commerce “the hand

of Divine Providence,” because, “Perhaps if I had succeeded in my business I would not have turned to writing.”

Eisenstein wrote more than 150 articles for the Jewish Encyclopedia and provided seven entries to “Murray’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary.” He also contributed thousands of articles on subjects including American Jewish history to numerous journals.

For Hebrew papers published in Europe, such as *Hasfira* and *Hamelitz*, he wrote about the experience of Jewish immigrants in America.

Treasuries on the law

J.D. Eisenstein’s books included a series of “otzarot” (treasuries) on Jewish law, midrashic literature and biblical Hebrew, as well as his *Otzar Yisrael*, the 10-volume encyclopedia he edited and in large part wrote. And, of course, a personal memoir.

He did more than write, however. Eisenstein organized the *Shoharei Sfat Ever* (Friends of Hebrew Culture) and set up a reading room for immigrant Jews on the Lower East Side. As a founder of a YMHA on Manhattan’s 42nd Street, he pledged to contribute, he recalled in his memoir, “400 Haskalah books and to pay for one-year subscriptions to European Hebrew newspapers.” He was also an early activist in the *Beit Medrash Hagadol*, a synagogue on the Lower East Side that offered immigrant Jews “piety and pleasure,” according to Eisenstein.

Eisenstein was a strong defender of traditional Judaism and, at least early in his life, a sharp critic of both Conservative and Reform Judaism. Nonetheless, writes Rabbi Robert L. Samuels, by 1952, when he was offered an honorary doctorate from the Jewish Theological Seminary, Eisenstein was happy to accept, just as he accepted a similar degree two years later from Hebrew Union College.

A grandchild, Ira Eisenstein, was a graduate of JTS who, as colleague (and son-in-law) of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, became a founder and leader of Reconstructionist Judaism. He edited for posthumous publication at least one of the 16 books that were left unpublished at the time of his grandfather’s death.

J.D. Eisenstein died in New York on May 17, 1956.

November 13 / Louis D. Brandeis is born

The first Jew to be named to the Supreme Court, Brandeis was born in Louisville, Kentucky.



Louis Brandeis. Wikimedia Commons

On November 13, 1856, American jurist Louis Dembitz Brandeis was born. Brandeis was the first Jew to be named to the U.S. Supreme Court, where he served as an associate justice from 1916 to 1939.

Brandeis was born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, the son of secularized, German-speaking Jewish parents who had immigrated from Prague, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After education in Louisville and for several years in Germany, where his family briefly relocated during an economic downturn in 1872, he entered Harvard Law School in 1875. He graduated with the best grade-point average in the school's history, a record that is said to have stood for eight decades.

Brandeis and a colleague, Samuel Warren, opened a law firm in Boston, and he pursued a private career until his appointment to the High Court in 1916. He was distinguished by his concern over the growing power of economic monopolies in the United States, and a general desire to pursue social justice. He was offended by conspicuous consumption (his friends owned yachts, he was satisfied with a canoe), feared the manipulative power of advertising, fought to limit the power of corporate trusts, and spoke of his belief in the power of the law to help in “the attainment of liberty” – hence his concern, as he declared, that “we hear much of the ‘corporate lawyer,’ and far too little of the ‘people’s lawyer.’” One landmark case he pursued

over several years was fighting the attempt of the New Haven Railroad, controlled by financier J.P. Morgan, to take over the Boston and Maine Railroad. He prevailed after a nine-year struggle.

Brandeis became an advisor to Woodrow Wilson after the latter became president in 1913 – the two shared a similar opposition to business trusts – and it was Wilson who named him to the Supreme Court three years later. So great was opposition to the nomination of the “radical” Brandeis that the U.S. Senate decided to hold his confirmation hearings in public for the first time ever.

Brandeis, though he remained a secular Jew, apparently became interested in Zionism through his friendship with the British-born Zionist leader Jacob de Haas. He accepted the leadership of a major American Zionist organization in 1914, and spoke on behalf of the cause around the United States, openly rejecting the idea that belief in the need for a Jewish state opened American Jews to the charge of dual loyalty. After a dispute over administrative issues with World Zionist Organization leader Chaim Weizmann, Brandeis withdrew from active involvement in the movement, but during continued to push for open immigration to British-controlled Palestine and also helped raise money for the Jewish population there.

On the court, he was distinguished by landmark rulings dealing with issues of privacy, free speech, economic centralization, and states’ rights, and many of the concepts of jurisprudence he pioneered continue to guide the American system to this day.

Brandeis retired from the court in 1939 and died in 1941. Legal scholar Wayne McIntosh described his greatness as going far beyond his career as a great Supreme Court justice, whose “concepts of privacy and free speech ultimately, if posthumously, resulted in virtual legal sea changes that continue to resonate even today.” Brandeis, he declared, was no less “a social reformer, legal innovator, labor champion, and Zionist leader.”

November 14 / Leonard Bernstein's triumphant debut

On this day in 1943, Leonard Bernstein, who would become one of the century's most celebrated conductors and composers, made a successful debut with the New York Philharmonic – at the tender age of 25.



Leonard Bernstein in 1945, two years after making his successful conducting debut with the New York Philharmonic. Photo by Wikimedia

On this day in 1943, 25-year-old Leonard Bernstein became an overnight star when he made his conducting debut with the New York Philharmonic, filling in for the ailing Bruno Walter in a concert at Carnegie Hall that was broadcast nationally on radio.

Born in 1918, and raised in Lawrence, Massachusetts, north of Boston, Bernstein was an accomplished pianist as a child. He was educated at Harvard University and at the Curtis Institute, before being accepted to Serge Koussevitzky's conducting class at Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony's summer home, in 1940. That experience led to his appointment as assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic, a position far less momentous than it may sound since the post rarely allowed one to appear before a live audience. At that point, Bernstein was already composing music as well.

On Saturday, November 13, 1943, Bernstein's children song cycle "I Hate Music" premiered at Town Hall in New York with mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel. His family had come south from Boston for the occasion. But he was notified that guest conductor Bruno Walter, the Jewish exile from Nazi Germany, was ill and might not be able to appear the following night with the Philharmonic. In the event that Walter's regular substitute, the orchestra's music director, Arthur Rodzinski, was unable to get into the city in time, Bernstein was told to begin studying the scores for the Sunday night concert.

The morning after the Town Hall recital, Bernstein called his parents, who were staying at a New York hotel, and told them not to head back to Boston, as he would be conducting the Philharmonic that evening. In a 1982 memoir about his family in *The New Yorker*, Burton Bernstein, Leonard's younger brother, recalled how his parents cried, "Oy gevalt! ... almost in unison," when they heard the news, "both of them holding their cheeks, as if to prevent their faces from collapsing."

Bernstein had no opportunity to rehearse with the orchestra before the concert – which was scheduled to be broadcast coast-to-coast on CBS Radio. When the audience was informed that Maestro Walter would be replaced by the young Bernstein, some concertgoers left Carnegie Hall in a huff. Those who remained, however, heard Bernstein lead the Philharmonic in a program that included the overture from Schumann's "Manfred," Richard Strauss's "Don Quixote," and the Prelude to "Die Meistersinger."

The performance, of course, was a success, and when it was over, the audience and the assembled press went crazy over the charismatic young conductor. Burton Bernstein recalled how his parents kvelled backstage after the performance, as his father, Sam, "found his tongue and held forth for the press. 'Just the other day,' said Sam, 'I said to Lenny, "If only you could conduct the 'Don Quixote.'" And he said, 'Dad, you'll have to wait ten years for that.'" It was mostly fantasy, of course," Bernstein wrote. "Sam had never heard of 'Don Quixote' before that afternoon."

In the years that followed, Leonard Bernstein fulfilled his early promise with international conducting engagements (particularly following World War II), and premieres of compositions for the symphony hall, dance and musical theater. In 1947 he appeared for the first time in Tel Aviv, and the following year, during Israel's War of Independence, conducted (and played) Beethoven's First Piano Concerto with the Israel Philharmonic before an audience of soldiers in Be'er Sheva. Later came "West Side Story," "Kaddish," "Candide," his televised concerts for young people, and innumerable honors. He served as music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958 until 1969.

Leonard Bernstein died on October 14, 1990 in New York.

November 15 / N.Y.'s first kosher butcher is licensed

Asser Levy, a successful if often-sued Dutch businessman, was the first Jew to open a kosher butchery in N.Y., serve in the local militia or own property in North America.



A kosher butcher. Wikimedia

On November 15, 1660, Asser Levy received his license to operate as a butcher in New Amsterdam, with a waiver from having to slaughter hogs, making him New York's first kosher butcher. (Some sources give the date as October 15.)

Levy's date of birth is unknown, but he probably came from Amsterdam. He is believed to have arrived in the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam in 1654, as part of a group of some two dozen Jewish refugees who left the Dutch colony of Recife in Brazil when it was taken over by Portugal (which intended to introduce the Inquisition there).

Levy went on to make a significant mark on the history of the New World. A year after his arrival, he joined with Jacob Bar-Simson in petitioning the governor of New Amsterdam for permission to serve in the local militia – or at least to be relieved of the tax that was paid by those who did not perform their service guarding the colony. When their request was turned down – with an invitation to “depart whenever and whither it please them” – they appealed to the Dutch West India Company in Holland, which eventually sent a rebuke to Governor Pieter Stuyvesant for his discriminatory actions. The two petitioners were subsequently permitted to do guard duty.

Court records show Levy involved in litigation immediately after his arrival in New York, when a woman successfully sued him for money she said he owed her for his

travel fare. In following years, he was involved in numerous business transactions and often in litigation over debts.

But in the meantime, he became, in 1661, the first Jew to own property in North America (in New Orange, near Albany) and, shortly thereafter, in New Amsterdam. In 1664, when prosperous members of the colony were asked to loan the city money to build fortifications to defend it from the British, he provided 100 florins. (Later, when the British replaced the Dutch as sovereigns in the colony, he was the first Jew to swear allegiance to the British crown.) And while the historical record shows he was involved in frequent lawsuits over financial matters and even successfully sued the “city weigher” for “affronts” (presumed to be anti-Semitic statements), he was trusted by Jews and Christian alike, often serving as the executor of estates of Christian merchants. He built up extensive holdings and business partnerships not only in New York but in the colonies of New England as well.

In 1678, 18 years after receiving his butcher’s license, Levy built a slaughterhouse on what is today Wall Street, along the East River. He also owned a popular tavern in the area. After his sudden death, on February 1, 1682, there was extensive litigation over his estate. Oddly, his place of burial is unknown. But several parks in New York City and a public school are named for him.

November 16 / Yeshiva U. becomes a university

Yeshiva University, the first Jewish-sponsored university in the U.S., straddles the line between religious and secular learning.



Yeshiva University. Wikimedia

On November 16, 1945, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College, in New York, officially became a university, when the New York State Board of Regents accepted its request to change its name to Yeshiva University. This made it the first university in the United States with Jewish sponsorship.

The schools that comprise Yeshiva U. had their beginnings in the late 19th century, but it was the 1915 merger of the Etz Chaim Yeshiva (founded in 1886) – which combined Talmud study for elementary-school students with some secular instruction – with the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) that pushed it toward becoming multi-faceted educational institution. The university established several high schools in different parts of the city and a B.A.-granting men’s college in 1928 at the university’s present location in Washington Heights (Stern Women’s College, with its campus in Manhattan’s midtown, came into being 26 years later).

The university is devoted to the philosophy of Torah Umadda – Jewish learning and secular education side-by-side – and, not surprisingly, most of its students are Modern Orthodox Jews. But in 1970, the university took on the status of a secular university, meaning that by law it was committed to accepting students without regard to ethnic or religious background. This move, which had its opponents within the university,

was undertaken to avoid losing eligibility for government funding. At the same time, the RIETS, which has a four-year program toward Orthodox rabbinic ordination – and the university's high schools, were became legal "affiliates" of the college and professional and graduate schools that not made up Yeshiva University. Even with this change, all students at the "secular" Yeshiva College are required to take a full course on Jewish studies and observe religious law on campus, meaning its students are overwhelmingly Orthodox Jews.

The tension inherent in attempting to maintain a modern but traditional identity was exemplified three years ago, when a group of students organized a "Tolerance Club." One of its first activities was to hold a panel discussion on campus, which attracted more than 700 people, about the experience of being Orthodox and gay. The university administration immediately shut the club down on the grounds that homosexual activity contravenes Jewish religious law.

Today, Yeshiva is a research university centered in four different Manhattan campuses, with highly regarded undergraduate colleges and a business school as well as graduate schools of medicine, law, social work, Jewish studies and education, among others. It also runs high schools for boys and girls. The university has links with several dozen men's and women's yeshivot in Israel, so students can combine their studies in New York with time in Israel. Of its approximately 11,000 students include, some 1,000 are in the high schools and the rabbinical seminary, 6,400 are in the undergraduate colleges, and the rest are in graduate programs.

November 17 / All Jews of England arrested in 'coin-clipping' scandal

Some 680 Jews detained in the Tower of London, with more than 300 subsequently executed, on suspicion of coin clipping. All Jews were eventually expelled from Britain in 1290.



A groat, part of the currency of England during the reign of Edward I.

On November 17, 1278, all the Jews of England were subjected to arrest and search of their homes on suspicion of coin clipping and counterfeiting. Eventually, some 680 were imprisoned in the Tower of London, where it is believed that more than 300 were actually executed in 1279. At the time, the Jewish population of England is believed to have been some 3,000.

The most significant antecedent preceding the roundups and hangings of 1278-1279 was the Statute of the Jewry, imposed by King Edward I in 1275. That statute forbade Jews to deal in usury. Ostensibly, the measure allowed Jews to make a living by commerce in “lawful merchandise ... and their labor,” and to lease land for farming (for up to 15 years). But the practical effect of the statute was largely to deprive Jews of a legal livelihood. Jews were also limited in where they could reside, and were now required to wear a yellow badge identifying them as such.

Coin clipping was a widespread practice, one in which both Jews and Christians indulged, and which led to a financial crisis in the kingdom. (One contemporary chronicle estimated that, overall, the practice reduced currency’s value to one-half its face value.) By 1275, coin clipping had been elevated to the status of capital crime.

It was in this context that the November 1278 raid on coin clippers got under way. According to the Bury Chronicle, “All Jews in England of whatever condition, age or sex were unexpectedly seized ... and sent for imprisonment to various castles

throughout England. While they were thus imprisoned, the innermost recesses of their houses were ransacked.”

Those who were arrested were then tried and, according to the estimate by historian Zefira Entin, 269 Jews – and 29 Christians - were put to death, in London alone, and more than another 50 in other towns and cities.

Those who could afford it, and who had a patron at the royal court, could buy their way out of their punishment, and there are records of Jews who purchased pardons for themselves. On the other hand, there is little evidence of Jews taking up a royal offer to convert to Christianity – who were soon obligated to attend regular sermons by Dominican priests - as a means of saving their lives.

By May 6, 1279, King Edward announced that anyone suspected of currency violations who had not by then been convicted and executed could settle accounts with the crown by paying a fine. This measure brought an estimated 16,500 pounds, in the form of fines and of confiscated property, into the king’s coffers. That sum is said to have been equivalent to 10 percent of the crown’s annual income at the time

The final expulsion of the Jews took place in 1290. By that time, there were some 2,000 Jews left in the realm to send into exile.

November 18 / The man who helped 700 boys survive Buchenwald dies

A Buchenwald inmate himself, Werber said that the knowledge that his wife and daughter were dead 'drove me in my obsession to save children.'



The Nazi camp of Buchenwald, upon its liberation in 1945. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 18, 2006, Jack Werber, a Polish-born Jew who not only survived Buchenwald himself but also helped some 700 children in the Nazi death camp to remain alive until liberation, died, aged 92.

Jacob Werber was born in Radom on September 28, 1914, the youngest of Fajja and Josef Werber's eight children. Before World War II the city, in east-central Poland, had around 100,000 residents, about one-third of them Jews.

Werber was raised in a traditional religious family, although he attended secular schools and was active in the socialist Hashomer Hatzair movement. His father was a furrier and hatmaker; his mother died when Jacob was six.

In 1939, after the Germans invaded Poland, Werber was sent to the Buchenwald death camp, near Weimar, Germany. By that time, he had both a wife, Rachel, and a daughter, Emma, neither of whom survived the war. Of the 3,200 Jews on Werber's transport to Buchenwald, only 11 were alive at the end of the war.

In August 1944, a transport of boys from six to 16 years old arrived at Buchenwald. Werber already knew that his wife and daughter were dead, a loss, he later wrote, that "drove me in my obsession to save children." As a barracks clerk, Werber resolved to do all he could to help the new inmates escape deportation to the east, which he was convinced meant certain death. Together with members of the camp's underground

organization and the cooperation of several prison guards who were already thinking about how they would survive after Germany lost the war, Werber arranged to hide the youngest boys in other barracks and to arrange work for the older ones. As a result, he helped some 700 boys to survive the war.

After the war, while searching for relatives, Werber met Mildred Drezner, a survivor of Birkenau-Auschwitz. They married, and in 1946 Werber's brother Max helped them immigrate to the United States. Max Werber, 32 years Jack's senior and his only surviving relative, had gone to America before World War I.

For a number of years Werber, like his father before him, worked with animal pelts. He was one of a number of manufacturers who cashed in on the fad for coonskin caps spurred by the popular Disneyland TV series "Davy Crockett," originally broadcast in 1954-55. As he told an interviewer for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1989, "I was the Davy Crockett king," making up to around 12,000 caps a week. When they ran out of raccoon fur, the hatmakers used rabbit skins, and when that ran short, they put fur around the edge only.

Werber later moved into real estate, eventually owning some 30 private homes and several apartment buildings as well as a shopping center. He and Millie had two sons, David and Martin. In 1996, Werber published a memoir, "Saving Children: Diary of a Buchenwald Survivor and Rescuer," written together with William B. Helmreich.

November 19 / Conservative movement pioneer Solomon Schechter dies

On this day in 1915, rabbi, scholar and educator Solomon Schechter, who helped the Conservative movement in America take major steps forward in the beginning of the 20th century, died.



Solomon Schechter examining manuscripts from the Cairo Genizah. Wikimedia Commons

On November 19, 1915, rabbi, scholar and educator Solomon Schechter died at the age of 67, in New York City. Schechter, born in the Romanian town of Focsani in 1847, is remembered for landmark contributions in two principal fields. As one of the first to recognize the historical importance of the documents found in the Cairo Genizah, he arranged for a vast cache of them to be brought to Cambridge University for preservation and study. As the second president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1902, he took on a central role in the formation and development of the Conservative movement's rabbinical school. He also founded the United Synagogue of America (later, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism), the movement's umbrella organization.

Schechter was born into a Chabad Hasidic family, the son of a ritual slaughterer (a *shohet*, from which the family name derived), and had a traditional Jewish education, revealing his prodigious learning skills from a very early age. By the time he was in his 20s, he was studying at modern, "scientific" Jewish institutions in Vienna and then Berlin. In 1890, he was appointed lecturer in Talmud and rabbinics at Cambridge, and

it was there, in May 1896, that Schechter was asked by English twin sisters, who had recently returned from a visit to Cairo, to examine some pages of Hebrew writing they had picked up while there. The documents, it turned out, came from the *genizah* – a storeroom for preserving used Hebrew texts that hold holy language and thus cannot be destroyed – at the Ibn Ezra synagogue in Fustat, Old Cairo, which had been in use since the late ninth century C.E.

Schechter, who had been aware of the existence of the *genizah* if not of the extent of its treasures, immediately recognized the pages as an 11th or 12th-century Hebrew copy of the 2nd century B.C.E. Book of Ben Sira, an apocryphal work that had previously been known only in its Greek translation, but which Schechter had been convinced was composed in Hebrew. (Years later, much older, but largely identical, copies of parts of the same text were found in excavations at the Dead Sea and Masada.)

By December 1896, Schechter had organized an expedition to Cairo, from which he returned with some 193,000 of the 210,000 fragments that had been found in the storeroom; they became the basis of the Taylor-Schechter Collection at Cambridge. The contents of the Cairo Genizah continue to serve as a rich source of primary information about Jewish life in the Mediterranean region over nearly a millennium.

After a brief period at University College London, Schechter came to New York in 1902 to take over the Jewish Theological Seminary, serving as its president until his death. He played a vital role not only in establishing the institution organizationally and financially, but also in envisioning a path for Conservative Judaism. Although committed to the binding nature of Jewish law, Schechter proposed a middle way that allowed for adapting halakhah to the needs of the people.

On the practical level, he oversaw the creation of the United Synagogue of America. Some of the scholars who joined the JTS faculty during his tenure included Louis Ginzberg, Mordechai Kaplan and Israel Friedlaender. Additionally, Schechter was involved in the establishment of the Jewish Publication Society, and chaired the committee that oversaw the 1917 JPS translation of the Hebrew Bible into English.

Schechter's widow, Mathilde Roth Schechter (1857-1924), continued playing an important role in Jewish affairs after his death. She was a translator and scholar who co-wrote a Jewish hymnal, a prodigious fundraiser for JTS, and played key roles in the founding of Hadassah and of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.

November 20 / American Jewish comic dies early

Allan Sherman, the portly writer and performer of such comic songs as “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh,” left a sizable mark on American culture.



Allan Sherman guest starring on the television show 'The Loner.' Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 20, 1973, comic songwriter and parodist Allan Sherman died at age 48. With his rotund physique and highly specialized material – much of which played on Yiddish words and an intimate familiarity with the increasingly confident culture of middle-class, mid-century American Jews – Sherman was not an obvious candidate for stardom. Nonetheless, he hit it big in 1962 with "My Son, the Folk Singer," the fastest-selling record in history at the time. His career was supposedly given a little push by United State President [John F. Kennedy](#), who was overheard singing Sherman's song "Sarah Jackman," a parody of "Frere Jacques," in a hotel lobby.

Allan Sherman was born in Chicago on November 30, 1924, and his life was rarely easy. His parents divorced when he was a teenager, his obese father died while attempting an extreme weight-loss diet and he was expelled for misbehavior from the University of Illinois, where he wrote a humor column for the college newspaper.

Was it any surprise that such a misfit found his niche as a producer of television game shows? A show Sherman created ended up becoming the long-lived "I've Got a Secret" (1952-1967). In his spare time, he wrote songs, generally send-ups of well-known folk or pop tunes that he retooled with new, topical lyrics. American Jewish entertainer George Burns discovered Sherman at a party where he was performing at the invitation of Harpo Marx, his neighbor in Brentwood, Los Angeles. Liking what he heard, Burns recommended Sherman to an executive at Warner Bros. Records, and the result was a contract and the million-copy-selling album "My Son, the Folk Singer."

In addition to “Sarah Jackman,” a phone conversation in song between a woman named Sarah Jackman and her friend Jerry Bachman (Q: “How’s your brother Bentley?” A: “Feeling better ment’ly”; Q: “What’s with Uncle Sidney?” A: “They took out a kidney”), the disc includes Sherman’s parody of the Harry Belafonte Calypso hit “Matilda”: “My Zelda,” which includes the memorable line “My Zelda, she found her big romance / When I broke the zipper in my pants / My Zelda, she took the money and ran with the tailor.” Written by an insider, his songs gently but explicitly teased the ways of American Jews who were still in transition from their Eastern European origins to unprecedented prosperity and acceptance.

Sherman's debut album was followed in rapid succession by “My Son, the Celebrity” and My Son, the Nut” (both recorded in front of live audiences in 1963), the latter of which features the now-classic “Hello Muddah, Hello Fadduh,” a young kid’s plea to his parents written from sleep-away camp sung to the tune of the “Dance of the Hours” (from Ponchielli’s opera “La Gioconda,” but by then popularized by its inclusion in Disney’s “Fantasia”). It goes: “Take me home, I promise I will not make noise / Or mess the house with other boys / Oh please don’t make me stay / I’ve been here one whole day.”

By this album, which remained atop the Billboard Top 200 for almost two months, Sherman was making fewer explicitly Jewish jokes. But he was still very funny, as per his song about France’s Louis XVI, set to the tune of “You Came a Long Way from St. Louie,” with such lines as, “You went the wrong way, Old King Louie / You made the population cry / 'Cause all you did was sit and pet / With Marie Antoinette/ In your place at Versailles / And now the country's gone kablooie / So we are giving you the air / That oughta teach you not to / Spend all your time fooling 'round / At the Folies Bergere.”

Whether there was a limited appetite for what Sherman had to offer or U.S. culture lost some of its sense of humor after the death of its president in November 1963, the singer’s next two albums did not sell well, and Warner Bros. dropped him from the label. He continued working on a variety of projects, including song parodies written for corporations and a Broadway musical that ran for six performances in 1969, but with limited success. His wife divorced him and he was plagued by illness. He died of emphysema just short of his 49th birthday.

Over the decades, Allan Sherman’s songs have remained popular, inspiring such successful parodists as “Weird Al” Yankovic and Adam Sandler. In recent years, nearly all of his recordings have been rereleased, both individually and together in a boxed set.

November 21 / Shul rebels found Reform Judaism in U.S.

Reformers from Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim broke off from the synagogue after it rejected changes they sought for the religious service.



Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim Synagogue in South Carolina Photo by Wikimedia Commons

November 21, 1824, is widely seen as the day when American Reform Judaism was born. On that day, a group of members of Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim, in Charleston, South Carolina, met to draw up a list of the changes they wanted to see adopted in the synagogue's religious service. When their requests were rejected by the board, they left the shul and established the first Reform community in the United States.

The earliest record of a Jew in South Carolina goes back to 1695, 25 years after the establishment of a British English colony there. The original Beth Elohim, whose members prayed according to the traditional Sephardic ritual, dates to 1749; its stately Greek Revival structure, built after a fire in 1838 and still in use by the synagogue today, was dedicated in 1841.

The 47 reformers who met on November 21, and reconvened on December 23 to formally sign their petition, were generally younger than their fellow congregants, most having born in America after the Revolution. The demands they addressed to the Adjunta, as the board of trustees was called, included switching the language of prayer to English, shortening the service (by removing everything "superfluous"), and introducing a weekly sermon. They also wanted to institute regular fees, rather than having fundraising appeals take place during prayer services.

When, on January 10, 1825, they learned that all of their requests had been denied – without any open discussion -- they resigned from Beth Elohim, and, led by Isaac

Harby and Abraham Moise, they organized The Reformed Society of Israelites for Promoting True Principles of Judaism According to Its Purity and Spirit. The society did not purport to be a new synagogue, and its members convened only once a month for meetings.

In his book “American Judaism,” historian Jonathan Sarna pointed to the influence of Protestant churches of the time on the group, by noting that the reformers “argued for changes that would, simultaneously, improve the faith and restore it to what they understood to be its original pristine form, shorn of ‘foreign and unseemly ceremonies’ introduced by subsequent generations.”

By 1830, the society had assembled a Reform prayer book, the first in the U.S. By the end of that decade, however, the group had disbanded. Most of its members returned to their former congregational home, which they then proceeded to change from within.

In 1838, the building that housed K.K. Beth Elohim was destroyed by fire. As plans for a new structure were being drawn up, a group of 38 reformers called for a meeting to discuss “the propriety of erecting an organ in the synagogue to assist the vocal part of the service.” A majority of the congregation, as well as its new minister, Gustavus Poznanski, were in favor.

Now, it was the old-timers, who had lost the vote on the issue, 46-40, who withdrew from the synagogue. They set up a new shul, which they called Shearith Israel (“Remnant of Israel”).

Some traditionalists remained behind, however, making Beth Elohim a split congregation, with its president lined up with the reformers and its board of trustees dominated by traditionalists. Eventually, they brought their dispute over control of the community to court, and in a case that dragged on for three years, a state appeals court finally ruled that “questions of theological doctrine, depending on speculative faith or ecclesiastical rites,” were not the domain of the state. The court declared that only a majority of congregants could make such decisions, while noting that change and reform were inevitable in such communities. It was a ruling that had important implications for the development of religious life in the young country, reaffirming a separation of religion and state stipulated by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

In 1866, the members of Shearith Israel rejoined Beth Elohim, which, in 1873, became a founding member of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, today called the Union for Reform Judaism.

November 22 / Comedian who didn't 'get no respect' is born

Funny man Rodney Dangerfield kicked off his one-liners about his life as a loser with those famous words.



Rodney Dangerfield's comedy album 'No Respect.' Photo by Wikimedia Commons

November 22, 1921, is the birthdate of comedian Rodney Dangerfield, who found success playing a persona who didn't "get no respect" from anyone – not his parents (*"I remember the last time I was kidnapped, and they sent a piece of my finger to my father. He said he wanted more proof"*), not his wife (*"My wife met me at the door the other night with a sexy negligee. Unfortunately, she was just coming home"*), not his children (*"For Christmas I gave my kid a BB gun. He gave me a sweater with a bullseye on the back"*) and not even his psychiatrist (*"My psychiatrist told me I was crazy, and I said I want a second opinion. He said, okay, you're ugly too"*).

Jacob Rodney Cohen was born in the town of Babylon, on Long Island, New York. His parents were Philip Cohen, a vaudeville entertainer who went by the name of Phil Roy, and Dotty Teitelbaum, both of Hungarian Jewish background. Most of the time his father was somewhere else (in his 2004 memoir, his son calculated that they spent an average of two hours a year together) and his mother, he wrote in the memoir, "was coldhearted and selfish," someone who never gave her son "a kiss, a hug or a compliment."

Rodney Cohen started selling jokes to comics at the age of 15, and began performing himself, under the name of Jack Roy, when he was in his 20s. After nine unsuccessful years, he gave up comedy and started selling aluminum siding, later noting that he had been so poorly known at the time he quit show-biz that "I was the only who knew I quit!"

It was only when he was in his 40s, having renamed himself Rodney Dangerfield (he adopted the name from a character who appeared on Jack Benny's radio show), that his career began to take off. His big break came when he was called in as a last-minute replacement for an act on Ed Sullivan's Sunday night TV variety show, in 1967. He was invited back often to Sullivan, and also began appearing on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, and as a headliner in Las Vegas.

In 1969, he opened up Dangerfield's, a comedy club on Manhattan's Upper East Side, which gave him a regular venue for his work, and where such acts as Jerry Seinfeld, Roseanne Barr, Jim Carrey and Rita Rudner performed early in their careers.

He told The New York Times that he thought of his trademark line after seeing the 1972 film "The Godfather." "All I heard was the word 'respect,' " he recalled. "You've got to give me respect,' or 'Respect him.' I thought to myself: It sounds like a funny image -- a guy who gets no respect. Maybe I'll write a joke, and I'll try it."

The phenomenon image of an exasperated Dangerfield, his eyes bulging, his hand constantly adjusting a poorly fitting red necktie, beginning a recitation of one-liners about his life as a loser with the words, "I tell you, I get no respect – no respect at all," was in itself enough to make fans howl with delight. That would be followed by observations like, "My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met," or "Steak and sex, my favorite pair. I have 'em both the same way - very rare," in endless variations on the same theme. Often, the delivery was far funnier than what was being said.

Beginning in the 1980s, Dangerfield began performing regularly in films, including "Caddyshack," with Bill Murray and Chevy Chase, "Easy Money" and "Back to School." He even played a non-comic role, a sexually abusive father, in Oliver Stone's 1994 "Natural Born Killers."

Dangerfield was married twice, and had two children. In August 2004, he entered a Los Angeles hospital for heart-valve-replacement surgery. When asked how long he expected to be hospitalized, he told a reporter, "If all goes well, about a week. If not, about an hour and a half."

In fact, he went into a coma after the surgery, and although he emerged for a period from that, Dangerfield died at UCLA Medical Center on October 5, 2004.

His gravestone reads, simply, "Rodney Dangerfield ... There Goes the Neighborhood."

November 23 / Anti-Jewish pogroms end in Poland

In three days of violence following the declaration of Polish statehood in 1918, the army terrorized thousands of Jews, killing 150.



As the head of the American Relief Association, Herbert Hoover pushed for an impartial investigation of the violence. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 23, 1918, three days of anti-Jewish pogroms came to an end in Lemberg, in eastern Galicia (today Lviv, Poland). During the unrest, the city's large and influential population of Jews found itself caught in the middle of a national struggle between Poles and Ukrainians. Up to 150 Jews were murdered and many others had their homes and property looted and destroyed.

Following the end of World War I and the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, long-simmering ethnic tensions between Poles and Ukrainians in Galicia came to the fore. Although Ukrainians made up two-thirds of the region's population, in the capital city, Lemberg, the proportions were almost reversed. On November 1, the West Ukrainian People's Republic declared independence in Eastern Galicia and made Lemberg its capital, taking the city's Polish population by surprise. Fighting broke out between Polish and Ukrainian forces there and in other towns, and on November 21, what was now the Polish army conquered Lemberg, a city of some 200,000 residents.

Although there were some isolated instances of Jews fighting with Ukrainians, the Jewish community declared its official neutrality in the conflict and even organized its own defensive militia. The Poles, however, disarmed the militia upon their arrival in Lemberg, and rumors of Jewish collaboration with the Ukrainians spread among their forces, which included a number of released criminals. To top it off, Polish commanding officer, Czeslaw Maczynski helped spread anti-Semitic tropes and put off an order to impose martial law on the city, allowing the Jewish quarter of Lemberg to be closed off and Polish forces to run rampant.

Joseph Tenenbaum, a leader of the disarmed Jewish militia and a witness to the events, described how organized groups of Polish troops, well-armed and each led by an officer, went house to house in the Jewish quarter, beating and killing residents and destroying and looting property. A report later prepared for the Polish Foreign Ministry concluded that 150 Jews were murdered and some 500 Jewish-owned businesses were ransacked. It explicitly held the army officers in control of Lemberg culpable for the violence.

Lemberg was not the only Polish town to experience anti-Jewish pogroms at the time, and descriptions of the violence received international attention. By the following June, Herbert Hoover, then the head of the American Relief Association (later United States president), convinced both U.S. President Woodrow Wilson and the Polish prime, that an impartial investigation of the 1918 pogroms was necessary to salvage the reputation of the newly independent Poland, which the U.S. wanted as an ally in the developing rivalry with the Soviet Union. Wilson appointed Henry Morgenthau, Sr., a (Jewish) former American ambassador to the Ottoman Empire who, in 1918, had conducted a damning investigation into accusations of Turkish genocide of Armenians, to head a delegation to the region and prepare a report.

The Morgenthau Commission investigated eight cities where anti-Jewish actions had taken place in 1918 and 1919, including not only Lemberg but also Pinsk, where, in April 1919, the Polish army had executed 35 Jews on trumped-up charges of being Bolsheviks. With regard to Lemberg, Morgenthau concluded the Polish government was not behind the pogrom and refrained from using that term at all. While not minimizing the violence against the Jews, he did suggest that it had a political rather than a purely racial motivation, stating that "these excesses were the result of a widespread anti-Semitic prejudice aggravated by the belief that the Jewish inhabitants were politically hostile to the Polish State."

Thanks to the attention paid to the pogroms, and specifically the Morgenthau Report, the Paris Peace Conference passed the Minority Protection Treaty ("Little Treaty of Versailles") in 1921. While recognizing Polish independence, the treaty committed the Polish state to render "total and complete protection of life and freedom of all [its residents] regardless of their birth, nationality, language, race or religion."

November 24 / Europe's first secular Jew is born

Philosopher Baruch de Spinoza was banned by the Jewish community of Amsterdam for his allegedly heretical views on God and religion.



Baruch de Spinoza Photo by Wikimedia Commons

November 24, 1632, is the day that philosopher Baruch de Spinoza was born, in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam. The son of a family that originated in Spain before the Inquisition, and eventually settled in Holland, Spinoza was banned by the Jewish community of Amsterdam for his original and allegedly heretical views on God and religion. Although he never recanted his beliefs, he also did not convert to Christianity, and continued developing his philosophy, producing a number of works that are studied to this day. As such, he has been called Europe's first secular – or modern – Jew.

Baruch de Spinoza (after his excommunication, he Latinized his name to Benedict de Spinoza) was the second son of Miguel, a Portuguese-born merchant, and his second wife, Hanna Debora de Espinoza, conversos who re-embraced their Judaism on their immigration to Amsterdam.

Baruch received a traditional Jewish education, but his formal studies ended when he was 17 and joined his father's import business. It is apparently the beginning of Spinoza's dealings with the world outside Amsterdam's insular Jewish community that opened him up to free-thinking Christians like Frances Van den Enden, a former Jesuit who saw his own writings proscribed by the Church. Van den Enden taught Spinoza not only Latin, but also apparently exposed him to the rational thought of Descartes and to the concept of democracy.

In 1654, Miguel de Spinoza died, and Baruch began to run the family business, together with his brother Gabriel. Later, encountering debts he could not repay, he turned to the civil authorities (rather than Jewish ones) in Amsterdam to be recognized as an orphan, so as to be freed of responsibility to his father's creditors. At the same time, he began lowering his annual contributions to the city's Jewish community, eventually ending them altogether. These events closely corresponded to a lawsuit with his sister, Rebekah, who disputed his inheritance. Baruch won the suit, but later relinquished the family holdings to her, turned over the business to Gabriel, and took up the profession of optics. Around the same time, Spinoza was shaken by a knife attack, by someone who was apparently outraged by his public expressions of unorthodox views.

On July 27, 1656, the Jewish community of Amsterdam – its *parnassim*, or secular leaders, not its rabbis -- issued its *herem* (ban) on Spinoza, whom it accused of “abominable heresies” and “monstrous acts,” and cursed “by day and ... by night... when he lies down and... when he rises up.” It also forbade any other member of the community from having any contact with him.

Oddly, the writ of *herem* does not in any way specify Spinoza's heresies or monstrous acts. Despite its harshness, there is evidence that Spinoza was given an opportunity to redeem himself before it was issued, but he refused the demand that he keep his thoughts to himself. Although there is no evidence that the municipal authorities had pressed the Jewish leadership to deal with Spinoza, it is clear that the Jews were a tolerated minority (they had only recently been permitted to settle in Holland) who were expected to remain true to their faith and keep contact with Christians to a minimum. Spinoza was consorting with non-Jews and discussing matters of theology openly with them.

After being banned, Spinoza left Amsterdam, and no longer lived the life of an observant Jew. Yet, he also did not adopt another religion. Although he moved several times, he spent the last years of his life in The Hague, where he pursued the profession of lens-making and devoted the rest of his time to thinking and writing. He died on February 20, 1677, probably from an illness connected to the glass dust he inhaled from his lens-grinding.

To this day, philosophers are still trying to categorize Spinoza's teachings, to determine, for example, whether he was an atheist, or a theist or a pantheist.

Clearly, he denied the existence of a God who directly involved in history; his God was impersonal, perhaps co-equal with nature. The human soul, apparently, was not immortal. The Scriptures were written by humans, not God or his agent Moses. Since most of Spinoza's works were published posthumously, there were likely more personal reasons behind his ostracism.

Almost immediately after he died, his writings were shipped to Amsterdam and published. And almost as quickly, they were banned throughout the Netherlands.

November 25 / Safed destroyed by quakes

In autumn 1759, not one but two earthquakes struck near the holy city of Safed.

On November 25, 1759, the second of two major earthquakes in less than a month struck along the Levant fault zone, causing significant death and damage in the Galilee city of Safed.

The first was on October 30, with a strength of 6.6 on the surface wave magnitude scale and an epicenter closer to Safed. The far-stronger November 25 temblor, which reached a magnitude of 7.5, was centered a little north of there in the Baalbek valley.

Although Safed is mentioned in the Bible and the Talmud, it began to play a significant role in Jewish life in the Land of Israel only in the 13th century, after it came under Mamluk protection. The 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain brought the city an influx of Sephardic Jews, and by the 18th century, Safed was numbered among the Four Holy Cities, together with Jerusalem, Hebron and Tiberias.

With Jewish communities of Sephardi, Ashkenazi and Italian origin, Safed became a base for the development of Jewish mystical thought and for rabbinical study. It also emerged as a significant manufacturing and trading center, and the first printing press in the Middle East was established in the city in 1563.

By 1759, however, the city's status had been greatly diminished. It fell victim to warfare between Druze and Ottoman forces in 1660, and that was followed by outbreaks of plague in the 1740s.

The first quake of 1759 took place at 4 A.M. on October 30, and was felt as far north as Damascus and along the Mediterranean coast; in the area around Safed, it is estimated to have killed some 2,000 people, some 200 of them in the city itself.

The event of November 25 was far worse. It destroyed a third of Damascus and killed thousands there, damaging Tripoli, and toppling many of the surviving columns of the Roman-era temple in Baalbek. Safed was left in ruins.

Most of the Jews who survived fled the city, but were quickly replaced by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. These included some 300 followers of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, who arrived in 1778, and some 450 disciples of the Vilna Gaon, the rabbinic opponent of Hasidism, who settled there in the early 19th century.

They, too, became the victims of warfare, epidemic and, on January 1, 1837, another huge earthquake (this one along the Dead Sea Transform fault). The Jewish quarter of the city, built on a hill, was basically destroyed, as houses at higher altitude collapsed onto the roofs of those below them. Relief teams did not begin to arrive until January 19, and about half of the city's Jewish population of 4,000 is estimated to have died. After that, even the printing press was transferred out of Safed.

November 26 / Norway's Jews are sent to Auschwitz

The deportation of more than 500 Norwegian men and women was one of the last steps in the Nazi's systematic extermination of the country's Jewish population.



Anti-Semitic graffiti on an Oslo storefront in 1941. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 26, 1942, the German ship S.S. Donau left Oslo, Norway, carrying 532 of Norway's Jews, en route to the Auschwitz concentration camp. A total of 761 Norwegian Jews were sent to death camps, of whom just 26 survived the war.

When Norway adopted a constitution in 1814, it included a clause forbidding Jews and Jesuits from entering or residing in the country. The law was only repealed in 1851. A half-century later, the pogroms in Russia led to an influx of Jews seeking refuge in Norway, with another surge of immigration coming in the 1930s, as Jews began to flee Nazi Germany, and then countries that came under its occupation. By 1942, there were some 2,200 Jews living in the Scandinavian state, most of them in Oslo and Trondheim.

Germany invaded Norway on April 9, 1940, and despite the arrival of French and British troops to help in its defense, all resistance was vanquished by June 10. (The royal family and the members of the government escaped and set up a government-in-exile in London.) From then until the end of World War II, the country was ruled by a combination of 300,000 occupying forces led by Reichskommissar Josef Terboven and an on-again, off-again puppet government headed by Vidkun Quisling, the head of the Norwegian Nazi party.

Anti-Jewish measures began in May 1941, when all radios owned by Jews were confiscated. Detailed registries of all Jews in the country were assembled by cross-referencing lists from government authorities with records demanded from the

country's synagogues and other Jewish organizations. Jews had to have the letter "J" stamped in red on their identity cards. Their businesses and households were legally defined as bankrupt, meaning the state could seize and redistribute their assets.

Mass round-ups of Jews began in October 1942, by which time approximately 150 had fled Norway for neutral Sweden. First males over the age of 15 were arrested and held in two concentration camps in Norway. Then, on November 26, a force of 300 Norwegian police and militiamen rounded up the country's Jewish women and children as well, and sent both the men and women to the Oslo port, where they were put on board the Donau for transport to Stettin, Poland. Arriving there on November 30, they were sent by train to Auschwitz, where 346 of them were taken directly to the gas chambers. The remaining 186 people were dispatched to the Birkenau sub-camp to become slave laborers.

On the eve of the November 26 roundup, members of several Norwegian resistance organizations received notice of the impending action, and quickly got word to as many Jews as possible. As a consequence, at least 900 were able to make their way to Sweden and escape deportation. The Swedish government was liberal in dispensing naturalization papers via the consulate in Oslo.

On February 25, 1943, another 158 Jews who had not been included in the earlier deportation were shipped to Stettin via the S.S. Gotenland, and eventually to Auschwitz, where all but 26 (or 28) were sent immediately to their deaths.

In 1996, the Norwegian government appointed a committee to examine the fate of the country's Jews during the war, and to determine what had happened to property that had been confiscated from them. As a consequence, a sum of 450 million Norwegian krone (approximately \$62.5 million) was distributed, part to survivors and their heirs, part to Jewish institutions. Today, Norway has a Jewish community some 1,500-strong.

November 27 / The Joint is established

Almost by definition, the Joint has been active in some of the world's most dangerous and politically repressive countries, bringing relief to Jews around the world.



On a train bound for Palestine: Since 1914, the Joint Distribution Committee has been sending assistance to Jews in the Land of Israel. Photo by Hashomer Hatzair archives, Givat Haviva

On November 27, 1914, the Joint Distribution Committee of American Funds for Relief of Jewish War Sufferers was established by the merger of two existing American Jewish relief organizations.

Today, nearly a century later, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee or “Joint” as it is now known, in full and for short, is a worldwide organization offering assistance to Jewish communities both in Israel and the Diaspora, and to victims of humanitarian crises everywhere. In 2010, it spent nearly \$334 million on projects.

The impetus for creation of the Joint was the start of World War I, in August 1914. The U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, Sr., received a desperate request for aid from the Jewish community of Palestine, which then numbered 59,000, and which had been cut off by the outbreak of hostilities from its normal sources of support. Morgenthau cabled Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, both prominent members of the American Jewish community, in New York, with a note that said, in part, “Serious destruction threatens thriving colonies... Fifty thousand dollars needed.”

Within a month, the money had been raised: Schiff kicked in \$12,500, the merchant Nathan Straus matched him, and the American Jewish Committee contributed \$25,000.

As requests for more assistance continued to come in, two existing relief organizations – the American Jewish Relief Committee and the Central Committee for the Relief of Jews, the latter an Orthodox body, joined forces on November 27 for a more efficient distribution of funds. They were joined early the following year by the labor union-based People’s Relief Committee.

Even after the U.S. entered the war, in April 1917, the Joint found ways to continue to channel both money and needed food and supplies to Jewish communities both in the Land of Israel and in war-torn Europe.

When the war ended, the dissolution of the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, and the Russian Revolution engendered their own humanitarian disasters. As just one example, the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-21 is said to have made 275,000 Jewish children orphans. The Joint responded to these crises, sending not only money and supplies, but also its own teams of health-care professionals and social workers to build new institutions and programs. In 1919, it established the Palestine Orphan Committee, which provided shelter and other assistance to more than 4,000 children during its first decade.

Almost by definition, the Joint has always been active in some of the world’s most dangerous and politically repressive countries. In cooperation with Stalin’s Soviet Union, the “Agro-Joint” helped resettle and train some 250,000 Jews on farms in Ukraine and the Crimea; in the 1930s, it helped 110,000 Jews emigrate from Nazi Germany, and later supported 15,000 Jewish refugees from Central and Eastern Europe who ended up in Shanghai, China, among many other efforts.

In more recent decades, it has played a major role in assisting Jews in the Former Soviet Union either to resettle in Israel or to rebuild their own communities in the newly independent republics where open Jewish life had been forbidden for so long. It also was involved in airlifting and resettling in Israel of Ethiopian Jews in both Operations Moses and Solomon, in the 1980s and 1990s.

November 28 / Introducing the Polaroid camera

On this day in 1948, the world got its first look at the Polaroid camera that would revolutionize instant photo technology and come to embody the look of nostalgia.



The classic Polaroid camera, which revolutionized instant photography. Photo by Bloomberg

On November 28, 1948, the instant Polaroid Land Camera went on sale for the first time at the Jordan Marsh department store in Boston, Massachusetts. Invented by the Jewish entrepreneur Edwin H. Land, a largely self-trained physicist, the first batch of Polaroid cameras sold out within a day. Eventually the product was found in half of all households in the United States, according to the Polaroid company.

Land was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on May 7, 1909, the son of the Russian-born Harry Land, a scrap-metal dealer, and the former Martha Goldfaden. “Din” Land, as he was nicknamed as a child and continued to be called throughout his life, began college at Harvard University but dropped out after a year and moved to New York, where he began experimenting with filters to polarize light. His interest in the subject had been sparked one summer at sleep-away camp by a near-accident in which one driver was temporarily blinded by the glare of an oncoming car. Because he wasn’t associated with an academic institution, he would read the scientific literature at the public library, and sneak into laboratories at Columbia University at night to do his experimentation.

By 1932, having mastered the technology that would allow him to produce polarizing filters, he established his company, Land-Wheelwright Laboratories, which five years later was renamed Polaroid Corporation. The polarizing gel he invented found its most successful commercial application in coating for sunglasses.

The idea for an instant camera came to Land while on vacation in New Mexico, after his 3-year-old daughter asked him why photographs didn’t come out of the camera in

a finished state. He later said that he pondered the question while taking a walk and, within an hour, stimulated by the “dangerously invigorating plateau air of Santa Fe,” he had figured out the basic design of a camera that would produce its own instant photographic print. From there, however, another four years would pass before Polaroid Land Camera Model 95 went on the floor at Jordan Marsh a few weeks before Christmas 1948.

Steve Jobs, the late founder of Apple computers, called Edwin Land one of his chief inspirations, describing him as a “national treasure.” Both men were college dropouts, both would imagine a product and then set out to bring it to life, and both were perfectionists who believed in investing in R&D but not in market research, since, as Land said, “Every significant invention must be startling, unexpected, and must come into a world that is not prepared for it.” Land was unusual in hiring many women for his company, and during the civil-rights struggle, he introduced an affirmative-action plan for hiring blacks.

Sepia-tone instant photographs were quickly followed by black-and-white, and then, in 1963, Polaroid brought out a camera that produced instant color prints. Land also did defense-related work, both during and following World War II: His company produced the optics for the Lockheed U-2 spy plane. Later products included the stylish SX-70 single-lens reflex camera, in 1970, from which emerged a finished photograph (with earlier models, the photographer had to wait for the print to develop and then had to apply a layer of fixer to it), and an instant movie camera that was a flop.

Land retired from the company in 1983, at which time he held 533 patents. He died on March 1, 1991. Since 2001, the company he founded has gone into bankruptcy twice and been sold three times. It stopped producing cameras in 2007.

November 29 / A child prodigy turned Oscar-winning composer dies

At age 6, Erich Korngold played some of his creations for legendary composer Gustav Mahler, who declared the boy to be a genius.



Erich Wolfgang Korngold Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On November 29, 1957, composer Erich Korngold – who, like other artists, was very much in vogue in his day, later disparaged and forgotten, and more recently awarded a reconsideration and revival – died, at the age of 60.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold was born on May 29, 1897, in what is today Brno, in the Czech Republic (then Austria-Hungary), the second child of Julius Korngold and the former Josefina Witrofsky. When Erich was 4, the family moved to Vienna, where Julius became the music critic of the *Neue Freie Presse*.

Erich Korngold was truly a musical child prodigy, playing piano duets with his father at the age 5 and soon after writing musical phrases in his notebook. By the time Erich was 6, he was composing music at a level that his father took him to meet Gustav Mahler. Erich played some of his own compositions for the great man, who declared the boy to be a genius.

At Mahler's advice, Korngold then studied theory and orchestration for several years with composer Alexander von Zemlinsky, who was also the principal conductor of the Vienna Volksoper. When Korngold was 11, the Vienna Court Opera, performed his ballet "The Snowman," which was given a command performance before the Emperor Franz Josef in 1910. He also wrote a number of pieces for solo piano during this period.

By 1914, Korngold was writing operas, beginning that year with the one-act “Ring of Polycrates.” Since it was too short to suffice for an evening’s program, he supplemented it with another one-act opera, “Violanta,” a tragedy; the two pieces had their premiere in 1916 at the Munich Hoftheater, under the baton of Bruno Walter. At age 19, and almost overnight, Erich Korngold had become one of the leading figures in German contemporary opera.

Although Korngold was drafted during World War I, he was assigned to a number of music-related duties in the rear, which meant he was able to continue his composition. It was during this period that he wrote “The Dead City,” a three-act opera that was to become his most well-known work, at least until he began composing for the screen. When it was staged at the Metropolitan Opera, in New York, in 1921, “The Dead City” became the first German work to be performed there in the wake of the war.

Korngold continued composing operas during the 1920s, and also reviving and re-orchestrating several operettas by Johann Strauss II (the “Waltz king”). He also was commissioned to write a piano concerto for left hand and orchestra for Paul Wittgenstein (son of industrialist Karl Wittgenstein and brother of Ludwig), who had lost his right arm in the war.

Robin Hood to the rescue

Korngold’s move to Hollywood preceded the arrival of the Nazis by several years: In 1934, the Austrian-born director Max Reinhardt invited him to California to adapt Mendelssohn’s music for “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” for a film version of the play, Reinhardt’s first movie in America. During the four years that followed, Korngold began writing music that turned film scores into a genre of their own. His early work for the screen included the scores for “Captain Blood,” “Anthony Adverse” and “The Prince and the Pauper.”

Korngold continued to divide his life between Hollywood and Vienna until 1938. He was fortunate enough in that year to have been invited by Warner Bros. to compose the music for “The Adventures of Robin Hood,” with Errol Flynn. When the Anschluss took place, he was therefore in the U.S., and he decided to remain. His family soon joined him in California, and within two weeks the Germans had seized all of his property. (His publisher had several people break into the composer's Vienna home to retrieve his manuscripts.)

Korngold, who noted that “We thought of ourselves as Viennese; Hitler made us Jewish,” would credit “Robin Hood” with saving his life. His score for the film won Korngold an Academy Award for Best Original Score. His other Oscar was for the music for “Anthony Adverse,” two years earlier, in 1936.

During the course of the war, Korngold resolved not to write music for the concert hall or the opera as long as “that monster in Europe” remained in power. Instead, he concentrated solely on film work, and donated part of his revenue from the 18 films he scored between 1934 and 1946 to helping refugees from Europe.

Korngold wrote his last original score, for the movie “Deception,” in 1946. By then, he longed to return to orchestral composition, and also to return to his birthplace. He

and his family had their first look at post-war Vienna in May 1949; the following January, Wilhelm Furtwangler conducted the premiere of his “Symphonic Serenade for Strings, Opus 39.” Plans for the staging of several operas also got under way. But despite initial enthusiasm among audiences and critics, Korngold’s return turned out to be unsatisfying. Aside from residual anti-Semitism he encountered, it also turned out that critics were no longer receptive to the romantic, lyrical style that characterized his work. Korngold returned to California.

Erich Korngold suffered a stroke in October 1956. A year later, on November 29, 1957, he died. Although by the time of his death, his music was considered largely passé, within a few decades, it began to undergo a resurgence. This was thanks in large part to the efforts of his son, George Korngold, a record producer (who died in 1987), and of Brendan Carroll, a Korngold biographer, who has helped to restore a number of original recordings of his work.

In 1947, when Jascha Heifetz premiered Korngold’s Violin Concerto with the St. Louis Symphony, American critic Irving Kolodin commented that the lush piece was “more corn than gold.” By the 1970s, however, when Andre Previn conducted a movement from that concerto on British TV, he was able to note that the critic who wrote those words was long-forgotten, whereas Korngold was still remembered. That remark has only proved itself to be more true in the intervening decades.

November 30 / Activist Abbie Hoffman is born

On this day in 1936, outspoken activist Abbie Hoffman was born. His outrageous antics made him a polarizing figure but his social commentary was also said to be in the 'Jewish prophetic tradition.'



Abbie Hoffman, second from left, and Jerry Rubin. Photo by Getty Images

On November 30, 1936, Abbot Howard Hoffman – better known as Abbie – was born in Worcester, Massachusetts. A self-styled revolutionary who was one of the leaders of the anti-Vietnam War movement in the 1960s, Hoffman gained wide fame and notoriety for his provocative and often humorous pranks, and for being one of the “Chicago Seven” tried for alleged intent to incite a riot at the 1968 Democratic Party Convention.

Hoffman was the son of Florence Schamberg and John Hoffman. He had what he called an "idyllic" childhood in Worcester, but by 17 he had his first arrest – for driving without a license. In high school, he earned a reputation for impudence toward teachers, fighting and vandalism. In 10th grade, Hoffman was expelled from his public high school after he attacked a teacher who ripped up an essay he had written declaring that "God could not possibly exist, for if he did, there wouldn't be any suffering in the world."

He finished his studies at a private school then attended Brandeis University, earning a B.A. in psychology in 1959. A master's in psychology from the University of California, Berkeley followed.

By 1967, Hoffman participated in the founding of the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies, who used street theater to convey their anarchistic, revolutionary, psychedelic sentiments. The Yippie flag featured an image of a cannabis leaf, and they organized marijuana “smoke-ins” in a number of cities.

According to a 2007 article by Yippie co-founder Paul Krassner, he and his comrades “had come to share an awareness that there was a linear connection between putting kids in prison for smoking pot in this country and burning them to death with napalm on the other side of the planet.” The group also ran a pig named “Pigasus the Immortal” for U.S. president in 1968.

In August 1967, Hoffman made a splash when he and other Yippies went to the gallery overlooking the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and began throwing dollar bills onto the floor, which some traders scrambled to pick up. The following summer, he and fellow Yippie Jerry Rubin were among a group of eight anti-war protesters arrested in Chicago during the Democratic Convention. The city had forbidden all but a minimal number of public protests, and wouldn't allow them to take place near the convention venue.

When demonstrations spilled over beyond what was permitted, police responded with unusual violence, and there were significant injuries on both sides. Hoffman and his co-defendants were indicted on federal charges of crossing state lines to incite a riot. (Black Panther Bobby Seale had his case separated from the others, who then became the Chicago Seven.)

Hoffman in particular took advantage of the trial, which was held before federal Judge Julius Hoffman – no relation to the defendant – to mock and insult the judge (he called him to his face “*a shande fur the goyim*”), and in general to make political speeches. After a lengthy trial, in which such public figures as Norman Mailer, Allen Ginsberg, Timothy Leary and Rev. Jesse Jackson appeared as witnesses for the defense, five of the Seven were convicted of the incitement to riot charge, and sentenced to five years in prison each.

In 1972, a federal appeals court overturned all the convictions, and a federal commission that investigated the street violence that accompanied the Chicago demonstrations concluded that what had occurred was in fact a “police riot.”

The Chicago Seven trial probably marked the peak of Hoffman's fame, though he continued with his public antics, and published a number of books, the most well-known of which was the 1971 “Steal This Book,” a guide for living for free, whose title deterred many bookstores from stocking it.

After a 1973 arrest on charges of distributing drugs, Hoffman skipped bail, had plastic surgery to alter his appearance, and remained in hiding under the name Barry Freed until turning himself in to police in 1980 – after prerecording an interview with newswoman Barbara Walters. He ended up serving a four-month prison sentence.

That same year, 1980, Hoffman was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. In 1986, he was arrested with a group of 14 others, including Amy Carter, the daughter of former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, for an unauthorized demonstration at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to protest CIA recruitment efforts on campus. Their trial in federal court provided another opportunity for Hoffman and his co-defendants to bring “expert” witnesses about alleged illegal CIA actions; the trial ended with the exoneration of all the accused.

In an interview near the end of his life, Hoffman explained his worldview as aspiring to “the redistribution of wealth and power in the world ... universal hospital care for everyone... [and not] a single homeless person in the richest country in the world. And I believe that we should not have a CIA that goes around overwhelming governments and assassinating political leaders, working for tight oligarchies around the world to protect the tight oligarchy here at home.”

Abbie Hoffman was found dead in his New Hope, Pennsylvania, apartment on April 12, 1989, with the remains of 150 phenobarbital tablets, as well as alcohol, found in his stomach. His death was ruled a suicide, although some of his friends suggested that he had been murdered.

A week later, a memorial service for him was held at Temple Emanuel, in Worcester, the synagogue he had attended as a child. Some one thousand people attended. Rabbi Norman Mendell suggested in his eulogy that much of Hoffman’s public life had been “in the Jewish prophetic tradition, which is to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable.”

December 1 / A playwright who ruled Bavaria for four days is born

Playwright, poet and political figure Ernst Toller had his work banned in Germany and was too political for Hollywood.



Ernst Toller

December 1, 1893, is the birthdate of German playwright, poet and political figure Ernst Toller, who served as president of the “Bavarian Soviet Republic” for a mere four days, in 1919.

Toller was born into a Jewish family in the town of Samotschin, in the Prussian province of Posen (today, Szamocin, Poland). His father, Mendel, was a prosperous wholesale grain merchant. He grew up speaking German and Yiddish.

In 1914, Toller began studies at the University of Grenoble, but, less than a year after his arrival in France, returned home, after Germany declared war on Russia, following the start of World War I. A patriot, he willingly enlisted to defend his country. When his First Bavarian Foot Artillery Regiment was sent off to the Western Front, he wrote in his diary, “How happy I am to go off to the front at last. To do my bit. To prove with my life what I think I feel.”

After experiencing abuse from the commanding officer in his unit, for what he described as anti-Semitic reasons, Toller asked to be transferred to the trenches, and served at Verdun and Bois-le-Pretre. As happened with so many others, this experience turned him against the war.

By May 1916, Toller had suffered a mental breakdown of sorts, and was discharged from the army as “unfit for active service.” His 1919 play “Transformation” is based in part on his experiences.

Back in Germany, he resumed studying, now at Heidelberg University. Simultaneously, he involved himself with vigor in political activity, and also became committed to the idea that art – wrote drama and poetry – had to serve a greater purpose. The poet, he wrote, needed not only “to decry the war, but to lead humanity toward his vision of a peaceful, just and communal society.”

War, peace and prison

As reward for his political attempts to end the war, Toller was expelled from school. He moved to Munich and became involved in union activity, helping to organize a munitions workers strike there, under the leadership of Social Democrat Kurt Eisner. He was arrested, together with a number of other strike leaders, and sentenced to prison, only to be released in May 1918, and sent back to the army. This time he was confined to a psychiatric hospital and then again discharged as unfit for service.

The end of the war coincided with the short-lived German Revolution, and a smaller revolution in Bavaria that overthrew the monarchy and led to the establishment of the Bavarian Soviet Republic. Between April 6 and April 12, Toller was president of the central committee of that republic, until it was overthrown by the Communist Party, which was in turn replaced by a right-wing government.

Toller was tried for treason and sentenced to five years in prison, having been spared a death penalty in part because of the testimony on his behalf of Thomas Mann and sociologist Max Weber. During his imprisonment, Toller wrote four plays, which earned him a reputation as one of the country’s leading dramatists. When “Transformation,” which he completed while behind bars, had its 100th performance, Toller was offered an amnesty, which he turned down, out of solidarity with other political prisoners.

Only upon his release, in July 1925, did he first have the opportunity to see one of his plays on stage. Shortly after, what was to be his most well-known drama, “Hoppla, We’re Alive,” had its premiere in Berlin. It tells the story of a political revolutionary who is released after five years’ confinement in a psychiatric hospital, only to find that his former comrades no longer have the will or desire to fight the system. He then kills himself in despair.

Banned in Germany – with Freud and Mann

Toller was conscious early on of the threat that Nazism posed to Germany and to world peace. And the Nazis, for their part, were conscious early of Toller’s standing as a literary figure and moral compass. By the 1930s, he was probably his country’s most admired playwright, and this, together with his outspokenness on public issues, brought him into the sights of the Nazis. On April 1, 1933, two months after his party had taken power, Joseph Goebbels declare Toller “political enemy number one,” telling an audience that "Two million German soldiers rise from the graves of Flanders and Holland to indict the Jew Toller for having written: 'The ideal of heroism is the stupidest ideal of all'."

After his works, together with those of other subversive writers like Freud, Mann and Brecht, were banned in Germany, Toller was convinced by friends that he should flee.

He headed for London, where he remained for three years. It was during this time that he wrote his autobiography, "I Was a German," and also frequent articles for the press about the dangers of Nazi Germany, and in support of the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.

In October 1936, while visiting the United States, Toller was offered a screenwriting contract by MGM. He signed, hoping that he would be given the opportunity to address the pressing issues of the day in his work. In the end, though, his work was too political for it to be produced in Hollywood.

Toller fell into deep depression after German's invasion of Czechoslovakia and Franco's victory in Spain and after learning that both his brother and sister back home had been taken to concentration camps. On May 22, 1939, he committed suicide by hanging himself in his room in the Mayflower Hotel, in New York.

The year after his death, the film version of Toller's last play, "Pastor Hall," was brought to the screen, in a British production. It presents the real-life story of Martin Niemoller, the German Lutheran churchman imprisoned for his outspoken opposition to the Nazis.

December 2 / Inventor of the LP is born

Peter Carl Goldmark invented not only the 33 1/3 record but also developed an early color-TV technology and much more.



Although it took several years for the LP to take off, when it did, it became the industry standard. Photo by Dreamstime

December 2, 1906, is the birthdate of inventor and engineer Peter Carl Goldmark, whose many technological achievements included the development of a system for broadcasting television in color – in the days when black-and-white TV was still in diapers -- and the creation of the long-playing 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ phonograph record, more commonly known as the LP.

Peter Karoly Goldmark was born in Budapest, in Austria-Hungary, the eldest child of Sandor Goldmark and the former Emma Steiner. One of his great-uncles, chemist Joseph Goldmark, discovered [red phosphorus](#), which is used in making matches, while another one, Karl Goldmark, was a violinist and composer.

When Peter was 8, his parents divorced, and he moved with his mother to Vienna. From childhood, he experimented with different electrical technologies. Setting up a lab in the bathroom, he built a radio receiver and attempted to develop a method for reproducing movie film – and started a fire instead.

Goldmark attended the University of Berlin and then the University of Vienna, where he received both his bachelor's and doctoral degrees (the latter in 1931), in the field of physics. He also continued his independent experiments, and in 1926, after building a tiny television from a do-it-yourself kit, received a patent for a method of increasing the size of the TV's picture.

After receiving his Ph.D., Goldmark spent some time working as a television engineer in London, before moving to New York, in late 1933. In 1936, he took the job of chief

television engineer at the Columbia Broadcasting System, charged with getting the company on the air, something that happened in 1941, although the medium really got under way in earnest after World War II.

In the meantime, Goldmark saw the film "Gone with the Wind" in 1940, while on his honeymoon with his second wife (a first marriage, in 1936, had lasted only a short time), and was very taken by its use of Technicolor. He immediately got to work on the technology that would be necessary for color-TV broadcasting. Although a prototype, called the "field sequential system," was actually functioning by August 1940, it never received final approval from the Federal Communications Commission, because it was not compatible with existing black-and-white TVs. Instead, a system developed by RCA became the industry standard.

During World War II, Goldmark was occupied with defense work, and invented several systems for jamming enemy radar, one of which was utilized during the 1944 Normandy invasion.

Getting into the groove

In 1945, a visit to a friend's house, where the host played a 78-RPM recording of Vladimir Horowitz performing Brahms' Second Piano Concerto, proved especially irritating, not only because of the poor quality of the sound, but mainly because the short playing time of the discs – all six of them -- required frequent interruptions.

By 1948, Goldmark had created the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ RPM long-playing record. All of its technology – the recording process, the physical disc and the grooves in which the music was embedded, and the playback equipment – was an improvement over the 78. Although it took several years for the LP to take off, when it did, it became the industry standard, so that by 1972, LP recordings were providing CBS with a third of its revenue.

Goldmark's numerous other inventions (he was fully or partly responsible or partly responsible for more than 160 different devices and technologies) included a high-quality photo composition system, work on what would become the audio cassette, and even the technology that allowed NASA's lunar modules to send photographic images back to earth.

When CBS created its CBS Laboratories division, in 1951, Goldmark was named its head, a position he held until his retirement, in 1971. He then formed his own company, which gave him more time to focus on educational projects and medical technology. "Electronic video recording," a means he developed in 1958 with education in mind was a precursor to the video cassette recorder that became available commercially in the late 1970s. Some of the aspirations he had for using video and television to distribute information to disadvantaged or geographically dispersed populations are being fulfilled today by the Internet.

On November 22, 1977, President Jimmy Carter presented Goldmark with the National Medal of Science for his life work. On December 2, he celebrated his 71st birthday. Five days later, Peter Carl Goldmark was killed in an automobile accident on the Hutchinson River Parkway, not far from his home, in Westchester, New York.

December 3 / First heart transplant patient goes under the knife

Louis Washkansky was a fun-loving, hard-drinking, athletic man who got a new heart and ended up dying of pneumonia.



An operating room. Photo by Nir Kafri

On December 3, 1967, Louis Washkansky became the first human being ever to undergo a heart transplant, in an operation performed by Dr. Christiaan Barnard, in Cape Town, South Africa. Washkansky survived for 18 days with the new heart.

Louis Washkansky was born in 1914 in Kovno (today Kaunas), Lithuania. When he was 9, his mother took him and his three siblings to Cape Town, to join their father, who had come ahead of the family to pave the way in their new home. The elder Washkansky opened a grocery in the city's Gardens neighborhood.

According to a detailed article about Washkansky's historic transplant by Dr. Irving Lissoos, in the journal *Jewish Affairs*, the recipient was a fun-loving, hard-drinking, athletic man, a member of the Maccabi Wrestling Club and Gym. He also "smoked like a chimney."

In 1940, Washkansky enlisted in the South African Engineering Corps, and saw action in Africa and in Italy. On one occasion, writes Lissoos, Washkansky disappeared from his unit in Italy, returning after a few days with a live ox, which was then slaughtered to provide fresh meat for the soldiers.

In 1947, Washkansky, who returned to Cape Town after the war and opened his own grocery, married Anne Sklar, also a child immigrant to South Africa from Lithuania.

(The two were introduced by Anne's brother, Solly Sklar, a onetime South African heavyweight wrestling champion, who had served in the army with Louis.)

Washkansky had the first of three heart attacks in December 1960. He also was a diabetic. In January 1967, his family doctor referred him to Dr. Mervyn Gotsman, a physician at the cardiac clinic at Cape Town's Groote Schuur hospital. (Gotsman later became the head of the cardiology department at Hadassah University Hospital in Jerusalem, and the personal physician of Prime Minister Menachem Begin.)

By the late autumn of 1967, Washkansky's condition had deteriorated to the point where he was near death. By then, however, Groote Schuur was ready to attempt a heart transplant. Cardiothoracic surgeon Christiaan Barnard, who had studied transplant surgery in the United States and had already performed heart replacements on some 200 dogs, determined that Washkansky was a good candidate to be the first human to undergo the procedure. When the idea was proposed to Washkansky, he accepted immediately.

On Saturday, December 2, 1967, Denise Darvall, 25, and her mother, Myrtle, were hit by a car operated by a drunk driver as they crossed Main Road in Observatory, Cape Town. Myrtle died immediately, but Denise was brought to the hospital seriously injured. When it became clear that her condition was fatal, Darvall's father gave permission for transplantation of her organs. At the time, however, as standards for determining "brain death" were not yet agreed upon, a body's organs could be harvested only after "whole-body death" was declared.

In Darvall's case, it was only when Barnard injected potassium into her heart that it stopped beating, at which point it could be removed. (It was Christiaan Barnard's brother Marius, also a surgeon, who urged him to induce heart stoppage, and who revealed this only in 2006.) The five-hour operation, carried out by a team of 30 led by Barnard, began at 1 A.M. on December 3, and reached its emotional peak when Barnard applied an electrical current to the transplanted heart and it began to beat within Washkansky's body.

Washkansky reacted well initially, and he was in good spirits. For fear that the tissue of the new heart would be rejected by his body, his doctors decided to bombard him with medication that would suppress his immune system. Unfortunately, the drugs also prevented the patient's body from fighting the pneumonia he had contracted. Washkansky died on December 12.

Three days after Washkansky's surgery, Dr. Adrian Kantrowitz carried out a second heart transplant, on a baby in the U.S. (the infant survived only for a number of hours). And on January 2, 1968, Christiaan Barnard performed a third procedure, on Philip Blaiberg, a dentist, who was also Jewish. Blaiberg lived for more than 19 months with his new heart. Making his case even more dramatic was the fact that he received his heart from the body of a young "colored," that is, mixed-race, man.

December 4 / The Maggid, untrained successor to Baal Shem Tov, dies

The ascetic Dov Ber taught that everything in creation is a manifestation of God.



Dov Ber's grave, Mezeritch. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

December 4, 1772 (or December 15, in the Julian calendar), is the date on which Dov Ber of Mezeritch, the successor to Hasidism's founder, the Baal Shem Tov, died, 11 years after the death of his teacher master.

The birthdate of Dov Ber ben Abraham, who is known widely as the Maggid (preacher), was somewhere between 1700 and 1710; like most details of his life, the exact date is not known. He lived most of that life in Mezeritch, in the region then called Volhynia, which straddles modern-day Ukraine, Poland and Belarus.

The most well-known legend about Dov Ber's childhood concerns a fire that destroyed his family's house when he was 5. As his mother watched their home go up in flames, she wept, and Dov Ber asked why she was crying. She explained that a copy of the family tree, which traced their heritage back to King David, was inside. The son told her not to worry, that he would make a new family tree, "starting with me."

Although Dov Ber was not trained as a rabbi, he was well-versed in Torah and Talmud, and served as a *maggid*, a preacher. He found particular interest in the study of Lurianic kabbala and in the teachings of the scholar and mystic Moshe Haim Luzzatto, a contemporary. He lived his life as an ascetic, often afflicting himself, and his sermons often spoke about divine reward and punishment.

Living as he did in extreme poverty, Dov Ber suffered from frequent ill health, and in particular had a lame leg. Having heard about the curative powers associated with Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the Besht (an acronym for his name), Dov Ber traveled to the latter's home, in Medzhibozh. Over the course of several days, he visited with the Besht, but was disappointed that the famed teacher, far from offering profound spiritual lessons, related a variety of accounts of his day-to-day activities.

Presence of angels

After a few days, Dov Ber decided to leave town quietly, and waited for the moon to come out that night, so that he could travel with some light. Just before his departure, near midnight, he was called to the home of the Besht, who asked him to explain a passage in "Etz Haim," a mystical text by Haim Vital. This was Dov Ber's specialty, and he proceeded to interpret the words, only to be told that he was wrong. Taken aback, he insisted that his analysis was correct, but also asked the Baal Shem Tov to provide his own interpretation. The Besht responded that Dov Ber had indeed parsed the passage properly, but that his words lacked soul.

As he spoke, Dov Ber later reported, the room filled with light and with the presence of angels.

Not surprisingly, Dov Ber decided to remain in Medzhibozh, and he became a disciple to the Besht. Rabbi Yisrael helped him infuse his knowledge with spirituality, and taught him to appreciate the value of everyday life. Dov Ber continued to be a more intellectual and text-oriented preacher than his teacher, but he now joined to this a deeper spirituality. As the Besht supposedly described it, "before Dovber came to me, he was already a pure golden menorah. All I needed to do was ignite it."

The Baal Shem Tov died in 1761. For a year after his death, his son Tzvi served as his successor, until he announced that he was retiring - and turning over the leadership of the emerging movement to Dov Ber of Mezeritch.

Dov Ber indeed moved the base of the Hasidic movement to his town and began sending out followers to spread the teachings of the Besht throughout the region and beyond, to Poland, Galicia and Belarus. These included Elimelech of Lizhensk and his brother, Zusha of Anipoli (or Hanipol), Schneur Zalman of Liadi, Aharon of Karlin, Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, Nachum of Chernobyl and several others.

Each of these men became the head of a different branch of Hasidism, but after the death of Dov Ber, there was no longer a single leader uniting them all.

Dov Ber was said to have spent most of his time learning in isolation. Only on Shabbat would he emerge, dressed in white satin. He would ask his followers to call out random biblical verses, and then he would weave them into a coherent, cohesive sermon.

Like the Besht, Dov Ber left no writings of his own, but a relative of his, Solomon ben Abraham, collected many of his teachings into several volumes. He himself, however, admitted that he did not always understand the meaning of those teachings.

In brief, it can be said that Dov Ber taught that everything in creation is a manifestation of God, and that man's task is to reunite with God. This is done through prayer, but whereas the Baal Shem Tov had taught that all people could come close to God through prayer, Dov Ber said that only certain *tzaddikim* (righteous teachers) could achieve that union, through ecstatic prayer, and that they would serve as the link between regular people and God. Through their love for the tzaddik, normal people could find grace with God.

As Hasidism began to grow, so did opposition to it, although initially, the only rabbi with sufficient gravity to show that opposition openly was the Gaon of Vilna. In April 1772, when several followers of Dov Ber came to visit him, he refused to receive them, and placed a ban on them and their followers. This acrimony was said to greatly disturb Dov Ber, who died later that year, on December 4. According to tradition, he is buried in nearby Anipoli, next to the grave of his follower Zusha.

December 5 / One of Bollywood's leading ladies is born

Nadira (Florence Ezekiel) played princesses and vamps, and was supposedly the first Bollywood star to be chauffeured around in a Rolls-Royce.



Still of Nadira from 'Shree 420.'

December 5, 1932, is the birthdate of Nadira, the stage name of the popular Indian film star Florence Ezekiel, who appeared in more than 70 movies between 1953 and 2000.

Florence Ezekiel was born Farhat Ezekiel in Baghdad (apparently -- although other, generally reliable sources also cite her birthplace as being in Israel and Bombay, India).

The film industry of Bombay (today Mumbai) is celebrating its first century this year. For most of its first 50 years, it wasn't considered appropriate for Hindu women to perform in the pictures of Bollywood, as the city's movie business is now universally known; female roles were often played by Anglo-Indian women, or by Jewish women, who were seen as part of a foreign community. Nadira must have had this in mind when, at the age of 19, she sailed to Bombay, hoping to make it onto the silver screen. At the time, Bombay had a large and vibrant community of Jews with their origins in Baghdad. (Here there is also disagreement among experts, as some sources say Nadira's family settled in Bombay when she was a baby, and that she had her first screen role at the age of 12.)

Nadira got her first break in 1952, in the film "Aan" (Pride), in which she was cast as Princess Rajshree opposite the heartthrob Dilip Kumar. He played the handsome and courageous peasant Jai Tilak, who dared to seek the hand of the arrogant and

unattainable princess. Although one British critic complained that the movie “went aan and aan and aan,” it was a hit at the box office.

Despite this initial success as a leading lady, two years later, Nadira took a role in “Shree 420” (Mr. 420, a reference to the section of the Indian penal code that deals with swindlers) as a seductress named Maya, who helps turn the country boy Raj into a big-city con man. “Mudh mudh ke na dekh,” the song she sings to win over her prey, is still remembered by many Bollywood enthusiasts.

As Nadira herself later told an interviewer, “No one ever gave me the role of a heroine after that film.” Instead, dozens of films followed in which Nadira – with arched eyebrows and flaring nostrils -- played the part of a vamp, a brothel madam or a schemer or one sort or another, invariably leading men to ruin.

Nadira said that her mother warned her that no Jewish man would marry her, if she continued to play such roles. And indeed, although she did marry twice, neither relationship lasted; one, in fact, lasted no longer than a week. But she was a star, and supposedly the first in Bollywood to have herself transported in a Rolls-Royce.

By the 1970s, Nadira was being offered roles as a character actress, most notably as an Anglo-Indian mother in the 1975 film “Julie,” for which she won a Filmfare award for best supporting actress. (The annual cinema awards, named for an Indian magazine, are the country’s most prestigious.)

One of Nadira’s brothers emigrated to Israel, the other to the United States, but she remained in South Mumbai, where she died on February 9, 2006, at the age of 73. In her last years she suffered from alcoholism and a host of severe medical problems. But a journalist who visited Nadira’s home shortly before her death learned that she had warm relationships with her neighbors, who were welcome to borrow books from her well-stocked library. It included, said one, titles by “Shakespeare, Hitler, Vivekananda,” and on World War II and Judaism.

December 6 / Odd man out in Zabar's troika dies

Murray Klein evaded death, reportedly smuggled arms to Irgun, battled with the Zabar scions and learned how to enjoy life.



Inside Zabar's, at the meat department. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 6, 2007, Murray Klein, the Holocaust survivor and former gulag prisoner who made his way to America, where he helped to turn Zabar's into New York's most famous food emporium, died, at the age of 84.

Mordechai Klein was born on March 25, 1923, in a shtetl in Soviet Ukraine, near the Romanian border. While his parents and five siblings all died in German concentration camps, Klein survived the Holocaust by being sent to a Soviet labor camp. (He had been away at school when his family was arrested.) When he escaped from there, he is said to have become involved with the Irgun's operation in Europe, helping to smuggle arms to the Jewish militia in Palestine.

After the end of World War II, Klein was held in a displaced persons camp that was situated in the Cinecitta Studios in Rome between 1945 and 1947. His longtime co-partner at Zabar's, Saul Zabar, told The New York Times, at the time of Klein's death, that, "Even in the camp, we heard he was running his own bread business."

Discount caviar

Zabar's had been founded in 1934 by Louis Zabar, also the product of a Ukrainian shtetl, who had arrived in New York nine years earlier. In 1941, the store moved into its current location, at 80th and Broadway on the Upper West Side.

During the course of the 1980s, as business mushroomed, Zabar expanded that store, buying out most of the adjoining real estate north of the store on the west side of Broadway.

After the death of Louis Zabar, in 1950, his sons Saul and Stanley took over the business, which offered the usual fare of a dairy deli: smoked fish, a variety of cheeses, and coffee roasted by the store.

Murray Klein arrived in New York in 1950, with the help of a cousin, who also helped him get a job as a stock boy at one of the Zabar shops (in its early years, the business had as many as six outlets). After going off on his own, briefly, to open a hardware store, Klein returned to Zabar's in 1960, as the owner of a one-third share of the business.

Klein ran the retailing end, and the brothers Saul and later Stanley were the buyers, who traveled further and further to find and import gourmet cheeses, oils, caviar, chocolates, coffees, lox, of course, and most anything else one could imagine appealing to the sophisticated Western palate.

As for cost, Zabar's had plenty of customers with unlimited budgets, but Klein's policy was to sell everything for the lowest price possible. In 1975, when it saw that he was selling its product for 30 percent less than the competition, the Cuisinart company refused to ship any more food processors to Klein. He sued the manufacturer. They settled.

Ideas literally hitting the head

It was, in fact, Klein who had the idea of opening up the Zabar's mezzanine, where they began selling cookware and equipment – besides food processors, they offered espresso makers, pepper mills, salad spinners, ice-cream machines, to name but a tiny fraction – and it was he who insisted on hanging items from the ceiling so that shoppers would always be bumping into the merchandise.

By the 1980s, Zabar's had also adopted a regular loss-leader strategy, by which they would offer a gourmet item like truffles or caviar at cost, or lower, on the assumption that once someone was lured into the store, they would buy much much more than a jar of Beluga fish eggs. Readers of the New York Times in those years would read constantly, in both news columns and in ads, of price wars with Macy's over caviar and Perugina chocolates – battles that Murray Klein always seemed to win.

Those same readers also knew about the emotional feuding that went on between Klein and his partners – those who had the Zabar “royal blood,” as he put it, running through their veins. (“You could say we don't speak,” Klein told a reporter in 1985.) As early as the mid-80s, Klein was demanding that they buy him out. He couldn't take the pressure, he told the Times in 1985, and just wanted “a year – maybe two years – to learn how to enjoy life before I die.”

In fact, Murray Klein stayed on until October 1994, when he sold his one-third share to his partners and kicked himself upstairs to the position of “consultant.” Even then, they had to go to court to haggle about the exact terms of his departure. Always the optimist, Klein told the Times, when he retired, that he intended to use his time to take a cruise in the Mediterranean: “I'm a millionaire now. So I have to spend the money fast.”

In fact, he had another 13 years.

Klein, who died of lung cancer, was survived by his wife of 53 years, the former Edith Bronner, and a son and a daughter – neither of whom went into the food business.

December 7 / Satmar Hasidism founder is saved

On December 7, 1944, the train carrying Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, founder of the Satmar Hasidic dynasty, departed Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on the so-called Kastner Train.

On December 7, 1944, the train carrying Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, founder of the Satmar Hasidic dynasty, departed Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on the so-called Kastner Train. The train, carrying some 1370 Jews, took them to Switzerland and safety – unlike most of Teitelbaum's followers in Hungary, who died in the Holocaust.

Teitelbaum (1887-1979) grew up in Sighet, then in Romania, and was the son of the town's grand rabbi. As a young man he moved to Satmar, a town that went back and forth between Hungarian and Romania control (today it is part of Romania, and is known as Satu Mare), and in 1934 became its chief rabbi.

After the war, Rabbi Teitelbaum and his wife, Alte Feige, lived briefly in Jerusalem, but by 1947, he moved to the United States, and established his community in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

The Rudolf Kastner affair remains one of the more controversial episodes of Jewish rescue during the Holocaust, and the role played by the Satmar Rebbe is but one still-vexing chapter in the saga. Kastner (1906-1957) was a Hungarian Jew and Zionist official. During World War II, he was a leader of the Aid and Rescue Committee, which before the German occupation of Hungary, in 1944, helped Jews escape into that country, and after that tried to smuggle them from there into non-occupied Europe. The situation of Hungary's approximately 700,000 Jews was unusual in that, although the government ruling the country was virulently anti-Semitic, and sent many of them to labor camps within the country, it resisted Nazi attempts to deport them, so that they were relatively safe until very late in the war. But when Germany actually occupied Hungary, in March 1944, deportations were quickly arranged, and within four months, more than 437,000 Jews had been put on trains, most of them headed for Auschwitz – an operation that Winston Churchill described as “probably the greatest and most horrible crime ever committed in the whole history of the world.”

Kastner was criticized principally for the efforts he invested in rescuing a relatively small number of Jews, some of them family members, some of them wealthy Jews who paid for their place on his train, while acting to suppress distribution of the Vrba-Wetzler Report, which provided detailed information about what was happening in Auschwitz several weeks before the deportations began.

An interview given in 1960 to a Dutch Nazi journalist by Adolf Eichmann, the SS officer who had the principal responsibility for organizing the Jewish deportations to the concentration and death camps, gave some credence to this charge. Eichmann said that Kastner had “agreed to help keep the Jews from resisting deportation -- and even keep order in the collection camps -- if I would close my eyes and let a few hundred or a few thousand young Jews emigrate to Palestine. It was a good bargain.”

Nonetheless, there is no consensus among Holocaust historians that much could have been done, by the time the Vrba-Wetzler Report became available, to save the Jews of Hungary.

Kastner was actually proud of the diverse group of Jews he and his committee assembled for rescue. He called the train a Noah's Ark, because it had people of all ages and of all social classes, Zionists and non-Zionists, Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox, 972 females and 712 males. It's true that 150 seats were auctioned off to well-off Jews, but their payments were used to cover the \$1,000 per head ransom for the rest of the passengers on the train.

The train departed Budapest in July 1944, and instead of heading directly to Switzerland, it was taken to Bergen-Belsen on July 9, where the Jews were made to disembark. They were held at Bergen-Belsen until December 7, but were kept in quarters separate from the other inmates, and given a subsistence diet. Some died, 17 were not permitted to leave Bergen-Belsen, but approximately 1,670 passengers survived and left for Switzerland on this day 68 years ago.

Rabbi Teitelbaum had made an attempt at fleeing Hungary for Romania, but was caught by Hungarian police and sent to the Klausenberg (Cluj) ghetto. Satmar lore has it that Kastner's father-in-law had a dream that told him that if the Rebbe were not included in the train to freedom, none of its passenger would survive. In any event, Teitelbaum remained ideologically and theologically opposed to Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish state til the end of his life, and was unwilling to testify in Kastner's behalf in a 1956 libel trial in Israel. The defendant was Malchiel Gruenwald, a Hungarian survivor who had published a pamphlet accusing Kastner of collaboration with the Nazis, and of selling out the vast majority of Hungary's Jews in order to save a few people close to him. Gruenwald was found not guilty, in a court decision that was damning to Kastner. Although most of the judgment was overturned by the Supreme Court in 1958, Kastner was already dead, having been assassinated on March 4, 1957, by a squad of veterans from the pre-state Lehi underground.

Teitelbaum died in 1979, by which time he had overseen the founding of Kiryas Yoel, a totally Haredi town in Orange County, New York, that today has some 20,000 residents. To this day, his followers celebrate Kislev 21, 5705 – which in 1944 fell on December 7 – for the “miraculous” rescue of their rebbe.

December 8 / The death of an Australian who set out to 'heal his country'

Zelman Cowen became governor-general in 1977 after a political crisis to 'bring a touch of healing to the country and its people,' as he put it.

December 8, 2011, is the day that Zelman Cowen died, at his home in Melbourne, Australia. December 8 is also the date that, 34 years earlier, Cowen, one of his country's most accomplished law professors, had been appointed governor general of Australia, a largely ceremonial but highly symbolic position as the Queen's representative in Canberra.

Zelman Cowen was born in Melbourne on October 7, 1919, to Bernard and Sara Granat Cohen. (Bernard changed the family name to "Cowen" a few years later.) Both parents' families had left Russian Belarus in the 1880s, Bernard's family for London, from which he arrived in Australia in 1911.

Zelman, who was named for his paternal grandfather, Solomon Cohen, was offered a scholarship to the prestigious secondary school Geelong College, but his father refused to let him study there, as it would have meant attending chapel each morning. Instead, he went to Scotch College, Melbourne.

During his youth, Zelman read a biography of the great English defense attorney Edward Marshall Hall (a book he received as a bar mitzvah present, he later recalled), and was inspired to study law. This he did at the University of Melbourne, graduating with first-class honors and being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship in 1940. World War II led to the deferral of his Rhodes; first he enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy, in which he served as an intelligence officer, after surviving the Japanese attack on Darwin, in February 1942.

Cowen only journeyed to Oxford in 1945, shortly after marrying Anna Wittner. After a two-year tenure at New College, and a bachelor of civil law degree, he was appointed a lecturer in law at Oxford's Oriel College. While there, he produced a doctorate on Sir Isaac Isaacs, the first native-born (and Jewish) governor general of Australia, which was later published as a book. He also served as a legal consultant to the British military government in Germany.

In the decades that followed, Cowen was a professor of law at the University of Melbourne, and later vice chancellor (chief academic executive) of both the University of New England, in Armidale New South Wales, and at Queensland University, in Brisbane. The latter post, in the early '70s, coincided with serious student unrest, which he weathered honorably.

In 1975, Australia went through a political crisis, which led to the then-governor general John Kerr, dismissing the prime minister, Gough Whitlam, and appointing Malcolm Fraser in his place. Two years later Kerr resigned himself, and Fraser, who in the interim was elected premier, asked Zelman Cowen to take on the position.

Cowen accepted, declaring his intention to “bring a touch of healing to the country and its people.” He combined the status of an international expert on constitutional law with a strong Jewish identity, which meshed with Australia’s pride in its cultural diversity.

In 1982, resigning from the governor-generalship (the position has no set term), Cowen returned to Oxford, where he became provost of Oriel College, a post he held until 1990. Much of that time, he also was chairman of the British press council. In the 1990s, back home, he was active in Melbourne’s Jewish community, campaigned for Australia to become a republic (a referendum to that effect failed, in 1999), and was patron of Melbourne’s St. Kilda Football Club.

For the last 15 years of his life, Cowen suffered from Parkinson’s Disease, though he remained active in public affairs. He and Anna had four children, Shimon (a Chabad rabbi and director of the Institute for Judaism and Civilization Inc.), Yosef (also known as Nicholas), Kate and Ben.

Sir Zelman Cowen’s state funeral took place on December 13, 2011, at Temple Beth Israel, the synagogue where he and Anna had been married in 1945.

December 9 / All but one of Shabbetai Zvi's devotees are excommunicated

The rabbis of Constantinople ousted all the followers of the false messiah, except for Nathan of Gaza.



Nathan of Gaza Photo by Wikimedia Commons

December 9, 1666, is the date on which the rabbis of Constantinople excommunicated all the followers of Shabbetai Zvi, with the exception of Nathan of Gaza -- the man most responsible for spreading messianic fervor across the Jewish world. A mere year and a half earlier, Nathan, a learned man who was a student of Lurianic kabbala, had had the vision informing him that Shabbetai Zvi (1626-1676) was the agent who would usher the world into the age of redemption. After convincing Shabbetai of the truth of his vision, Nathan, a brilliant spokesman, took on the mission of spreading the word through the Holy Land and Europe.

Abraham Nathan ben Elisha Hayyim Ashkenazi – only later did he come to be called Nathan of Gaza, mostly by his enemies -- was born in Jerusalem in 1643. His father was Elisha Haim ben Yaakov, a Polish or German Jew who added the surname of "Ashkenazi" to the family name when he settled in Jerusalem. Elisha Haim worked as an emissary of the Jewish population of Jerusalem, raising money for its member in Europe and in Morocco.

Nathan was raised in the holy city, where he studied for his first 20 years with the great Talmudist Jacob Hagiz. Late in 1663, when Samuel Lissabona, a wealthy businessman from Gaza, consulted Hagiz regarding a suitable groom for his daughter, he recommended his star student, Nathan. After marrying Lissabona's daughter, Nathan moved to Gaza, and it was there he began to study Lurianic kabbala.

According to the great scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem, exposure to kabbala aroused in Nathan "an awakening that had the violence of an explosion." Whereas Nathan had previously been simply brilliant, now he also seemed to be almost possessed by a new spiritual force.

Ecstatic experiences

First in 1663 and then two years later, Nathan had intense mystical visions, which he actually described in writing. In the latter vision, he was witness to the mysteries of creation, and saw an image of an individual whom he later understood was Shabbetai Zvi engraved on a divine chariot. The patriarch Jacob appeared too, and said to Nathan, "Thus saith the Lord, behold your savior cometh, Shabbetai Zvi is his name."

This second incident lasted some 24 hours. During that time, Nathan danced ecstatically and emitted a strange fragrance that was said by some to be the scent of the Garden of Eden. This second experience endowed him with the reputation of a prophet. In fact, Nathan's new status as a visionary and healer reached the ears of Shabbetai Zvi, who was in Egypt on a mission for the Jews of Jerusalem.

Shabbetai Zvi is known to have suffered from emotional difficulties, and was identified by Scholem as manic-depressive. When he heard about Nathan's special talents, he put aside his mission and hastened to Gaza, where he sought "a *tikkun* [healing] and peace for his soul," according to a contemporary account. Nathan, however, dropped to the ground in respect when he met Shabbetai Zvi.

Following extensive lobbying on Nathan's part, finally, by May 31, 1665, Shabbetai, whose first reaction had been disbelief, was willing to accept the mantle of Messiah. And Nathan took on the task of promoting his message. The two complemented each another – the one confident and articulate, the other unsure of himself and unpredictable.

Nathan announced that the messianic age would begin in 1666, and be heralded by the arrival of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel in the Holy Land, led by the Messiah riding on a lion with a seven-headed dragon in its mouth.

The rest of the story is well-known: Shabbetai Zvi headed to Constantinople in 1666, where, according to Nathan's prophecy, he would place the sultan's crown upon his own head. Instead, he was arrested upon his arrival in the Ottoman capital, and finally, after having been moved to a prison in Adrianople, given the choice of accepting Islam – or being executed. He went with the first option, and his conversion, on September 16, 1666, led most of his disappointed followers to abandon him. Others followed him into apostasy, while keeping alive secretly a new, subversive Jewish sect that turned much of Jewish law on its head.

Nathan, however, maintained his belief in Shabbetai, though he did not himself take on the yoke of Islam. Yet, so high was the esteem in which he was held by the rabbis of Constantinople, that when they placed a mass ban on all the followers of Shabbetai Zvi, they did not include Nathan among those subject to *herem*. Instead, as Gershom Scholem writes, "they requested the Jewish communities to turn him back wherever he appeared and, above all, to permit no contact between him and the believers."

Nathan of Gaza ended his days still a believer, as he continued traveling from community to community still spreading the word about Shabbetai. He died on January 11, 1680, probably in the city of Uskup, now Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, which is where he was buried. His grave remained a site of pilgrimage for some until it was destroyed during World War II.

December 10 / The man who discovered retroviral RNA is born

Howard Temin held firm to his ground-breaking theory as the scientific world howled. He was awarded the Nobel in 1975.

December 10, 1934, is the birthdate of Howard Martin Temin, the biologist who came up with the theory that RNA from a virus could replicate itself into the DNA of a host organism. Temin held firm with this conviction even as many of his peers and colleagues scoffed, and was vindicated.

For his discovery, Temin shared the 1975 Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology.

Howard Martin Temin was the son of a middle-class Jewish family from Philadelphia. His father, Henry Temin, was a lawyer, and his mother, Annette Lehman Temin, was active on a voluntary basis in a number of educational initiatives in the city.

Howard attended Philadelphia's Central High School, the magnet school for outstanding boys, and attended Swarthmore College, where his graduating class yearbook predicted he would be "one of the future giants in experimental biology."

In 1959, Temin earned his doctorate at California Institute of Technology, where one of his colleagues in studying the connection between viruses and cancer was Renato Delbecco, who would later share the Nobel with him and with David Baltimore. From there he went to the University of Wisconsin, where he worked until his death, in 1994.

Waiter, there's a sump in my tissue culture

Temin's first lab in Wisconsin was in the basement of the medical school, where, he recalled in his Nobel Prize autobiographical essay, he had "a sump in my tissue culture lab and [...] steam pipes for the entire building in my biochemistry lab."

It was at Wisconsin that Temin began theorizing that RNA could perpetuate itself by replicating into the DNA of a healthy cell, an idea that many of his peers scoffed at.

One of the reasons for resistance to his theory was that it seemed to contradict what had come to be referred to as the "central dogma" of Francis Crick regarding the transfer of genetic information within an organism. Crick said that information went only in one direction: "DNA makes RNA makes protein," he ruled, and the reverse was not possible.

Only when Temin – and also David Baltimore, who made the same discovery independently, also in 1970 – isolated and identified reverse transcriptase, the enzyme that actually does the work of turning RNA into double-stranded DNA, did other scientists accept that he had been right all along.

Subsequent research did not find many cancers to be caused by viruses (as opposed to genetic mutations or heredity), so the application of this new knowledge was initially limited. But the discovery of transcriptase became keenly relevant a decade later, when AIDS became known in the West.

Viruses whose genomes are copied into the host's DNA are called retroviruses. AIDS turned out to be caused by a retrovirus -- HIV -- which relies on reverse transcriptase to replicate its genome.

Pesky wellwishers

Temin was extremely dedicated to his work – on the day he was informed that he was to receive the Nobel Prize, a colleague recalled after his death, he expressed frustration that all the attention he was receiving was keeping him from his research. Yet he was far from lacking in other interests.

At Wisconsin, he was politically outspoken as an anti-war activist, and, testified a colleague, very well informed about nuclear weapons and military strategy. Another colleague observed in an essay about Temin that he attended Shabbat services each week, and had a large Jewish library at home. (His mother, Annette Temin, had been an active member of Hadassah and belonged to the board of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, outside Philadelphia.)

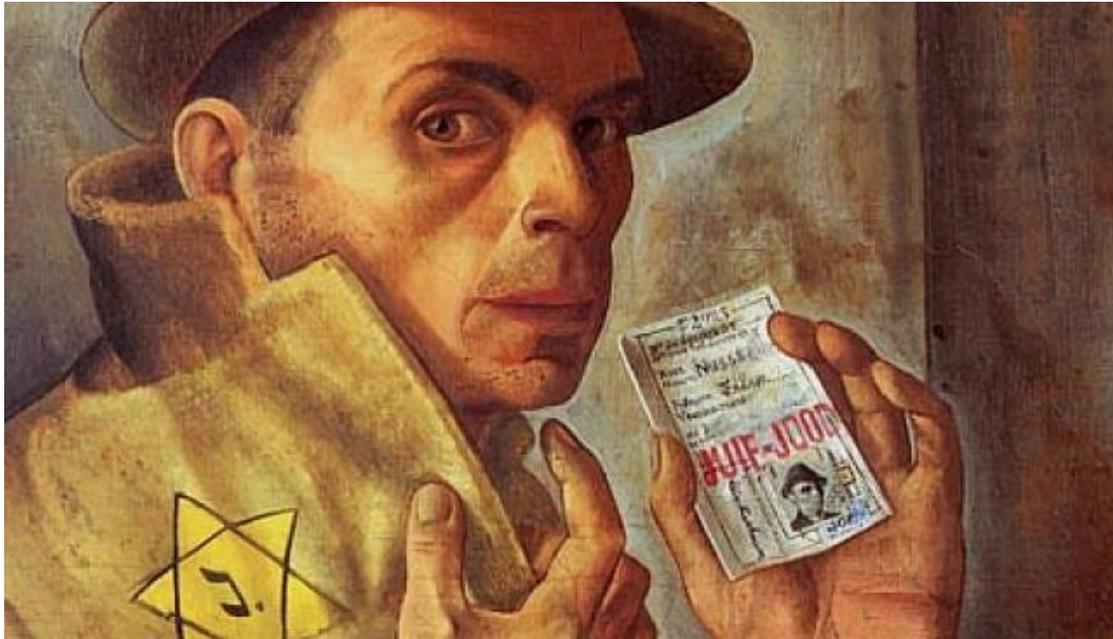
The year after he won the Nobel, in 1976, Temin visited the Soviet Union, carrying forbidden Hebrew books with him to give to Jews he met with. He also met with dissident scientist Andrei Sakharov, taking out a message from him when he departed.

Temin was also very health-conscious, walking or bicycling almost everywhere he could, and an outspoken opponent of smoking, to the extent that, in December 1975, after receiving his Nobel medal from King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, he turned to the audience and scolded members who were smoking even as he was being honored for his work in fighting cancer.

It was therefore bitterly ironic that Temin was killed by lung cancer – an adenocarcinoma not related to cigarette smoke – and died at the age of 59, on February 9, 1994. He was survived by his wife, Rayla Greenberg Temin, also a geneticist at the University of Wisconsin, and two daughters, Sarah and Miriam.

December 11 / An artist who painted wonderfully in hiding from the Nazis is born

Felix Nussbaum, creator of 'Triumph of Death,' never stopped painting in years of fleeing. In the end, he was caught.



Felix Nussbaum, self-portrait with Star of David and Jewish identity card, painted in hiding
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

December 11, 1904, is the birthdate of the German-born Jewish artist Felix Nussbaum, who was arguably on his way to becoming one of the great painters of the 20th century, when his life was cut short by the Holocaust. Fortunately, in large part due to the efforts Nussbaum made to hide his work with non-Jewish friends before his deportation to Auschwitz, much of his work survived.

Felix Nussbaum was the younger of the two sons of Philipp Nussbaum and Rachel van Dyk Nussbaum, a bourgeois couple from the German city of Osnabrueck. Philipp was an amateur artist himself, the owner of an ironmonger's shop who was to serve proudly in the German cavalry in World War I.

Felix attended Jewish primary school and then gymnasium in his birthplace. The first piece of art of his that survives was an Art Nouveau drawing, titled "Remain Pious," he made for a cousin on the occasion of his bar mitzvah, in 1920.

During the early 1920s, he studied the subject seriously, first in Hamburg, and then in Berlin, where he worked with several different masters. In 1924 he met Felka Platek, a Polish-born artist with whom he shared a studio in Berlin, and whom he married in 1937.

A short-lived scholarship

Nussbaum, whose main influences are artists like Van Gogh, Georgi di Chirico and the German Expressionist Karl Hofer, had his first solo show in 1927, at the Jacques Casper Gallery in Berlin. In 1932, he was awarded a fellowship by the Prussian Academy of Art to study at its Villa Massimo in Rome.

By the following spring, however, the Nazis had taken power in Germany, and in April Joseph Goebbels visited Rome and told Nussbaum and his colleagues that the role of the Nazi artist is to focus his work on the themes of “the Aryan race and heroism.” A short time later, after a fight with a fellow student, Nussbaum’s fellowship was withdrawn.

In 1935, his studio back in Berlin went up in flames, apparently an act of arson, and approximately 150 of his works were destroyed.

In the years that followed, Nussbaum and Platek, whom he married in 1937, moved around a lot, as did the rest of his family, as they sought a safe haven in various European cities. He also continued to paint and to exhibit, including in solo shows in Cologne, Brussels, Ostende and the Hague. In 1938, he participated in a show of “Free German Art” in Paris, which was meant to be a response to the “Degenerate Art” exhibition then moving around Germany.

Painting in his hiding place

In May 1940, after the Germans invaded Belgium and France, Nussbaum, then in Brussels, was arrested, as an enemy alien, and sent to the St. Cyprien internment camp, in southern France. Later in the year, while being transported, he escaped from captivity and made his way back to Brussels, where Platek was. From then, until their deportation, in June 1944, the two of them remained in hiding with various friends in Brussels, one of whom provided Felix with a basement studio where he continued painting.

But the couple was betrayed and on June 20, 1944, they were turned in to the authorities in Brussels. On July 31, they were deported, on the last train to leave the Mechelen transit camp for Auschwitz.

They arrived there on August 2, and were murdered a short time later. On September 3, Brussels was liberated by the Allies.

Nussbaum remained extremely prolific during his years of hiding, and his work, often grotesque and macabre, offers rare testimony of someone who was able to document artistically his own reactions to being a Jew in the Holocaust. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jewish themes became increasingly common in his late works. Nussbaum’s last known painting, “Triumph of Death,” is dated April 18, a chilling Hieronymous Bosch-like depiction of a scene in which skeletons play music and hold court over a despoiled post-apocalyptic wasteland.

In 1942, Nussbaum had hidden some 100 oil paintings with two dentist friends in Brussels. They are among some 460 works by Nussbaum that are known to have survived. All can be found, together with extensive biographical and critical material, in an online catalogue raisonne maintained by the [Felix Nussbaum Foundation](#).

The foundation, together with Nussbaum's native city of Osnabrueck, also operates a museum dedicated to displaying his work.

December 12 / America gets first (unofficial) female rabbi

The establishment frowned but Paula Ackerman bowed to popular demand and led the congregations, not once, but twice.

On December 12, 1950, Paula Ackerman, the widow of Rabbi William Ackerman, became the first female rabbi in America, not that she was recognized or ordained as such. She simply acceded to the request of her late husband's congregation, Temple Beth Israel, in Meridian, Mississippi, and began serving as the synagogue's spiritual leader.

She would continue as the community's unofficial rabbi for nearly three years, the first woman to fulfill such a role in a mainstream American Jewish movement. And she did so with the tacit approval of the national movement.

Paula Herskovitz was born December 7, 1893, in Pensacola, Florida, the daughter of Joseph and Dora Herskovitz. She grew up there in a family that was active in Temple Beth El there, the state's first Reform synagogue.

An excellent student in high school, she was offered a scholarship to study at Sophie Newcomb College, in New Orleans. But when her father told her he would not permit her to attend medical school after college, she opted out of an undergraduate education altogether.

Instead she worked as a music teacher, a math and Latin tutor, and taught Hebrew school at Beth Israel. That's also where she fell in love with William Ackerman, the synagogue's young new rabbi.

The couple married in 1919, after a seven-year courtship, and moved, first to Natchez, Mississippi, and, in 1924, to Meridian, when William Ackerman became rabbi of Reform Temple Beth Israel. He served in that position until his death, on November 30, 1950, a week short of his 64th birthday.

Planting a seed

Over the years, Paula Ackerman had taught at Beth Israel's Hebrew school, and she had filled in for her husband when he was traveling or sick. With those things in mind, and with the understanding that it might take them some time to hire a new rabbi for their small congregation, the board of Beth Israel asked the rebbetzin if she would be willing to take William's place on the pulpit until a new rabbi was found.

After more than a month of deliberation, as well as consultations with officials at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, she agreed.

In a December 12 letter to Rabbi Jacob Schwartz, then the national director of synagogue activities at the UAHC, she expressed her understanding of the gravity of the decision she was considering: "I ... know how revolutionary the idea is --

therefore it seems to be a challenge that I pray I can meet. If I can just plant a seed for the Jewish woman's larger Participation -- if perhaps it will open a way for women students to train for congregational leadership then my life would have some meaning."

Not so fast, lady

Schwartz, a personal friend, gave her his blessing, but Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, the president of UAHC, after initially giving her his informal support, told her that after further consideration, he had concluded that her not having ordination would present too many obstacles for the experiment to be worthwhile. (Of course, it would be more than another two decades before a woman was ordained in the Reform, or any other, movement.)

By that point, however, the synagogue board was set on having her as their "spiritual leader."

Paula Ackerman served in that position from January 1951 until the autumn of 1953, during which time she led services, and officiated at funerals, weddings and even conversions. The novelty of a female rabbi garnered a lot of attention nationally, and after Beth Israel hired a permanent rabbi and Ackerman resigned, she began to teach and lecture around the United States. (In 1968, Temple Beth Israel, which had taken a congregational stand against the frequent bombings of black churches in the South during the period of civil rights activism, had its education building bombed by members of the Ku Klux Klan.)

In 1962, she received a request from her childhood synagogue, Beth El, to return to Pensacola and serve as its leader until the board could find a new rabbi; she did so, holding the position for nine months. Thus she wound up becoming a de-facto rabbi not once, but twice, despite never being ordained.

She remained in Pensacola until 1982, when she moved to Georgia, and died in Thomaston, about 100 kms south of Atlanta, on January 12, 1989, at the age of 95.

December 13 / A false messiah burns at the stake

Raised as a Catholic son of conversos, Solomon Molcho decided he was the Jewish Messiah, and opted to die for his beliefs rather than recant.

On December 13, 1532, the false messiah Solomon Molcho was burned at the stake in Mantua, Italy. As a Catholic-raised son of converso Jews who returned on his own to Judaism, and then allied himself with a Jewish adventurer from the East who tried to enlist the help of European monarchs in his military intrigues, it was perhaps inevitable that Molcho would end up accused of heresy and pay the ultimate price.

Molcho was born Diogo Pires, in Lisbon, Portugal, circa 1500. He was raised as a Christian by Marrano parents. As an adult, he attained a high position in the royal government as a recoding secretary to the high appellate court. In 1525, Molcho met David Reuveni, who had been sent by Pope Clement VII to Lisbon with a letter of introduction to King John III. Reuveni, a man of mysterious origins who claimed to have ancestry leading back to ancient Israel had arrived in Rome atop a white horse, seeking European alliances to fight the Muslims.

In Portugal, Reuveni was received not only by the king but by many conversos, who saw in him the Messiah. Diogo Pires was one of them. He decided to return to Judaism, and asked Reuveni to help him be circumcised. When Reuveni warned him he would be risking the wrath of the Inquisition, Pires went ahead and circumcised himself. Then he set off for the Orient, first to Salonika, then to Syria and the Holy Land. He studied, and then began to teach, kabbalah. By now, he had changed his name to Solomon Molcho, and he began to preach the coming of the Messianic age in 1540. In 1529, his disciples in Salonika prevailed upon him to publish a volume of his sermons, which came to be called "Sefer Hamefoar."

After two of his visions came to pass – a flood in Rome in 1520, and an earthquake in Portugal the following year – Molcho began to imagine that he himself was the Messiah. In a missive to his followers, Molcho described how the Christian world would "fall into the hands of its enemies. The people of Israel will reveal its power. God will have mercy upon His servants ... I will take vengeance and pay to each his desserts."

Linking up with David Reuveni, Molcho paid a call on Charles V in Ratisbon (today, Regensburg, Germany), hoping the Holy Roman Emperor would provide them with arms to fight the Turks. Instead, the emperor had the two men arrested and then turned them over to the Inquisition in Mantua. After a trial for heresy, Molcho was offered the opportunity to repent and to return to Christianity. He refused, preferring to die a martyr's death at the stake. (Reuveni ended his days in prison, where he may have been poisoned.) Eight years later, in 1540, he still had followers who awaited his return to usher in the era of redemption.

December 14 / Alfred Dreyfus's widow dies

Lucie Dreyfus's letters to her 'darling Fred' sustained him through his painful ordeal, as did the knowledge that she had shielded their children from the case.



Alfred Dreyfus. Photo by Courtesy

On December 14, 1945, Lucie Dreyfus, the widow of the Capt. Alfred Dreyfus, died.

Born Lucie Eugenie Hadamard in 1871, the woman who would remain loyal to her husband throughout his 12-year ordeal – in which he was framed as a traitor to the French army, convicted and sent to a penal colony in the South Atlantic – came from a well-off, prominent Jewish family. Her father had followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather as a diamond merchant, and when Lucie married the young officer Dreyfus, she came with a generous dowry. At the time of Dreyfus's initial arrest, in October 1894, he had an annual income of 40,000 francs (a typical second lieutenant in the army had a salary one-twentieth that amount), which only made more preposterous the charge that he had sold military secrets for monetary gain.

Alfred Dreyfus, too, came from a well-off Jewish family, with its roots in Alsace, but one more assimilated than Lucie's: She observed Jewish holidays, studied Jewish topics, and remained involved in Jewish communal affairs to the end of her dramatic life. The couple were married in 1890, and they had two children, Pierre (born 1891) and Jeanne (born 1893). Only a year after he began working as a trainee -- and the only Jewish officer -- in the army's General Staff headquarters, Dreyfus had his life turned upside down, after the army learned that information about new weaponry was being passed to the Germans, and suspicion fell on him. He was arrested and tried and convicted in a secret court martial, and sentenced on January 5, 1895, to life imprisonment on Devil's Island, in French Guiana.

Evidence soon emerged that another officer was the real spy and that a conspiracy had framed Dreyfus, but it was not until 1899, and a bitter public battle over the case, that he was released from his imprisonment and pardoned by President Emile Lube, and not until 1906 that he was officially exonerated and restored to the ranks of the French Army. Dreyfus continued to serve through World War I, retiring as a lieutenant colonel, and dying in 1935, at age 75.

Dreyfus family letters reveal the depth of Lucie's love and loyalty to her husband (at one point she expressed her readiness to join him in exile, explaining, "I shall not be able to live without you") and also the cruelty of French officials in the extent to which they censored and distorted correspondence between the two. When Lucie would write encouragingly to Alfred about legal measures being taken on his behalf, the authorities would delete the information from her letters. In another case, a missive from Alfred was redacted so as to make it sound like he had resolved never to write her again. So distraught was the prisoner on Devil's Island when he learned of this that he wrote to the governor of Guiana to protest: "By sending to Mme. Dreyfus only an excerpt from my letter an interpretation has been given which must have been more than painful for my dear wife."

Lucie's letters to her "darling Fred" sustained him through his painful ordeal, as did the knowledge that she had shielded their children from knowledge of the case. She made sure that he received reading material and food, and she was intimately involved in the legal campaign to reopen the case.

During World War I, once she could resume her own life, Lucie attained a nursing certificate and volunteered her services, and later cared for her husband in his ill health preceding his death. By 1940, as the Germans were closing in on Paris, she was 71 years old, but Lucie gathered together family members – her two adult children and eight grandchildren -- and fled for Vichy in the south. The group split up as they took refuge in various towns, but Lucie continued to keep in contact, financially support and even to visit her relations over the next two years. Most family members succeeded in escaping for the United States, but Lucie's 22-year-old granddaughter Madeleine Dreyfus Levy, a social worker, insisted on staying in Toulouse in order to continue her work in the Resistance, helping smuggle other Jews out of France. (She had three other siblings also involved with the Resistance.) Lucie assumed a false identity and was sheltered in a convent in Valence, where no one knew who she really was. Madeleine, however, was eventually arrested, sent to Drancy and then deported to Auschwitz, where she died in early 1944.

Lucie survived through liberation, dying on this date in 1945 of heart disease and tuberculosis. She was buried in a joint plot with her husband in Montparnasse cemetery in Paris, and the marker on their grave also includes the name and fate of the granddaughter Madeleine, whose body of course was never found.

December 15 / The Portuguese burn a converso backslider

Isaac de Castro Tartas, 22, recited the Shema at the stake, starting a defiant practice that confounded the Lisbon authorities.

On December 15, 1647, Isaac de Castro Tartas, a converso Jew of Portuguese descent, was one of six people burned at the stake by the Portuguese Inquisition, in Lisbon. He was 22 years old, and was sentenced to death for having backslided into Jewish belief and practice, and refusing to repent for his crimes.

Castro Tartas was born Thomas Luis, in Tartas, France, probably in 1625, to a family with origins in Portugal. In 1640, the family moved again, this time to Amsterdam, where Jews were now permitted to practice their faith under relatively limited restrictions. The men were circumcised, and renamed themselves with Hebrew names.

Isaac apparently began medical studies in Leiden, the Netherlands, but had to flee after killing a young nobleman there, probably in a duel. He sailed to Recife, the city on the northeast coast of Brazil that had been founded by Portugal, but which was occupied by the Dutch between 1630 and 1654. During that brief interlude of Dutch rule, many Jews took up residence in Recife, making it the first settlement of Jews in the New World.

Defiantly Jewish

In Recife, Isaac refused to assume a low profile, and openly practiced his Judaism and even confronted Catholic priests. Word of his presence got back to his enemies in Holland, who continued their pursuit of him in Brazil. At this point, Isaac fled to Portuguese Brazil, specifically to what is today called Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia, south of Recife.

There, in 1644, Isaac was identified and arrested by agents of the Portuguese Inquisition.

According to witnesses, he was actively spreading Jewish teachings among converso relations he had found in Bahia. He claimed to his interrogators to be a Jew who wished to be baptized into the faith, but apparently tefillin were found in his possession, giving the impression that he was still a practicing Jew.

The following year authorities extradited Isaac back to Portugal, where he was put on trial as a Judaizer. Now, he fully embraced his Judaism, rather than deny it.

According to historian Miriam Bodian, Castro Tartas also claimed that he was entitled to practice Judaism because of a “universal natural right to freedom of conscience,” the only case known, she writes, of the use of such a defense. The record of his testimony has him making the claim that “an act that is done in accordance with one’s conscience cannot be judged culpable, and the act I have and will continue to do – the act of professing Judaism - is done according to the dictates of my conscience.”

Needless to say, the court did not accept Isaac's defense. He was sentenced to death, a punishment carried out on this day in 1647.

As Isaac burned, he recited the Shema, the Hebrew affirmation of faith in the one God of Israel, and this quickly became known among the converted Jews of Lisbon, who began to recite the line in public, to the great consternation of the authorities.

Back in Amsterdam, too, Isaac's martyr's death became highly celebrated. His brother, David de Castro Tartas, a publisher, commemorated his memory in several of his publications. Such figures as Saul Levi Mortera and Menasseh ben Israel praised his memory publicly, and the poet Salomon de Olyvera wrote a verse in Hebrew about the martyr, who, in response to the demand that he accept Christianity, tells his judges, "I shall rise and take courage -- I am triumphant/ You will bow down to nothingness and fall" (as cited in "Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation," by Miriam Bodian).

December 16 / Maker of yogurt for 'happy digestion' is born

Daniel Carasso took the Spanish yogurt manufacturer his father founded in 1919 and expanded it into the modern-day Danone Group.



Containers of Activia yogurt, produced by Danone. Photo by Bloomberg

December 16, 1905 is the birthday of Daniel Carasso, who took the Spanish yogurt manufacturer founded by his father in 1919 and expanded it into what is today called the Danone Group, which markets its products in 140 countries.

Daniel Carasso was born in Saloniki (today, Thessaloniki, Greece), to a family that had emigrated from Spain to the Ottoman Empire at the time of the Inquisition. In 1916, in the wake of the Balkan Wars, when Saloniki passed from Ottoman to Greek hands, his father, Isaac Carasso, moved the family, first to Switzerland and then to Barcelona.

After learning the basics of yogurt production in Switzerland, Isaac set up his own company in Barcelona. He was taken by the idea that the lactic-acid bacilli found in yogurt could be a boon to human health, particularly in fighting intestinal disorders among children. Carasso acquired cultures of the bacteria from the Pasteur Institute in Paris, and introduced them into his product, which initially was sold only in pharmacies. He named the company after his only son, Daniel, whose nickname in Catalan was “Danone.”

In 1923, Daniel Carasso went to study business in Marseille. Two years later, he added to that a course in bacteriology at the Pasteur Institute, before opening a branch of his father’s company in France, in 1929. Initially, Daniel tried selling a pill,

Vigardyne, with the active ingredients of yogurt. Soon, he began selling yogurt in porcelain pots, marketing it as a health food that was a “dessert for happy digestion.”

In 1941, after the German occupation of France, Daniel, newly married, fled to the United States. He left control of the French company in the hands of two non-Jewish friends, Norbert Lafont and Luis Portabella.

Shortly after arriving in New York, Daniel Carasso and two American partners bought a small family-owned yogurt company, Oxy-Gala, which they renamed Dannon, an Americanized version of “Danone.” In 1947, they added strawberries to the mix, to make the sour, fermented dairy product more palatable to local tastes. “Fruit on the bottom” became a Dannon slogan, other flavors were added, and the product became a hit.

Dannon was bought by the American firm Beatrice Foods in 1959, by which time Daniel had moved back to Paris and resumed management of the European branch. In 1965, Danone merged with Gervais, a producer of fresh cheese products, and seven years later, with the bottle manufacturer BSN, headed by Antoine Riboud. After Danone-Riboud bought back the American Dannon from Beatrice Foods, in 1981, it renamed the international company the Danone Group.

Today, after several reorganizations, the Danone Group is a multinational manufacturer of dairy products, including yogurt, and of bottled water and baby foods, with annual revenues exceeding 20 billion euros. It is headed by Franck Riboud, the son of Daniel’s former partner, Antoine Riboud. In Israel, the group owns a 20 percent share of the Strauss Group, which has held the license to produce Danone products here since the 1970s.

Daniel Carasso died at his home in Paris, on May 17, 2009, at the age of 103.

December 17 / A great Zionist mind dies young

Ber Borochov, the socialist-Zionist theoretician and political leader, passed away in 1917, long before his Zionist dreams became a reality.



Borochov. Photo by Wikimedia

On December 17, 1917, the socialist-Zionist theoretician and political leader Ber Borochov died, at the age of 36, after having returned from New York to Russia in the lead-up to the revolution there.

Borochov is remembered for his ideological synthesis of Zionism and socialism, which together he saw as providing the proper answer to the unique predicament of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. At the time, most socialists rejected nationalist movements in favor of a universal class struggle, and Zionists represented a wide range of economic approaches, and weren't inclined to align themselves with one in particular.

Dov Ber Borochov was born July 4, 1881, in Zolotonosha, in what is today Ukraine, and grew up in nearby Poltava. From his Hebrew teacher father he received the influence of Zionism; whereas his educator mother encouraged his didactic tendencies. His upbringing was secular, but his experience of anti-Semitism at school helped cultivate his Jewish identity. He joined the anti-Czarist Russian Social Democratic Party, but was expelled when he founded a Zionist Socialist Workers Union in Yekaterinoslav.

Borochov saw himself as a Marxist, and insisted that Marx understood that the needs of workers differed from one context to another. In the case of the Jews, their unique situation demanded, he said, a blending of the nationalism of an oppressed people with the revolutionary socialism of the working class. His first major work laying out his philosophy was "The National Question and the Class Struggle," published in 1905. In it, he argued that economically, the Jews constituted an inverted pyramid:

Whereas in a typical society, industrial and agricultural workers make up the base of the pyramid, among the Jews, few filled these roles, and the lack of normal productive life made them vulnerable to forces outside their control, and led to their wanderings from country to country. Borochov believed that process would inevitably bring them to Palestine, where they would finally take up the working-class roles they eschewed in the Diaspora.

In November 1905, he joined and quickly became a leader of the Poalei Zion (Workers of Zion) movement, and became a staunch supporter of a Palestine-based Zionism at a time, following the Sixth Zionist Congress, when the Uganda option was being debated. He became the principal ideologue of the movement, and was active in organizing branches in various European cities and in the United States. In Palestine, Poalei Zion organized the Hashomer self-defense organization, and pioneered the concept of “conquest of labor” – among the key elements of the Labor movement. There, it went through a number of splits and metamorphoses, most significantly dividing into the non-Marxist Mapai, the precursor to today’s Labor Party, which was led by David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, and Mapam, the more left-wing precursor to today’s Meretz party.

Surprisingly, Borochov also became a student and a prophet of Yiddish. Other Zionists saw it as a language of the Diaspora, to be shed in favor of a revived Hebrew; Borochov, who said he only began studying Yiddish at age 26, believed that Yiddish and Zionism were perfectly compatible. He championed the pedigree and sophistication of the language, and said that its fusion of German, Hebrew and Slavic elements were part of its greatness. His call for formal study and a standardization of the language’s structure were key in leading to the establishment of the YIVO Institute of Yiddish Studies in Vilna (and today still existent in New York).

By 1914, Borochov was living in New York, working simultaneously on both the Labor Zionist and Yiddish causes: He contributed regularly to the Yiddish daily *Di Warheit* and wrote a short dictionary of Old Yiddish; and he supported U.S. involvement in World War I, at the side of Russia. It was to Russia that he hastened to return in March 1917, during the period before the Revolution when the Social Democrats came to power. There he contracted pneumonia, and died on this date in Kiev.

December 18 / A soldier who revived Judaism in north Portugal is born

Artur Carlos de Barros Basto, who brought dormant Jewish community back to life, found himself outcast and castigated by wider society, and unprotected by his brethren.



Artur Carlos de Barros Basto had a distinguished military career that ended in disgrace - and post-humous vindication. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

December 18, 1887, is the date of birth of Artur Carlos de Barros Basto, the man who singlehandedly revived the dormant Jewish community of northern Portugal after discovering in his childhood that his own family was descended from New Christians.

Artur Carlos de Barros Basto was born in Amarante, Portugal, not far from Porto, the country's second-biggest city, on its northern coast. He was raised as a Catholic, and supposedly learned of his family's Jewish roots only from his grandfather, when the older man was dying.

This, followed by the 1904 dedication of a new synagogue in Lisbon, sparked Barros Basto's intense interest in Judaism.

Barros Basto entered the Portuguese armed forces, and while he was in officers training, in Lisbon, he attempted to join Sha'arei Tikva, the new synagogue there. However, he found his efforts rebuffed. He had no choice but to pursue his Jewish education on his own, and eventually underwent conversion to Judaism in Tangiers, Morocco. That came after participation in Portugal's Republican revolution in 1910, in which Barros Basto raised the Republican flag over Porto. He also served as a lieutenant on the Western Front during World War I.

After his conversion, Barros Basto – who took on the Hebrew name of Abraham Israel ben Rosh – returned to Portugal and married Lea Israel Montero Azankot, from a prosperous Jewish family from Lisbon. The couple moved back to Porto in 1921, where Artur began his one-man campaign to revive the Jewish community.

In 1923, he officially registered that community with the government; in 1927, he began a Jewish magazine, Halapid, which he edited until 1958; and in 1929, he established a yeshiva in the city and began raising funds for construction of a synagogue. With donations from the Kadoorie family, of Hong Kong, and Edmond de Rothschild, of France, the grand new Kadoorie-Mekor Hayim Synagogue was inaugurated in 1938 – the same year as the pogroms of Kristallnacht hit the Jews of Germany.

Saving German Jews

These institutions were intended to serve the Jews who began to emerge from the woodwork. Barros Basto began traveling to other provinces in the north, looking for more descendants of Jews who had converted in the wake of the Portuguese Inquisition, in the 16th century.

He also helped bring thousands of German Jews to Porto during the 1930s, saving them from certain death in the Holocaust. To help with their needs, Barros Basto oversaw the opening of an office of the Joint Distribution Committee, and even initiated the opening of an Ashkenazi synagogue in the city to accommodate them.

Barros Basto's activism, however, brought the scrutiny of the conservative, dictatorial regime of Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, which also came to power in the 1930s. First, he was given army assignments that sent him increasingly further from Porto, and then the yeshiva was shut down.

Finally, in 1937, he was tried in a military court for immoral acts, namely the circumcisions that had been performed on students at the yeshiva. He was convicted and drummed out of the army.

Unfortunately, the far-from-established Jewish community of Porto did not rally to his support.

Barros Basto died on March 8, 1961, hoping until his last day for exoneration. It took another half-century for it to come, however.

On February 29, 2012, after lengthy lobbying by both his daughter and granddaughter, Barros Basto was posthumously reinstated to the army by a parliamentary commission, which acknowledged that his dismissal had been motivated by anti-Semitism.

December 19 / 'Uganda plan' prompts shooting of Zionist leader

A student angry over the proposal to set up a Jewish national homeland in Africa narrowly missed Max Nordau.



A gathering of the Zionist Congress from the film 'It Is No Dream.'

On the evening of December 19, 1903, a Hanukkah ball in Paris was interrupted by gunshots, as a young man opened fire on Zionist luminary Max Nordau. Nordau was not hit by the bullets, although a bystander was grazed by a shot. As he took aim at the 54-year-old Nordau, the shooter, a 27-year-old student of Russian origin named Chaim Zelig Louban apparently shouted, “Death to Nordau, the East African.”

At the time, the meaning of the cry was well understood: The Zionist movement was racked by a bitter controversy over Theodor Herzl’s recommendation that it consider a proposal by the British government to set up of a temporary national home in British East Africa, in what is today actually part of Kenya, though it has always been referred to as the “Uganda plan.”

The idea was raised at the Sixth Zionist Congress, held in Basel in August 1903, and, although it met with fierce opposition from many members, the Congress did vote to have an exploratory committee visit the proposed plot of land the following year. Particularly opposed to the idea was the delegation from Russia, whose members would not consider any alternative, even a temporary one, to a Jewish home in Palestine.

Nordau (1849-1923) was then the second-most important figure in the Zionist leadership. Born in Pest, Hungary, he had grown up in an Orthodox family, but by the time he was a young man, he had become completely assimilated. Nordau was trained as a physician, and worked as a journalist and as a social philosopher (and held some

beliefs that could be considered bizarre today: He was, for example, a supporter of eugenics). Like Herzl, he was largely converted to the Zionist cause after witnessing the Dreyfus Affair first-hand in Paris, where he lived beginning in 1880.

Out of loyalty to Herzl, Nordau had supported the idea of sending a team to visit Africa when it was raised at the Zionist Congress – he referred to Africa as a “*nachtasyl*” (night shelter, in German), or temporary refuge -- but he was never truly in favor of the Uganda alternative, nor did he expect it to come to pass.

The day after the shooting, Nordau wrote to Herzl, with not a small amount of self-pity: “Yesterday evening I got an installment on the debt of gratitude which the Jewish people owes me for my selfless labors on its behalf. I say this without bitterness, only in sorrow. How unhappy is our people, to be able to produce such deeds.”

Chaim Louban, who was apprehended at the scene of the crime, initially confessed to the attempt to kill Nordau, describing himself as a “revolutionary” who had been sent to carry out the task by his comrades in Bern, Switzerland. Within days, however, according to newspaper accounts from the time, he declared that he had never meant to hit Nordau and had only fired in the air. The bullet that hit another guest did so only after ricocheting, he said, a claim that was reportedly confirmed by the unfortunate bystander.

Following Herzl’s death, in July 1904, Nordau was offered the leadership of the Zionist Organization, but turned it down, and gradually became less active in the movement. He died on January 23, 1923, in Paris.

December 20 / A writer and champion of Kafka dies

Max Brod was a prolific writer in his own right, but is best known for defying Kafka's wishes and introducing his works to the world.



Max Brod Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 20, 1968, Max Brod died, at the age of 84. Brod was a Prague-born novelist, composer and journalist, and a Zionist who emigrated to Palestine in 1939 and rebuilt his life and career here with amazing success. History remembers him principally, however, as the friend and champion of Franz Kafka, who recognized and encouraged Kafka's talent from very early on, and, when the latter died, in 1924, disregarded his instructions to destroy his manuscripts, and was responsible for having them published.

Max Brod was born May 27, 1884, into an assimilated, German-speaking, Jewish family in Prague, then part of Austria-Hungary. At age 3, he was diagnosed with severe spinal curvature, and spent a year in a corrective harness; nonetheless, he went through life with a hunchback. He attended Catholic school and gymnasium, and then Charles University, in Prague, where he studied law.

It was at university, in 1902, that Brod met Kafka, who was also pursuing a law degree. Kafka attended a lecture delivered by Brod about the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, and afterward, as Brod later recalled, approached him to discuss the topic. The two continued their conversation as they departed, wrote Brod, "filling the endless walk home by disagreeing strongly with my all too rough formulations." From then on, he and Kafka were close friends and colleagues.

Kafka believed that one's work for survival should be kept separate from one's art. He worked in an employment-insurance office, and Brod, convinced of the wisdom of that principle, took a job in the post office, staying there until 1924, when he devoted himself fulltime to his career as novelist, critic and more. Kafka also wrote,

prolifically, but did not publish a word until convinced to do so by Brod, in 1908. Nonetheless, most of what Kafka wrote, he destroyed.

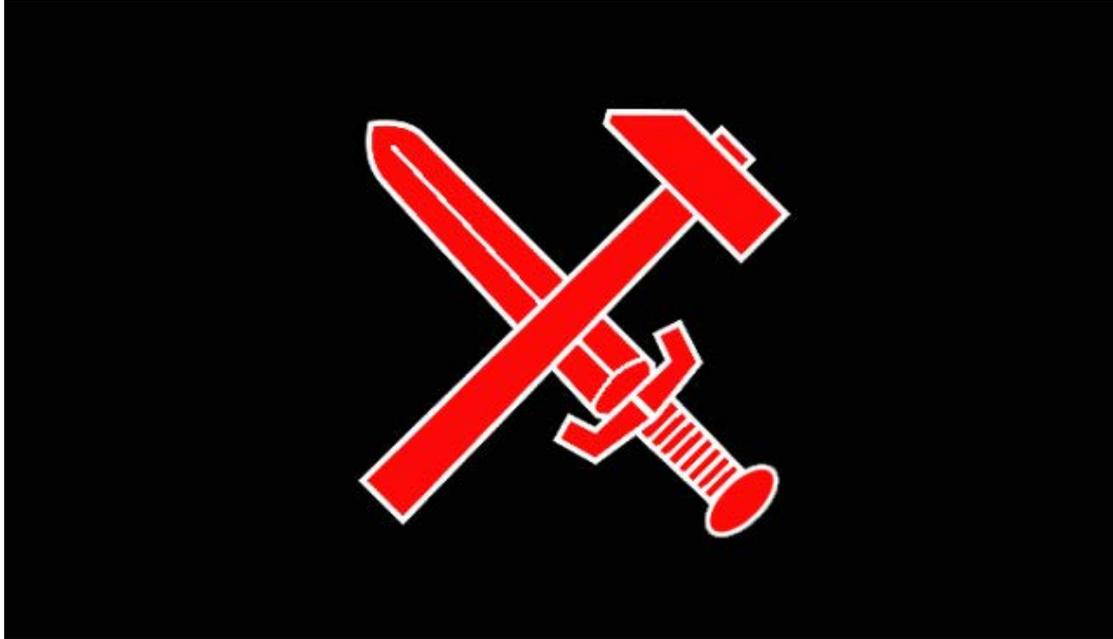
It is estimated that Kafka, by the time he died, at age 41 of tuberculosis, had already burned 90 percent of his literary output. Naming Brod as the executor of his estate, he instructed him, both orally and in a letter he left for him, to get rid of what remained as well. Brod always claimed that he told Kafka he had no intention of fulfilling his order. In fact, so certain was Brod, from so early on, of Kafka's genius, that, as he later wrote, during "22 years of our unclouded friendship, I never once threw away the smallest scrap of paper that came from him, no, not even a postcard."

And so, within three years of Kafka's death, Brod had arranged for the publication in German of "The Trial" (1925), "The Castle" (1926) and "Amerika" (1927), meaning that the world soon knew directly of the writer whom Brod spoke of in almost messianic terms. The problem – as the world also now knows – is that Brod was so protective of Kafka's legacy, and perhaps of his own role in the Kafka saga -- that he too left instructions regarding the disposition of the Kafka literary estate that led to significant confusion. As a consequence, 40 years after Brod's death, the fate of the Kafka papers that hadn't already been transferred to Oxford University's Bodleian Library decades ago had to be decided in an Israeli court. A year ago, the Tel Aviv District Family Court ruled that those papers should [go to the National Library](#), in Jerusalem, but the two sisters who were battling the library for the right to sell the estate to the German Literary Archive, are sure to appeal.

As for Brod, as a committed Zionist, he – together with his wife, Elsa Taussig, and luggage filled with various sketches and documents belonging to Kafka -- came to pre-state Israel in 1939, and during the next 29 years, he worked as a dramaturge at Habima Theater, and continued writing fiction and non-fiction. He died in Tel Aviv.

December 21 / Plot to bomb Nazi HQ foiled

Helmut Hirsch, a 20-year-old German Jew living in Prague, intended to blow up Nazi headquarters. But on this day, he was arrested.



The symbol of the Black Front, a group of German expatriates in Prague dedicated to overthrowing the Hitler, of which Helmut Hirsch was a member. Photo by Wikimedia

On December 21, 1936, 20-year-old Helmut Hirsch, a German Jew, was arrested in Stuttgart, Germany, on suspicion of involvement in an apparent plot to blow up Nazi party headquarters in Nuremberg. At his trial several months later, Hirsch said that, given the chance, he would have killed Adolf Hitler. As a result, it was widely reported that he had actually attempted to do so, though that does not seem to be the case.

Hirsch was born on January 17, 1916, in Stuttgart. Because both his paternal grandfather and his father had, at different times, immigrated to the United States and become naturalized citizens, Helmut was eligible for American citizenship too, and in fact his parents registered him at an American consulate when he was born. This all became relevant after his arrest, when significant efforts were made by the U.S. government to have him released.

Helmut spent most of his youth in Stuttgart, where his family moved from Alsace after World War I. Highly creative, he drew, painted, wrote and was deeply involved in the Deutsche Jungenschaft, a youth movement that combined camping and outdoors activities with serious engagement with culture and politics. The movement was outlawed by the Nazis when they came to power.

In 1935, when Jewish students were forbidden from studying at German universities, Helmut moved to Prague, where he enrolled as an architecture student at the German Institute of Technology. His family joined him there the following year when his sister graduated high school. By then, Helmut's former counselor from the Deutsche

Jungenschaft had introduced him to the leader of the Black Front, a group of German expatriates in Prague, some of whom were former colleagues of Hitler, but all of whom were now dedicated to overthrowing the Fuehrer.

The leaders of the Black Front worked to convince Helmut Hirsch that he should play a key role in a dramatic anti-Nazi action, telling him that the participation of a Jew in such a plot would serve as inspiration for other German Jews. He agreed to venture back into Germany to set off two bombs in Nuremberg, one in the Nazi Party headquarters there and possibly at the offices or the press of the Nazi weekly *Der Stuermer*.

Hirsch applied for a visa to reenter Germany, stating that he was going to visit his sick mother. By 1936, however, his entire family was living in Czechoslovakia, a fact that was known to German authorities. This may have been what raised suspicion against him, although it's also possible that the Black Front had been infiltrated by an informer; in any event, by the time Hirsch crossed into Germany, he was under surveillance.

Letters he wrote to his family after his arrest suggested that Helmut was not sure he was ready to go through with the plan. And in fact, when he arrived in Germany, on December 20, 1936, instead of heading to Nuremberg, per his instructions, he went to Stuttgart to meet an old friend whom he apparently hoped would talk him out of being involved. When the friend didn't show up at the train station, he checked into a hotel, where early on December 21, Gestapo agents arrested him. He was charged with conspiracy to commit treason and with possession of explosives with criminal intent, even though he had never picked up the explosives he was supposed to detonate.

At his trial, held in camera before the People's Court, in March 1937, Hirsch freely admitted his involvement in the plot, and although the public defender assigned to him argued that he should be acquitted since he had never begun to carry the plan out, he was found guilty and sentenced to death.

At that point, Helmut's family and friends began to lobby various international human-rights organizations to petition the German government to commute his sentence, if not to free him. At the same time, a cousin in the United States campaigned to have the government there reinstate Helmut's father's American citizenship. It did, and as a result, Helmut too was declared a U.S. citizen in April 1937. At that point, the American ambassador to Berlin, William Dodd, became involved in his case and met with both the German foreign minister and a key Hitler aide, in the hope of having Hirsch's life spared.

The efforts were for naught, and Helmut Hirsch was executed by decapitation on June 4, 1937.

December 22 / Finnish citizenship for 'Mosaic Confessors'

Which led to the anomaly, in WWII, of a field synagogue in the Finnish camp by the Nazi camp.



The synagogue in Turku, one of two in Finland. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 22, 1917, the Finnish parliament passed an act that offered citizenship to “Mosaic Confessors” – that is, the country’s Jews. The act, which followed Finland’s declaration of December 6, went into effect several weeks later, on January 12, 1918. At the time, there were a little over 1,000 Jews living in the country.

The presence of Jews in Finland goes back only two centuries, to the first half of the 19th century, when Russian cantonists, Jews from the Russian Empire who had been conscripted as children and served 25 years in the czar’s army, finished their service in Finland, and were permitted to remain there.

Until 1809, Finland had been part of the Swedish kingdom, which restricted Jews’ residence to three cities, none of which was in Finnish territory. In that year, following the so-called Finnish War, between Sweden and Russia, Finland became a semi-autonomous “grand duchy,” within Russia.

Nonetheless, most of the Swedish restrictions on Jews still applied. The exception applied only to the cantonists, and even they were subject to a number of different economic restrictions, which meant that most of them worked in the second-hand clothing business. Violation of the restrictions led to immediate deportation.

Citizens, yes, but restrictions remained

The question of citizenship for the Jews began to be discussed in the Finnish Diet in 1872, and continued for the next two decades. Even after 1889, when a statute formalizing the circumstances under which Jews could live in Finland was passed, many restrictions remained.

The two Russian revolutions, of February and November 1917, changed things. When it became clear, in the latter, that the Bolsheviks were going to take power, the right-wing government in Finland decided to declare independence. In January 1918, a short civil war ensued in Finland, between Reds and Whites (communists and non-communists), with the latter winning.

In the two decades that followed, the Jewish population roughly doubled, from 1,000 to 2,000, with most of the newcomers being emigrants from newly communist Russia. When the two countries fought their Winter War, in 1939-40, 204 Finnish Jews fought loyally against the Soviets, 27 of them giving up their lives.

The truly anomalous aspect to this is that, during the Continuation War (1941-44), after the non-aggression pact between the USSR and the Third Reich had ended, the Finns found themselves continuing their fight against the Soviets side-by-side with German forces. Among the Finns were some 300 Jewish soldiers.

The Nazis accepted this fact, and even famously tolerated the presence of a field synagogue in the Finnish camp, next to their own encampment. The Jewish soldiers are said to have had a fair amount of contact with the Germans, without any egregious incidents.

Some 500 Jewish refugees from Europe also arrived in Finland during the war, of whom some 150 remained. They lived in constant fear of being turned over to the Germans, although in the end, the number who suffered that fate was limited to eight, only one of whom apparently survived the war. The Finnish prime minister, Paavo Lipponen, publicly apologized for that action in 2000.

December 23 / Jews banned from beyond the Pale

Catherine the Great empress approved the creation of the Pale of Settlement, to restrict Jews' movement and rights.



Portrait of Catherine the Great by Russian painter Fyodor Rokotov Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 23, 1791, Catherine II (“the Great”), the empress of Russia, authorized the creation of the Pale of Settlement, an area in the western part of the empire in which Jewish subjects would be required to reside. The borders of the Pale, which was abolished formally only in 1917, changed with time, as did the rules regarding Jews who were exempted from the requirement to live there, but at its peak, the Pale was home to approximately five million Jews, estimated to be 40 percent of the world’s Jewish population at the time.

Beginning in 1772, the first of three “partitions” of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth brought the eastern half of Poland under the control of the Russian Empire. Prior to then, only small numbers of Jews lived in Russia, but with the incorporation into the domains of Russia of parts of the lands of modern-day Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland, Jews became a sizable minority overnight.

The influx of skilled Jewish merchants and artisans into the empire intimidated those same classes of Moscow society, whose members complained to municipal and royal authorities of the “well-known fraud and lies” of the Jews, which supposedly gave them an advantage in commerce. The empress responded by banning the Jews from Moscow, and reiterating an existing rule that said Jews were entitled only to those privileges explicitly allocated to them. They also were not permitted to live within 50 kilometers of the western border of the Pale, supposedly to keep them from engaging in smuggling.

Under the rules of the Pale, Jews could move freely about the territory, which at its peak covered an area of some 1.2 million square kilometers, but they could not, at some periods, live in some of its largest cities – Kiev, Sevastopol and Nikolaev. Nor could they establish new settlements within rural villages, and there were restrictions regarding their right to engage in agriculture.

Different rules for the skilled and talented

Certain classes of Jews, however, were not subject to these limitations, including master artisans and craftsmen, soldiers and holders of certain academic degrees. There were large numbers of Jews in each of these groups and they could leave the Pale as needed. As for other Jews, though, the empire had inspectors who would travel around looking for violators, sometimes bringing them back to their home provinces in chains.

Along with the skilled and talented, there were even larger numbers who were deeply impoverished. Historian Martin Gilbert has assembled statistics regarding the percentages who lived in deep poverty in the different districts of the Pale, and concluded that some 22 percent of the Jews in parts of Lithuania and Ukraine survived only thanks to the support they received from other Jews. And indeed, the well-ordered Jewish *kehillot* (organized communities) developed extensive networks of self-help groups, which provided food, clothing, loans, medical care, even dowries to destitute brides so they could get married.

After the assassination of Czar Alexander II, in 1881, for which Jews were wrongly blamed by many, Russia suffered a wave of pogroms, which were often encouraged by the authorities. In a model case of punishing the victim, the official response was to institute new regulations, called the May Laws, which placed greater restrictions on the Jews of the Pale. Quotas on the number who could receive higher education, or work in certain professions, as well as additional residence restrictions, were imposed on Jews.

The pogroms and May Laws also marked the beginning of the great wave of Jewish emigration from the empire, which continued until the start of World War I, in 1914. Among those Jews who remained, the Russian military insisted that they be moved out of war zones, near the borders, so they were often forced to pick up and move to the Russian interior. Others fled to the interior, out of fear of the invading Germans.

The Pale of Settlement was official abolished on April 2, 1917, although by that time it had largely ceased to exist in practice.

December 24 / A Jewish war hero plays Christmas carols at Guadalcanal

Yet Dov-Ber Rosofsky, aka Barney Ross, concealed his career as a champion boxer from his mother.



Dov-Ber Rosofsky hadn't been brought up to fight, yet he made his mark both in the ring and in World War II. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 24, 1942, U.S. Marine Barney Ross, who just a few years earlier had been the world welterweight boxing champion, played the organ as he accompanied Father Frederic Gehring in leading 700 marines in Christmas Eve singing at Guadalcanal.

At the time, Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands in the Pacific, was the venue of one of the fiercest battles of World War II. It lasted from August 1942 until February 1943, when the Japanese yielded and then evacuated the strategically placed island.

As U.S. Admiral William “Bull” Halsey said, about the battle, “Before Guadalcanal the enemy advanced at his pleasure. After Guadalcanal, he retreated at ours.”

In those years, Barney Ross was one of the most well-known and admired Jews in the United States. Born Dov-Ber Rosofsky, on December 23, 1909, Ross grew up the son of immigrant parents from Brest-Litovsk, in the Russian Empire (today in Belarus). His father, Isidore Rosofsky, was a rabbi who made a living in the United States by operating a small greengrocer’s in the Maxwell Street Jewish ghetto of Chicago.

Isidore groomed Dov-Ber, who was also known as Beryl, to become a rabbinic scholar, and would beat him on occasions when he got into fights in the neighborhood. When the boy was 14, however, his father was shot dead during a robbery at his shop. In the wake of that tragedy, Dov-Ber gave up his studies and

started working to help support the family: One of his employers was the mobster Al Capone.

My son, the boxer

Dov-Ber also began boxing, and had such success that by the age of 18, he was fighting professionally.

So as to avoid humiliating his mother, he fought under the name “Barney Ross,” although he proudly and publicly embraced his Judaism. In return, he became a hero for millions of American Jews, during a period when in Germany their brethren were facing the tightening noose of Nazism.

Ross’s pro career lasted less than nine years, from September 1929 until May 1938, during which he fought 81 fights and won 72 of them. He had the rare distinction of winning the championship in the lightweight, light welterweight and welterweight divisions, and he earned the reputation of being a smart and courageous fighter who never gave up.

After retirement, Ross invested in a cocktail lounge before enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps following Pearl Harbor, in December 1941, though he was already two years above the maximum age normally permitted in the corps. What’s more, Ross insisted on combat duty, which is how he ended up in Guadalcanal in the fall of 1942.

Night in a foxhole

On November 19, while out on patrol, Ross was caught in a firefight, and spent the night in a foxhole with three wounded comrades. During the night he held off the Japanese foe, firing 400 rounds and lobbing 22 grenades, eventually killing 22 of the enemy. By morning, two of the others in his hole were dead, but Ross, who was himself injured, carried the survivor, who was heavier than him by 60 kilograms, back to safety. For his heroism, Barney Ross was awarded a Silver Star.

A month later, Ross was recruited by Marine chaplain Father Frederic Gehring to play the organ on Christmas Eve.

Gehring, a Roman Catholic priest, was himself something of a legend, as he risked his life repeatedly to be present with soldiers in battle, and had rescued several missionaries from behind enemy lines, for which he was awarded the Presidential Legion of Merit. He also saved the life of a 6-year-old Chinese girl who turned up on Guadalcanal, wounded and suffering from malaria, and eventually arranged for her to come to the U.S.

Supposedly, Ross was the only one on the island who could play Gehring’s small pump organ, and the priest had him learn the music for a full program of Christmas carols, including “Silent Night.” Father Gehring himself played the violin that night, as 700 troops crowded into the chapel tent. Once they had run through the Christmas repertoire, Gehring asked Ross to play a Jewish song. He obliged by performing “My Yiddishe Momma,” which had been his theme song during his years in the ring.

This too was an amazing feat of bravery for Corp. Barney Ross, considering the injuries he had suffered just a month earlier, and the fact that he returned to the United States two months later suffering from malaria and addicted to morphine, which he had been given freely for pain while hospitalized.

Ross later wrote a book, which was adapted for the screen in a film called "Monkey on My Back," about his successful battle against addiction. In the 1960s, he was a character witness at the murder trial of his childhood friend Jack Ruby, who shot Lee Harvey Oswald, the assassin of President Kennedy.

Barney Ross died of cancer at age 57, on January 17, 1967.

December 25 / A born-again Jewish philosopher is born for the first time

German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig was ready to convert to Christianity until one last experience of Yom Kippur turned him in the other direction.

On December 25, 1886, German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig was born. Rosenzweig is best remembered for announcing his intention in 1913 to become a Christian, but deciding he wanted first to expose himself to the experience of life as an observant and studious Jew so that he would be making the move with open eyes. He learned about Judaism and then attended High Holiday services that year, and the spiritual power of Yom Kippur led him to reverse his decision. From then until the end of his life, he led his life as an observant Jew and devoted himself to Jewish thought and education.

Rosenzweig was the only child of Georg and Adele Rosezweig, a well-off and largely secular Jewish couple in the German town of Kassel. After briefly studying medicine, Franz turned to history and philosophy, and concentrated on the work of Hegel, whose idealized but abstract vision of history saw it as a process progressing constantly toward redemption. Rosenzweig had several friends and close relatives who had converted from Judaism to Christianity, and he found the logic of their decision persuasive. At one point, he became convinced that a Jew had two choices: either to become a Zionist or to convert to Christianity. He chose the latter, but told his friends he wished to undergo baptism “as a Jew” rather than as a “pagan.”

Rosenzweig never spoke or wrote about what precisely happened to him in that traditional Berlin synagogue on Yom Kippur of 1913, but the historian Nahum Glatzer concluded, from conversations with Franz’s mother and from indirect statements by the philosopher himself, that he underwent a personal mystical experience. Later, for example, Rosenzweig said in a lecture that, “Anyone who has ever celebrated Yom Kippur knows that it is something more than a mere personal exaltation (although this may enter into it) or the symbolic recognition of a reality such as the Jewish people (although this also may be an element) – it is a testimony to the reality of God which cannot be controverted.”

For the next year, Rosenzweig immersed himself in Jewish study before joining the German army with the outbreak of World War I, in 1914. Late in his service, he had an opportunity to spend time with – and be impressed by -- traditional Orthodox Jews in German-occupied Poland. When he returned to the trenches, he began writing what became his major work of Jewish philosophy, “The Star of Redemption.” He wrote it out on postcards, which he then sent home; it was published as a book in 1921. Very roughly, Rosenzweig understood revelation for the Jews as an ongoing and personal experience, rather than a one-time historical event. The individual Jew is to find meaning through a personal encounter with the Torah, which is itself a record of the Jews’ encounters with God. If the Christian – and the secular philosophical – view of history was linear, something progressing toward ultimate perfection, Judaism, according to Rosenzweig, existed outside of history.

Rosenzweig developed a progressive motor disease (ALS) shortly after that point, and from then until the end of his life in 1929, he became gradually but completely paralyzed. Deprived of even the ability to speak, he nonetheless continued working and writing until the end with the help of his wife, Edith. In 1920, he was appointed director of the influential Frankfurt Lehrhaus (House of Jewish Learning) for adults. He also collaborated with Martin Buber on a translation of the Hebrew Bible to German.

Rosenzweig died on December 10, 1929 in Frankfurt. He was 43.

December 26 / MP who instigated fatal riots in U.K. is born

Nobody knows why Lord George Gordon converted to Judaism, but he died in prison rather than remove his hat.



**Lord George Gordon, before he converted and renamed himself Yisrael bar Avraham Gordon.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons**

December 26, 1751, is the birthdate of Lord George Gordon -- member of British Parliament, instigator of some of the worst public unrest ever seen in England – the “Gordon Riots” – and a convert to Judaism who died in prison living the life of an Orthodox Jew.

George Gordon was the third and youngest son of Cosmo George Gordon, the third Duke of Gordon. His godfather was King George III.

As a young man, his family bought a commission for him in the Royal Navy. He reached the rank of lieutenant, but when he was not awarded command of a ship, he resigned from the service, in 1772.

Even then, Gordon’s tendency to identify with the underdog and to speak his mind about it was evident: When sailing in the Caribbean, he met the governor of Jamaica and expressed his disapproval of the slavery he encountered there.

Gordon entered Parliament in 1774. He had intended to run in a district in Inverness-shire, Scotland, but the incumbent, fearing defeat by Gordon, prevailed upon the newcomer to allow him to buy him another district, in Ludgershall, Wiltshire, in the country's southwest.

A party unto himself

He served in the House until 1780, earning the reputation of being a party unto himself. He was, for example, a strong critic of the British war against the American colonies, and in general, spoke out fearlessly on issues related to human rights. Yet, in 1778, the same Gordon became a leading opponent of the Papists Act, which overturned existing laws that denied Roman Catholics equal status in society.

The government's motive for the legislation was largely a desire to encourage Catholics to enlist in the military, to serve in the American War, but nonetheless, it reversed a strong trend of institutional anti-Catholicism in the country.

On May 29, 1779, Gordon, as president of the "London Protestant Association," led a demonstration of an estimated 60,000 citizens opposed to the Papists Act in a march from St. George's Fields in London to Parliament. The protest went on for a week, and turned violent, with 15,000 troops called in to quell it. In the end, some 300 people were killed.

Gordon was imprisoned in the Tower of London for six months, while waiting for trial on charges of treason, for his part in the rioting, but in the end was acquitted when his defense counsel successfully argued that he had not acted out of traitorous motives.

Defaming Marie Antoinette from the Froggery?

There are varying versions regarding when and why George Gordon converted to Judaism. What is definite is that Yisrael bar Avraham Gordon, as he renamed himself, was living as an Orthodox Jew in the Birmingham neighborhood called the Froggery when he was arrested in 1788 and tried and convicted on charges of defaming Queen Marie Antoinette of France, and several lesser figures. He was sentenced to five years in Newgate prison.

The prison authorities were very accommodating of Gordon's religious needs: He was supplied with kosher food and wine, was permitted to organize a Shabbat minyan and to pray daily with tallit and tefillin. And a mezuzah hung on the doorpost of the large chamber that served as his cell.

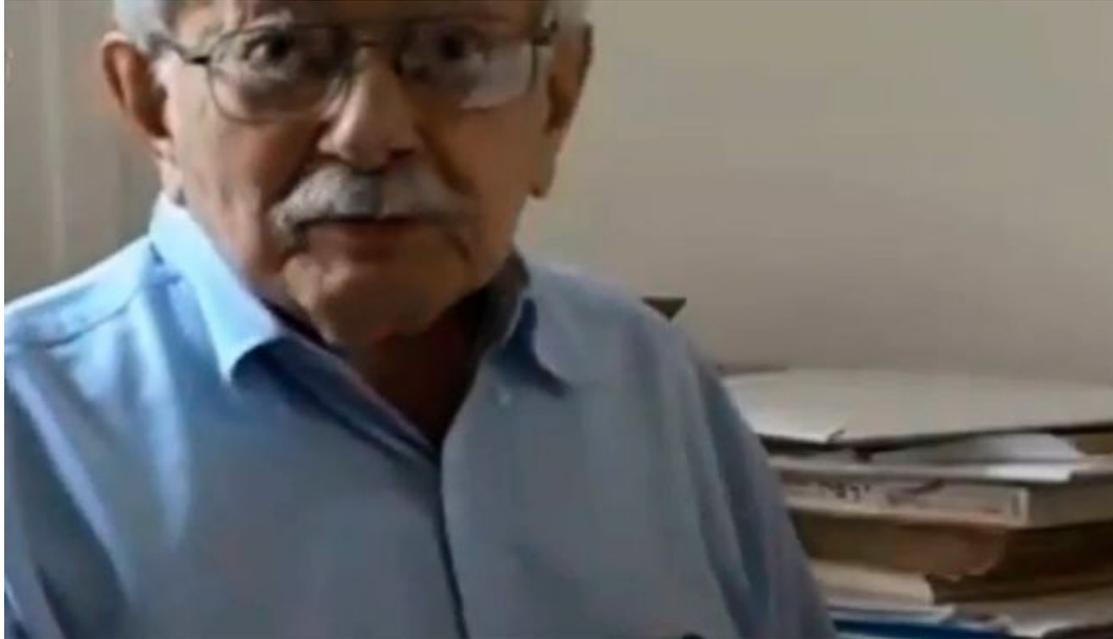
His conversion seems to have left his fellow Englishmen both [bemused and amused](#).

At the end of his sentence, in January 1793, Gordon was brought before the court and expected to make a pledge regarding his intention to behave well in the future. But he refused to remove his hat, for religious reasons, and the testimony of the two Orthodox Jews he brought to vouch for him as character witnesses was not admitted by the court. Hence, Gordon remained in prison.

That's where Lord Gordon was when, on November 1, 1793, he died of typhoid fever, at the age of 41. He was buried in the St. James' burial grounds in London, an Anglican cemetery.

December 27 / A fiercely secular Yiddish writer dies

How life boiled down for Itche Goldberg: 'Check for \$150,000 or corned beef sandwich.'



Itche Goldberg Photo by YouTube

On December 27, 2006, Yiddish writer, editor, teacher and tireless promoter of the language Itche Goldberg died, at the age of 102.

Even as the number of Yiddish speakers dwindled dramatically over the course of the 20th century, largely as a result of the Holocaust, Goldberg, a secular communist-turned-socialist, continued to fight to keep alive his vision of a secular Yiddish culture, and dismissed any rumors that the language was “dead.”

Yitzhak Gutnik Goldberg was born March 22, 1904, in Opatow, Poland. From a young age he was called “Itche” – Little Yitzhak – a name that stuck with him throughout his life.

In 1914, his father and a brother moved to Canada, while Itche, his mother and four other siblings relocated to Warsaw, staying there another six years. During that time, Itche studied at a Hebrew teachers seminary. Later, when he arrived in Toronto, he attended McMaster University, though he never finished his degree.

Goldberg became involved with the Workmen’s Circle organization, a secular, socialist group that ran a network of schools operating in Yiddish. He taught, first in Toronto, and later in New York, where he broke with the Workmen’s Circle over ideology, and helped found a school system within the more radical, communistic International Workers Order.

Tear down the mezuzah

Although his personal politics moderated with the years, particularly in the wake of the bloody and anti-Semitic rule of Stalin in the Soviet Union, Goldberg remained dedicated all his life to the idea of a secular Jewish identity, which he saw as espousing humanistic and non-religious values, but still dipping deep into Jewish culture and history. Toward the end of his life, he told an interviewer, “Just because I’m secular doesn’t mean I’m antireligious,” though he was furious when a photograph of him donning tallit and tefillin made its way into a Yiddish paper in New York, and he ordered the removal of a mezuzah attached to his door by the same Chabad missionary who had supplied the tefillin.

Goldberg’s industriousness was impressive: He taught, both in schools and at the “red-diaper baby” summer camp Kinderland, and later at Queens College; and he directed the schools run by the IWO, which at their peak had some 80,000 students in 140 schools. He edited a classic Yiddish anthology for children, “Yiddish Stories for Young People,” and wrote librettos for more than 20 vocal pieces in Yiddish. He translated such diverse works as Latin-language classics and the poems of Langston Hughes into Yiddish, and from 1964 to 2004, he edited and kept alive the literary journal *Yidishe Kultur*. Each year, the periodical published a memorial volume dedicated to the Jewish writers murdered under Stalin.

Itche Goldberg remained sharp until his death, in which he was survived by his wife, the former Jennie Wilensky, age 101. When he turned 100, the year he finally had to close *Yidishe Kulture*, Goldberg was honored with a series of celebrations. At that time, he told an interviewer from *The Times* about his two dreams: “One dream is that someone will knock on the door and I will open it and they give me a check for \$150,000 for the magazine. Second dream is that someone knocks at the door and I open it up and he gives me a corned beef sandwich. Those are my only two dreams. I’m not asking for much. Really, I’m not. And I think they’re both reachable.”

December 28 / Farewell to the so-called 'father of Canadian Jewry'

Though he isn't credited with developing the Jewish community, businessman Aaron Hart, who died on this day in 1800, was the most prominent and influential Jew in Canada's early years under the British.



Painting of Aaron Hart, the 'Father of Canadian Jewry,' by Dominic Boudet. Photo by Wikicommons

On December 28, 1800, Aaron Philip Hart, remembered by some as the “father of Canadian Jewry,” died in Trois Rivieres, Quebec at age 76.

As one of the first – if not the first -- traditional Jews to settle in what became Canada, Hart arrived in Trois Rivieres, then the site of a British fort along the St. Lawrence River midway between Montreal and Quebec City, in 1761. There he built a small business empire and a family.

Hart was born in London, England, on August 16, 1724 to parents who had immigrated from Bavaria. He arrived in Canada by way of Jamaica and then New York City, where he landed in 1756. (A Masonic certificate from June 10, 1760, is the first document mentioning him by name, and attests to the fact that he was one of the first Jews in North America to join the Order of Freemasons.) In 1760, he became a purveyor (possibly a commissary officer) to the forces of Jeffrey Amherst, who led the British down the St. Lawrence and conquered Montreal.

In 1761, Hart settled in Trois Rivieres, where he provided the British forces with supplies (as an English-speaker, he was at an advantage in the province that had until recently been under French control), entered the fur trade, and began buying up large tracts of land. He was generous in making loans, and when debtors were unable to pay

off their obligations, he often took his repayment in land. He also owned a retail and wholesale emporium in town. An early biographical account of the Jewish merchant referred to his “devouring ambition.”

Although he was of Ashkenazi descent, Hart was one of the founders of the first Sephardi synagogue in Montreal in 1768. That same year, he returned to England to marry his cousin Dorothea Caroline Judah, after which many of his cousins and in-laws followed him back to Trois-Rivieres. His hope was to establish a family dynasty in the New World and he enjoined his sons to become involved in business by giving them pieces of property to manage. He also opened a brewery with his sons. Yet, seven of his eight sons would eventually leave Trois Rivieres. One son, Ezekiel, was elected by the citizens of Trois Rivieres to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada – twice, in 1807 and 1808 -- and twice was not permitted, on procedural grounds related to being a Jew, not to take his seat.

Nonetheless, the Harts were generally accepted in Quebec, so much so that within several generations, despite their Jewish upbringing, most had assimilated into Catholic society. Despite Aaron’s moniker as the “father of Canadian Jewry,” the Hart dynasty did not remain a significant one in the history of the country’s Jewish community.

At the time of his death, Aaron Philip Hart was thought to be the wealthiest man in British Canada.

December 29 / Action! Hollywood's first feature starts filming

Director Cecil B. DeMille and Jewish producer Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) made history, exactly 101 years ago.

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The Squaw Man

December 29, 1913, marks the day that filming began on “The Squaw Man,” the production credited with being the first full-length motion picture made in Hollywood. Directed by Cecil B. DeMille (his first movie) and Oscar Apfel, “The Squaw Man” was produced by Samuel Goldfish (later Goldwyn) and his brother-in-law Jesse L. Lasky. It premiered on February 12, 1914. (Lasky and Goldfish were both Jewish; DeMille, though raised Episcopalian, had a Jewish mother.)

DeMille biographer Scott Eyman writes that “The Squaw Man” is more correctly called “one of the first features made in Hollywood,” since there had been at least one other full-length movie made there earlier the same year. Nonetheless, “The Squaw Man” qualified for a number of records as the “first”: It was Cecil B. DeMille’s first foray into moviemaking; previously he had worked as a writer and director for Broadway. It was the first movie produced by Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company, the company that later became Paramount Pictures. And it certainly was the first of three versions of “The Squaw Man” that DeMille made between 1913 and 1931, the third one being a talkie.

“The Squaw Man” was based on a successful stage play by Edwin Milton Royle, about a British military officer, Capt. Wynnegate, who gallantly takes the blame for an act of embezzlement carried out by an unscrupulous cousin. Wynnegate flees England for the American West, where he weds a Ute Indian princess, Nat-U-Rich. Later, after the death of both Nat-U-Rich, and of the knavish cousin, who confesses

his guilt before dying, Wynnegan returns to England to inherit the family title and estate.

In general, Westerns were a popular genre for early motion pictures because they could be shot outdoors, for relatively little money. Dustin Farnum, a popular and busy star of the New York theater, agreed to take the role of Wynnegan, on the condition it could be shot across the river, in Fort Lee, New Jersey. However, when the Motion Picture Patents Company, the trust established by Thomas Edison that controlled most movie-making in the U.S. and which was opposed to feature films (they didn't think audiences had the patience), threatened to disrupt filming, it was decided to move production to Arizona.

DeMille, Apfel and the film cast and crew took a train from New York to Arizona, with the two fledgling moviemakers writing the treatment as they headed west. When they stepped off the train in Flagstaff, however, DeMille didn't like the quality of the light, or the nature of the scenery, and he ordered everyone back on the train, whose final destination was Los Angeles. He had heard that the light, terrain and weather in California were auspicious for moviemaking.

On arrival, the team rented a barn in Hollywood, near the corner of Vine and Selma. There, over the next three weeks, they shot the interior scenes of "The Squaw Man," with various exteriors being shot at sites like Mt. Palomar and San Pedro. Filming ended on January 20, 1914. Total cost, aside from the fee paid for the rights to Royle's play, was \$15,450.25, according to Scott Eyman.

The movie had its premiere screening for exhibitors on February 17, 1914, and within two weeks had been sold in 31 of the 48 states. It eventually made a profit of \$244,700 – 25 percent of which, by agreement, went to leading man Farnum.

Today, after having been physically moved twice, the "Lasky-DeMille Barn" where "The Squaw Man" was shot serves as the Hollywood Heritage Museum, and is situated next to the Hollywood Bowl amphitheater.

December 30 / Massacre in Granada, Spain

Caught in inter-tribal hostilities between Arab communities that had recently conquered southern Spain, Jews were victims of a violent pogrom.



Ancient map of Granada, Spain, where on this day in 1066, 4,000 Jews were killed. Photo by Wiki Commons

On December 30, 1066, the Jewish population of Granada, Spain, fell victim to a massacre by an angry Arab crowd -- with an estimated 4,000 killed. The pogrom followed the murder of Joseph Ibn Naghrela, the Jewish vizier to the Berber king of Andalusia.

Historians don't agree and can't offer many specifics on the catalyst for the violence, but it seems the Jews were caught in inter-tribal hostilities between the North African Arab and Berber communities that had recently conquered and colonized southern Spain.

Joseph Ibn Naghrela was the son of the legendary Shmuel Hanagid (993-c – 1056), rabbi, poet, grammarian and political sage, who in recognition of his rare talents (he began his professional life as a spice merchant), had been advanced to the position of assistant vizier to the Berber king Habbus al-Muzaffar. When Habbus died, in 1038, Shmuel arranged for the king's older son, Badis, to succeed him, even though the royal court and other Jewish courtiers supported another son, Buluggin. In appreciation, Badis named Shmuel his vizier ("nagid," roughly, in Hebrew).

When Shmuel died, his place as vizier was taken by his son Joseph. A near-contemporary Jewish historian, Abraham Ibn Daud, wrote of Joseph that, "Of all the good traits of his father, Joseph lacked but one. He was not humble.... He was proud to his own hurt, and the Berber princes were jealous of him."

Another historian reported that Abu Ishaq, an Arab jurist who aspired to a position at the court, wrote a poem accusing Joseph and his fellow Jews of plotting against Badis with the intention of betraying him to a nearby rival, al-Mutasim. The king was not impressed by the charges, but they whipped up the sentiment of the populace of Granada against the city's Jews.

In his book "The Jews of Islam," Bernard Lewis quoted from Abu-Ishaq's poem, in which he urged action against Granada's Jews: "Do not consider it a breach of faith to kill them, the breach of faith would be to let them carry on. / They have violated our covenant with them, so how can you be held guilty against the violators? / How can they have any pact when we are obscure and they are prominent? / Now we are humble, beside them, as if we were wrong and they were right!"

On December 30, 1066, which fell on the Sabbath, an angry Muslim crowd attacked the palace in Granada and grabbed Joseph, who had taken refuge there. They crucified him, and then proceeded to butcher other members of the Jewish community.

December 31 / The man who told Jews it was okay to engage with modern society dies

Samson Raphael Hirsch, uncompromising to the end, could reasonably be called the father of modern Orthodoxy.



Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On December 31, 1888, Samson Raphael Hirsch, the German rabbi who could reasonably be called the father of modern Orthodoxy, died, at the age of 80.

Hirsch was a man of apparent contrasts -- a student of the Enlightenment who believed that Jews had a role to play in contemporary society, not only for themselves but because they had something to offer humanity, but also a traditionalist and staunch opponent to Reform who wrote that it would have been better for the Jews not to be emancipated if the price they it entailed was assimilation.

Samson Raphael Hirsch was born in Hamburg on June 20, 1808, the first child of Raphael Hirsch, a merchant who was learned in Torah studies (and himself son of a highly regarded teacher and rabbi), and Gella Hirsch. He was educated in public school, where he had a secular education, while he pursued his Jewish education at the same time with top-level scholars. Later, he studied at both yeshiva and, briefly, at the University of Bonn. One of his classmates was Abraham Geiger, who became the leading proponent of German Reform and Hirsch's ideological adversary.

In 1830, Hirsch became rabbi of Oldenburg, a job he held for 11 years, a period during which he wrote "Nineteen Letters on Judaism," a defense in epistolary form of traditional religion. That was followed two years later, in 1838, by the publication of "Horev," an explanation of the 613 commandments expounded in the Torah.

Torah with Derekh Eretz

In 1843, while serving as chief rabbi of Emden, Germany, Hirsch applied for the position of Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He came in a distant third, however, in voting among the country's different Jewish communities. Although he did little writing during this period, when he was occupied with pastoral responsibilities, this is when he developed the concept of "Torah with *derekh erez* [literally, "way of the land"]". This can be understood as both a call to combine a life of study with regular work, so that one can support oneself, and a call to be engaged with the outside world in a more general sense, behaving vis-à-vis other people, including non-Jews, with propriety and respect.

Torah with *derekh erez* became a byword for "neo-Orthodoxy," what we know today as modern Orthodoxy.

From 1851 until his death, Hirsch was rabbi of an initially small Orthodox congregation in Frankfurt, a city most of whose Jews had been won over by Reform. Under his leadership, a group of 13 families grew into a community of some 500, with a religious school for its children. Prussian law at the time allowed for only a single, united, recognized Jewish community in a particular locale. Hirsch, whose opposition to Reform became more combative with the years (he saw Reform as a mortal threat to the Jewish people), lobbied for a change in the law, so that groups like his would be able to "secede" from the larger community, which meant not having to pay to support it. The law was indeed changed, but the Reformers in Frankfurt responded by reaching out to the traditionalists within Hirsch's synagogue with a number of concessions intended to keep the community intact. Hirsch pressed on for secession, but was overruled by a majority of his congregants. This was a source of some bitterness for him.

Hirsch was a lover of the Land of Israel, but a loyal German, who showed little interest in the political Zionist movement that was showing signs of emerging at the time. And for all of his worldliness, he was committed to the idea of the divine origin of all Jewish law and opposed to the "historical" study of Scripture that came into vogue during his lifetime. And of course, he remained uncompromising on the question of the binding nature of *halakha*.

January 1 / Ellis Island festively opens to take in the tired and poor

This entry point to America was designed to process as many as 5,000 immigrants a day. It couldn't keep pace with the inflow.



Tourists travelling to the Statue of Liberty. Photo by Bloomberg

On January 1, 1892, the U.S. federal government opened the Ellis Island immigration station in New York Harbor.

Over the next 52 years, some 12 million aspiring American citizens made their way through this gateway, including most of the Eastern European Jews who immigrated to the United States through 1924, when an immigration act that greatly reduced the numbers allowed in from Eastern and Southern Europe. The largest numbers of Jewish immigrants, approximately 2 million, arrived between 1881 and 1914, when World War I broke out. In the latter year alone, 138,051 arrived from Eastern Europe, although the outbreak of the war soon reduced the flow dramatically.

Ellis Island takes its name from Samuel Ellis, an 18th-century immigrant probably from Wales, who leased it to the State of New York beginning in 1794, after which it was turned into an arsenal and fort.

Prior to Ellis Island's reopening in 1892, immigrants to the U.S. were processed through Castle Garden, in lower Manhattan – some 8 million of them, beginning in 1857. But after the federal government took over responsibility for immigration matters, in 1890, it allocated \$75,000 for the enlargement of Ellis Island and construction of a vast, three-story building from Georgia pine. This is what opened festively on January 1, 1892, and this is what burned to the ground five years later, when fire destroyed all the wooden structures on the island. No lives were lost, but immigration records going back to 1855 went up in smoke.

The familiar red-brick structure that today constitutes the immigration museum at Ellis Island opened on December 17, 1900, and so numerous were the waves of immigrants who arrived there that even its intended capacity of processing 5,000 arrivals a day could not accommodate all comers. The all-time high was reached on April 17, 1907, when 11,747 immigrants arrived in a single day.

For immigrants who traveled by first or second class, the stay on Ellis Island was brief. Those who came by third class or steerage however, had to undergo a legal and medical inspection, though even that could be completed in three to five hours if there were no problems. Only 2 percent were actually excluded from entering the United States.

Even before it set up a formal office on Ellis Island, in 1904, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society played an important role in helping Jews with the challenges they faced on arrival. It's estimated that the organization, which had been founded in 1881, helped facilitate the entry of 100,000 Jews who might otherwise have been turned away – lending immigrants the \$25 “landing fee,” providing translation services, running religious services, assisting with medical procedures and even providing bond for those who didn't have work lined up. And, crucially, in 1911, HIAS opened a kosher kitchen on Ellis Island.

In 1965, Ellis Island became part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, and a major renovation of the site allowed for it to be reopened in 1990 as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Since Hurricane Sandy, however, both the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island have been closed to the public.

January 2 / The founder of modern Jewish literature is born

Sholem Abramovich, a.k.a. Mendele Mokher Sfarim, drew on his experiences of poverty - and grew increasingly cynical.



Odessa literary group; L-R: Y. Ravnitzki, S. An-ski, Mendele Mocher Sforim, H.N. Bialik, S. Frug. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

January 2, 1836, is the date of birth of the writer known as Mendele Mokher Sfarim, who is widely seen as the founder of both Hebrew and Yiddish modern literature.

His name was actually Sholem Yankev Abramovich: Mendele Mokher Sfarim was the name of the character who narrated several of his stories, which audiences assumed to be a stand-in for the author. He was born in the town of Kapyl, in the Odessa governorate, in what is today Belarus.

Abramovich came from a line of rabbis on his father's side, but when his own father, Chaim Moyshe Broyde, died when Sholem Yankev was only 15, he was left fending for himself. He then headed in the direction of Ukraine, accompanying itinerant beggars, who turned up later in his stories.

In 1853, Abramovich arrived in Kamianetz-Podoloyi, where he did some teaching, got married, and began writing about education. In 1857, the writer Avrom Ber Gotlober, submitted an essay Abramovich had written, "Letter on Education," to the Hebrew journal Hamagid; it became his first published work.

Can't write fluff in Hebrew

When his first marriage ended in divorce, Abramovich remarried, in 1858, and moved to the home of his new in-laws, in Berdichev. There he began writing fiction in

Hebrew, before coming to the conclusion that the sacred language was archaic and stiff, and thus not accessible to the common man, who spoke Yiddish.

Yet Yiddish was not deemed appropriate for literature among Enlightenment Jews – at least, until Abramovich began writing in it. Nervous about its impact on his reputation, he published his first story in the vernacular language, a short novel called “The Little Man and the Pupil” [of the eye], under a pseudonym, in 1864.

Both that and a play called “The Tax” (on kosher meat) were narrated by the sacred-book-seller Mendele, which is how people began referring to the author.

At other times, he relied on a persona he called Yisrulik the Meshuggene to narrate his tales.

He learns it's tough to get by

Abramovich’s early Yiddish works were rational and anti-mystical, and they preached the benefits of secular education as the way to improve one’s lot. But as the author’s identification with the impoverished classes, and his indignation with the Jewish middle class and communal elite, and with Russian officialdom, grew, he became less certain that it was possible to better one’s lot. In biting satire, he skewered those who exploited the Jewish poor, and criticized anti-Semitism.

All the while, Abramovich was struggling to make a living. He studied for rabbinical ordination, but didn’t find a job as a rabbi. Finally, after 1881, when he moved to Odessa, he was appointed head of a Jewish school. This was the same year his oldest son converted to Christianity and married a non-Jewish woman, and that a wave of pogroms broke out in Russia.

Odessa is where Abramovich spent the last 36 years of his life. It was during this period that he began writing again in Hebrew, and also translating his Yiddish work into a new, modern version of Hebrew. This work was rich with Biblical, Talmudic and midrashic allusions.

He died on December 8, 1917.

January 3 / Zionists and Arabs ink first accord

Chaim Weizmann and Emir Faisal ibn Hussein worked to realize their peoples' respective aspirations.



Chaim Weizmann, left, wearing an Arab headdress as a sign of friendship, and Emir Faisal ibn Hussein in 1918. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 3, 1919, Chaim Weizmann, head of the British Zionist Federation, and the Emir Faisal ibn Hussein, head of the Arab delegation to the Versailles peace conference, signed an agreement of cooperation between their two peoples. In it, Faisal, representing the Arab nation as a whole, accepted the terms of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which the British government committed itself to “establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people.” Weizmann, on behalf of the Zionist movement, expressed its support of an independent “Arab state,” and the two agreed that both entities would work peacefully toward realization of their respective aspirations and mutual cooperation.

The meetings that led up to the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement came in the context of the end of World War I, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, and the convening of the Versailles conference to decide the future of the lands over which the war had been fought. Weizmann (1874-1952), the Russian-born chemist who had been living in the United Kingdom since 1904 and was a key member of the political Zionist movement from its beginnings, had been essential in eliciting the Balfour Declaration (named for the British foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour, who signed it) from the British government in November 1917.

Faisal ibn Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi (1885-1933) was an Arabian-born descendant of the Prophet, a member of the Hashemite family, which oversaw the Muslim shrines of Mecca. After meeting British intelligence officer T.E. Lawrence (“of Arabia”), in 1916, and with his assistance, Faisal organized the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman sultan, which helped Allied forces to conquer the Arabian Peninsula and Greater

Syria. His goal was a single, independent, pan-Arab monarchy, and like Weizmann, he believed the British could help him achieve it.

Faisal and Weizmann first met in June 1918, five months before the armistice, and they began discussing cooperation. Whereas Weizmann had the standing to speak in the name of the Zionist movement, Faisal was the self-appointed representative of a people that were only beginning to think of themselves in national terms. And though he expressed his approval of the Zionist aspirations for a home – the Zionists were careful not to speak about a state at that stage – he did not necessarily have the authority to speak on behalf of the Arab residents of Palestine. In fact, after their first meeting Weizmann recorded in his diary that Faisal was “contemptuous of the Palestinian Arabs whom he doesn’t even regard as Arabs.”

The two men met again later in 1918, and then on January 3, 1919, in Aqaba, to sign their memorandum. In it, they agreed to work together with “the most cordial goodwill” to effect Jewish immigration to Palestine and to protect the religious and property rights of Palestine’s Muslims, as well as control over the Holy Places. They subjected their peoples to the terms of the Balfour Declaration and agreed that the peace conference would determine the precise boundaries of their respective territories, with disputes to be resolved by the British government.

Both men went to lengths, in the agreement and in other statements, to express their mutual goodwill, and to make it clear that they agreed that the Jewish immigrants to Palestine would assist the Arabs “in forwarding their economic development.” They also defined, in other correspondence, the boundaries of Palestine, which are similar to what we think of as the Greater Land of Israel, including most of the Golan, but extending on the north and on the east into what are today Lebanon and Jordan.

Faisal also appended a crucial reservation to the agreement, which declared that the entire plan was contingent on the Arabs receiving independence, in accordance with a plan outlined elsewhere by the emir. He stipulated that if that plan were to be altered with the “slightest modification or departure,” he would not be bound “by a single word of the present Agreement.”

The peace conference, however, did not grant the Arabs their state, and Faisal ended up becoming the monarch of Iraq alone. Weizmann remained convinced that their agreement was valid, but neither Faisal nor the Arab world in general saw things that way.

January 4 / British barrister breaks glass ceiling

After more than 20 years as a celebrated defense attorney in England, on this day Rose Heilbron was the first woman appointed judge on a prestigious court, one of many glass ceilings she broke through.



As a female criminal defense attorney, Dame Rose Heilbron became something of a celebrity in England. Photo by Bloomberg

On January 4, 1972, Rose Heilbron was appointed a judge at the Old Bailey, the first woman to sit at the prestigious Central Criminal Court of England and Wales. It was one of a number of glass ceilings broken by the Jewish barrister (courtroom lawyer) from Liverpool: the first woman to be appointed a King's Counsel (a senior barrister, based on merit), the first to be a Recorder (part-time judge), the first female Treasurer of Gray's Inn (the elected head barrister of one of London's four Inns of Law), among distinctions.

Rose Heilbron was born August 19, 1914, the daughter of Max and Nellie. Her father ran a boarding house for immigrant refugees and later a small hotel. Rose received her law degree at Liverpool University in 1935 and two years later joined the Northern Circuit of the bar.

As a female criminal defense attorney, Heilbron, who married physician Nathaniel Burstein in 1945, became something of a celebrity in England, with much made of the fees she took and the cost of her house, said to be "over 5,000 pounds" sterling. Her early years in the profession coincided with World War II, and some colleagues said that her career took off because all the male attorneys were at war. But she continued to distinguish herself when the men came home: As one observer told *The Guardian* at the time of Heilbron's death, in 2005: "She got up there by sheer hard work and cleverness." In 1949, she became one of the first two women named a King's Counsel at the English Bar.

In 1949-50, Heilbron defended the notorious George Kelly, who had been accused of shooting to death the deputy manager of Liverpool's Cameo cinema. Kelly supposedly said he wasn't prepared to have "a Judy defend [him]," but in fact she took his case through five different courts, and found herself named Woman of the Year by the Daily Mirror. Kelly, however, went to the gallows in 1950 – only to have his conviction posthumously quashed by an appeals court in 2003.

Other notable cases for Heilbron in the 1950s included the successful defense of four men accused of hanging a boy during a robbery – she proved that his death was an accident – and of a solicitor charged with the murder of his lover.

Heilbron's career as a judge began in 1956, when she first sat as a Recorder, but it was not until this day in 1972 that she was appointed the first female judge at the Old Bailey; two years later, she was the second woman to be named a High Court judge. In 1981, she presided over the "handless corpse" trial, in which an Australian drug kingpin, Alexander Sinclair, was found guilty of the murder of a victim whose body was found in a flooded Lancashire quarry, and was initially unidentifiable because his hands had been cut off. So expensive was the prosecution of the case, which spanned the globe, and so lengthy the trial, that Heilbron ordered Sinclair to pay 1 million pounds toward the costs of his own prosecution, seeing that she had been told his net worth was 25 million pounds, "give or take a million or two." She also chaired a group that oversaw the reform of the rape laws, changes that included protecting the identity of complainants and that limited the freedom of defense attorneys to question victims about their sexual history.

Rose Heilbron retired from the bench in 1988, and she died on December 8, 2005, at the age of 91.

January 5 / Maryland Jews get the vote

For all Maryland's avowal of tolerance, passing the bill took quite a long time.



Change in Maryland can come slowly. (Illustration: Maryland Republican Larry Hogan speaking to supporters, Nov. 22, 2013). Photo by AP

On January 5, 1826, the General Assembly of Maryland passed a bill granting Jews the right to vote or to hold public office in the state.

The process leading to passage of the bill had been a long, arduous one, despite the fact that Maryland had been founded as a colony dedicated to religious tolerance, and coming 51 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and 35 after passage of the Bill of the Rights, both of which professed a commitment to freedom of religion in the United States.

The grant for establishment of a colony in Maryland was given to Cecil Calvert in 1632. Cecil was the son of George Calvert (1579-1632), a convert to Roman Catholicism who not only wanted to establish a haven for his co-religionists, but also a man who imagined a separation of church and state in general. As a sign of tolerance and good will toward Protestants, in 1649, George's descendants introduced what came to be called the "Toleration Act" in the colonial assembly. It guaranteed that no form of Christianity would be favored over another.

The bill went even further, however, stating that anyone who would "blaspheme God ... or deny our Savior Jesus Christ to be the son of God, or shall deny the Holy Trinity ... shall be punished with death and confiscation or forfeiture of all his or her lands and goods...." Later the penalty was refined, so that death was meted out only to third-time offenders. For a first offense, the punishment was a boring of the tongue, and second offenders had a "B" (for blasphemy) branded on their foreheads.

Very quickly, Protestants began pouring into the colony, and Catholics became a minority subject to significant persecution.

Starting in 1797, a prominent Baltimore businessman named Solomon Etting petitioned the General Assembly on behalf of “a sect of people called Jews,” asking for them to “be placed upon the same footing with other good citizens.” His petition was referred to a committee, which deemed his request “reasonable,” but deferred action on it for what amounted to another five years.

Starting in 1802, the issue of full civil rights for Maryland’s Jews was brought before either Maryland’s House or Senate on five different occasions, and defeated each time. Beginning in 1819, the main champion of such a bill was Thomas Kennedy, a Scottish-born member of the House of Delegates who claimed never to have met a Jew (at the time, there were only an estimated 150 of them in the state), but who believed that one’s religion was a private matter and no concern of the state’s. He also defined as “absurd and ridiculous” the fact that, whereas, on the national level, a Maryland Jew could “hold a seat in Congress, command the armies of the United States, or even fill the presidential chair,” within the state, he could not be “a constable, a justice of the peace ... or an ensign in the militia.”

Kennedy promised to work his entire life, if necessary, to achieve equality for the Jews. As it turned out, it took only until January 5, 1826 (Kennedy lived until 1832) for his goal to be achieved, when the House confirmed an enabling statute that repealed the clauses in the state constitution that required state office-holders to be Christians. It should be noted that the new law applied only to Jews, rather than being a blanket cancellation of discrimination based on religion, and it still required those seeking office to profess belief in “future state of rewards and punishments,” a condition that was dropped only in 1867.

In October, 1826, two Jewish residents of Baltimore, Solomon Etting and Jacob I. Cohen, were elected to that town’s city council, the first Jews to attain public office in Maryland.

January 6 / First Soviet yeshiva in 20 years opens in Moscow

But only two rabbis were ordained during the five years the yeshiva functioned.



The Choral Synagogue in Moscow. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

January 6, 1957, is the day that Yeshiva Kol Ya'akov opened in Moscow. The last still-functioning yeshiva had closed during the 1930s, and even the Communist authorities recognized that a need existed to have some trained rabbis in the country. During a brief thaw in the official repression of religion, an easing of the atmosphere that followed the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, it was thought that the opening of a rabbinical seminary could also improve the image of the Soviet Union in the West.

The man who convinced authorities of the rightness of the idea was Rabbi Solomon Shlifer, who was born in Ukraine in 1889, and who had served as rabbi of Moscow's Choral Synagogue starting in 1943. Shlifer survived the treacherous period of Stalinist rule by making gestures to Communism and to the regime – for example, in 1946, he removed the words “From Zion shall go forth Torah,” from above the Choral Synagogue ark. Although he had been a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, nearly all of whose members found their deaths at the hands of the authorities after the establishment of the State of Israel, he was saved by the personal appeal he wrote to Stalin.

The initial call for applicants to study at the new yeshiva met with a lukewarm reception. Potential candidates were nervous about declaring their desire to become rabbis. For his part, Rabbi Shlifer understood that a certain percentage of applicants were likely to be informants. Nonetheless, he selected some 12 students, and on January 6, 1957, a festive opening was held for the seminary.

The classroom was held in a shed-like structure in the courtyard of the Choral Synagogue, and permission was also granted for the opening of a kosher restaurant nearby for students. There was no dormitory, so students from outside Moscow were put in private apartments with other families.

More circumcisers than rabbis

Unfortunately, things started to go wrong even before the yeshiva had opened. Students from outside Moscow had trouble getting visas that would allow them to reside there (the first class included six students from Georgia, five from Moscow, two from Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and one each from Minsk, Belarus, and Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine); the regime prohibited the receipt of donations from overseas to fund the yeshiva, but also clamped down on fund-raising through collection boxes in local synagogues.

The cruelest blow came less than three months after the opening of the yeshiva, when Rabbi Shlifer died, on March 31, 1957. His place as yeshiva head was taken by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Levin. The fact that students had diverse origins meant that classes were taught in three languages: Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew. They also had wide-ranging educational backgrounds, and ranged in age from 20 to their 50s.

The yeshiva ended up placing a disproportionate emphasis on laws of kosher slaughtering and on circumcision technique, and turned out more *shohetim* and *mohelim* (slaughterer and ritual circumcisers) than it did ordained rabbis: Over the five years that it functioned, Kol Yaakov ordained only two rabbis.

By 1959, the short respite from the anti-religious attitude in Russia had been replaced with an atmosphere of intense hostility, with synagogues being closed down, circumcisions being prohibited, and cemeteries being confiscated. Likewise, there was widespread dissemination of anti-Jewish propaganda being disseminated, not only in Yiddish, as during previous waves of anti-clericalism, but also among the public at large.

When an American rabbi, David Hollander, visited Kol Ya'akov, in 1962, he found only five students enrolled. Although it never officially closed, by the mid-1960s, the yeshiva was indeed effectively shut down.

January 7 / Hebrew's reviver is born

Born Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda is known as the father of modern Hebrew, having revived the ancient language for life in the Jewish national home.



Eliezer Ben-Yehuda at his desk in Jerusalem. Photo by Wikimedia

On January 7, 1858, Eliezer Yitzhak Perelman, better known by the name he adopted for life as a Hebrew speaker in Palestine, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, was born. In the early days of the Zionist movement, it was he who believed that the Jews moving to the revived Jewish homeland in Eretz Israel could be convinced to speak Hebrew. And the best way to accomplish that was through personal example.

Ben-Yehuda was born in Luzhki, Lithuania (today in Belarus), into a family of Chabad Hasidim, who hoped he would himself become a rabbi. He had a traditional religious education, but on the sly the head of his yeshiva also exposed him to the ideas of the secular Enlightenment. This led him to switch to a Russian-language gymnasium and later to study at the Sorbonne in Paris, where there were teachers who taught Hebrew using Hebrew as their language of instruction. At the time, modern Hebrew literature was being revived by such writers as Mendele Mocher Sefarim and Abraham Mapu, and he became obsessed with such works. He was also inspired by the knowledge that Hebrew had served since at least the Middle Ages as a *lingua franca* for Jews from different communities around the world both for verbal and written communication.

In 1881, Ben-Yehuda, now married, arrived in Jerusalem, where he decided he and his family would speak only Hebrew. His first son, Ben-Zion Ben-Yehuda (who later renamed himself Itamar Ben-Avi), was indeed raised in an environment in which he was permitted to hear only Hebrew (Ben-Yehuda's wife, Devora, was forbidden from even singing Russian lullabies to her children). At the same time, he began compiling a dictionary of modern Hebrew, a large part of which consisted of words he had

created out of ancient Hebrew roots to express modern concepts. He published its first volume in 1910; the 17th and final volume appeared in 1959, long after his death. And he found a receptive audience to his proposals among the highly committed Zionists who were arriving to populate Palestine, both to the idea of speaking Hebrew and to that of setting up schools where Hebrew would be the language of instruction. The main source of resistance came from the ultra-Orthodox community, primarily in Jerusalem, who considered it sacrilege to use the sacred tongue in their day-to-day lives.

Ben-Yehuda tried to dress like the ultra-Orthodox, but he was identified as a heretic and even subjected to a *herem*, a religious ban. The Ottoman authorities, too, fueled by false tips from Ben-Yehuda's Jewish enemies, viewed him with suspicion, even going so far as to arrest him at one point. During the years of World War I, when the Turks outlawed Zionism in the Holy Land, Ben-Yehuda moved temporarily to the United States.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda also established and edited, at different times, three Hebrew-language newspapers, and he helped to set up the Committee (today, the Academy) of the Hebrew Language. By the time of his death in 1922, the British Mandate was ready to recognize Hebrew as the official language of the Jews in Palestine.

When Devora died, in 1891 at age 36, she left him with five young children. Eliezer sent for her sister Paula in Russia, with whom he had been in love for some time, and married her. She changed her name to Hemda. In the meantime, just months after Devora's death, three of their children died of diphtheria over a period of just 10 days. Ben-Yehuda mourned for two weeks, and then resumed publication of his paper *Ha'or*.

Hemda remained Eliezer's wife and helpmate for the next three decades, until his death, from tuberculosis, on December 16, 1922.

January 8 / Impresario Bill Graham is born

One of the great rock promoters of the 20th century started out life in a Yekke family and went on to promote shows that brought together numerous stars.



Graham promoted bands such as Jefferson Airplane, here playing at Woodstock in 1969. Photo by Henry Diltz/Michael Lang/Sony via Bloomberg

On January 8, 1931, Wolfgang Grajonca was born in Berlin. Some years later, when he was a teenager growing up without his family in New York, Wolfgang renamed himself “Bill Graham,” which is how one of the great rock promoters of the 20th century was known to the public.

Graham’s parents, Friedel and Yankel Grajonca, had immigrated to Germany from Russia several years earlier. After Kristallnacht, in November 1938, Friedel placed her son and one of his five sisters in an orphanage for protection (Yankel Grajonca had died two days after Wolfgang’s birth). The orphanage arranged for them to be sent to France.

After the fall of France, they were spirited south to Marseille and then to Spain and Portugal. Tolla, the sister, did not survive the journey; Wolfgang, with the help of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, sailed in September 1941 for the United States. There he was placed in an orphanage and was eventually adopted by a family in the Bronx, New York. Three of Graham’s sisters who remained in Germany survived the war and eventually made it to the United States, while his mother and another sister died in the death camps.

Graham - he supposedly chose his name out of a phone book, looking for something that resembled “Grajonca,” but sounded American - became a U.S. citizen in 1949, and after being drafted, fought in the Korean War. He was an undisciplined soldier, but was awarded a Bronze Star for valor and a Purple Heart after being wounded.

After the war, he earned a degree in business administration in New York, worked a variety of odd jobs, before moving to San Francisco, where one of his sisters was living. There, in 1965, he became the business manager of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, a radical theater company, which he had encountered at a free concert in Golden Gate Park.

When the Mime Troupe's director, Ronnie Davis, was arrested on obscenity charges, Graham arranged a benefit concert to raise money for legal fees. Among those who appeared were poets Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti as well as music acts The Fugs and the Jefferson Airplane. The success of that effort led to further benefit shows, which he mounted in the old Fillmore Auditorium, and eventually to Graham's leaving the company to become an independent promoter.

From there, it was a short if tumultuous journey to becoming a major promoter. He managed Jefferson Airplane for a while, and staged shows with the Grateful Dead, Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Lenny Bruce, the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, B.B. King, and many others, including, later, the Rolling Stones. In San Francisco, he operated both the Fillmore and the Winterland ice-skating arena, and in 1968 opened up what he called Fillmore East in New York, where he also ran a booking agency.

Throughout the '70s, Graham, who himself became a celebrity in part because of his tempestuous personality and partly because of his meticulous managerial skills, organized increasingly large events, promoting shows that brought together several major acts in large outdoor spaces – for example a show in San Francisco's Kezar Stadium, in March 1975, featuring the Grateful Dead, Santana, Bob Dylan and the Band, and Neil Young, among others, a benefit to raise money for after-school programs in the city. That same year, he paid for "Mama Menorah," a giant 22-foot Hanukkah candelabra erected by Chabad in San Francisco's Union Square, and now an international tradition for the Hasidic sect.

In 1985, Graham sponsored a rally in San Francisco to protest the decision of President Ronald Reagan to attend a memorial ceremony in Germany at Bitburg Cemetery, where members of the Waffen SS had been buried; in response, his offices were firebombed. His concert promotion continued through that decade and the beginning of the '90s, as he became involved in increasingly larger benefit productions, including the American segment of the Live Aid global effort to raise money to fight hunger in Africa, in 1985.

On October 25, 1991, Graham attended a concert he had promoted at a hall in Concord, California, northeast of San Francisco. Shortly after his helicopter took off from the site it crashed into a utility tower, killing Graham, his companion and the pilot. A week later, a free concert in his memory in Golden Gate Park, at which many of the acts he had worked with over his career performed, drew up to a half million people.

January 9 / The inventor of the bra is born

Victoria wouldn't have a secret without Ida Cohen Rosenthal.



A bra boutique in Jaffa. Inspired by Ida Cohen Rosenthal. Photo by Daniel Tchetchik

January 9, 1886, is the birthdate of Ida Cohen Rosenthal, the co-founder of Maidenform, today the world's largest manufacturer of "shapewear."

She was born Ida Kaganovich (she anglicized her maiden name to "Cohen" after coming to the United States) in the town of Rakaw, in what is today Belarus. Her father, Abraham Kaganovich, was a Torah scholar; her mother, the former Sarah Shapiro, ran a grocery. After some time studying in Warsaw, as a teenager Ida returned to Rakaw, where she met William Rosenthal, an artist. Fearing conscription after the start of the Russo-Japanese War, in 1904 William decided to emigrate to the U.S., to which Ida soon followed him. They married in 1907.

The couple opened a dress shop in Hoboken, New Jersey, which they moved to Manhattan in 1918. Three years later, they joined forces with Enid Bisset (who later dropped out because of poor health) and began experimenting with brassiere design.

The fashion of the day emphasized flat chests (Flapper style), but Ida thought this was a mistake. Many years later, she would explain to the New York Times: "Do you know that during World War I, women in this country were told to look like their brothers? Well, that's not possible. Nature made woman with a bosom, so why fight nature?"

Bras pick up fast

William, a trained sculptor, designed a bandeau, a supportive band with cups that separated and supported breasts. These bras, which they called Maiden Form, initially

came only as an accessory sewed into their dresses, until they started selling them separately.

Bisset had to retire when she became ill, but the Cohens continued, and had rapid success. By 1925, they had opened a plant in New Jersey for bra production, and by 1928, that's all they were selling – 500,000 of them that year.

Maidenform became known as well for the ad campaign they employed for two decades starting in 1949, in which models were shown in various public venues with their upper halves garbed only in a brassiere, with the statement - if for example she was depicted in a department store - "I dreamed I went shopping in my Maidenform bra."

When William Rosenthal died in 1958, Ida took over as the company's president. She had to stop working in 1966, however, after a stroke.

Since October 2013, Maidenform has been owned by Hanesbrands, a publicly traded company.

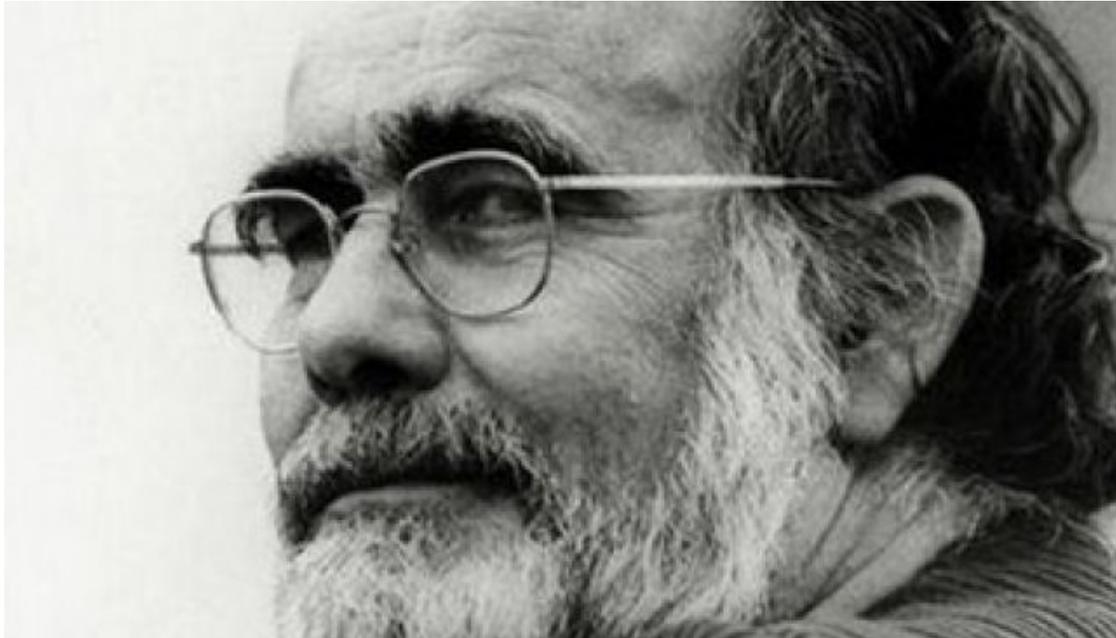
Ida and William were very involved in Jewish philanthropy, not only donating to the ADL and the UJA, but also setting up a collection of Hebrew books at New York University's library, consisting of the library of William's father, Solomon Rosenthal. In 1943, they also created a Boy Scout camp in memory of their son Lewis, who died of meningitis in 1930 at age 23.

Ida Cohen Rosenthal died on March 29, 1973, of pneumonia.

In 1965, as she was about to turn 80, she was asked by The Times what she thought about the trend, then popular, of women going braless. She responded, authoritatively: "We are a democracy and a person has the right to be dressed or undressed, but after 35, a woman hasn't got the figure to wear nothing."

January 10 / Producer who brought R&B to white America is born

Jerry Wexler coined the name 'Rhythm and Blues' and told Aretha Franklin to 'drop the Judy Garland cabaret act' and be herself.



American record executive and producer Jerry Wexler. Photo by Atlantic Records

January 10, 1917, is the birth date of Jerry Wexler, the American record executive and producer who brought the music of black Americans – artists like Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles and Otis Redding – to the white, American mainstream. It was Wexler who, as a young music journalist, coined the name “rhythm and blues” to describe the music he championed, and who then went on to join Ahmet Ertegun in giving that music a home at Atlantic Records.

Gerald Wexler was born in the Bronx, New York, and raised in northern reaches of Manhattan, in Washington Heights, a decade before construction had begun on the George Washington Bridge connecting the neighborhood to New Jersey. His father, Harry Wexler, was a Polish-born Jew who never advanced beyond his work as a window washer; his mother, Elsa Spitz, was a German Jew who was convinced she had married beneath her station, and who pushed her son to achieve more than her husband ever did.

In his 1993 autobiography, “Rhythm and the Blues,” Wexler described his bar mitzvah training, which began in a Reform synagogue, with “Rabbi Lux, a handsome American hunk,” but ended, after pressure from his father’s family, at an Orthodox shul, where “I was brutalized by a long-bearded, garlic-reeking sadistic *melamed* who used his ruler to deconstruct my antipathy for Hebrew.” Though the experience contributed to Wexler’s lifelong conviction as an atheist, he admits that “I actually took pleasure writing about Moses and Joseph and the Old Testament prophets.”

From Aretha Franklin to Led Zeppelin

After high school, several false starts at college, and army service in the U.S. during World War II, Wexler studied journalism in Manhattan – Manhattan, Kansas – at Kansas State University. Returning to New York after graduation, he began working as a reporter at *Billboard*, the weekly paper of the recorded-music industry, in 1949. It was there, after an editor asked his staff to come up with a better name for black music than “Race Records,” that Wexler suggested “Rhythm and Blues.” It took immediately.

When his work came to the attention of Ahmet Ertegun, Wexler received an offer in 1953 to join the Turkish-born music producer at the small new black-music company he had founded in 1947. He remained at Atlantic until 1975, when he went freelance as a producer.

Atlantic already was working with musicians like Joe Turner, Ruth Brown and the Drifters, and had just signed soul pioneer Ray Charles. Wexler took the company deeper into the South, making Atlantic the distributor for Stax Records, in Memphis (the label of Sam & Dave and Otis Redding) and bringing musicians to FAME Studios in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, to record.

Aretha Franklin was probably the greatest star Wexler brought to Muscle Shoals. Signing her in 1966, after she was dropped by Columbia Records, Wexler urged Franklin “to drop the Judy Garland cabaret act,” as *Rolling Stone*’s Ashley Kahn wrote in an obituary for the producer, and to sing the way she had been taught to in her father’s church.

Although never especially interested in rock music, Wexler also brought such acts as the Allman Brothers and Led Zeppelin to Atlantic. He was one of the first music executives to go into the studio during recording sessions, and, though he was not a trained musician, he became a skilled producer himself. (When he brought Dusty Springfield from the U.K. to record in Memphis, her contract stipulated that he would produce the sessions.)

Atlantic was bought by Warner Brothers in 1967, and while Ertegun remained with the company, Wexler, who had pushed for the deal, later told journalist Ashley Kahn that it was the “worst thing we ever did,” mainly because he had under-anticipated the value of the company. He left Atlantic in 1975, but continued producing music until his retirement, in the late 1990s. Acts he worked with in those years included Linda Ronstadt, Carlos Santana, Dire Straits and Bob Dylan, whose 1979 “Slow Train Coming” he produced.

Wexler later recalled to an interviewer how he hadn’t realized until he and Dylan began their work that the Jewish musician “was on this born-again Christian trip” until Dylan “started to evangelize me.” He finally told him, “Bob, you’re dealing with a sixty-two-year-old confirmed Jewish atheist. I’m hopeless. Let’s just make an album.”

Jerry Wexler lived in happy retirement in Sarasota, Florida, until his death, of heart congestion, on August 15, 2008.

January 11 / A future French premier is born

Pierre Mendes France, the prime minister who withdrew France from Vietnam, served for less than a year. He also, at one point, broke out of jail with a saw.



Pierre Mendes France Photo by Wikicommons

January 11, 1907 is the birthdate of Pierre Mendes France, the French premier who – though he was only in office for a little more than half a year – is credited with withdrawing his country's troops from Vietnam and negotiating independence with Tunisia.

Mendes France was born in Paris to an assimilated Jewish family (its original name was Mendo Franca) that had come to France from Portugal during the 16th century. He was a brilliant and industrious student from a young age but at university, encountering the rabid anti-Semitism of parts of France's political right, he also became involved in politics leading the Radical Socialist Party's youth organization.

After earning his law degree at the University of Paris, Mendes France became the youngest member of the Paris bar association in 1928. By 1930, he had written a thesis on monetary reform and published his first book on international monetary policy; two years later, having moved to rural Normandy, he was elected to the Chamber of Deputies as its youngest member and served as mayor of his new home, Louviers. When Leon Blum, the country's first Jewish premier, brought him back to Paris in 1938 to serve as one of two undersecretaries of the Treasury, together with Georges Boris, also a Jew, the idea of three Jewish men overseeing economic policy brought out blatant expressions of anti-Semitism, both in the press and the legislature itself.

When World War II began, Mendes (as he was widely called in France) volunteered for the air force, but after France was occupied by Germany, he moved with his family to Morocco where he joined the Free French resistance forces. In 1941, he was tried and convicted of desertion by the Vichy regime, only to escape from prison by sawing through the bars of his cell. Making his way to London, Mendes rejoined the resistance, and later the government-in-exile set up in Algeria by Charles de Gaulle. Although he and de Gaulle later had a falling out, the leader of Free French forces appointed Mendes France to several significant economic positions.

In 1947, when regular politics resumed, Mendes was elected again to the National Assembly. With very firm solutions for how to get France out of its ongoing economic crisis and clear-cut ideas on ending the country's colonial ventures overseas, he put himself forward several times as a candidate for premier.

He finally had his chance in June 1954 after French forces were defeated by the Communists at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam and the government of Joseph Laniel resigned. Mendes France formed a government on June 18. One of his first acts was to go to Geneva to negotiate peace with Vietminh leader Ho Chi Minh – an agreement that led to the division of the former French colony into communist North Vietnam and the anti-communist South Vietnam, setting the stage for American involvement a few years later.

Mendes France then went to Tunisia, and negotiated an agreement with the growing independence movement that led to an independent state by 1956. He also began similar discussions with the nationalists in Morocco. At the same time, however, Algeria's fight for independence began and on February 5, 1955, less than seven months after taking office, the government of Mendes France lost a vote of confidence over Algeria in parliament and he resigned.

After de Gaulle came to power and replaced the Fourth Republic with a presidential-style Fifth Republic, Mendes France became affiliated with the Unified Socialist Party, and later with the new Socialist Party. He was in and out of the legislature, but never again played a major role in elective politics in France. By the time Socialist leader Francois Mitterrand became president, in 1981, Mendes France was too old to join his government. In his final decades, he did, however, command great respect as a public intellectual, particularly on economic issues (he believed in more government control over and coordination of the economy), and for his efforts to bring Israelis and Palestinians together, though these efforts were not always appreciated in Israel.

Pierre Mendes France died on October 18, 1982.

January 12 / Jews of Sicily expelled by Spanish rulers

At its height in 1492, the Sicilian Jewish community numbered over 30,000 people living in over 50 locations on the island.



Historical map of Sicily. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 12, 1493, the expulsion of the Jews of Sicily took effect, some six-and-a-half months after it was proclaimed. Although several official efforts were made to attract Jews back to the island in the centuries that followed, the expulsion was essentially the end of the Jewish presence on the island.

At the same time, it should be noted that there are estimates that up to half of the 30,000 to 40,000 Jews who lived in Sicily at the time of the expulsion converted to Christianity, and thus were permitted to remain.

The history of Jews in Sicily goes back at least to the Second Temple period, when a large number of Jewish slaves are believed to have been brought to the island from Jerusalem, after its conquest by Pompey in 63 B.C.E. Archaeological artifacts and documents from the Cairo Geniza, among other things, testify to the Jewish presence there during the millennium-and-a-half that followed.

In 1171, the medieval Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela recorded the existence of a Jewish community of some 200 families in the port city of Messina, which he described as “a land full of every good thing with gardens and plantations.” It was also, he said, the spot from which “the majority of pilgrims meet to embark to Jerusalem, because it's the best point of embarkation.”

Although the fate of the Jews in Sicily varied from settlement to settlement and from one era to another, overall the island was good to them. By 1492, there were Jews living in more than 50 different places on the island, in separate neighborhoods called “Giudeccas,” and their overall population exceeded 30,000. They had a monopoly on

textile dying, and were involved in a number of other crafts. They also included scholars and physicians.

Under the reign of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (reigned 1220-1250), the Jews were extended the same rights and privileges as other citizens, and even offered the emperor's special protection against Crusader persecution.

During the 14th century, and the first half of the 15th century, Sicily had been basically an independent kingdom, although linked by family ties to the kingdom of Aragon. When Ferdinand and Isabella joined Aragon and Castile into a united kingdom in 1479, however, Sicily came under direct Spanish rule.

And when the monarchs declared their intention to expel the Jews from their kingdom, the decree applied to Sicily as well. The difference, as Italian scholar Sergio Calabrella has written, is that, "the anti-Semitism of Spain was not shared by the Sicilian people."

When the order finally came down, nonetheless, the Jews were forbidden from leaving with more than a small number of articles of clothing, a pair of sheets, and some petty cash. All the rest of their possessions were taken by the crown or by wealthy Christian families in Sicily.

As noted, it is believed that up to 50 percent of Sicily's Jews elected to convert; they were known as "neofiti" (neophytes), and of course included crypto-Jews who secretly tried to maintain some of the customs of the faith. Those who left initially attempted to resettle on the Italian mainland, in such southern regions as Apulia, Calabria and Naples. When they were expelled from there, they then went east to the Ottoman Empire.

On February 3, 1740, Charles de Bourbon, the king of Naples, issued an official invitation to the Jews to return to Sicily, but few responded favorably to the offer, and most of those who did not remain.

January 13 / A Stalin-sanctioned murder staged to look like an accident

In the early years of Soviet Communism, Yiddish actor and community leader Solomon Mikhoels proved threatening enough for Stalin to get rid of him.



Joseph Stalin. Photo by AP

January 13, 1948, is the day that the Russian Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels was murdered by Joseph Stalin's secret police, in an incident that was meant to resemble a road accident. Mikhoels, who was artistic director of the Moscow State Yiddish Theater, was more than a beloved artistic figure – he was also perceived as a leader of what was an extremely insecure Jewish community in the early decades of Soviet communism. As Stalin became increasingly paranoid and turned much of his fury on the Jews, Mikhoels' death became inevitable.

Mikhoels was born Shloyme Vovsi on March 16, 1890 in Dvinsk, today Daugavpils, Latvia. He began law studies in St. Petersburg but gave them up in 1918 when he joined the Yiddish chamber theater of Alexander Granovsky. In the early years of the Soviet Union, different nationalities were encouraged to develop their own cultures. Yiddish was declared the official language of the Jews, and a completely secular Yiddish culture was allowed to thrive in schools, literature, journalism and the theater – even as any expression of Jewish religious life was suppressed.

In 1919, Granovsky's company moved to Moscow, where it became the State Yiddish Theater (also known by the Russian acronym Goset), and put on productions of stories by Sholem Aleichem (for example, "Tevye the Milkman"), Mendele Moykher Seforim ("The Travels of Benjamin III") and Avraham Goldfaden ("Bar Kochba"). The foyer of the company's building, as well as the sets and costumes for its first season of plays in 1921 were created by a young Marc Chagall.

During a European tour of the company, in 1928, Granovsky defected, and Mikhoels was named its artistic director. He strived for a combination of traditional Yiddish works with more politically revolutionary plays by contemporary writers such as Dovid Bergelson and Peretz Markish. He starred in what may have been Goset's most acclaimed work, a Yiddish version of "King Lear." In 1939, Mikhoels was named a People's Artist of the USSR and received the Order of Lenin.

After Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Stalin's government established the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, whose members, all highly respected Jewish artists and intellectuals, were given the task of soliciting sympathy – and material assistance – abroad for the Soviet war effort. In that capacity, Mikhoels traveled to the United States and Canada, Mexico and the United Kingdom, where he met with officials and lectured to Jewish communities. Members of the committee also made weekly radio broadcasts for foreign audiences, in which they talked, among other things, about the German oppression of the Jews and about acts of Jewish resistance.

What had been helpful to the Soviet cause during World War II, the connection with Jewish communities around the world, became a "bourgeois" threat in Stalin's eye following the war, especially as the effort to create a Jewish state in Palestine picked up steam. In the following years, the Yiddish State Theater was closed, the teaching of Yiddish in schools was outlawed, and many of the members of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee were arrested and tried for treason.

The first task in Stalin's campaign against the Jews was getting Mikhoels out of the way. But putting a beloved figure such as Solomon Mikhoels on trial would have been too risky. Instead, on the personal orders of Stalin, and the direct supervision of the deputy minister of state security, Sergei Ogotstov, Mikhoels was lured to a state residence in Minsk where he was arrested and killed. His body was then placed on a highway and run over by a truck so as to present his death as a tragic accident. He was subsequently given a state funeral and the Yiddish State Theater was even renamed in his memory, though the company would be shut down within the year.

Even dead, the revered Mikhoels was a symbolic threat, from Stalin's point of view, enough so that within a few years, his reputation was attacked, and charges of being a "bourgeois nationalist" were leveled against him, as well as being implicated in the so-called Doctors Plot, in which a number of Jewish intellectuals were accused, and executed for, alleged involvement in a plot to assassinate Soviet leaders.

Only with the death of Joseph Stalin, in 1953, did the campaign to purge Jews from public life cease and it became possible to rehabilitate Mikhoels' reputation.

January 14 / Jews' Lane in Frankfurt burns to the ground, again

Loss of life from the conflagration in this supremely crowded, unsafe ghetto street could have been much worse.



The medieval wall of Frankfurt, outside which the ghetto was built Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 14, 1711, a fire broke out in the Judengasse, the “Jews’ Lane” in Frankfurt, Germany, burning all of its structures to the ground. Although the loss of life was limited, with only four casualties, the extent of the physical destruction reflected the very crowded nature of the ghetto, and more generally, the precarious quality of life for Jews in this ancient European city.

Jews lived in Frankfurt as early as the late 11th century, but it wasn’t until 1462 that they were required to live in a single, confined quarter. Considering that Frankfurt’s Jews were massacred en masse in 1241 and then again, to the last one of them, in 1349, after being accused of spreading bubonic plague in the city, it may have been to their benefit to be relegated to a walled ghetto.

Although the plan for the ghetto was announced in 1442, it was another two decades before the first 11 houses were built by Frankfurt’s city council to accommodate the Jews.

The quarter was established outside the city walls, in a former moat on Frankfurt’s eastern side – a narrow alley 330 meters long and no more than four meters wide. Residents were permitted only to rent their homes, with ownership remaining in the hands of the city.

The 'wailing of the Jews'

The move to the ghetto required that the Jews evacuate their synagogue, which until that date had stood next to the municipal cathedral. Complaints about the “wailing of the Jews” were among the justifications for moving them into a separate neighborhood. Additionally, Jews were now required to wear distinctive clothing (usually a yellow ring on their outer garment) and were prohibited from visiting public baths.

Initially, the population of the ghetto was small, like the ghetto itself – 15 families, comprising 110 residents. By 1543, that number was up to 260, and a mere 70 years later, 2,700 Jews were living there.

Because the Judengasse could not be extended, the only way to accommodate its growing population was to build up, or to wedge in new buildings between the two existing rows of housing. The Judengasse had become one of the most densely populated areas in Europe.

The ghetto’s three gates were locked each evening at dusk, as well as on Sundays and Christian holidays. Public sanitation was poor, and rates of infection and child mortality high, but Jews kept pouring into the Judengasse, drawn by Frankfurt’s thriving economic life.

The Christians open the gate

The fire of 1711 was apparently accidental, and had its origin in the Eichel House, the home of Rabbi Naphtali Cohen, which stood opposite the quarter’s synagogue. The building was all-wood in construction, and burned to the ground.

The fire quickly spread to the ghetto’s other buildings, destroying them all. The fire began at 8 in the evening, meaning that the ghetto gates were locked. Eventually, however, the Christians allowed for their opening, so that most of the ghetto’s Jews did escape, and deaths in the fire were limited to four.

Reconstruction took place rapidly, and Jews were permitted to rent homes in other parts of Frankfurt until the ghetto was able to re-accommodate them. Unfortunately, another devastating fire occurred 10 years later, in 1721.

There were of course observers who thought the Jews had got what was coming to them.

Historian Eoin Bourke quotes several different observers who compared the ghetto’s inhabitants to sub-human creatures. One of them, writer and scholar, Johann Michael von Loen, for example, noted, after the 1721 conflagration, how “fire had twice tried to purify this slimy habitat and had reduced it by its flames to rubble and ashes.” That only caused the Jews, who live “like vermin in dung,” to rebuild faster, he observed, pointing out that “the more they feel locked in and sit on top of each other, the better they propagate: the place is creeping and crawling with Hebrew figures. To the question of how this ancient remainder of the 12 Israelite tribes nourishes itself, the answer is by fraud.”

In 1796, the ghetto was largely destroyed again, this time by a French bombardment, during the Napoleonic Wars. Finally, in 1811, the regulation requiring Jews to live in the ghetto was cancelled, and in 1862, Frankfurt became the second city in Germany to grant Jews complete civic rights and equality.

January 15 / A crime boss cashes in his chips

Russian-born Meyer Lansky was a gambling and crime kingpin across the country during the heyday of American gangsters.



Russian-born American gangster Meyer Lansky. Photo by Wikimedia

On January 15, 1983, Meyer Lansky, a major figure in American illegal gambling and organized crime in general, died in New York at the age of 80.

Lansky was born Maier Suchowljansky in Grodno, Russia (today Belarus) in 1902. According to his U.S. passport, which can be viewed on the website created in his memory by his now-late widow, Thelma, at meyerlansky.com, his date of birth was July 4. Lansky immigrated with his family to the United States in 1911 and grew up first in Brownsville, Brooklyn, and later on New York's Lower East Side. He did well academically, but in 1917 left school after 8th grade. He found a job with a tool-and-die maker, and supplemented his income by organizing dice games, hooking up with two men who became notorious gangsters in their own right and longtime business partners of Lansky's: Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel and Charles "Lucky Luciano" Luciana.

For many Americans, Lansky is identified with "Hyman Roth," an American casino kingpin living in Havana, and modeled on him in part, in the 1974 film "The Godfather Part II." (A line said by Roth to Michael Corleone in that film, "We're bigger than U.S. Steel," is a real remark that Lansky is said to have made to his wife when they were watching a television news report on the Mafia.) The character was played by Lee Strasberg, and is only one of many depictions of Meyer Lansky that turned up film, TV and books in recent decades.

By 1928, at the height of Prohibition, Lansky and Siegel were running a crime group of their own, the Bugs and Meyer Mob, which together with big-time smuggler Arnold Rothstein (who will be familiar to fans of HBO's "Boardwalk Empire," where

Lansky also appears), smuggled alcohol into the country. The gang also offered strong-arm services to local bootleggers, and ran a number of gambling operations.

Even today, 30 years after his death, it is still hard to distinguish between myth and fact in parts of Lansky's biography (for example, did he die with almost no property to his name, as he and his family claimed, or did he leave behind secret bank accounts with \$300 million in them, as the FBI believed at the time?). Lansky's strength, however, seems have to been in running businesses efficiently, albeit illegally, rather than having excelled as a muscle-man himself.

He also was a proud Jew and American patriot. In the years preceding World War II, Lansky and his gang took it upon themselves to make the lives of Nazi sympathizers in New York hell, showing up at legally organized meetings in Yorkville, New York, and beating participants with pipes and bats (local authorities allegedly tolerated their activities as long as they kept their promise not to kill anyone). During the war, Lansky had gang members at ports along the Eastern seaboard keep watch for the entry of German saboteurs or infiltrators arriving via submarine.

Following the war, Lansky began operating gambling establishments around the United States, often in tacit collaboration with local governments, which received kickbacks that they used to supplement municipal budgets. He and his mafia colleagues helped bankroll Bugsy Siegel's Flamingo hotel in Las Vegas; when it kept hemorrhaging money and Siegel refused to give it up, the crime families decided to have him killed. Lansky always claimed that he agreed to the 1947 assassination of his old friend with great reluctance, although within an hour of Siegel's death, his men had entered and taken control of the Flamingo.

The Cuban government also brought him in to clean up the country's racetrack industry, with Lansky then expanding into casino-hotels. When Fulgencio Batista became president of the island nation, he hired Lansky as an adviser on gambling reform, and offered him and his mafia partners control of all of Cuba's newly expanded racetrack and casino operations. In return, Batista received major kickbacks. Lansky invited the heads of the U.S. organized crime families to what became known as the Havana Conference, on December 22, 1946, at the Hotel Nacional, to discuss and approve the proposal. Entertainment was provided by Frank Sinatra, among others.

When Batista was overthrown, in 1959, and Fidel Castro came to power, gambling was outlawed, and the assets of the tourism industry nationalized (or looted and destroyed). Lansky lost his hotels, which included the Nacional, the Riviera and the Montmartre, and had to flee Cuba. He settled in Miami Beach, but in 1970, when federal authorities began pursuing him for tax evasion, he moved to Israel, applying for citizenship under the Law of Return. Prime Minister Golda Meir was extremely uncomfortable with the idea of offering refuge to a man who was wanted by the U.S. government, and Israeli authorities turned down Lansky's bid to make aliyah. He appealed the decision to the Israeli Supreme Court, which upheld the ruling and ordered Lansky's extradition back to the United States, in 1972.

Lansky was arrested when his plane from Israel touched down in America, and prosecuted on tax evasion and other charges. He was acquitted of, or found too sick to

stand trial for, all the charges. (His only time spent in prison was three months for running an illegal gambling operation in Saratoga Springs, New York, in 1952.) He lived out the remainder of his life quietly in Miami Beach, where he died of cancer on this day 30 years ago.

January 16 / House of Converts opens in London

In an attempt to deal with the problem of Jews in England, in 1232 King Henry III offered all those who converted to Catholicism a communal home and a tiny wage.



Henry III of England, whose tomb effigy is seen here, tried to handle the 'problem' of English Jews by offering them a home in exchange for conversion. Photo by wikimedia

On January 16, 1232, the Domus Conversorum (House of the Converts) opened in London.

Forty-eight years before England's Jews were decisively banished from their homeland, a kinder, gentler attempt to solve the problem of their presence was attempted with the establishment by King Henry III of the Domus Conversorum. The arrangement was as follows: Jews who converted to Catholicism forfeited all their property to the crown. No longer having any assets or even a roof over their heads, they were to be taken in by the communal home and provided with a small wage for work they did there. They were also offered instruction in Christianity.

The costs of the Domus Conversorum were covered by the Treasury, by bequests left by clergy for the purpose, and by the establishment of a poll tax on those who remained Jewish. In general, English society and its monarchs in the Middle Ages had a relationship with the Jews that ranged from toleration, so that they would be able to continue their profitable work as usurers, which was taxed at high rates, and resenting them, both for their insistence on remaining Jewish and for the steady drop in tax revenues they provided as they were taxed more onerously. The various financial levies were accompanied by blood libels, massacres and expulsions from individual towns. Eventually, Henry's son and successor, Edward I, expelled the Jews from the kingdom in 1290, but only after trying a variety of other measures to convert them, to prohibit them from money-lending, and to punish them for so-called coin-clipping, the shaving off of small amounts of the precious metals that coins were composed of.

(In 1279, he had the heads of all Jewish households in the realm arrested on coin-clipping charges, and executed 300 of them.)

Between 1232, when the House of the Converts opened, and 1290, however, only some 100 Jews, out of an estimated 16,000 in the kingdom, actually took advantage of the hospitality it offered. The House was set up in a building in Chancery Lane that later became the Public Record Office. And in fact, detailed records were kept of all activity, down to the smallest financial transaction, that took place in the House during the years it was open. Between 1331, when the record-keeping began, and 1608, it is known that 48 individuals moved into the Domus. In the two and a half centuries that followed, an even smaller number of converts applied for admission. Officially, however, the Domus was only shut down by an act of law in 1891. The building was subsequently demolished.

Jews were finally permitted by law to return to England in 1655.

January 17 / French Jew executed for 'ritual murder' of Christian child

Raphael Levy might have saved himself if he had agreed to convert during his trial.



Saint Etienne Cathedral in Metz Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 17, 1670, a French Jew named Raphael Levy was strangled to death and then burned at the stake, in the town of Metz, after having been convicted of the kidnapping and ritual murder of a 3-year-old Christian child named Didier Le Moyne.

Levy was a well-to-do livestock merchant from the village of Boulay, in the duchy of Lorraine, in eastern France. On the day of his alleged crime, several months earlier, on September 25, 1669, he had gone to Metz to purchase provisions for the celebration of Rosh Hashana, before hurrying home for the start of the holiday. The same day, young Didier, whose family lived in Glatigny, between Boulay and Metz, disappeared, while his mother was in town doing washing.

When a local resident claimed that he had seen someone matching Levy's description – that is, with a black beard – riding a horse with a small child, Levy was asked to come to Metz for questioning. Although Boulay and Metz were in different jurisdictions, and only the latter was in the domain of France, Levy, at the urging of his Jewish neighbors, voluntarily presented himself before the local parliament, the regional governing body.

Once he was in custody, Levy was arrested and tortured, and tried and convicted. His prosecution, reported French historian Pierre Birnbaum, in a 2012 book on the affair, coincided with a general reawakening in the region of the suspicion that Jews were involved in host abuse, that is, acts of torture performed on Eucharist wafers, which in Christian tradition are transubstantiated into the living body of Christ. At the same

time Levy was arrested, a number of other Jews, prominent citizens of Metz, were also in prison on suspicion of host abuse.

By introducing elements of this other imagined outrage into the Levy case, his prosecutors were able to finesse the oddness of his being accused of a crime associated with Passover and the production of matza (killing a Christian child for his blood) during the Jewish new year. Even after Raphael Levy's execution, the people of Metz petitioned the French king for permission to expel the Jews from their city. The request was denied.

Raphael Levy might have saved himself had he agreed to convert during his trial. But he didn't, and while he was in custody, he received mail – confiscated by his captors – urging him to recite a particular formula about being a Jew and dying a Jew, if he was subjected to torture. Later, at the time of his execution, he was observed to tie two leather straps to himself, one on his forehead, the other on his forearm – tefillin, of course. When asked what they were, recorded one witness, “he answered that within the knot were the commandments of the Law and that Jews traditionally tied them about their head when at the point of death” (quoted by historian Susan L. Einbinder, in her book “Beautiful Death”). Fearing some sort of witchcraft, the court clerk then removed the phylacteries from Levy's person.

Later, an official inquiry into the prosecution of Levy by the Royal Council, under King Louis XIV, in Paris, concluded that he had been the victim of a judicial murder.

January 18 / A kabbalah legend dies

The grave of Rabbi Shalom Sharabi, known by the Hebrew acronym formed by his name, 'Rashash,' is still a site of pilgrimage.



The grave of the 'Rashash' in Jerusalem. Photo by Wikipedia

On January 18, 1777 (Shevat 10, 5537), kabbalistic master Rabbi Shalom Sharabi died, in Jerusalem.

Known by the Hebrew acronym formed by his name, “Rashash,” Sharabi was born in 1720 in Sharab, as the Jewish quarter in the town of Ta’izz, Yemen, was called. Tradition has it that despite his early distinction as a Torah scholar, after the early death of his father, Sharabi became a merchant to support the family. He continued his studies during his free time, and found himself drawn to Jewish mysticism.

Encountering a dangerous situation during one of his business trips, Sharabi vowed to move to the Land of Israel if God would save him; when the danger passed, he fulfilled that promise, though he took his time traveling to the Holy Land, passing through India, Baghdad and Damascus along the way.

Arriving in Jerusalem, Sharabi found his way to the Beit El yeshiva, which had been founded in 1737 by the noted kabbalist Rabbi Gedalia Chiyun. Initially shy about revealing the level of his learning, Sharabi worked as a *shamai* (sexton) in the beit midrash there, observing all that happened but keeping his wisdom to himself. Only when a question came up that confounded the entire yeshiva over a period of days, sending Rabbi Chiyun into a profound depression, did he write down the answer on a slip of paper and leave it in one of the rabbi's books.

One person had observed him when he placed the paper into Rabbi Chiyun’s book, the rabbi’s daughter Hanna. In fact, she testified that she had often seen Shalom Sharabi paging through her father’s volumes. Sharabi was now forced to fess up, and

it was at this point – according to the legend – that Rabbi Chiyun appointed him as his successor (he was then 27) and had him marry young Hanna.

As a kabbalist, Rabbi Sharabi studied only the Zohar and the works of Rabbi Isaac Luria and his student, Rabbi Chaim Vital; one tradition even identifies him as the reincarnation of the Ari, as Luria is known. The prayerbook he edited and annotated, Siddur Harashash, is still used today by kabbalists.

Under Rabbi Sharabi's leadership, Beit El yeshiva flourished, and was attended by both Sephardi and Ashkenazi students, who devoted their entire lives to study and prayer. It attracted scholars both at home and from abroad long after his death. During the 1948 War of Independence, the yeshiva building was badly damaged, and after the Old City fell into Jordanian hands, the yeshiva set up a new home, on Rashi Street, in West Jerusalem. Following the Six-Day War, the old yeshiva was rebuilt in the Jewish Quarter, under the name Yeshivat Hamekubalim Beit El, and today, both it and the Rashi Street institution operate.

Rabbi Sharabi's grave on the Mount of Olives continues to be a site of pilgrimage for students of the yeshivas.

January 19 / Hedy Lamarr, actress and inventor of torpedo anti-jamming technology, dies

The star of the racy 'Ecstasy' led a drama-filled life, with six husbands and three children, before fizzling out in Florida.



Hedy Lamarr, in "Algiers," 1938. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 19, 2000, the actress -- and inventor -- Hedy Lamarr died, at the age of 85. The Viennese-born Lamarr became a Hollywood film star after immigrating to the United States in 1937, yet it was another of her achievements that could qualify her for immortality: co-inventing technology to help radio-guided torpedoes avoid enemy detection.

Despite her exotic beauty, Lamarr never acquired the type of distinctive screen persona that might have turned her into a presence similar to an Ingrid Bergman or Greta Garbo. Nor was her achievement as the co-inventor of missile technology during World War II exploited at the time by the U.S. Navy, although elements of her invention made their way into contemporary creations like global-positioning systems and Bluetooth technology.

Hedwig Eva Maria Kiesler was born in Vienna on November 9, 1914, to Emil Kiesler, a banker, and the former Trude Lichtwitz, a pianist from a socially prominent Budapest family. Both her parents were born Jews (a cousin, Friedrich Kiesler, was the designer of Jerusalem's Shrine of the Book), although one Lamarr biographer says her mother had converted to Catholicism, while another says Hedwig was registered as a Jew at birth. In any event, Lamarr never acknowledged her Jewish background, even to her own children.

In 1933, the year that Lamarr starred in what is now her most well-known film, the Czech production "Ecstasy," she also married the Viennese munitions magnate

Friedrich Mandl, one of Austria's wealthiest men. The half-Jewish Mandl sold arms to many of the European countries that would fight on both sides in World War II, and hosted both Hitler and Mussolini at his castle in the 1930s.

Fritz Mandl was not happy with "Ecstasy," in which the 19-year-old Hedwig Kiesler is seen fully nude, first swimming and then chasing after a stallion, and in which her face is photographed in close-up as her character has an orgasm (she used method acting to simulate the climax, she later wrote). The film is in fact very far from being pornographic, but it was scandalous at the time in Austria, and Fritz Mandl bought up as many copies of it as he could.

Hedy escapes

Her husband's controlling character finally led Hedy to escape her marriage, in 1937. She made her way to Paris and then London, where she met Louis B. Mayer, who offered her a Hollywood movie contract.

It was Mayer who insisted that she change her name to "Hedy Lamarr," inspired by a silent film star, Barbara La Marr, who had died in 1926. (Many years later, Hedy Lamarr sued the makers of the 1974 Mel Brooks movie "Blazing Saddles" for invasion of privacy for naming the character played by Harvey Korman "Hedley Lamarr." The sides settled out of court.)

Lamarr had her American screen premiere in 1938, playing opposite Charles Boyer in MGM's "Algiers." In the next two decades, she appeared in another 26 films, the most successful of which was "Samson and Delilah," directed by Cecil B. DeMille, in which she played opposite Victor Mature.

Hedy Lamarr was married six times, all told, and was mother to three children, one of them adopted. Perhaps her most interesting connection, however, was with the modernist composer George Antheil, her partner in the 1942 patent she received for "spread-system" communication.

Antheil was a polymath whose expertise included endocrinology, and he and Lamar became friends when he was recommended to her as someone who could make suggestions for enlarging her breasts. (He later wrote that she was "the most beautiful woman on earth," and that her breasts were "fine, real postpituitary," high praise in Antheil's book.)

Together, Lamarr and Antheil teamed up to develop a system that was meant to help radio-controlled torpedoes avoid having their radio signals jammed, something that would cause them to go off-course. (She had learned a lot about munitions from her first husband; Antheil had already composed music that employed remote control of automated instruments.) They patented their invention and offered it at no cost to the U.S. Navy, but the navy didn't get around to employing the technology until the 1960s.

Much more recently, the technology has had application in cellphone engineering and in satellite systems.

Lamarr's last decades were sad and somewhat ignominious. She lost most of her vision, published a salacious, told-to autobiography that she later sued her publisher over, saying that her ghost writer had made up many of the lewd anecdotes recounted in it, and she was arrested twice for shoplifting. For the most part, she lived a reclusive life in Florida, where she died of heart disease, in the town of Casselberry on January 19, 2000.

January 20 / A Nazi parley

It was at the Wannsee Conference, named for the Berlin villa where it was held, that Nazi bureaucrats received their marching orders for the Final Solution.



Adolf Eichmann standing in his glass cage, flanked by guards, in this file photo in the Jerusalem courtroom where he was tried in 1962 for war crimes committed during World War II. Photo by AP

January 20, 1942, is the date of what has become known as the Wannsee Conference, named for the villa in the Berlin suburbs where this 90-minute meeting of Nazi-German bureaucrats took place. In popular memory, the conference and the accompanying Wannsee Protocol (the minutes of the meeting) that emerged after the war are seen as the critical moment when the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” was explicitly decided upon by the top Nazi brass. In fact, Wannsee really served as an opportunity to bring together the officials who would be in charge of carrying out the long-planned “evacuation” of the Jews of Europe to the east, and introducing them to Reynhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Main Security Office, who had executive authority for it. And even in the written minutes, the language used to describe the intended genocide of European Jewry is largely euphemistic.

Participants knew that the plan they were discussing had already been decided on by Hitler and his principal deputy Hermann Goring, and much of the physical framework of the extermination was already in place. By October 1941, the first deportations had begun. But after the initial successes of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, which began in June 1941, the Third Reich faced the real possibility that an additional 4 million Jews from the western USSR would soon come under German control. Deporting, murdering and disposing of the bodies of so many people would require serious logistical planning. One focus of the Wannsee meeting, then, was to present an outline of the estimated numbers of Jews living both in countries already occupied by Germany and those whose conquest was aspired to. In total,

participants were told that Europe was home to more than 11 million Jews, only about half of whom were living in countries already under German control.

The minutes, which were recorded by Adolf Eichmann, the SS officer who eventually became a principal overseer of the plan, describe how, “in the course of the final solution,” Jews would be sent to undertake tasks of physical labor in the east, “in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes.” Those who survived, according to the protocol, who “will undoubtedly consist of the most resistant portion, [which will] have to be treated accordingly, because it is the product of natural selection and would, if released, act as the seed of a new Jewish revival (see the experience of history).”

Much of the minutes, too, are taken up defining “who is a Jew” for purposes of deportation, as the Nuremberg Laws had been vague about people whose “racial” line was only one-quarter or one-part Jewish, or who were married to Jews but not Jewish themselves. Heydrich went on for more than an hour, focusing at length on this subject, and there was some discussion about how the populations and regimes of different countries under occupation could be expected to react differently to the expulsion of their Jews.

Thirty copies of Eichmann’s protocol were distributed, to all the meeting’s participants, and all but one was destroyed by war’s end; only in 1947 did a U.S. prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials find a copy of the text in the papers of Martin Luther, a by-then-deceased Foreign Ministry official who had been at Wannsee. Later, during Adolf Eichmann’s interrogation and his 1962 trial in Israel, he was asked about the conference, and he explained that Heydrich had instructed him, in preparing the minutes, to be vague, and to render “certain over-plain talk and jargon” into “office language.” Nonetheless, he reported, toward the end of the meeting, after some Cognac had been served, the participants loosened up and talked more freely “about methods of killing, about liquidation, about extermination.”

In 1992, the Wannsee House became a Holocaust memorial and library.

January 21 / Czech woman who drew fellow Auschwitz inmates is born

Dr. Josef Mengele put Dina Gottliebova Babbitt to work during the war; after it, she fought to reclaim her art from the museum at Auschwitz.



Dina Gottliebova Babbitt Photo by YouTube

January 21, 1923, is the birthdate of Dina Gottliebova Babbitt, the Czech-born Jewish woman who, as a young artist in Auschwitz, was called upon by the German doctor Josef Mengele to draw portraits of inmates, thus saving both her own life and that of her mother. Toward the end of her life, Babbitt, who died in 2009, became embroiled in a bitter dispute with the museum at Auschwitz over its refusal to return to her the paintings that had survived the war.

Annemarie Dina Gottliebova was born in Brno, Czechoslovakia (today the Czech Republic). In 1939, when the Germans invaded her homeland, she was living in Prague, where she had gone to study at the Academy of Fine Arts. In 1942, she and her mother, Johanna Gottlieb, were arrested and sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, outside Prague. The following year, they were transferred to the Auschwitz death camp.

At Auschwitz, in an effort to brighten up a children's barracks, Gottliebova painted on its wall images from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," the 1937 Walt Disney animated film. Her drafting skills caught the attention of Mengele, the SS officer and physician who is infamous for the experiments he carried out on inmates at the camp.

Mengele was unhappy with the ability of photographs to accurately reproduce the skin shades of prisoners. In particular, he wanted a better means of capturing the dark skin

of Romani, or Gypsy, inmates, whom Nazi doctrine perceived as racially inferior to Aryans.

Mengele ordered Gottliebova to use watercolors to paint portraits of a number of Romani prisoners. She told the doctor that she had a condition for her work, that her mother be spared from execution. According to The New York Times, she told him she would walk into the camp's electric fence if he didn't agree. Mengele's response was, "What's her number?"

Gottliebova was provided with watercolors, a drawing pad, and two chairs, one meant to serve as an easel, the other for her subjects. When Mengele saw her first finished work, a girl in a red scarf, he suggested she sign it. "Do you mean my name or my number?" she asked him.

"Your name," she later recalled him responding. That's how the signature "Dina 1944" ended up on her paintings.

Both Dina and Johanna Gottlieb survived the war (Dina's father and her fiancé were both murdered), and ended up in Paris. There, Dina applied for a job as an animator with Warner Bros. The man who interviewed her for the studio was Art Babbitt, a former long-time top animator for Walt Disney, who created Goofy the dog and, coincidentally, worked on "Snow White." He subsequently argued with Disney over its labor practices, and left the studio.

Gottliebova ended up marrying Babbitt and moving with him to Los Angeles, where she worked as an assistant animator for him on a number of projects. (They eventually divorced.) Her favorite jobs, her daughters told the Times, after her death, were commercials for the breakfast cereal Cap'n Crunch. She always assumed that her Auschwitz watercolors had been destroyed.

In fact, though, seven of the artworks survived, and ended up in the hands of another former Auschwitz prisoner, who sold six of them to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and State Museum, in 1963. It purchased the seventh in 1977.

Only in 1969 was the museum's director able to match the signature on the paintings to that on other unrelated work by Gottliebova Babbitt he had come across in a book. He contacted her, and invited her to visit Auschwitz.

Babbitt traveled to Poland in 1973, at her own expense, and identified her work. But, to her surprise, she was not permitted to take it back with her to the U.S., as she had expected to do. She then spent the last three and a half decades of her life pursuing that goal.

The Auschwitz museum stubbornly insisted that the paintings were of historical significance, like all the other artifacts in its collection, and that a dangerous precedent would be set if they were to relinquish them to Babbitt. She stubbornly insisted that they were hers, and would struggle to the end of her life to reclaim them. A suggestion from the museum that she could take the watercolors on loan for the duration of her life was not acceptable to her, and when it had reproductions of the paintings made and sent to her, she refused to even open the crate they were shipped in.

In 2009, animators Neal Adams, Joe Kubert and Stan Lee, together with historian Rafael Medoff, created a comic book about Babbitt and her cause, and another 450 artists signed a petition urging the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum to return the art to Babbitt. It would not.

Dina Gottliebova Babbitt died on July 29, 2009, at her home, in Felton, California, at age 86. As of 2012, according to a website maintained by her daughters, the family was continuing in its effort to reclaim the seven Gypsy paintings.

January 22 / Birth of a salesman

S.J. Popeil, the genius behind the Veg-O-Matic and the Chop-O-Matic, created simple and useful tools and peddled them on television.



The Veg-O-Matic, one of Popeil's famous labor-saving devices. Photo by courtesy of Veg-O-Matic

January 22, 1915, is the birth date of S.J. Popeil, inventor of the Veg-O-Matic and Chop-O-Matic, among many other time-saving devices. His genius was not just a tinkerer's soul, which inspired him to constantly create simple but useful and reliable tools, but in pioneering a style of sales via demonstration that when partnered with the reach of television made it possible to sell unlimited units.

Samuel J. Popeil (pronounced "po-PEEL") grew up in Asbury Park, New Jersey, in an extended family of marketers, who generally hawked their wares along the boardwalk of that seaside town, as well as in department stores. S.J. began his career at age 17 working as a substitute pitchman for his uncle Nathan Morris, whose company made and sold items like the Morris Metric Slicer.

S.J. was a natural at demonstrating and selling the items, and so in 1939, together with his brother Raymond, they set up their own company, Popeil Brothers, moving it two years later to Chicago. By all accounts, business took precedence over family ties, and competition was fierce. When a product sold by Nathan Morris, the Roto-Chop, bore a strong resemblance to the Chop-O-Matic, for example, Samuel Popeil had no qualms suing his uncle for copyright infringement, which he did in 1958. That case ended after Morris collapsed during the trial with a heart attack – from which he rapidly recovered the following day, after his nephew agreed to settle.

Popeil's most iconic products were the Veg-O-Matic, a proto-food processor without the motor that could slice, dice and chop, and the Pocket Fisherman, a fishing rod that

folded up and fit in the pocket. In its first year alone, 1973, the Pocket Fisherman sold 2 million units. Demonstrating a kitchen chopper required one to haul around large quantities potatoes, for example, so it was logical that Popeil thought of showing customers a videotape of the process; from there to broadcasting the tape on late-night TV was not a great leap.

S.J. Popeil was also the father of Ron Popeil (born 1935), whose company Ronco exceeded even his father's wildest dreams, with products that ranged from the Showtime Rotisserie to the Electric Food Dehydrator to the Inside-the-Shell Egg Scrambler. Although Ron's parents divorced when he was young, and he grew up shunted between foster homes and other family members, he did follow his father's career path, and began by selling Popeil Brothers products in Chicago's Maxwell Street open-air market. Supposedly the one benefit S.J. gave to his son was a willingness to extend him credit, but once Ron went into business by himself, his father cut off contact with him.

Ron became a regular fixture on TV screens in the U.S., with ads featuring the telltale line, "But wait, there's more!"

In 1972, S.J.'s estranged second wife, Eloise, was found guilty of attempting to murder her husband. She and her boyfriend had offered two hitmen \$25,000 if they would poison Samuel, or, as the boyfriend eventually testified, "just blow his head off and forget it." Eloise testified at the trial that her husband had kept her under regular surveillance and was "insanely jealous" of her. She eventually spent six months in prison, after which S.J. and she remarried.

S.J. Popeil died July 15, 1984. He was survived by Eloise, Ron, daughter Lisa (a singer and voice coach), and another son.

January 23 / A very stubborn pioneer of science is born

Gertrude Elion was awarded a Nobel for her work in pharmacology, though she never did finish her PhD.



Gertrude Elion, who won a Nobel for pharmacological inventions despite not having a doctorate. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

January 23, 1918, is the birthdate of Gertrude Belle Elion, the American-born biochemist and pharmacologist who helped develop some of the most important drugs of the 20th century, and won a Nobel Prize for her efforts - although she never even finished her Ph.D.

Elion's life story is a classic example of the difficulties that were faced by women who wanted to work in science in the first half of the 20th century. Without unusual tenacity, and unusual luck – both good and bad – it's unlikely she would have accomplished what she did.

She was born in New York to immigrant parents: Robert Elion, a Lithuanian-born dentist, and the former Bertha Cohen, a Russian-born housewife.

At 15, Elion watched as her grandfather suffered a painful death from stomach cancer; she resolved then to devote her life to finding a cure for cancer. With her parents' encouragement, she studied chemistry at Hunter College in New York, graduating with top honors in 1937.

Following graduation, however, Elion could neither find the funding that would allow her to continue her studies nor could she land a research job. She recounted years later to the Academy of Achievement how she would sit for interviews and then be told outright, "We think you'd be a distracting influence in the laboratory.' Well, I guess I

was kind of cute at the age of 19, but ... I would have been so busy working that -- you know.”

Pickle acid tester

For a time she went to secretarial school, before taking a job for the A&P supermarket chain as a food analyst – checking the acidity of pickles and the color of mayonnaise. In 1941, she earned a master’s degree at New York University and eventually, in 1944, after the United States had entered World War II and the job market opened more to women, she was hired by the research division of drug company Burroughs Wellcome, where she spent the rest of her career.

Her good luck was in being hired by George H. Hitchings, becoming his partner over the next 40 years in the development of drugs used to treat herpes (acyclovir), malaria (pyrimethamine), rheumatoid arthritis (azathioprine) and leukemia (6-mercaptopurine) among others disease, and to prevent organ rejection in transplant patients. In their research, Elion, Hitchings and their teams pioneered the design of compounds that would disable the pathogens they were fighting without damaging the healthy cells around them.

For their inventions and conceptual advances (which also led to the invention, after their retirement, of AZT, used to treat AIDS), they shared the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology in 1988, along with James Black, who, separately, had developed beta blockers.

Elion’s tragically bad luck was that her boyfriend and fiancé, Leonard Kanter, became ill in 1941 with acute bacterial endocarditis, and died six months later. After that, she never married or had children, and devoted herself almost completely to her work. She was convinced, however, that no employer would have kept her on had she had her own family.

Elion moved with Burroughs Wellcome (today part of GlaxoSmithKline) in 1973 to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She died there on February 21, 1999.

January 24 / Brian Epstein signs the Beatles

Epstein, a British Jew who dropped out of school with dreams of becoming an actor or fashion designer, settled for managing one of the biggest bands in rock 'n' roll history.

On January 24, 1962, Liverpool businessman Brian Epstein signed a contract to manage a local rock-and-roll band calling itself The Beatles. The contract was for five years, and it provided Epstein with 25 percent of the group's gross income.

Epstein was born on September 19, 1934, to Harry and Malka Epstein, both of whose families had their origins in the Russian empire. The family owned a large furniture store that expanded to be a chain of shops that also sold musical instruments and appliances. It was called North End Music Shops. Brian Epstein had dropped out of school at the age of 15, but was reluctant to enter the family business – he told his parents he wanted to be either an actor or a fashion designer. They weren't moved by that, but after a brief tenure as a furniture salesman and a psychiatric discharge from the Royal Army Service Corps, he did attend acting school at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Despite showing promise, he quit after three terms.

Back in Liverpool, Epstein took over the record business at North End Music Shops, which quickly expanded. By 1961, the chain had nine branches and was one of the largest retailers of recorded music in the north of England. It was in this capacity that he became aware of the Beatles, who received prominent coverage in the local music newspaper Mersey Beat, for which Epstein wrote a column. In November of that year, he went to hear them play a lunchtime gig at the Cavern club, which was around the corner from one of his stores. He wasn't sure what to make of them. "They smoked as they played and they talked and pretended to hit one another," he later recalled. "They turned their backs on the audience and shouted at them and laughed at private jokes."

Still, he went back for more, until, several weeks later, on December 3, he met with the members of the group – then John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Pete Best – and expressed interest in managing them. (Best, the drummer, was dismissed from the band the following August, and replaced by Ringo Starr.)

Because McCartney, Harrison and Best were still under 21 years old, they needed legal consent from their parents to enter a contract with Epstein. McCartney's father was not happy about his son's having a Jewish manager, and Lennon's aunt and guardian was not impressed with Epstein either, but the group signed in the end. Epstein himself never bothered to sign the contract. Even before the arrangement was formalized, he arranged for the Beatles to audition at the record company Decca. The tryout did not go well: The selections the band chose to play did not highlight its talents, and at one point, when Epstein offered some advice from the control room, Lennon angrily called him a "Jewish git." A month later, they learned that Decca was not interested in signing them.

A recording contract only came the following May, after George Martin of EMI, a company that did significant business with the Epstein chain of stores, reluctantly agreed to produce them. The company offered the group, collectively, one penny on

every disc sold. Their first recording session with Martin took place on June 6, 1962, after which Martin asked them to replace Pete Best.

Brian Epstein, by all accounts, played a central role not only in all the band's business matters, but also in the way the Beatles presented themselves to the world – and style was always a major part of their allure. He admitted that he was enchanted by just about everything about the band, and later, when it became known that he had a secret homosexual life, theories that he was sexually obsessed with the members or even had relationships with one or more, began to circulate; though there is no evidence that he did more than modestly propose to both Lennon and Best, one time each.

It was a time when homosexuality was illegal in the United Kingdom, and although the band knew about Epstein's life, and protected his secret zealously, he was a tormented man. He became addicted to amphetamines, and even underwent drug treatment at a clinic. But it was sleeping pills that did him in. On August 27, 1967, Epstein took six Carbitral pills while he had alcohol in his system. By the time police found him in the bedroom of his home on London's Chapel Street, he was dead. His death was later ruled as accidental.

Epstein was buried at the Long Lane Jewish Cemetery in Liverpool at a funeral that the Beatles (who were in India at the time of his death) did not attend, so as not to upstage the proceedings. The rabbi at the funeral, Norman Solomon, who did not know deceased, referred to him as "a symbol of the malaise of our generation." (Today, on his website, Rabbi Solomon acknowledges that "I seriously underestimated the significance of his achievement.") Later, on October 17, 1967, a memorial service was held at the New London Synagogue. Rabbi Louis Jacobs officiated at the service, at which the Beatles were present.

January 25 / An anti-pope of Jewish descent dies

Many heads of the Catholic Church have been rumored to be of Jewish lineage, but it is fairly certain that Anacletus was the great-grandson of a converted Jew.



Part of a mosaic in the church Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome, featuring Innocent II (left).
Photo by Wikimedia

On January 25, 1138, the anti-pope Anacletus II died. Although many heads of the Catholic Church have been rumored over the ages to be of Jewish descent, it is fairly certain that Anacletus, born Pietro Pierleoni (his date of birth is unknown), was the great-grandson of a converted Jew.

The term “anti-pope” has been used in situations where the election of the pontiff has been disputed, so that two candidates have laid claim to the title. The one who in the end achieves recognition is the one who goes down in history as pope, with his opponent being remembered as an “anti-pope.”

Baruch, the great-grandfather of Anacletus, was a Roman moneylender who converted to Christianity and changed his name to Benedict. He married into Roman aristocracy, and it was his grandson, Petrus Leonis, who resolved to have his son enter the priesthood. Petrus studied in Paris and was a Benedictine monk at the abbey Cluny, before returning to Rome. Pope Paschal II appointed him a cardinal in 1111 or 1112.

In February 1130, while Pope Honorius II lay dying, a group of cardinals decided they would promote Cardinal Gregory Papareschi to the papacy. They arranged to elect Papareschi within hours of the death of Honorius, and to install him as Pope Innocent II the following day, on February 14. That same day, however, a majority of cardinals, who included most of those that elected Innocent but now had misgivings over the impropriety of the process, convened and named Pietro Pierleoni as pope.

Pierleoni's family was still a major banking power in Rome, so it's little surprise that support for his papacy was complete in that city. But Innocent, who fled Italy for France, was able to line up the political support of the influential Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux, who persuaded both the leaders and the church hierarchy of France, England and Germany to recognize Innocent. Lothair, the Holy Roman Emperor, invaded Rome in 1132, and occupied all but St. Peter's Basilica and the pope's castle, St. Angelo, so that it was possible for Innocent to be crowned as pope (again) on June 4, 1133. Nonetheless, Innocent soon had to flee Rome again, this time for Pisa.

The papal schism thus continued, with the enemies of Anacletus making much of his Jewish ancestry. He was accused of robbing the church of much of its wealth, together with Jewish helpers, and of incest. Only after the death of Anacletus, on this day in 1138, did Innocent become the undisputed pope, and that happened only two months later, when the man whom the supporters of Anacletus elected to succeed him, Cardinal Gregory Conti, resign from the papacy.

January 26 / Acclaimed Russian-Jewish writer Isaac Babel sentenced to death in Moscow

The author of 'Odessa Tales,' often cited as one of the finest stylists of the 20th century, fell afoul of Soviet authorities in the 1930s.



Isaac Babel. Photo by Wikipedia

January 26, 1940 is the date on which Russian-Jewish writer Isaac Babel, widely considered one of the finest stylists of the 20th century, was tried and convicted on a variety of trumped-up charges, in a Soviet legal proceeding that lasted all of 20 minutes. He was executed the next day in Moscow by firing squad.

Isaac Emanuilovich Babel was born in Odessa, in the Russian Empire (today Ukraine), on July 13, 1894. Although his family soon moved from the Moldavanka quarter of the city, and he grew up in more well-off environs, it was this working-class Jewish section that served as the background and inspiration for many of his tales. Similarly, although Babel described his family as “destitute and muddle-headed,” his father, Manus Babel, was an affluent seller of farm machinery. He and Isaac’s mother, Feyga, had their son homeschooled by tutors after the boy was rejected from the school of their choice due to its Jewish quota.

Babel was educated in both traditional Jewish subjects and secular ones, and, by the time he was 16, was enamored of modern French literature, particularly the work of Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, and even was writing stories in French (he wrote a short story in 1922 named for the latter). He also translated the Yiddish stories of Sholom Aleichem into Russian in the 1920s.

His first short story was published in 1915. By the following year he was living in St. Petersburg and had met the writer and editor Maxim Gorky. In his autobiography, Babel declared, “I owe everything to that meeting and still pronounce the name of

Alexey Maksimovich Gorky with love and admiration.” He claimed that Gorky urged him to immerse himself in life, and write from his experiences.

In 1920, he served as a correspondent with the 1st Cavalry Army in the Soviet-Polish War, out of which he produced first the nonfiction “1920 Diary,” and later “The Red Cavalry,” a book of stories.

By the late 1920s and early '30s, Babel was an acclaimed and prominent Soviet author. In 1926, he published his book of short stories “Odessa Tales,” many of which centered around a colorful Jewish leader of a criminal gang named Benya Krik. That later served as the basis for the play “Sunset,” as well as for a film named for Krik, with Babel writing the screenplay.

Soon, however, Soviet realism was in, and Babel’s literary formalism was out, and he stopped publishing, even telling the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934 that he was becoming “the master of a new literary genre, the genre of silence.” The following year, a new play was cancelled by authorities while it was still in rehearsals.

In the meantime, Babel’s first wife, Yevgenia Gronfein, had relocated to Paris, where he visited and considering staying; the two had a child, who, as Nathalie Babel Brown, became one of the main scholars of his work. Back in Moscow, Babel had children with two other women, and also became close with, and perhaps had an affair with, Yevgenia Feinberg, the wife of Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the secret police (the NKVD).

It was Yezhov’s successor, Lavrenti Beria, however, who ordered Babel’s arrest, on May 15, 1939. At the same time, the police confiscated 15 manuscript folders, 11 notebooks and seven notepads belonging to him; they were never seen again; in 1988, the KGB announced that it had no record of the papers.

Once he was under arrest, Babel’s name disappeared completely from public life. During his confinement, he was apparently tortured, and he confessed to being a spy and a Trotskyite counterrevolutionary terrorist. He was tried in Beria’s chambers on January 26, at which time he rescinded his confession, saying: “I have never been a spy. I never allowed any action against the Soviet Union ... I was forced to make false accusations against myself and others ... I am asking for only one thing – let me finish my work.”

Isaac Babel was found guilty of all the charges against him and shot to death the following day.

His official rehabilitation began in 1954, during the rule of Nikita Khrushchev, when his conviction was declared annulled. His extant writings were published in full editions in Russia only during the past dozen years.

January 27 / Nine Jewish 'spies' are hanged in Baghdad

Show trials, public hanging and 'feast' that followed, in 1969, earned widespread international criticism of Iraq.



Memorial, located in Or Yehuda, dedicated to Iraqis killed in 1969

On January 27, 1969, the Iraqi authorities hanged 14 alleged spies in a public execution in Baghdad: nine Jews, three Muslims and two Christians.

The country's Jewish community had shrunk to less than 3,000, from more than 130,000 as recently as 1948. The establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 on one hand and the *Farhud*, pogroms against Jews in June 1941, on the other, led to the mass emigration of the vast majority of the community, mainly between 1949 and 1951.

The terrible defeat suffered by the Arab allies, including Iraq, in the Six-Day War, in June 1967, only increased suspicion and discrimination against the country's few remaining Jews. They were dismissed from government jobs, their bank accounts were frozen and they were confined to house arrest, among other restrictions.

Additionally, the Iraqi regime was under significant public pressure in early 1969. The preceding July, the Ba'ath party had mounted a bloodless coup against the government of President Abdul Rahman Arif. The new government was weak and was in constant fear that it would itself be the target of a coup. It also faced an ongoing rebellion from the country's Kurds.

After an Israeli air attack on an Iraqi position in northern Jordan on December 4, 1968, retaliation for the shelling of communities in the Galilee, the Baghdad regime

began noisily hunting down an American-Israeli spy ring it said was trying to destabilize Iraq.

The arrests of alleged conspirators began in late 1968. Twelve Jewish men from Baghdad and Basra was taken into custody and charged with espionage. Nine were hanged on January 27, 1969. The remaining three were transferred to Basra to be tried, and were executed in that city on August 26, 1969.

Baghdad Radio invited citizens to come to Liberation Square on January 27 to “enjoy the feast.” A reported 500,000 people showed up, and danced and celebrated before the corpses of the convicted spies.

Despite significant international criticism of the executions, the pressure on Iraq’s Jews did not let up after the spy trials. Jews continued to be arrested, sometimes to be subjected to show trials, other times disappearing into prisons and never heard from again. By the time of the August executions, 51 Jews had been killed by the regime in 1969 alone; 100 more were imprisoned or tortured.

It was only in the early 1970s that most of Iraq’s Jews were permitted to leave. They left behind a small number who were too old to travel.

January 28 / Translator of Yiddish Medieval romance dies

Elijah Levita, the great Renaissance-era Hebrew grammarian and poet, is remembered for scholarly works and the 'Bovo Bukh,' a Yiddish version of the romance of Sir Bevis of Hampton.



An illustrated image of the Romance of Sir Bevis of Hampton. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

January 28, 1549, is the day on which Elijah Levita, the great Renaissance-era Hebrew grammarian and poet, died. Aside from his many scholarly works, Levita is remembered for his translation into Yiddish of the Medieval chivalric romance of Sir Bevis of Hampton – called the “Bovo Bukh” in Yiddish.

Levita, also known as Eliahu Bakhur (“Elijah the Kid”), was born in Neustadt, Germany, on February 14, 1469. When the Jews were expelled from this region, he moved to Italy, first to Padua and then Rome, where in 1514, he took up residence in the palace of Cardinal Egidio da Viterbo. He served as a Hebrew tutor to the humanist priest, and also copied Hebrew manuscripts – mainly connected to Kabbalah – for his library. It was during this period that he wrote his legendary Hebrew grammar, known as “Sefer Habakhur” – named for him but dedicated to the cardinal. In 1527, when the mutinous troops of the Holy Roman Emperor invaded Rome, he moved to Venice, where he took up employment as a corrector in the printing house of Daniel Bomberg, and also continued his work as a Hebrew tutor.

Other scholarly works by Levita included one on cantillation (Sefer Tuv Ta’am), a concordance of the Masoretic text of the Bible (Sefer Hazikhronot) and another one about vocalization in the Masoretic text (Masoret Hamasoret). In addition to his writings, he is important for introducing various influential Christians to Hebrew during the Reformation, when study of the language came into vogue. One of his students, Sebastian Muenster, translated Levita’s grammatical works into Latin.

Levita translated the Bovo Bukh early on, in 1504, but only saw it printed around 1540. He worked from the popular Italian translation, called “Buovo d’Antona.” As Yiddishist Michael Wex describes the work in his book “Born to Kvetch,” “the story of Bove is basically Hamlet meets Mickey Spillane – on a horse.” The mother of Bove, a prince, has his father, the king, killed, and then marries the murderer. Worried that the son will grow up to avenge his father’s death, they try to eliminate him as well. He escapes but is sold into slavery in Flanders, before saving the Flemish from invasion by the Babylonians, no less. He is aided by a magic horse, Rundele, and he marries the daughter of the Flemish king, Druziana, with whom he lives happily ever after, once he has taken care of his father’s killer and sent Mom to a convent. And all of this in Yiddish.

The Bovo Bukh was a perennial Yiddish favorite, remaining in print for nearly half a millennium; the most recent edition was published in 1909. Through a complex linguistic process, described by Wex in his book, its description in Yiddish as a “Bove mayse” – a tale about the knight Bevis – was transformed into the phrase “*bobe mayse*,” which is roughly an old wives' tale, though that is in no way an accurate description of the original book.

Elijah Levita died in Venice at the age of 80. British Prime Minister David Cameron is apparently a distant descendant, through his great-great grandfather Emile Levita, whose line can be traced back to the Hebraist. This would also mean that Cameron is a descendant of the tribe of Levi.

January 29 / 'Dr. Strangelove' premieres

Director Stanley Kubrick's dark parody of the nuclear scare drew uncomfortable laughs at the height of the Cold War.



The War Room. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On January 29, 1964, “Dr. Strangelove,” the classic black comedy film satirizing the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff and the policy of mutually assured destruction that sustained it, had its world premiere in the United States. The opening was originally scheduled for November 22, 1963, but was cancelled when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

“Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb,” was directed and co-written by Stanley Kubrick (1928-1999), the Bronx-raised child of Jewish parents Jacques Leonard Kubrick, a physician, and Sadie Gertrude Perveler. Based on “Red Alert,” a thriller novel by Peter George about an unauthorized American nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, the story was turned into an outrageous satire by Kubrick, who was assisted in the screenplay by Terry Southern and Peter George.

In Kubrick’s telling: An overly patriotic U.S. Air Force general orders a strike on the USSR and disables the communications devices of the strategic bombers sent on the mission so that they cannot be recalled. The plot is discovered, and measures are taken to help the Russians shoot down the planes en route, but one bomber gets through. The U.S. president, speaking with the Soviet ambassador, is informed that the Russians have a doomsday device that, if the USSR is attacked, will automatically launch enough nuclear weapons to destroy the U.S., if not all life on earth.

The president’s scientific advisor, the German-accented Dr. Strangelove, tells him not to worry and that the Americans can eventually, after 100 years, repopulate the earth if they can preserve a cohort of men and a large number of women who can begin

breeding underground until the radiation passes. At the end of the film, an enthusiastic American bombardier is seen astride a bomb that he intends to manually direct onto a Soviet target, before the screen cuts to clips of mushroom clouds from actual nuclear detonations, accompanied by the World War II song “We’ll Meet Again” on the soundtrack.

Armed with the razor-sharp screenplay, the cast of comic actors – including, principally, Peter Sellers playing a British Royal Air Force officer, the American president, Merkin Muffley and the insidious Dr. Strangelove (who involuntarily reveals his continuing loyalty to his former employer, Adolf Hitler), as well as George C. Scott, Slim Pickens, Sterling Hayden and Keenan Wynn – make the film hilarious, despite its shocking subject matter and the fact that the Cold War was at full steam at the time. The New York Times film critic Bosley Crowther wrote that “Dr. Strangelove” displayed “contempt for our whole defense establishment” and was “the most shattering sick joke I’ve ever come across.” But most reviews were very favorable. The movie drew sell-out crowds and was nominated for four Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actor (Sellers).

Kubrick, who began his career as a photographer and relocated from the U.S. to the United Kingdom after his 1960 Hollywood hit “Spartacus,” went on to make “2001: A Space Odyssey” (1968), “A Clockwork Orange” (1971) and “The Shining” (1981) – to cite some of the most distinguished examples of his limited output. He was known as a perfectionist who insisted on control of every aspect of a film’s production, and as his career progressed, the time between his films grew longer and longer. His much anticipated final film, “Eyes Wide Shut,” came out a full dozen years after the movie that preceded it, and he did not live long enough to attend its premiere in July 1999. He died shortly after completing editing, on March 7, 1999.

January 30 / Hitler makes first call for Jews' 'annihilation'

On January 30, 1939, Germany's Fuhrer addresses the Reichstag and speaks explicitly of annihilating Europe's Jewry.



German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and his personal representative Rudolf Hess, right, during a parade in Berlin, Germany, on Dec. 30, 1938. Photo by AP

On January 30, 1939, the sixth anniversary of Adolf Hitler's ascension to the chancellorship of Germany, the Fuhrer delivered a speech to the Reichstag in which he spoke explicitly about the annihilation of European Jewry. Toward the end of what was a more than two-hour speech, Hitler made a threat regarding what would happen to the Jews if they succeeded in dragging Germany into "another" world war:

"Today I will once more be a prophet: If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!"

The bulk of Hitler's speech was devoted not to the subject of the Jews, but rather to recounting the glorious history of the Nazi party. In a 1997 article in the journal *History & Memory*, the German historian Hans Mommsen explains that Hitler's insertion of a few paragraphs about the Jews came against the background of ongoing negotiations between the Third Reich and the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, on a plan for Jewish emigration from Germany.

The Final Solution did not really get under way until the summer of 1941, when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union; in early 1939, the Germans were still hopeful that they could get rid of their Jews by way of emigration, while in return they wanted the Western powers to loan them money to carry out rearmament. In fact, serious discussions were going on with George Rublee, the American chairman of the

Intergovernmental Committee, which had been set up in the wake of the failure of the Evian Conference, in July 1938, to find nations willing to accept Jewish refugees. The snag was that far from wanting to lend Germany money, these potential refugees were insisting that the Jews be allowed to leave the Reich with their accumulated wealth.

Hence Hitler's mocking tone, in which he chided the Western democracies for their putative concern for Germany's Jews, but who, when asked to do their part, say "We ... are not in a position to take in the Jews," unless "Germany is prepared to allow them a certain amount of capital to bring with them as immigrants."

That, of course, was something the Third Reich was unwilling to consider. Germany, he asserted, was "merely paying this people what it deserves." After all, "when the German nation was, thanks to the inflation instigated and carried through by Jews, deprived of the entire savings which it had accumulated in years of honest work, when the rest of the world took away the German nation's foreign investments, when we were divested of the whole of our colonial possessions, these philanthropic considerations evidently carried little noticeable weight with democratic statesmen. "

Mommsen does not suggest or imply that Hitler had benign intentions toward the Jews, but he does assert that in January 1939, the Fuehrer was not yet convinced of the need to murder all of Germany's Jews, not to mention those in the rest of Europe. But as someone who was intimately involved in the production of the virulently anti-Semitic film "The Eternal Jew," he apparently approved the insertion of this portion of the January 30 speech, and he also repeated in the same language, in half-a-dozen speeches in the years that followed, his threat about the "annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."

If Hitler's language was meant to appease even more extreme Jew-haters in the Nazi party, says Mommsen, in the end, the historian suggests that it "inadvertently turned into actual politics by giving unrestricted leeway to the party radicals who demanded immediate implementation."

January 31 / The Theodosian Code is published, spelling bad news for Jews

Emperor Theodosius II's legal code governing the Byzantium Empire established Christianity as the official religion and circumscribed the rights of Jews.



A bust of Emperor Theodosius II. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Emperor Theodosius II's legal code governing the Byzantium Empire established Christianity as the official religion and circumscribed the rights of Jews.

January 31, 438 C.E. is the date that the legal Code of Emperor Theodosius II was published. Theodosius (401-450) ruled over Byzantium, the eastern half of the Roman Empire, based in Constantinople. In 429, he appointed a committee to compile and codify all the laws that the eastern empire had adopted since its establishment under Constantine in 312.

One of Theodosius' goals in publishing the codex was to establish Eastern Orthodox Christianity as his empire's official religion and to clarify church doctrine. This had an impact on the Jews of the reign, whose status was somewhere between that of Christians and pagans. Their continued presence was necessary to prove the theological superiority of Christianity, but they were not supposed to thrive.

Before the code came into effect, Jews had held equal citizenship to Christians and were even exempted from certain laws, such as the prohibition on circumcision; their right to observe the Sabbath was also protected. The Theodosian Code, however, introduced a number of anti-Jewish measures. It barred Jews from holding positions in the military and civil service. The only exception to that restriction was the office of decurion, tax collector, whose holder, by Byzantine law, was required to make up any shortfall in tax revenues out of his own pocket.

Jews were also prohibited from buying slaves, although not from holding them (slaves could be inherited) a restriction apparently designed to give Christians the opportunity to convert their pagan slaves and to deprive Jews of the same opportunity. The code stated: "He who misleads a slave or a freeman against his will or by punishable advice, from the service of the Christian religion to that of an abominable sect and ritual, is to be punished by loss of property and life." Similarly ambivalent was a law that banned construction of new synagogues – although not repair of existing ones.

The Theodosian Code was later adopted by the western empire, based in Rome. In Byzantium, it was superseded in 529 by the Justinian Code, which tightened restrictions on Jews in a number of realms.

February 1 / The first rabbi in the New World is born

Born in Portugal, Isaac Aboab da Fonseca served as a hakham in Amsterdam and migrated to Recife, where the sheer success of the Jewish community annoyed the Portuguese to the point of war.



Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, the spiritual leader of the Kahal Zur Israel synagogue. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

February 1, 1605, is the birthdate of Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, celebrated as the first rabbi in the New World for his time as spiritual leader of the Jewish community in the Dutch colony of Recife, in Brazil.

Isaac Aboab was born Simao da Fonseca to two Converso Jews in the Portuguese town of Castro Daire. When he was 7, the family moved, first to France, then to Amsterdam, where they were able to resume their life as Jews.

Showing great intellectual promise at an early age, Isaac studied with Isaac Uzziel, a respected scholar and a student of kabbala.

During his 20s Aboab was a teacher and hakham (rabbi) in Amsterdam. The city had three Sephardi synagogues: there is some historical disagreement if he was hakham at Beit Yisrael or at Neve Shalom. In any case, in 1641 or 1642 he sailed to the colony of Pernambuco (whose capital was Recife), which the Dutch had conquered from Portugal in 1624. Fortunately, at that time, the Inquisition no longer officiated there, but that reprieve was not to last.

By 1645, there were some 1,500 Jews in Recife, about half of its European population. Rabbi Aboab was the spiritual leader of the Kahal Zur Israel synagogue, which had a yeshiva and mikveh and a tzedakah fund. (The remains of the Kahal Zur Israel synagogue were discovered by archaeologists in 1999, and today can be visited in Recife.)

The fact that the Jewish community of Pernambuco thrived was galling to the Portuguese, who aspired to retake the colony. A Jesuit priest, Joam Fernandes Vieyra, appealed to the Portuguese king, lamenting that Recife's Jews "were originally fugitives from Portugal," and that the openly Jewish life they were leading was "to the scandal of Christianity." He urged him to have "the Portuguese ... risk their lives and their property in putting down such an abomination."

Thus began the nine-year Portuguese siege of Recife, led by Vieyra.

The Jews of the colony fought with the Dutch through the long conflict, and a poem written by Aboab about the ordeal is the oldest-surviving Hebrew text written in the New World. He described how he and his congregants "were in want of everything and were preserved alive as if by a miracle."

In 1654, the Portuguese retook Recife, and expelled the Jews. Some of the colony's Jews moved to other Dutch colonies in the Americas, including New Amsterdam (which became New York). Rabbi Aboab returned to the Netherlands, where he was appointed chief rabbi of the of the Sephardi Jewish community of Amsterdam.

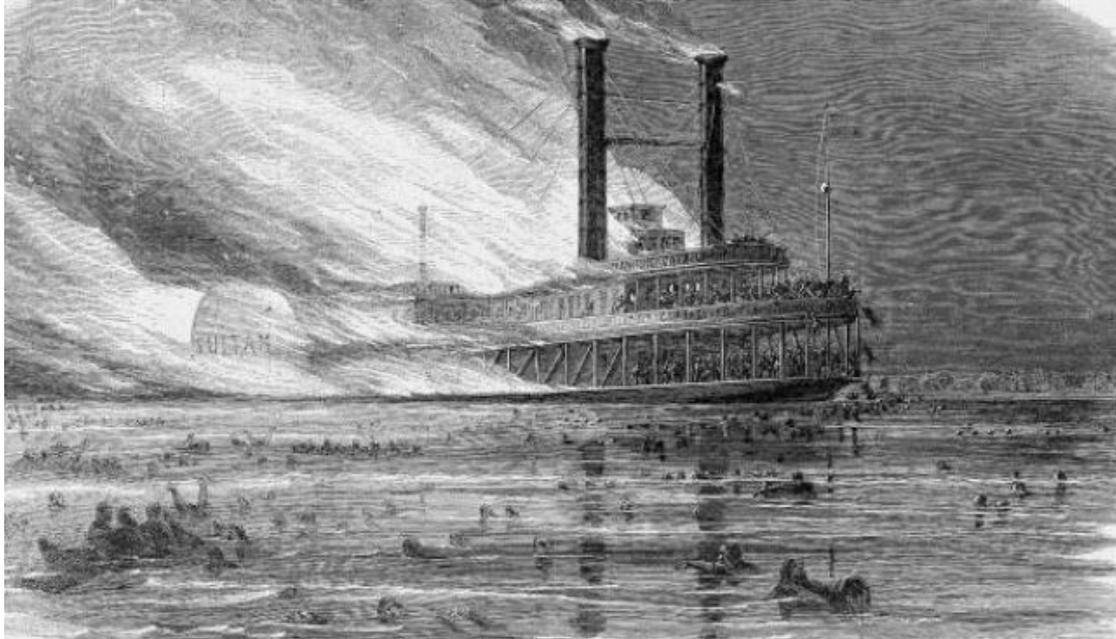
In that capacity, he was one of those who officiated in 1656 in the excommunication of Baruch Spinoza, on grounds of heresy. He was also among those who believed in the messianic mission of Shabtai Zevi, a frenzy that peaked in 1666, when Zevi converted to Islam.

Like the rest of Amsterdam's Jews, Aboab recanted his faith in Shabtai Zevi, whose name was obliterated from all publications where it appeared. Aboab was also involved in a number of other theological controversies during his long tenure as community leader.

Isaac Aboab da Fonseca died on April 4, 1693, and was buried in the Dutch Portuguese Jewish Cemetery at Ouderkerk aan de Amstel.

February 2 / Pioneer of Texas Jewish community dies

Rosanna Dyer Osterman opened her Galveston home to wounded Union and Confederate soldiers during the Civil War.



The Sultana steamboat on fire Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 2, 1866, the Jewish pioneer, nurse and philanthropist Rosanna Dyer Osterman perished, when the steamboat she was a passenger on suffered an explosion and went down while plying the Mississippi River.

Rosanna Dyer was born on February 16, 1809, in Mayene, Germany. Her parents, John M. and Isabella Dyer, immigrated with her and her siblings to the United States three years later. In 1825, she married the merchant and silversmith Joseph Osterman, who had been born in 1799 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and had immigrated to the United States in 1819, settling in Baltimore.

In 1837, Joseph Osterman headed to Texas, which had become an independent republic the year before (it gained statehood in 1845), and where two of Rosanna's brothers had already settled. Rosanna joined him there in 1838. From a store set up in a tent, Joseph, together with Rosanna, went on to run a highly successful general store and import-export business.

The couple, along with Rosanna's brothers, Isadore and Leon, became leading citizens of Galveston in general, and the city's nascent Jewish community. Rosanna is credited with bringing the first rabbi to Galveston, in 1852, and helping establish a Jewish cemetery – the first one in Texas - that same year.

With training as a nurse, Rosanna Osterman played an important role in caring for victims of successive yellow-fever epidemics, beginning in 1853, opening the family home to the sick. She played a similar role the following decade during the Civil War,

operating a field hospital for wounded soldiers of both the Union and Confederate armies.

During the war, Galveston, a port city set on a barrier island, was a strategic asset fought over by the two armies. It was briefly occupied by the North in late 1852, and then regained by the rebels in January 1863, in part thanks to Rosanna Osterman.

Osterman was one of the few residents of Galveston to remain in the city, maintaining her infirmary, when it was in Union hands and its port blockaded. While caring for a Union soldier, she is said to have learned that the northern forces had learned from a runaway slave of a Confederate plan to retake the city on January 12, 1863. She passed the intelligence on to the Confederate commander in Houston, Texas, and the Southern army moved up its attack to January 1, the date of the Second Battle of Galveston.

Joseph Osterman, who had done so well in his business that he was able to retire in 1842, died in 1861 from a shooting accident.

In the early hours of February 2, 1866, Rosanna Osterman lost her life, when the Mississippi River steamboat W.R. Carter exploded, near Vicksburg, Mississippi, with 200 people aboard. The Carter was one of a half-dozen steamboats belonging to the Atlantic and Mississippi Steamship Company that were lost in similar circumstances during a relatively short period. But as the Cincinnati Enquirer reported a short time after the destruction of the Carter, "The horrible suspicion that these six steamboats had been sacrificed for the sake of the insurance was happily refuted by the fact that this company had no insurance on any of its boats."

Osterman's body was transferred downriver to New Orleans, and she was buried in the Dispersed of Judah Cemetery there, where Joseph's remains were also reinterred.

Rosanna Dyer Osterman left an estate of more than \$204,000, and as she and Joseph had had no children, all of the money went to philanthropic causes, both in Galveston and nationally. In her city, the estate helped establish non-denominational homes for widows, orphans and sailors. It was also used to build synagogues in both Galveston and Houston, and for a number of other Jewish charities in other cities.

February 3 / A U.S. Army chaplain makes the ultimate sacrifice

Rabbi Alexander D. Goode gave up his life vest to save soldiers after their vessel was struck by a German torpedo in 1944.



The USS Dorchester, pictured in this undated photo. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 3, 1944, Rabbi Alexander D. Goode, a U.S. Army chaplain on the U.S. Army Transport, died after giving up his life vest to other soldiers on the vessel, when it was struck by a German torpedo. As the ship went down, according to testimony of men who survived the attack, Goode, together with his colleagues Methodist Minister George L. Fox, Roman Catholic Priest John P. Washington, and Dutch Reformed Pastor Clark V. Poling joined their arms and prayed together.

The son of Rabbi Hyman Goodekewitz, Alexander David Goode was born May 10, 1911, in New York, and raised in Washington, D.C. Goode attended college at the University of Cincinnati, and was ordained at the (Reform) Hebrew Union College in that city in 1937. In 1941, serving as a rabbi in York, Penn., he founded the first pluralistic Boy Scout troop of its kind in the U.S., which included both black and white boys of different religious backgrounds. When World War II broke out, he applied for service as an army chaplain (the navy had earlier turned him down), and was sent to the Army Chaplains School at Harvard University, where he met Rev. Fox. Following graduation, Goode was assigned to a base in the U.S., but asked for transfer to a combat posting, and was assigned to sail with the Dorchester to a U.S. Army base in Narsarsuak, Greenland.

On January 23, 1943, the USAT Dorchester, a 5,600-ton converted passenger steamer, sailed from Boston toward Greenland, meeting up with three Coast Guard cutters and two other transport ships at Newfoundland. After the war, it was discovered that the

Germans had cracked the Allied naval codes, and knew that the six vessels would be heading for Greenland.

On February 3, shortly after midnight, a German U-boat 223 fired five torpedoes at the convoy just south of Greenland; one hit the *Dorchester*, which was carrying 904 men. The ship immediately began to sink, and 12 of its 14 lifeboats were disabled. Within 30 minutes, the *Dorchester* had sunk, before many of the men even understood the seriousness of the situation.

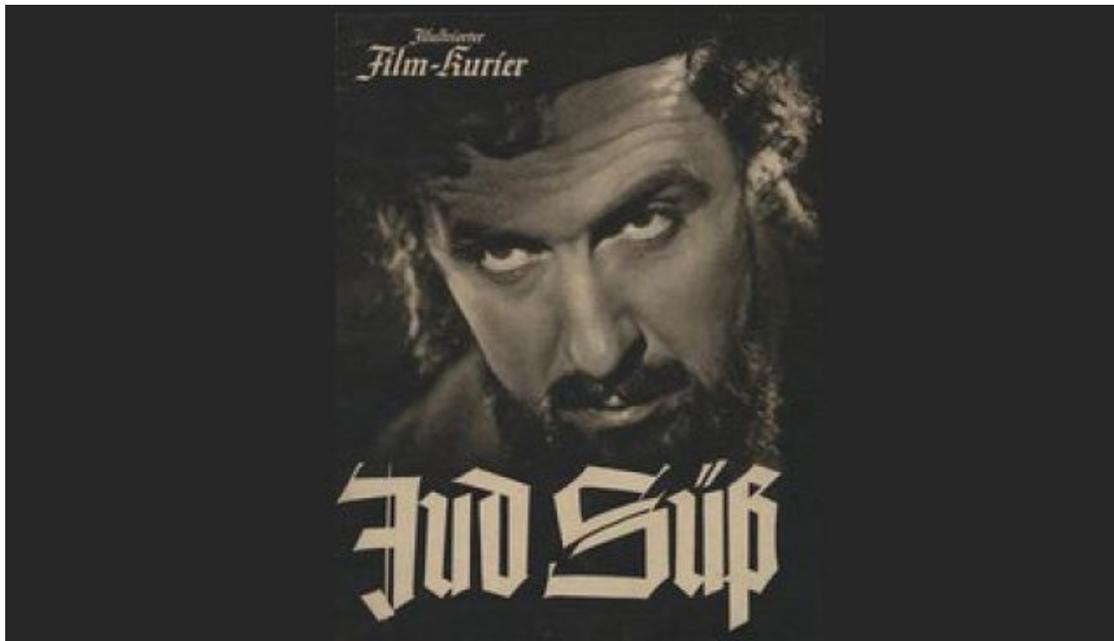
Goode, Fox, Washington and Poling remained calm, according to survivors, and helped guide men to the functioning lifeboats. All four also turned over their life vests to soldiers who lacked them: Whether this was a spontaneous gesture or something they had discussed beforehand is not known.

One survivor, Private William B. Bednar, later recalled hearing "men crying, pleading, praying. I could also hear the chaplains preaching courage. Their voices were the only thing that kept me going." Another survivor, John Ladd, said that he saw the four with their arms linked as the ship sank beneath the surface of the sea. "It was the finest thing I have seen or hope to see this side of heaven," he said.

The Coast Guard vessels were able to rescue a total of 230 men, but 674 died that night, including the captain, Hans Danielson. The four chaplains were all posthumously awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart, and on this day in 1951, President Harry S. Truman dedicated a chapel in their memory at the Grace Baptist Church in Philadelphia.

February 4 / A controversial financier hangs

Joseph Suess Oppenheimer, adviser and confidant of Duke Karl Alexander of Stuttgart, Germany, rejects conversion and gets the gallows in 1738.



A movie poster of 'Jew Süss,' the iconic 1940 Nazi propaganda film by director Veit Harlan, based on the life of 18th century Jewish financier Joseph Suess Oppenheimer. Photo by Wikicommons

On February 4, 1738, Joseph Suess Oppenheimer, a controversial Jewish financier and close adviser to the recently deceased Duke Karl Alexander of Wuerttemberg, was executed by hanging in Stuttgart, Germany, after being convicted of a litany of charges, including fraud and treason. Oppenheimer has figured in a number of literary and dramatic treatments over the centuries, most notoriously in a Nazi propaganda film in 1940, directed by Veit Harlan.

Born in Heidelberg in 1698, Oppenheimer showed an early aptitude for business. He was introduced to Prince Karl Alexander in 1732, when the latter was governor of Serbia, and became his banker and adviser. He continued as close confidant when the prince became Duke of Wuerttemberg in December 1733. Oppenheimer helped the duke regulate his finances, find new sources of income (taxes, stamps, even the establishment of several monopolies under the duke's ownership), and was given responsibility for running the mint.

Oppenheimer's extensive power and influence, and the fact that he contracted out many valuable financial opportunities to fellow Jews, led to deep resentment among the duke's enemies and later among the wider public. Accusations were leveled at Oppenheimer that he minted substandard coins and profited in other illicit ways. He invited an investigation and offered to step down as mint director, but Karl Alexander, keen to show his confidence in his aide, promoted Oppenheimer to be his privy councilor of finance.

In 1736, Oppenheimer was also given responsibility for managing court officials and making appointments, a position he used to accept bribes, which he then split with the duke, causing additional resentment. When Karl Alexander died suddenly, on March 11, 1737, all the Jews of Stuttgart were placed under arrest. Oppenheimer attempted to flee, but was also arrested and tried on grounds of fraud, embezzlement, treason and even illicit relations with women of the court. He was convicted and sentenced to death.

Oppenheimer was offered several opportunities to convert to Christianity, an act that might have saved his life, but he refused, even at the last minute as he was led to the gallows. He responded by reciting the *Shema* prayer. Engravings of the execution on February 4, 1738, show a crowd of many thousands in attendance. After his death, his body was left hanging on public display in a cage for six years.

Oppenheimer's story was revived in 1925 by the Jewish German writer Lion Feuchtwanger, whose novel "Jew Süss" was a popular success. Ironically, it was this sympathetic portrait of the financier that was adopted and twisted by director Veit Harlan in his iconic 1940 Nazi propaganda film version of "Jew Süss." The making of that film was itself the subject of a 2010 German feature, "Jew Süss: Rise and Fall," which was nominated for the top prize at the Berlin Film Festival that year, though it was poorly received by critics.

February 5 / World Jewry responds to French-instigated blood libel in Damascus

A delegation of Jews got the pasha to release Jews who were arrested and tortured for allegedly murdering a Franciscan Capuchin monk under orders of the French consul, but the charges were never dropped.



A fresco in a Polish church. Jews were usually accused of killing Christian children, not monks. Photo by Wikipedia

On February 5, 1840, Father Tommaso, the Franciscan Capuchin monk who headed a monastery in Damascus, Syria, disappeared, along with his servant. This event led to what became known as the Damascus Affair, in which a group of Jews in the city found themselves falsely accused of murdering the priest. The affair aroused great public passions within the Muslim world, and became one of the first cases in which Jewish collective activity on an international level worked to end an injustice – in this case, a blood libel - against a Jewish community.

Syria at the time was under the rule of Egypt, led by Pasha Muhammad Ali, who had broken away from Ottoman control. Because Catholic citizens were protected by France, investigation of the case fell to the French consul in Damascus, Ulysse de Ratti-Menton, who was known for his anti-Semitic sympathies.

Acting on claims from the Capuchins that the priest had been killed by Jews who intended to use his blood for the upcoming Passover holiday, Ratti-Menton began rounding up residents of the Jewish Quarter. One of those arrested implicated eight other Jews under torture; they were arrested and also subjected to terrible physical abuse. Two died and a third converted to Islam, in order to have his life spared.

The Egyptian governor of Syria, Sherif Pasha, accepted the French findings and approved of the sentence issued to the Jewish defendants. A local crowd attacked and ravaged a Damascus synagogue. In the meantime, local authorities arrested 63 Jewish children, in an effort to force their parents to reveal where the blood of Tommaso was being stored.

A sympathetic Austrian consul in Damascus passed information about the tortures being imposed on the Jews to James de Rothschild, the honorary Austrian consul in Paris. This led to a series of intercessions by various European diplomats, and also aroused the sympathies of a wide variety of Jews both in Europe and the United States, some of them otherwise quite assimilated.

A delegation that included Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Cremieux traveled to Egypt to meet with Muhammad Ali. They asked the ruler to order the re-investigation of the affair by more objective authorities, and the release of the prisoners. Muhammad Ali refused to have the case reopened, but did act to have the Jews under arrest freed, on August 28, 1840.

The same delegation then traveled to Constantinople, where they prevailed upon the sultan, Abdul Mejid I, to issue a firman (edict), declaring blood libels untrue and prohibiting trials on the basis of such accusations.

Although the success of the Jewish delegation in effecting the release of the prisoners was celebrated in the Jewish world, the charges were never officially repudiated. Consequently, they continued to be circulated and widely accepted, not only in the Middle East but also in Europe, particularly France. In 1846, a two-volume set of the complete records of the French consul's investigation was published in France, and subsequently in Arabic, German, Russian and Italian. To this day, the Damascus blood libel is repeated in the Arab world, most notably in a 1983 book by the then-Syrian defense minister, Mustafa Tlass.

At the same time, the affair is remembered for the impact it had on Jewish communities, not only in Europe, but also in the United States, where Jews began to organize politically in order to lobby the government to intercede on behalf of their brethren in Damascus. And indeed the American consul in Alexandria expressed a protest to that effect to the Egyptian ruler.

February 6 / The false messiah who founded Frankism is arrested in Warsaw

Jacob Frank proclaimed himself successor to Shabbetai Zvi, converted to Catholicism and spent 13 years in prison for heresy.



Jacob Frank on his deathbed. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 6, 1760, Jacob Frank, a mystic, messianic Polish Jew who created a new, transgressive religion that attracted tens of thousands of followers, was arrested in Warsaw and turned over to the Catholic Church, beginning an imprisonment that lasted 13 years.

Jacob Leibowitz (as he was called at birth) was born circa 1726 in Korolivka, a town in Podolia, eastern Poland (today in Ukraine). Although it was around 60 years since the false messiah Shabbetai Zvi converted to Islam and about 50 years after his death – and despite the fact that in 1722 Poland’s rabbis had placed a ban on the so-called “Sabbatean heresy” – there was still a large movement of Jews in Europe who regarded themselves as his disciples. One of them was the father of Jacob Leibowitz, who, when he was expelled by the Jewish community of Korolivka, in 1730, moved with his family to Czernowitz, where there was a large group of Jews who shared his beliefs.

Jacob himself had a minimal education. He became a gem and textile trader, traveling frequently to the Ottoman Empire for business. In cities such as Smyrna and Salonika he came into regular contact with various Sabbatean sects including Doenmeh, crypto-Jews who maintained an outwardly Muslim lifestyle. It was during these travels that he was given the nickname “Frank,” a general term for Europeans in the East.

In about 1751, Jacob Frank decided that he was the Messiah. When he brought that news back to Podolia, he also brought with him some of the Sabbatean teachings he had picked up. Not a modest man, Frank announced that he had superseded Shabbetai Zvi, and like Zvi, he adopted an antinomian ideology that declared that “all laws and teachings will fall.” Transgression was the key: turning Jewish fast days into feasts, eating foods prohibited by the laws of kashrut and participating in orgies.

What certainly got Frank into trouble was a ritual in which a young woman, representing the Shechinah – the feminine aspect of God – would stand topless in a circle and the men of the community would kiss her breasts, similar to how worshipers in synagogue kiss the Torah scrolls.

Frank was driven out of town, and some of his followers were tried by a rabbinical court for immodest behavior. When a rabbinical assembly in Brody banned Jews from any contact with Frank or his followers, Frank went to the bishop of Kamenetz-Podolsk and declared that he and his group did not recognize the sanctity of the Talmud. The only Hebrew book they found holy, they said, was the Zohar, the principal text of kabbalist mysticism.

Frank was taken under the protection of Bishop Dembowski, who pitted some of Frank’s followers against traditional rabbis in a “disputation.” As judge of the debate, Dembowski declared the Frankists victors, and ordered the burning of all copies of the Talmud in Poland.

The next step for the Frankists was conversion to Catholicism, apparently an intermediary step on the way to a new religion. In 1759, Frank was baptized (with King Augustus III of Poland as his godfather). In the coming decades an estimated 26,000 Frankists followed suit.

But Frank also aroused the suspicion of the Church, whose protection he lost after the death of Dembowski, his patron. On February 6, 1760, he was arrested. He was tried and convicted of heresy in a Catholic court, and imprisoned in the Czestochowa monastery. It was only after the first partition of Poland, in 1772, and the arrival of Russian troops in Czestochowa that he was freed.

Frank lived out the remainder of his life first in Brno, and then in Offenbach, Germany. There, calling himself “Baron Frank,” he continued instructing his followers, and there he died, on December 10, 1791.

February 7 / Hungarian Jews receive protection

A commission to study the situation of Hungarian Jews convened on this day in 1791 following a decree by the king that their situation should not worsen.



King Joseph II of Hungary, early in his reign, expressed his intention to cancel the longstanding decrees that restricted and oppressed the Jews. When he died, the Jews petitioned to honor this. Photo by Wikimedia

On February 7, 1791, the Hungarian Diet, the legislative institution established in the Middle Ages, appointed a commission to study the situation of the Jews of Hungary. This followed the approval by King Leopold II on January 10 of the De Judaeis bill, which effectively offered the Jews protection against any worsening of their situation.

The background to the bill was the death of King Joseph II a year earlier. Joseph, early in his reign, had expressed his intention to cancel the longstanding decrees that restricted and oppressed the Jews. Thereupon followed a period of emancipation that gave the Jews the right, for example, to settle where they wanted, but also required them to assume the obligations of other citizens and conduct their lives in the official language of the empire, rather than Hebrew or Yiddish.

When Joseph died, several cities, including Pest, saw an opportunity to expel their Jews. On November 29, 1790, the country's Jews handed a petition to Joseph's successor, Leopold II, asking to have their equality with other Hungarian citizens confirmed. After various consultations, the Diet drafted the De Judaeis bill, which confirmed the continuation of the status quo.

The bill stipulated that a commission would be appointed to regulate "the condition of the Jews," and until that time, "the Jews within the boundaries of Hungary and the countries belonging to it shall, in all the royal free cities and in other localities (except

the royal mining-towns), remain under the same conditions in which they were on Jan. 1, 1790; and in case they have been expelled anywhere, they shall be recalled."

In fact, although a commission was appointed, no further action regarding the Jews was taken up by the Diet until 1839-1840. In the meantime, maintenance of the status quo meant Jews were prohibited from residing in all the principal towns – the so-called royal free cities -- except Pest, where Jews could settle, upon payment of a "toleration tax".

February 8 / Philosopher Martin Buber is born

Buber was shunned by some Orthodox for his lax approach to Jewish law, by some Reform Jews for his promotion of Hasidism, and by many Jews for his reconciliatory attitude to the Arabs.



Buber's most well-known philosophical work described a relationship between man and God that was meant to lead to more meaningful relationships between people. Photo by Wikimedia

February 8, 1878, is the birth date of Martin Buber, the philosopher and educator who did much to popularize Hasidic teachings and who served as a bridge between Judaism and Christianity.

Martin Buber was born in Vienna. His parents divorced when he was three and he spent much of his youth living with his grandparents in Lemberg (today Lwów, Ukraine). Salomon Buber, his grandfather, was both a Hebrew scholar and student of Greek linguistics. Although raised in an Orthodox family, Buber began to grow distant from ritual observance as a teenager and found himself drawn to secular philosophy. He studied that subject and art history at the Universities of Vienna, Leipzig and Berlin, and received a doctorate from Vienna in 1904.

Buber became involved in the Zionist movement while in Leipzig and in 1901, at the request of Theodor Herzl, became editor of the movement's journal *Die Welt*. He and Herzl soon parted ways on the question of the movement's goals: Herzl emphasized the need to advance a political solution to the Jewish problem, whereas Buber was more concerned with a spiritual renewal of the Jewish people and the establishment of agricultural settlements in the Land of Israel. Hence, Buber gave up his position at the journal the same year he assumed it. It was also in 1901 that he married Paula Winckler, a Roman Catholic writer for *Die Welt*, who converted to Judaism. She wrote novels under the pseudonym Georg Munk.

During the five years that followed Buber's withdrawal from active involvement in the Zionist movement, he spent time living among Hasidic Jews in remote Galician villages and studying their literature and ways. The simplicity and directness of the spirituality of the Hasidim appealed to him and he went on to publish several collections of Hasidic tales.

In 1916, Buber founded and became editor of the Jewish monthly *Der Jude* and in 1922, he and his friend Franz Rosenzweig established the *Lehrhaus* center for adult Jewish education in Frankfurt. Although it closed in 1930 after Rosenzweig's death, Buber reopened it three years later after Jews were expelled from German universities. That same year, he was dismissed from his professorship at the University of Frankfurt and in 1938, after being forbidden from speaking publicly at all, immigrated to Palestine.

Buber was appointed a professor of social philosophy at the Hebrew University, a position he held until his retirement in 1951. He also helped establish a college for training teachers in adult education in Jerusalem and was a founder of *Brit Shalom*, an organization that advocated a binational state in Palestine. Even after statehood, he continued to call for the creation of a federation of states in the region.

Probably Buber's most well-known philosophical work was "I and Thou," in which he described a relationship between man and God that was also meant to lead to more equal and meaningful relationships between people. The "I-Thou" relationship is characterized by mutuality and duality, rather than by a unilateral nature. Direct spirituality was also something that Buber perceived among the Hasidim, although critics have charged him with romanticizing them. He saw the essence of religious life in its experience, rather than in dogma, and had a less-than-Orthodox approach to Jewish law. His disdain for dogma also explained his rejection of the idea of absolute truths, though he acknowledged the temptation to search for answers in black or white.

"I have occasionally described my standpoint to my friends as the 'narrow ridge,'" said Buber at one point. "I wanted by this to express that I did not rest on the broad upland of a system that includes a series of sure statements about the absolute, but on a narrow, rocky ridge between the gulfs, where there is only the certainty of meeting what remains undisclosed."

Buber was shunned by some Orthodox for his lax approach to halakhah, or Jewish law, by some Reform Jews for his promotion of Hasidism, and by many Jews for his reconciliatory attitude to the Arabs. He also opposed the execution of Adolf Eichmann, whom Israel tried and convicted for crimes against humanity in 1961, saying that, "for such crimes there is no penalty."

Buber died in Jerusalem on June 13, 1965.

February 9 / The Sanhedrin of Paris convenes at the behest of Napoleon

The body representing Jews from around the empire met to draft answers to Napoleon's questions about Jewish practice.



A painting depicting Napoleon granting freedom to the Jews. Photo by Wikimedia

On February 9, 1807, the newly constituted Sanhedrin of Paris convened, under the authority vested in it by the Emperor Napoleon. The establishment of this body, intended to be an heir to the court and governing body of the same name that existed briefly in ancient Israel in the years before and after the destruction of the Second Temple, came in the wake of Napoleon's emancipation of the Jews.

The year before the Sanhedrin met, an Assembly of Jewish Notables had gathered in Paris to consider a list of 12 questions from the emperor on Jewish practice and belief. The assembly was comprised of 112 distinguished Jews, both rabbis and laymen, led by Rabbi David Sinzheim of Strasbourg. Napoleon's questions had to do with Jews' relations with non-Jews and with the French state and its laws, and with Jewish laws of marriage and divorce -- including the possibility of intermarriage. The assembly was also asked about Jewish law's position on usury.

Napoleon (who reigned from 1804 to 1815) was pleased with the responses he received from the Assembly, but had some questions about their specific content. Hence, he conveyed to its members his desire to convene a second body, a Sanhedrin, representing Jews from around the empire, which was to consider his questions and reservations, and to formally ratify its decisions.

The 71 members of the Sanhedrin opened their meetings on February 9, 1807, at the Hotel de Ville of Paris. Their three leaders were Sinzheim of Strasbourg, joined by

Joshua Benzion Segre, from Vercelli, Italy, and Abraham de Cologna, rabbi of Mantua.

Just to be clear, he told the Sanhedrin the answers he hoped to receive. In particular, he requested of its members to reconsider the question of intermarriage, which he thought would be beneficial to the Jews. He also suggested they consider other “methods that might end or contain the Jews’ evil ways.”

The body’s members held their ground on issues of principle. They were not, they said, able to give their imprimatur to the idea of intermarriage, but made it clear that they accepted that a civil marriage between a Jew and a Christian was legal. They also declared the need for Jews to adhere to French civil law -- except in cases where its laws conflicted with halakha (Jewish law). They also stated that Israelites were forbidden from lending money for interest, both from other Jews or from Christians.

The Sanhedrin’s final session took place on March 9, and on April 6, the body conveyed its responses, in French and Hebrew, to Napoleon. A year later, on March 17, 1808, the emperor effectively placed the Jews on probation, issuing a number of new restrictions on the citizenship they had been offered 17 years earlier.

Apparently, Napoleon was under pressure from a number of different Christian communities, whose leaders were unhappy with the equality he had offered the Jews. These included his own uncle, Cardinal Joseph Fesch, who had warned the emperor that equality for the Jews would have catastrophic consequences: “Do you not know that the Holy Scriptures predict that the end of the world will happen when the Jews will be recognized as a corporate nation?”

Within a year, however, Napoleon, who received the appeals of Jews from around France, revoked the restrictions he imposed following the meeting of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, never convened again.

February 10 / A teacher and renouncer of Spinoza dies

Rabbi Shaul Levi Morteira of Amsterdam taught the renegade Jew in his yeshiva and joined in his excommunication.



Rabbi Shaul Levi Morteira of Amsterdam. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 10, 1660, Rabbi Shaul Levi Morteira of Amsterdam died. Morteira, the head of the combined synagogues of the city and one of the principal teachers of Baruch Spinoza, was a dominant figure in this central Jewish community. He did not shy away from theological controversy, and he has been presented by historians in terms that range from flattering to extremely negative.

Sources generally say that Shaul Levi Morteira was born in Venice in 1596, although historian Marc Saperstein, editor of a volume of Morteira's collected sermons, figures it had to be a few years before that, perhaps 1594. He was a descendant of the distinguished Ashkenazi Katzenellenbogen family.

In approximately 1612, Morteira accompanied the physician Elijah Montalto, a converso who had returned to Judaism, to Paris, where Montalto was to serve as personal doctor to the queen, Marie de Medicis. Morteira, in turn, was personal rabbi to Montalto. When Montalto died suddenly, in 1616, it was Morteira who escorted his body to the closest Jewish cemetery, Amsterdam's Oudekerk burial ground.

In Amsterdam, Morteira accepted an invitation from the Sephardi synagogue Beth Jacob to stay on as its spiritual leader. He also founded and taught at a Jewish school, Keter Torah, where his students included Spinoza.

Amsterdam, which only in 1603 permitted Jews to practice their religion openly, was a place of intellectual ferment and insecure identity. Many of the Jews who settled

there were exiles from Spain and Portugal, some of them second-generation conversos who now wanted to return to their ancestral religion. Some still had relatives living in Iberia as Christians.

Morteira came into this atmosphere as an outsider and a rationalist, a follower of Maimonides. In the 1630s, he became involved in a messy and public dispute with Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, a Portuguese-born son of conversos. Ostensibly, the argument was over the two rabbis' respective interpretations of a phrase in the Mishna (Sanhedrin 2:1), according to which "All Israelites have a share in the world to come." Morteira argued that this applied only to religiously observant "Israelites," whereas Aboab believed that it applied to all Jews. Morteira insisted that transgressors would face eternal damnation, whereas for a first-generation returnee to Judaism like Aboab, those who converted under pressure deserved greater understanding and compassion.

So vexed was Morteira by the disagreement that he wrote to the *beit din* (religious court) of Venice, a far more senior Jewish community, for a ruling. The sages of Venice did not want to get directly involved, but sent a letter to Aboab urging him to soft-pedal his controversial stand, which he based on his study of Lurianic kabbala.

Aboab did not back down. Instead he claimed that kabbala, far from contradicting the Torah, actually revealed its hidden meaning, explaining that the souls of sinners would have a chance to repent by way of reincarnation in another body.

When, in 1639, the three synagogues of Amsterdam merged into one body, Aboab was rewarded for his impertinence by being given a junior position, while Morteira became the senior rabbi. (Aboab soon sailed off to Brazil, after Recife came under Dutch control.)

In 1656, when the rabbis of Amsterdam banned Spinoza for his heretical views on God, they were led by Morteira. Although Spinoza had been one of his prized students at Keter Torah, Morteira condemned him. And in this was he was joined by Aboab, who had in the interim returned to Holland, and by another colleague with whom Morteira had testy relations, Menasseh ben Israel (Manoel Dias Soeiro). All united to cut off Spinoza from their community.

Morteira continued to engage in polemics until his death, on February 10, 1660. In 1659 he issued an argument against the Christian reformer John Calvin.

February 11 / A heavyweight boxing champ is born

With his devastating punch, Max Baer could have been one of the greatest fighters of all time, but for Baer, boxing was just a way to make a living. After he retired, he tried his luck as a movie star.



Max Baer, a Jewish heavyweight boxing champion who took to wearing a Star of David on his shorts. Photo by Wikimedia

February 11, 1909, is the birth date of Max Baer, who held the title of world heavyweight boxing champion for 364 days in 1934-35. Baer is best remembered by Jews for his June 1933 victory over Germany's Max Schmeling at New York's Yankee Stadium. Schmeling was said to be a favorite of Germany's new chancellor, Adolf Hitler, so it was of special significance that Baer was of Jewish heritage, and brandished a Star of David on his boxing trunks to boot.

Maximilian Adelbert Baer was born in Omaha, Nebraska to a Jewish father, Jacob Baer (whose own father, Achille Baer, had emigrated from Alsace to the Wyoming territory in the 1860s), and his Scots-Irish Protestant wife, Dora, nee Bales. The couple did not raise their children in any particular faith, but Max always identified himself as a Jew.

In 1922, the family moved to California and over the next few years, lived in several towns in the San Francisco area before Jacob bought a pig and cattle ranch in Livermore, east of the city. Max worked there as a teenager and later said that it was from helping slaughter the animals and hauling their carcasses around that he developed his upper-body strength.

By 1929, Baer was boxing professionally around the West Coast, winning 23 of his first 26 fights before a pivotal bout on August 25, 1930 against Frankie Campbell. In the fifth round of that fight, Baer had his opponent against the ropes and pounded his head repeatedly without the referee interceding until Campbell collapsed. The next

day, the fighter died. Baer, who was charged with manslaughter in the case but eventually cleared, was nonetheless disconsolate at what he had done and went on to lose four of his next six bouts.

Soon after, Baer moved to the East Coast, and began training with former world heavyweight champ Jack Dempsey, who helped prepare him for the fight with Schmeling. Although that contest was depicted in the United States as a battle between Jew and Nazi – even between good and evil -- the truth is that this was the first time that Baer wore the Star of David on his uniform, and also that Schmeling was no Nazi. Sports journalist Jeremy Schaap, in a 2006 book, reported that it was Baer's manager, Ancil Hoffman, who encouraged the fighter to emphasize his Jewish identity. Baer's son, the actor Max Baer, Jr., confirmed this.

"My dad didn't know who Hitler was," he said. "He only read the sports pages, but Hoffman kept drilling it into his head, 'You're fighting for the Jews.'" Baer knocked Schmeling out in the 10th round and announced that he would continue wearing the Jewish star until the end of his career.

Although Schmeling was courted by Hitler, he never joined the Nazi party, and he had a Jewish manager. During Kristallnacht, in November 1938, he sheltered two teenage sons of a Jewish friend. The two boys later escaped to the United States, and credited Schmeling with saving their lives. Several months earlier, he had traveled to the United States for a second fight against the African-American boxer Joe Louis, another bout that the press depicted as a fight between good and evil. Louis beat Schmeling by a technical knockout in the first round.

Years later, Schmeling told an interviewer that he was "almost happy" to have lost the fight: "Just imagine if I would have come back to Germany with a victory. I had nothing to do with the Nazis, but they would have given me a medal. After the war I might have been considered a war criminal."

For Max Baer, his fight with Schmeling was probably the peak of his prizefighting career. Though it was only a year later that he won the title of world champion, it was in a fight in which he was mismatched with a far weaker opponent. A year later, cocky, inadequately prepared and acting like a clown, he lost the title in an upset to James Braddock. Baer continued fighting until 1941 and ended up with a lifetime record of 71-13-0. With his devastating punch, he could have been one of the greatest fighters of all time, but for Baer, boxing was just a way to make a living -- and to meet women.

What Max Baer really aspired to be was a movie star. And he indeed performed in 20 films, including, most notably, "The Prizefighter and the Lady" in 1933 with Myrna Loy. But he never attained the stardom of his son, Max Baer, Jr., who, over nine seasons, played the role of country bumpkin Jethro Bodine in "The Beverly Hillbillies."

Nor did he have the pleasure of witnessing that success: "The Beverly Hillbillies" first aired on CBS-TV in 1962. Max Baer, Sr., died on November 21, 1959, of a heart attack. In accordance with the wishes of his wife, he was buried in a Roman Catholic funeral, in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery, in Sacramento, CA.

February 12 / The premiere of 'Rhapsody in Blue'

A 25-year-old George Gershwin scrambled to write 'Rhapsody in Blue' in just a few weeks. It would go on to become one of the most popular and recognizable tunes of the 20th century.



During the premiere of 'Rhapsody in Blue,' composer George Gershwin improvised his piano solo. Photo by Wikicommons

On February 12, 1924, “Rhapsody in Blue” had its world premiere in New York. Performed by the Paul Whiteman orchestra with the 25-year-old composer, George Gershwin, playing solo piano, the composition proved pivotal in establishing Gershwin's reputation as a serious composer. It would go on to become one of the most popular orchestral pieces of the 20th century, featured in films, TV commercials and performed and recorded in numerous arrangements.

The origins of “Rhapsody in Blue” go back to the preceding November when Whiteman, the leader of a popular jazz band, asked Gershwin to compose a concerto-like piece for a concert scheduled for that coming February. Gershwin, concerned that three months was not sufficient time to write and revise a major composition, said no.

In early January, Gershwin’s brother and frequent collaborator Ira read an article in the New York Tribune about the upcoming Whiteman all-jazz concert in which he learned that “Irving Berlin is writing a syncopated tone poem, and Victor Herbert is working on an American suite” for the show and “George Gershwin is at work on a jazz concerto.” That was news to George, but during a conversation the next day with Whiteman, he was convinced to accept the commission.

Gershwin later told a biographer, Isaac Goldberg, that the musical themes in “Rhapsody” came to him during a train ride from New York to Boston.

"I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness," he said. "By the time I reached Boston I had a definite plot of the piece."

The actual writing of the concerto began on January 7 and went on for several weeks. Once Gershwin was finished composing, he passed the music on to arranger Ferde Grofe, who orchestrated the piece, completing it on February 4, eight days before the premiere.

The concert, which took place on the afternoon of February 12 at New York's Aeolian Hall, was titled "An Experiment in Modern Music," and included 26 different jazz compositions. The program, Whiteman told the audience beforehand, was intended to be "purely educational." Gershwin's composition, which was performed by Whiteman's band with an added string section, was the penultimate piece.

The piece famously begins with a long clarinet glissando, which Whiteman's clarinetist, Russ Gorman, had improvised during a rehearsal as a joke. Gershwin liked it and told Gorman not only to keep the glissando, but to put as much "wail" into it as he could. As for his own piano solo, Gershwin did not commit this to paper until after the concert, and much of what he played that day was improvised (and lost to history).

Critical responses to "Rhapsody in Blue" were mixed, but the public loved it. Whiteman and his band performed it 87 times by the end of 1927 and their recording of the composition sold one million copies.

Writing about it in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1955, Leonard Bernstein reflected some of the professionals' ambivalence about the piece. "Rhapsody in Blue," he wrote, "is not a real composition in the sense that whatever happens in it must seem inevitable." Rather, he declared, "it's a string of separate paragraphs stuck together." Yet the themes included in those paragraphs, wrote Bernstein, "are terrific – inspired, God-given," adding that "I don't think there has been such an inspired melodist on this earth since Tchaikovsky."

Grofe re-orchestrated the piece twice following the premiere, in 1926 and 1942, each time for a larger ensemble. The latter, and largest, arrangement is the one usually performed over the following decades. Gershwin apparently intended to do his own orchestration later in his career but did not live to do so.

The Brooklyn-born son of Jewish immigrants from Odessa died of a brain tumor on July 11, 1937, at the age of 38.

February 13 / A profound Zionist and Hadassah founder dies

A lifelong teacher ahead of her time in ignoring orthodoxy, Henrietta Szold was buried in the land she had devoted her life to improving.



An Israeli postage stamp (1960) honoring Henrietta Szold. Photo by Israel Postage Authority

On February 13, 1945, Henrietta Szold, American Zionist leader, and founder of some of Israel's most important social and educational institutions, died in Jerusalem at age 84.

Henrietta Szold was born December 21, 1860, in Baltimore, Maryland, the daughter of Rabbi Benjamin and Sophie Szold. Her intellectual skills became evident at a young age. After graduating high school, she taught both at the religious school of her father's synagogue and at a girls' private school in Baltimore.

One of her early projects, in the 1880s, was the establishment of a night school for Russian Jewish immigrants to help them learn English and practical skills for life in the United States. Later, when she studied at the Conservative Movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, she taught English to some of her European-born teachers.

In 1902 Solomon Schechter, the president of JTS, agreed to let Szold study at the all-male rabbinical school on the condition that she not seek ordination, something she most likely would have aspired to, had it been possible. (After her mother's death, in 1916, Szold insisted on saying the Kaddish memorial prayer for her, a practice both unorthodox and un-Orthodox.) In the meantime, she had also become an editor at the Jewish Publication Society, where she played an important role for some two decades, taking key roles in the creation of such works as Louis Ginzberg's "Legends of the

Jews,” and the undertaking of the Society’s ground-breaking 1917 translation of the Hebrew Bible into English.

Szold was involved in Zionist affairs from early on, and paid her first visit to Palestine in 1909. Three years later she and a group of other American women established Daughters of Zion-Hadassah Chapter. This became Hadassah, today an international organization with more than 300,000 members.

Their first project was to set up a visiting nursing service in Jerusalem, in 1913. This was followed five years later with the organization of the American Zionist Medical Unit, which brought American doctors to Palestine and established a field hospital here. This in turn was followed by the creation of medical, nursing and dental schools and Hadassah Hospital, which is supported by the Hadassah Women’s Organization to this day.

Szold was always insistent that the services established by the organization be available to all residents of Eretz Israel; she also was active in the Brit Shalom organization, which advocated establishment of a Jewish-Arab state.

She herself only settled in Palestine in 1920, when she was 60, and then stayed for only three years before returning to the United States for two years. Upon her return to Jerusalem, with her appointment to the three-member Palestine Executive of the World Zionist Organization, she assumed responsibility for education and social affairs in the emerging state.

She helped establish social-service departments in the country’s large cities and, in 1935, set up the school of social work at the Hebrew University. In 1933, she had the WZO take on responsibility for the Youth Aliyah program established by Recha Freier to bring German Jewish children to Palestine, saving them from the gathering storm in Europe.

Possibly the great tragedy of Henrietta Szold’s life was that she never married and never had children. “I would exchange everything for one child of my own,” she said at one point.

February 14 / A Valentine's Day massacre in Alsace

The Black Death, sweeping Europe in the 14th century, provided an excuse for the citizens of Strasbourg to unleash their anti-Semitism.



A 15th century depiction of the Black Death, the pandemic that swept Europe in the 14th century. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 14, 1349 – St. Valentine’s Day – the Jewish residents of Strasbourg, in Alsace, were burned to death by their Christian neighbors. Estimates of the number murdered range from several hundred to more than 2,000.

The Strasbourg massacre was one of a string of pogroms that took place during this period in a number of towns in Western Europe – 30 alone in the Alsace region, bordering the Rhine River, in what is today France.

Ostensibly, the reason for the pogroms was the widespread belief that Jews were responsible for the Black Death pandemic that swept across Europe in 1348-1350, killing between one-third and two-thirds of the continent’s population. (Black Death has been identified as *Yersenia pestis*, one of whose forms is bubonic plague.) They were accused of contaminating the wells from which their non-Jewish neighbors drew their drinking water. In the case of Strasbourg, however, even as reports were received from the Swiss cities of Bern and Zofingen of Jews having confessed – under torture – to such crimes, the city elders and master tradesmen came to the defense of the Jewish population, who were under the protection of the Church.

Strasbourg’s patrician class understood that Jews were important to their town’s economy, both in their role as money-lenders and in the high taxes they paid for the protection they received. Being creditors, however, had its down side, as it contributed to anti-Jewish sentiment among the less privileged and, in extreme cases, to the desire to kill the Jews and see the debt cancelled, or even to expropriate their property.

The city's nobles offered a show trial of Jews to appease the bloodlust of the masses, but the members of the city's butchers and tanners guilds wanted to rid Strasbourg of them altogether. They accused three patrician leaders of having been bribed by the Jews in return for protecting them and subsequently drove them from office.

The city's 2,000 Jews were given a choice of undergoing baptism or being killed. About half of them accepted conversion or left the city; the remainder were barricaded in the Jewish cemetery and burned alive. Following this, the new town council passed an ordinance forbidding Jews from even entering Strasbourg for 200 years. Less than two decades later, however, the first Jews were allowed to return. By 1388, another order of banishment was imposed, and there is no evidence of Jews being present in the city, even as visitors, until 1520.

It was only after the St. Valentine's Day massacre, with the Jews gone, that the plague arrived in Strasbourg. It killed an estimated 16,000 residents.

February 15 / Birthday of graphic artist Art Spiegelman

The Pulitzer Prize-winning artist is best known for his masterpiece 'Maus,' the graphic novel that depicts the Holocaust and its effect on survivors.



Art Spiegelman, the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novelist. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

February 15, 1948, is the birth date of Avraham Yitzhak ben Zev Spiegelman – better known to the world as Art Spiegelman, comics artist and graphic designer.

Spiegelman was born in Stockholm, Sweden, where his Polish-born parents, Wladyslaw and Andzia, settled after surviving Auschwitz. The couple's first child, Richieu, born in 1937, died in 1943 during the Holocaust. In 1951, the family emigrated from Sweden to the United States, where they ended up settling in Rego Park, Queens.

Spiegelman was fascinated by Mad magazine, comic books and trading cards while growing up. He attended New York's High School of Art and Design, with the intention of becoming a cartoonist himself. (His parents encouraged him to become a dentist.) He studied at, but did not graduate from, Harpur College (later State University of New York at Binghamton), and followed that with work at Topps, which produced the trading cards he so enjoyed. At the same time, he also began working on underground comics.

He served as a consultant with Topps for more than two decades; his creations there included a line of cards called "Garbage Pail Kids," a response to the Cabbage Patch Kids doll craze of the mid-1980s.

In March 1968, Spiegelman had himself admitted to a mental hospital following a breakdown that he later attributed to “survivor’s guilt” and to heavy use of LSD. After a brief hospitalization, he then suffered the loss of his mother, who killed herself after the death of her brother, the only other remaining survivor of her family.

In the 1970s, he moved to San Francisco and then later back to New York, working extensively during this period on a wide variety of comics projects. In 1972, a friend asked if he had any unpublished work about animals. The resulting three-page comic strip served as the basis, a decade later, for his groundbreaking book “Maus.” In it, he told the story of his parents’ experience in the war, depicting them and the other Jews as mice, and the German Nazis who persecuted them as cats or, *die Katzen*.

In 1975 and 1976, Spiegelman co-edited a serial comics anthology, *Arcade*; in 1977, he published a collection of his own work, “Breakdowns,” and in 1980 began publishing a new magazine called *Raw*, which was devoted to original work by unknown cartoonists.

His partner on *Raw* was Francoise Mouly, a French architectural student he had met and married several years earlier when she was on a break from her studies in New York. It was in *Raw* that Spiegelman began to serialize “Maus,” the story of his father in the Holocaust.

Spiegelman, in collaboration with Mouly, worked on “Maus” over the course of eight years, starting in 1978, when he began to interview his father about his Holocaust experiences. In 1986, the publisher Pantheon brought out the first six chapters as a graphic novel, with the title “Maus: My Father Bleeds History,” which sold over 150,000 copies. That was followed in 1991 by “Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began.” In 1992, he received a special Pulitzer Prize, the first time that a graphic novel was so honored, recognizing, despite its unorthodox form, that it was in effect a biography. In the book, the author’s character, called “Art Spiegelman,” who has been estranged from his father, Vladek, reconnects with him after he begins to interview him about the war years.

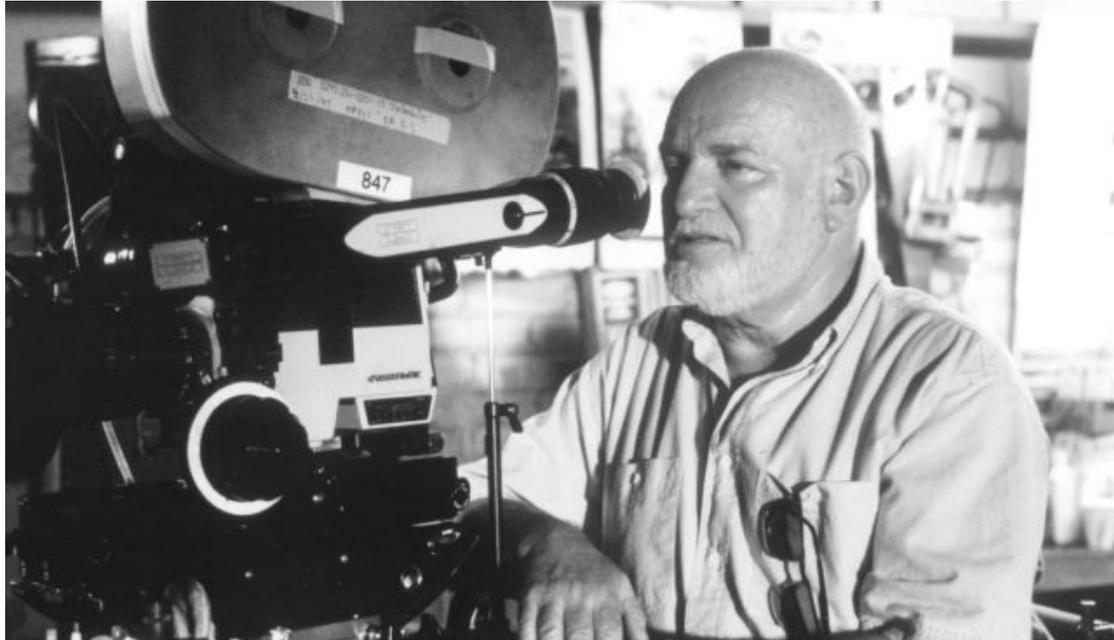
“Maus” helped bring graphic novels into the mainstream and also served as a very accessible tool for describing both the Holocaust and its effects on the families of survivors. It has been translated into 30 languages.

Between 1992 and 2002, Spiegelman was a contributing artist at *The New Yorker*, leaving after September 11, 2001, partially in response to what he described as “the widespread conformism of the mass media in the Bush era.” He was also traumatized by the World Trade Center attacks, something that found expression in his 2004 book “In the Shadow of No Towers.”

Spiegelman, a secular Jew, calls himself an “a-Zionist,” meaning neither Zionist nor anti-Zionist, and has described Israel as a “sad, failed idea.” He continues to speak out on political issues, to work as a teacher, and to create cartoon art.

February 16 / 'Midnight Cowboy' director John Schlesinger is born

British filmmaker, born in 1926, won a Best Director Oscar for his 1969 classic and was also nominated for 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' and 'Darling.'



John Schlesinger

February 16, 1926, is the birthdate of the British filmmaker John Schlesinger, whose best movies – which included “Billy Liar,” “Midnight Cowboy” and “Sunday Bloody Sunday” – raised critical expectations from him to such a high level that many evaluations of his career seem to focus less on his triumphs than on the disappointment caused by his artistic failures.

John Richard Schlesinger was born in London to two parents of German-Jewish descent, Bernard Edward Schlesinger, a pediatrician, and the former Winifred Henrietta Regensburg. He grew up in a middle-class Hampstead home, receiving his first movie camera at age 11, and was educated at private boarding schools.

In 1946, he was drafted into the Royal Engineers, before being transferred, after an injury, to an entertainment unit, where he performed for troops as a magician. That was followed by matriculation at Balliol College, Oxford (1947-50), where Schlesinger studied English, and spent much of his time acting in student productions. He also made two amateur films, with financing from his grandparents.

In the following years, Schlesinger continued acting, on stage, film and TV, but in the mid-1950s, he began directing short documentary films for the BBC programs “Tonight” and “Monitor.” After seeing his half-hour short “Terminus” (made for British Transport Films in 1960), the producer Joseph Janni told Schlesinger, “I’d like to discover you.”

Janni went on to produce six of Schlesinger's features, including his first four: "A Kind of Loving" (1962), "Billy Liar" (1963), "Darling" (1965) and "Far from the Madding Crowd" (1967). It was in these pictures that Schlesinger also began long-lasting professional collaborations with actors Alan Bates, Julie Christie and Peter Finch (all three appeared in the fourth of them).

"Midnight Cowboy," from 1969, was Schlesinger's first Hollywood production, and it won Academy Awards for both Best Picture and Best Direction. It also received an X rating (later reduced to R) for its (nongraphic) depiction of a naïve Texas boy (John Voight) arrived in New York to work as a "stud." Playing opposite Voight was Dustin Hoffman as Ratso Rizzo, a down-on-his-luck grifter.

Although bold at the time for its homosexual theme, "Midnight Cowboy" was less sexually direct than the heartbreaking "Sunday Bloody Sunday" (1971), in which Finch played a Jewish doctor in London who becomes hopelessly fixated on a much younger man (Murray Head). Schlesinger, who was openly gay long before it was common to be so, described it as the "most personal of my films."

One Schlesinger film project that never was distributed, for unclear reasons, is a 1967 documentary called "Israel: A Right to Exist." Produced by James Bond coproducer Harry Saltzman and written by Wolf Mankowitz, the film brought Schlesinger to Israel for the first time, shortly after the Six-Day War. It disappeared from screens after a few showings.

Schlesinger kept busy directing throughout his career, and was sometimes criticized for being indiscriminating in the work he accepted after he moved to Hollywood. Although his 1976 thriller "Marathon Man" with Hoffman and Laurence Olivier was a box-office success, and praised by some critics, he made a number of bombs, most notably the \$24-million "Honky Tonk Freeway," which was withdrawn from theaters a week after its release, in 1981.

Toward the end of his life, however, Schlesinger returned to British television, for which he made such highly regarded films as "An Question of Attribution" (about British art historian-traitor Anthony Blunt; 1992) and "Cold Comfort Farm," a quirky comedy from 1995.

Schlesinger never recovered from a stroke he suffered in 2001, and died on July 23, 2003, in Palm Springs, California, aged 77. After cremation, his ashes were interred at London's Liberal Jewish Cemetery.

February 17 / Congress gets its first Jewish lady

Florence Prag Kahn replaced her deceased husband and went on to make a mark of her own over the next decade.



Florence Prag Kahn, the first Jewish woman in the U.S. House of Representatives. Photo by Wikipedia

February 17, 1925, is the day that Florence Prag Kahn, the first Jewish woman in the U.S. House of Representatives, was elected. The widow of 11-term congressman Julius Kahn, she was chosen in a special election to serve out her husband's term after he died, in December 1924.

Florence Prag Kahn was only the fifth woman to serve in the House (the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed American women the right to vote, had been passed only in 1920). Most of them, like her, were elected to serve out the terms cut short by their husbands' deaths, but Florence Kahn ran successfully for reelection the following year, and ended up serving in Congress until 1937.

Florence Prag was born on November 9, 1866, in Salt Lake City, Utah, where her father, the Polish-born Conrad Prag, a merchant and friend of Brigham Young, had come from San Francisco to open a business. Her mother, Mary Goldsmith Prag, also Polish-born, had arrived in California in 1852, having crossed the Central American isthmus by mule and canoe before sailing by steamer to San Francisco. After Conrad's Salt Lake City business failed, the family returned to San Francisco in 1859, where they were prominent in the city's Jewish community. Mary Prag would later serve for many years on San Francisco's board of education.

Florence graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1887, one of only seven women in her class, and for the next decade taught in a high school. In 1899, she married Julius Kahn – a former actor who had previously served in the California state assembly – just days before he entered the U.S. Congress. A conservative

Republican, known for his strong belief in military preparedness, Julius eventually became chairman of the House Military Affairs Committee, and was a key sponsor of the bills that established the draft after the U.S. entered World War I, in 1917.

Serving as her husband's secretary during his 25 years in Congress, during part of which she was also a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, Florence became very knowledgeable about both policy and politics. When Julius died, on December 18, 1924, shortly after being re-elected for the 10th time, it was almost natural for Florence to decide to take his place, and in the special election, she defeated three other contenders for the seat.

Florence Prag Kahn's tenure in the House coincided with major economic development in the San Francisco Bay area, and her political savvy – she served on both the Military Affairs and Appropriations committees of the House – helped her secure federal funding for a number of major projects, including the construction of the Bay Bridge linking San Francisco and Oakland, and several military bases, including the Alameda Naval Air station.

She was no less conservative on security issues than her husband, and like him, a great believer in military preparedness. She once noted, "Preparedness has never caused a war, nor has unpreparedness ever prevented one." Her support of the Federal Bureau of Investigation led the bureau's director J. Edgar Hoover to call her the "Mother of the FBI."

More liberal on social issues, however, she helped bring about the repeal of Prohibition and opposed movie censorship. And though she always voted along strict Republican lines, she was known for her independent mind and her substantial wit, leading the American Mercury magazine to comment at one point that, "You always know how Florence Kahn is going to vote, but only God has the slightest inkling of what she's going to say."

In 1934, Theodore Roosevelt's daughter Alice Roosevelt Longworth said of her: "Mrs. Kahn, shrewd, resourceful, and witty, is an all-around first-rate legislator, the equal of any man in Congress and the superior of most."

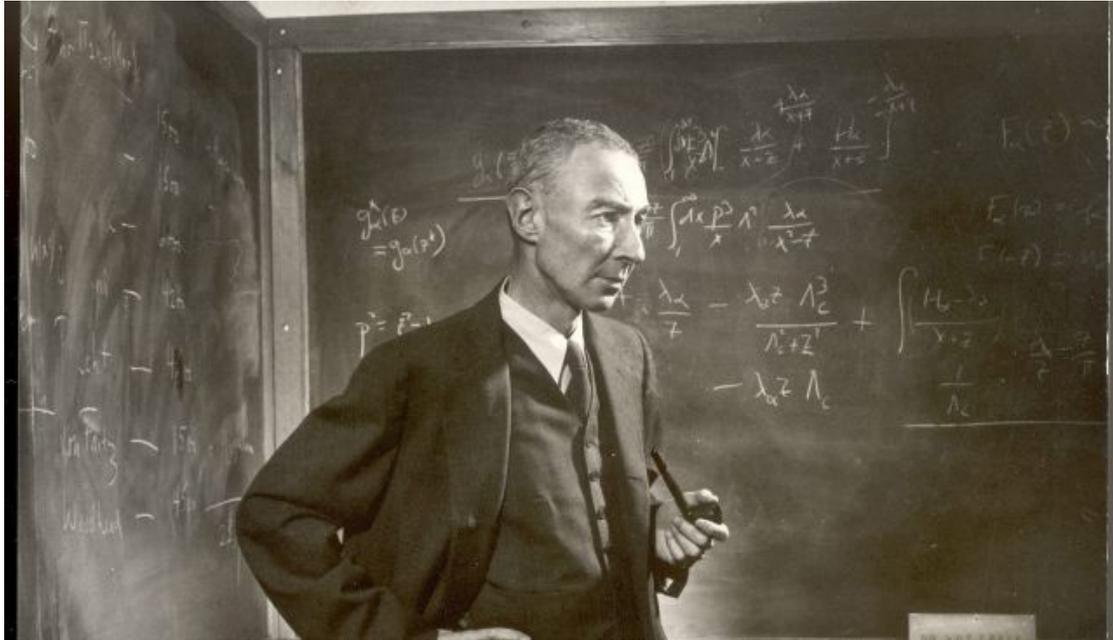
After being re-elected five times through 1934, Kahn was defeated in 1936, in large part a victim of the long coattails that Franklin D. Roosevelt's re-election that year extended to Democratic candidates nationwide.

In the years following her retirement from Congress, she remained active in public life, including in the National Council of Jewish Women, Hadassah, and her San Francisco synagogue, Reform Congregation Emanu-El, as well as in the American Association of University Women.

Florence Prag Kahn died on November 16, 1948, in San Francisco.

February 18 / Robert Oppenheimer, a father of the Bomb, dies

Upon seeing his invention in action, the brilliant, and by all accounts insufferable, physicist felt: 'I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' Truman was revolted by his remorse.



Robert Oppenheimer. Photo by Camera Press London

On February 18, 1967, physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer died, at the age of 62. An extremely versatile and intellectually fertile scientist, Oppenheimer is best known for his scientific leadership of the Manhattan Project, during World War II, which led to the invention of the atom bomb. Though the bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 ended World War II once and for all, less than a decade later, during the period of America's Red Scare, he became an object of official suspicion and ostracism for his left-wing political sympathies.

J. Robert Oppenheimer (the "J" either stood for Julius, his father's name, or was just a stand-alone initial) was born in New York on April 22, 1904. His father, Julius Oppenheimer, was a German-born textile importer, and his mother, Ella Friedman, was an artist. Both were Jews, but their household was a secular one. (Many years later, physicist Isadore Rabi, a strongly identifying Jew, commented that Oppenheimer would have been better off "if he had studied the Talmud rather than Sanskrit ... It would have given him a better sense of himself.")

His upbringing was extremely privileged: The family lived in an opulent apartment filled with fine art on Riverside Drive in Manhattan, and Oppenheimer was educated at the private Ethical Culture School.

Oppenheimer attended Harvard College, where he was admitted to graduate-level courses in physics in his freshman year and from which he graduated with highest

honors after three years. This was followed by graduate work at Cambridge and at the University of Göttingen, in Germany. There he earned his PhD in theoretical physics in 1927, under the supervision of Max Born, one of the pioneers of quantum mechanics, and 1954 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics.

Not easy to stomach

As brilliant as Oppenheimer was, he was also a difficult person whose arrogance and erratic and occasionally violent behavior – and sometimes just his extreme enthusiasm about his work – occasionally alienated his fellow students and, later, colleagues and students of his own. But his mind was so nimble, and his grasp of abstract scientific concepts so far-reaching, that more than once in his career academic institutions fought over the right to hire him.

During most of the 1930s, Oppenheimer worked and taught at the University of California, Berkeley, which agreed to release him for six weeks a year so that he could also teach at the California Institute of Technology, in Pasadena. He did research in astronomy and astrophysics, quantum physics, spectroscopy and more, and a number of the theories he wrote up went on to serve other scientists in groundbreaking discoveries of their own. In fact, Oppenheimer was nominated three times for a Nobel Prize, though he never won.

As early as October 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave the green light for a program to develop an atomic bomb. By the following June, after the U.S. was involved in World War II, this project turned into the Manhattan Engineer District, later the Manhattan Project, whose director, army Brig. Gen. Leslie R. Groves, Jr., chose Oppenheimer to head its secret weapons laboratory.

Oppenheimer had long been in love with the deserts of New Mexico, where he owned a ranch. He suggested to Groves that they set up their project's campus there, near Santa Fe, at the site of the Los Alamos Ranch School.

Remorse over a thousand suns

By 1945, more than 6,000 people were working at Los Alamos and by February of that year, they had settled on a bomb design that would utilize Uranium-235 in an implosion device. The first test of the bomb was undertaken at Alamogordo, NM, on July 16. Oppenheimer, a student of Sanskrit and the holy Hindu text Bhagavad Gita, later said that when he saw the sight of the explosion, it brought to mind two different verses from that book: "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky, that would be like the splendor of the mighty one ..." and also, "I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds."

In 1947, Oppenheimer, who was no longer interested in teaching, was appointed director of the Institute for Advanced Study, in Princeton, NJ, a position he held until the year before his death. He had a key role in the newly organized Atomic Energy Commission, a civilian body, and began to have misgivings about further weapons development (specifically of a far more powerful hydrogen bomb) and of an arms race.

During his lone meeting with Harry Truman, late in 1945, during which Oppenheimer argued against placing control of nuclear weapons solely in military hands, he supposedly the American leader, “Mr. President, I feel I have blood on my hands.”

Truman did not appreciate the show of remorse, and later said: “I don’t want to see that son of a bitch cry baby scientist in my office again.”

In June 1954, Oppenheimer had his AEC security clearance withdrawn, after various accusations of Communist Party affiliation led to his investigation by the FBI and eventually a highly publicized hearing by the Commission. In fact, Oppenheimer never denied that he had dabbled in Communist politics in the U.S., but his inconsistent and sometimes mendacious testimony during various hearings – about such issues as supposed attempts by the Soviets to recruit scientists working at Los Alamos, a story he later admitted fabricating in order to protect a friend who really was a Soviet agent -- hurt his reputation.

Though history has remembered him as a martyr to right-wing political hysteria, Oppenheimer, when questioned, actually named names of colleagues who were involved in left-wing activities.

Though cut out of the political realm, Oppenheimer remained an active physicist until the end of his life. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy decided to award him the Enrico Fermi Award for achievement in energy-related science, a gesture of political rehabilitation. He remained outspoken politically, although ambivalent on the question of nuclear armament.

Oppenheimer’s personal life was messy: He was married once, and he and his wife had two children (one of whom committed suicide as an adult), but even after his marriage, he had a tendency to carry on relationships with women who were married to friends or colleagues. Oppenheimer died of throat cancer, in Princeton on February 18, 1967.

February 19 / Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique' is published

Betty Friedan's groundbreaking book challenged the conventional wisdom that a woman's place was in the home.



Women gather at a Tupperware home party in 1958. Photo by AP

On February 19, 1963, “The Feminine Mystique,” by Betty Friedan, was published. Widely viewed as one of the most influential American books of the 20th century, it sought to debunk a popular belief at the time: that higher education was causing women to be dissatisfied with their "natural" role as housewives and homemakers. The book’s title referred to the postwar conventional wisdom that women were destined to find their fulfillment in the domestic life.

A 1957 survey that Friedan and two friends conducted for the 15th reunion of their graduating class from Smith College – a private women’s school in Massachusetts – served as the starting point for “The Feminine Mystique.” Two hundred classmates responded to the questionnaire, which asked how they felt about being mothers, how they spent their free time, who made the decisions in their households, and the like. The responses painted a surprising picture: those women who felt the most satisfaction in their lives were not playing the “traditional” role of domesticized housewives, while many whose lives revolved around being wives and mothers felt a sense of malaise – something Friedan came to call “the problem that has no name.” Often women in the latter group were unaware that others shared their feelings.

Friedan was startled by the findings, which she turned into an article titled, ironically, “Are Women Wasting Their Time in College?” and submitted to McCall’s, a women’s magazine. Both it and Redbook turned the piece down; an editor at the latter said that “only the most neurotic housewife will identify with this.” Undeterred, Friedan spent the next six years turning the article into a book, which was published

on this date by W.W. Norton. In it, she argued that women should be encouraged to seek fulfillment in pursuits that went beyond motherhood and that utilized their full range of talents. She also looked critically at the role such institutions as advertising, women's magazines and women's schools played in pushing the idea of the feminine mystique. Her words fell on fertile ground: Although Norton initially printed only 2,000 copies of the book, it quickly became a best-seller – and when it was reissued in paperback, it sold 1.25 million copies.

Born Bettye Naomi Goldstein, on February 4, 1921, Friedan grew up in a wealthy Jewish family in Peoria, Illinois. Her Russian-born father owned a profitable jewelry store; her mother, the daughter of Hungarian immigrants, wrote for the society page of a local newspaper before giving it up to be a full-time housewife. Peoria of that era was racially segregated and anti-Semitism was rife in the town, and both Bettye and her parents suffered from ostracism as Jews. She was turned down, for example, for membership in a high school sorority because she was Jewish.

Moving east for college was a liberating experience for Bettye. She edited the school newspaper and became involved in the labor movement and other left-wing causes. From Smith, she received a fellowship to attend graduate school in psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, but turned down a second fellowship to continue on to a PhD when her physicist boyfriend pressured her to do so. She split up with that boyfriend and moved to New York.

Although Friedan, who had by now dropped the final “e” from her first name, presented herself as an “educated housewife” after publication of “The Feminine Mystique,” she downplayed the fact that she had had a busy career as a journalist and was active in various radical political movements before marrying and having children. In 1947, she tied the knot with Carl Friedan, a theater producer who later worked in advertising. They had three children, but divorced in 1969. Although she wrote in a 2000 memoir that Carl had hit her, something he vehemently denied, she later said that, “My husband was not a wife-beater, and I was no passive victim of a wife-beater. We fought a lot, and he was bigger than me.”

“The Feminine Mystique” was a trailblazer for the “second-wave” feminism of the 1960s and '70s, and it made its author into a de facto spokesperson for her gender. Three years after its publication, she and several colleagues formed the National Organization of Women, where she served as president until 1970. She also was active in the abortion-rights movement, and in Democratic politics, and she continued to write up to the end of her life.

Betty Friedan sought equality for women with men – but never saw herself as being at war with them. As she told Life magazine in 1963, “Some people think I'm saying, 'Women of the world unite - you have nothing to lose but your men.' It's not true. You have nothing to lose but your vacuum cleaners.”

Betty Friedan died on her birthday, February 4, in 2006.

February 20 / He would save the Jews by saving the world: A human rights warrior dies

Rene Cassin believed that Jews can't be safe until general human rights for all are established. He got a Nobel Prize for his efforts to achieve that very end.



Rene Cassin. Photo by MAE, Collection iconographique

On February 20, 1976, the French jurist, human-rights pioneer and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rene Cassin died, at age 88. Cassin had a long and distinguished career as legal thinker and practitioner, and in the latter part of his life became renowned as a Zionist and Jewish activist. But it is for his work as the principal drafter of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, that he is best known for, and for which he earned the Nobel Prize two decades later.

Cassin was born October 5, 1887, in Bayonne, France, to Henri Cassin, a merchant of Sephardi-Jewish descent who gave up Orthodox observance and changed his first name from Azaria, and Gabrielle Dreyfus Cassin, whose Ashkenazi family from Alsace withheld her dowry from her when she married Henri. The couple divorced in 1911.

Rene Cassin studied law at the University of Aix-en-Provence, but the legal career he began in Paris in 1911 was interrupted by the start of World War I three years later. He was called up into the infantry and was severely wounded in 1916, surviving only because his mother was serving as a nurse in the field hospital where he was brought for treatment, and persuaded doctors to operate on him.

After the war, Cassin became a law professor, first at Aix, then at Lille, and finally at the University of Paris, where he held an appointment until 1960. He was active with war veterans – organizing both the French Federation of Disabled War Veterans and a

pacifist veterans group, and also working for veterans' rights on the international level. From 1924 to 1938 he was a French delegate to the League of Nations, where he worked to advance the causes of disarmament and of international law.

In the years before World War II, Cassin's focus was on seeing the creation of a federation of states united by "a superior moral rule: law," as he put it in a speech before the League.

When the Germans occupied Paris, in 1940, Cassin escaped to London, where he joined the resistance led by General Charles de Gaulle. He served the Free French in many capacities, including as principal negotiator with the British on the Free French Charter, and in the constitutional planning for a post-war government in his country.

Following the war, however, he did not take a government position, instead becoming president of the Council of the National School of Administration.

In 1947, Cassin was named one of 18 members of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, which, under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the late American president, undertook to draft a declaration of general human rights. Although the document that emerged was the first of its kind on the international level, it had roots in such national statements as the Magna Carta, the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man.

Its revolutionary character stemmed from its incursion on individual states' sovereignty, in saying that certain inalienable human rights trumped national laws. Cassin is considered the person responsible for the editing and molding of the declaration into its final form.

Cassin also served on the Court of Arbitration in The Hague and was president of the European Court of Human Rights. But he also became involved in Jewish affairs following World War II and the Holocaust. He founded the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations in France, in conjunction with the American Jewish Committee and the Anglo-Jewish Commission; its aim was to promote human rights at the United Nations from a Jewish perspective, and it continues its work today globally under the name CCJO Rene Cassin. He also headed the Alliance Israelite in France.

His fight for the protection of Jewish human rights was based in part on Cassin's belief that Jewish rights would be protected if the cause of universal human rights could be established. The Nazis, he believed, threatened all of humanity, not just the Jews.

Cassin's internationalism did not prevent him from being a supporter of Israel. It also was reflected in his involvement in the cause of Soviet Jewry during the years before Jews from the USSR were permitted to emigrate freely. But these causes always found their basis in Cassin's advocacy for universal human rights. As he himself declared in a 1968 speech in Jerusalem, "Never will Jews in particular obtain real equality until the totality of human rights are respected for everyone."

February 21 / Regensburg's Jews are driven out of the city

The 500-year-old community of this Bavarian city, expelled in 1519, was not permitted to return until 1669.



Memorial depicting the foundations of the Regensburg Synagogue destroyed in 1519. Created by Dani Caravan in 2005. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 21, 1519, the Jewish community of Regensburg was ordered to leave the Bavarian city, but only after its members had demolished the interior of their 13th-century synagogue.

Jews had lived in the city, also known as Ratisbon, for 500 years: The first written evidence of the town's *Judæorum habitacula* (Jewish quarter) dates to 1006.

In 1096, during the First Crusade, Ratisbon's Jews were forced to undergo conversion and baptism, but a year later the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV permitted them to return to Judaism.

In 1182, Henry's successor, Frederick I (also known as Frederick Barbarossa), extended formal privileges to the Jews confirming their right to trade in precious metals and other commodities, to lend money and to be tried before judges they accepted.

In the centuries that followed, Regensburg, the capital of the Upper Palatinate, became a center of Jewish learning. A number of Tosafists (Talmudic scholars) were based there, as was the mystic and poet Yehuda Samuel Hehasid (died 1217).

Even as a succession of persecutions, including the Black Death massacres of 1348-49, was visited upon Jews in other German towns, those of Regensburg were protected by the city elders.

Their status began to deteriorate in the 15th century, when additional taxes were levied on the community. By 1452, Jews had been expelled from most other Bavarian towns, and Duke Ludwig began demanding similar treatment for those of Regensburg. It was at this time that they were required to display a yellow Star of David on their clothing.

When city councilors tried to defend their Jewish wards, they found themselves attacked from the pulpit of the Regensburg Cathedral, most notably by the cathedral preacher Balthasar Hubmeier.

The expulsion finally became possible with the death of Emperor Maximilian I, on January 12, 1519. Less than six weeks later, with the emperor's throne still empty, the city's leaders were free to act upon their wishes.

They ordered the Jews out of their walled and gated quarter and out of the city. But first they were forced to destroy the interior of the synagogue, which was later replaced by a pilgrimage chapel.

The Jewish cemetery, dating to 1210, became fair game. Some 5,000 gravestones were smashed or taken for use in other buildings, as trophies of the expulsion.

Just days before the Jews' departure, the artist Albrecht Altdorfer visited the synagogue and quickly made two etchings, one depicting two men in its entrance, and another of the double-naved interior and the bimah.

Altdorfer, a member of the city government, was apparently responsible for informing the Jews of the decree against them, and took advantage of his visit to make a record of a building that soon would no longer exist as a synagogue.

An estimated 500 Jews left Regensburg, and were permitted to settle on the opposite bank of the Danube River, in Stadt-am-hof, until they were driven from there as well.

Only in 1669 were they permitted to return.

In the mid-1990s, Regensburg's central Neupfarrplatz, the site of the medieval Jewish quarter, was excavated, and today houses a historical museum.

In 2005, the Israeli artist Dani Karavan created a monument to the city's Jews at the spot where the synagogue once stood.

February 22 / Rashi is born

Be he descendent of King David or not, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki's light on sacred writings continues to guide Jewish scholars to this day.



Rashi's synagogue in Worms, Germany. Photo by Pancho Sudenderhauf

On February 22, 1040, Shlomo Yitzhaki, known universally by the acronym “[Rashi](#)” (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki), was born, in Troyes, in northern France.

Rashi was the greatest medieval interpreter of both the Bible and the Talmud. His commentaries on both sources are standard for any student of the texts to this day.

So great and honored was Rashi, in his day as well as in succeeding generations that many legends became associated with him. These include the belief that he was a descendant of King David, a claim that neither Rashi nor the earliest sources on his ancestry made.

What is known is that he was an only child, and that his father, Yitzhak (whom he mentions only once in his writings), was his first teacher. His mother's brother was Shimon Hazaken, who was a student of the great teacher Rabbenu Gershom Meor Hagolah. Rashi studied at the yeshivot in Mainz and in Worms before returning to Troyes to become the head of the community there, and of his own yeshiva.

When the First Crusade passed through his region in 1096, the three sons of his teacher Isaac ben Eliezer Halevi, in Worms, were killed, but Rashi himself survived. He wrote several selihot (penitential poems) mourning the destruction caused by the campaign.

It is also known that he owned a vineyard, though there is no historical support for the popular belief that he was a winemaker.

Rashi had three daughters – Miriam, Yocheved and Rachel -- each of whom married a Torah scholar. There is evidence that they were learned themselves, although it would have been very unusual for women of that era to have studied formally. There is also a tradition that they wore tefillin, based on a statement by Rabbenu Tam, one of Yocheved's four sons, discussing the need for a woman to say the appropriate blessing if she performs a mitzvah she is not obligated to, such as laying tefillin.

Rashi's commentary on the Testament covers most every book in the Hebrew Bible, but writings on Chronicles I and II, and Ezra, Nehemiah and part of Job appear to have been written by disciples. His commentary on the Five Books of Moses was the first Hebrew book to be printed, in Italy, in 1475.

The greatness of his Bible commentary lies not only in its explanation in concise and simple language of every word or concept that required elaboration, but also in his use of midrash (rabbinical teachings) to understand the intentions of the text.

Rashi wrote in Hebrew, but often explained complicated terms in French, which gives his text an added value today as a guide to some aspects of Old French, as well as to many details of everyday life in his times, thanks to the many analogies he offers.

Although he offers readers assistance in understanding both the literal meaning of the text and what the earliest commentators said about it, he does not necessarily distinguish between the two.

Rashi's commentary on the Babylonian Talmud was the first comprehensive guide to this work. Living in an important European trading town, he had access to many early versions of the basic rabbinic sources, and so could compare variants. As such, his commentary has been important in helping to establish an authoritative version of the text. Without his commentary, the Talmud, which was composed without punctuation and with minimal explanation, would likely remain, it is often said, a closed book to most readers.

Rabbi Shlomo died in Troyes on July 13, 1105, and was buried there. Although the precise location of his grave was lost, several monuments mark an open square in the city under which it is believed he lies.

February 23 / Soviet spy Leopold Trepper is born

The socialist Zionist organized a network that gathered information from German military headquarters and transmitted it by radio to Moscow.



Leopold Trepper. He received a military funeral in Jerusalem in 1982.

February 23, 1904 is the birthdate of the legendary Soviet spy Leopold Trepper, who before and during World War II headed the so-called Red Orchestra, the intelligence network that gathered information about the German military from several capitals in occupied Europe.

Trepper was born in Nowy Targ, today a town in southern Poland, although then in Austria-Hungary. He was one of 10 children whose father, a failed businessman, died when Leopold was 12, leaving the family in financial straits. The same year his father died, Leopold became active in the socialist-Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair, eventually becoming one of its leaders in Poland.

Trepper was able to finish high school in Lvov because his mother made it her first priority, but he left university in Krakow without a degree to help support his family, working as a miner and construction worker. Already a committed socialist, he helped organize a miners' strike, which led to his first imprisonment, at age 22, for several months.

In 1926, Trepper moved to Palestine, then under British Mandatory control. There he joined the Palestine Communist Party and organized a Jewish-Arab labor organization called Ihud (unity) within the Histadrut labor federation. For his Communist involvement, the British expelled him from the country in 1929.

After a brief period in France, where he worked as a Soviet industrial spy, Trepper went to Moscow, where he attended the Communist University for Western Workers and was recruited to the Red Army's intelligence service.

In 1938, he was sent to France and Belgium, where he organized a Soviet network that gathered information from German military headquarters in Berlin and transmitted it by radio to Moscow. The Red Orchestra operated by forming trading companies that, using the cover of their real businesses, penetrated the German military organizations to which they sold materials, using the income to finance their espionage.

In 1940, the Red Orchestra attained advance warning of Germany's plan to attack the Soviet Union, down to the date it was to commence in June 1941, but Stalin, not trusting the information, refused to act on it. The orchestra's achievements also included the obtaining of vital data on German industry and the plans for Germany's T6 Tiger tank.

The Germans, who were aware of Trepper's network, which they dubbed Die Rote Kapelle (Red Orchestra), invested great efforts in cracking it. In 1942, Trepper was arrested in Paris. Subjecting him to intense interrogation, including by Hermann Goering himself, the Nazis tried to turn him into a double agent.

Although he agreed to cooperate, Trepper included hints in his messages to Moscow that he had been turned. Within a year, he had escaped captivity and resumed his work for the Soviets.

In 1945, Trepper returned to Moscow, where he was arrested and interrogated. The charges included having "surrounded himself with Jews" in the Red Orchestra. Although he was imprisoned for a decade, he avoided execution, and in 1955, after Stalin's death, he was released and "rehabilitated."

In 1957, Trepper returned to Poland, where he became head of the officially sanctioned Jewish Cultural-Social Society and its Yiddish publishing house. Finally, in 1968, after an international campaign on his behalf, he was permitted to leave Poland for England. From there he made his way to Israel, in 1974. In 1975, he published a memoir, "The Great Game," about the Red Orchestra.

Trepper died on January 19, 1982, and received the funeral of a military hero in Jerusalem.

February 24 / A New Zealand premier is born

Julius Vogel rejected all setbacks, worked tirelessly to advance the Kiwi cause and had a vision of women running the world.



Julius Vogel, a man serially ahead of his time. Photo by Wikipedia

February 24, 1835, was the birthday of Julius Vogel, the first Jew to become premier of New Zealand. (The country's current prime minister, John Key, is also Jewish by birth.) He served in that position twice, in 1873-1875 and for six months in 1876.

Julius Vogel was born in London, the son of a Jewish mother, Phoebe Isaac, and a Dutch Christian father, Albert Leopold Vogel. The couple separated when Julius was 6, after which his mother moved back to her parents' home with Julius and his two surviving siblings.

Julius left school at age 15, returning a few years later to study metallurgy and chemistry. In 1852, he and a friend, A.S. Grant, sailed for Melbourne, Australia, where they established an assaying firm.

After several years of running various businesses in and around the gold fields in Australia, the friend, Grant, returned to England and Vogel settled in Dunolly, a gold-rush town in central Victoria, where he began to work in journalism. For several years, he was editor of the Marlborough and Dunolly Advertiser, but when recession hit and the paper failed, and an initial attempt by Vogel to run for the state assembly flopped too, he crossed the Tasman Sea to New Zealand, which had become a British colony in 1841. In October 1861, he arrived in Dunedin, a newly founded gold town in Otago province of New Zealand's South Island.

In less than two months, Vogel had established a new newspaper, the Otago Daily Times, where he remained as editor until 1868. Simultaneously, he began running for political office, serving first on the Otago Provincial Council, from 1863 to 1869.

In 1867, he married Mary Clayton, the daughter of a neighbor in Dunedin, with whom he had four children.

Vogel was a strong advocate for regional development, and administrative independence for the South Island.

In both business and politics, Vogel was ambitious and not overly concerned with appearances. When he lost an election for one district, he immediately changed constituencies to run (successfully) in another district. When the owners of the Daily Times fired him, he set up a competitor paper, and when that quickly failed, he and his family moved to Auckland, on the North Island.

In his new home, Vogel continued in journalism, but also became involved in national politics. He joined forces with William Fox, when the latter challenged the government of Edward Stafford, in 1869.

When Fox succeeded Stafford, Vogel became colonial treasurer. He used the position to encourage immigration to New Zealand, to expand the colonial infrastructure, and to buy lands from the indigenous Maori, with whom he generally worked to achieve reconciliation rather than confrontation.

He was an advocate of women's suffrage (although women did not get the vote in New Zealand until 1893).

Vogel's "Great Public Works" plan was dependent on the borrowing of large sums of money for New Zealand at low rates of interest, by way of stock offerings in England.

February 25 / Aleinu prayer prohibited in Castile

King bans prayer believing that the line uttered toward the end of each daily service was insulting to Christians and their messiah.



Alfonso XI, King of Leon and Castile, in an illumination of Froissart's chronicles. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

February 25, 1336 is the day the king of Castile (what is today north-central Spain) issued an edict prohibiting the recitation of the Aleinu prayer by his Jewish subjects. The reason for the ban was the perception that the line in the prayer uttered toward the end of each daily service was insulting to Christians and their messiah.

Tradition attributes the Aleinu prayer to the third century C.E. Babylonian rabbi Rav; there is an early version of it is mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud, where its connection to the Rosh Hashana Musaf service (the additional service that follows the morning prayers) is noted. By the ninth century, Aleinu was a regular part of the “Malkhuyot” section of Rosh Hashana Musaf, and soon was also adopted into the Yom Kippur Musaf.

According to historian Ruth Langer, the trouble started when Aleinu found its way into the daily Shaharit (morning) service, and eventually into the final part of all traditional services. By the end of the 12th century in northern France, says Langer, it was also being recited on a daily basis, at the end of the Shaharit (morning) service.

The prayer distinguishes between the Jewish people and the other nations of the world, as God “hath not set our portion with theirs, nor hath he made us like the families of the earth.” The difference, says the prayer, is that “they prostrate themselves before vanity and folly, and pray to a god who cannot help,” whereas the Jews “prostrate ourselves and bow before the King [who is] the Kings of Kings ...”

The phrase in question is a conflation of two phrases from the biblical Book of Isaiah (30:7 and 45:20): “in vain, and to no purpose” and “pray unto a god that cannot save.”

In the biblical context, it was clear that both these phrases were meant to describe idol-worshippers, and distinguish them from the Israelites. But in medieval times, Christian commentators such as the Dominican priest Bernard Gui, author of an early 14th-century “Inquisitor’s Manual,” read it as being “specifically intended and comprehended” as referring to Christians.

Considering the contemporary texts that find such additions to the traditional words as a reference to a people who prostrate themselves to “a man, of ashes, blood and bile; flesh, [an embarrassment] of rot and worms,” it does seem reasonable to think medieval European Jews did have Jesus and his followers in mind when they said those words.

It was in this context that an apostate Jew called Alfonso of Valladolid appealed to King Alfonso XI of Castile about the Aleinu. Originally named Abner of Burgos, Alfonso of Valladolid became an important polemicist against the Jews after his late-life conversion, employing his extensive knowledge of Hebrew sources to make his anti-Jewish arguments. King Alfonso ordered the Jews of Valladolid to participate in a disputation about the Aleinu prayer. The result of the debate was the victory of Alfonso/Abner, and the issuing of a royal edict, on this day in 1336, banning the recitation of Aleinu, or at least of its allegedly anti-Christian line. Violators of the edict were to be subject to a fine.

Thereafter, and to this day, prayer books belonging to the Ashkenazi tradition omit that line, although in modern Orthodox Siddurim in Israel, it has been restored.

February 26 / Levi Strauss, blue jeans pioneer, is born

Bavarian-born Jew Loeb Strauss moved to California in 1853 to set up a branch of his family's dry-goods business, and ended up revolutionizing fashion.



Levi's 506 jeans. Photo by Wikipedia

February 26, 1829, was the day Levi Strauss, pioneer of blue jeans and founder of the company that still bears his name, was born. Although Levi's jeans were long seen as the quintessential American article of clothing, Loeb Strauss (his given name) was a Bavarian-born Jew from the town of Buttenheim, who arrived in the United States with his family only in 1845. His father, Hirsch Strauss, had died two years earlier, and his mother, Rebecca Haas Strauss (Hirsch's second wife), sailed with her younger children and stepchildren to join two of the older sons, who had already set up a dry-goods business in New York.

By January 1853, 23-year-old Levi headed west to San Francisco, to seek his fortune by opening a branch of the family business to sell clothing and accessories to the California Gold Rushers. In 1872, one of his clients, Jacob Davis, a Reno, Nevada, tailor, sent Strauss a letter, describing how he used copper rivets to strengthen the stress points of the work pants that he fashioned out of fabric bought from the Californian. Davis suggested that the two seek a patent for the riveting method – a patent that was granted on May 20, 1873. The rivets were fastened at the corners of the pockets and the base of the fly.

By then, Levi Strauss was already an established member of San Francisco society, active in the city's first synagogue, Congregation Emanu-El, and other institutions. Davis joined him in California, where he oversaw the tailor shop Strauss established for the production of the "XX" model of "waist overalls," as these trousers were then

called (In 1890, the year the firm became incorporated, it also replaced “XX” with “501,” arguably the brand's most popular style that is still sold today.) The cotton denim itself was originally produced by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, of Manchester, New Hampshire.

Until the 1920s, Levi’s jeans were sold mainly in the West, and served for the most part as work clothes. Soon after, they started making their way east, mainly with vacationers who had encountered them at dude ranches they had visited. In World War II, they became an item rationed to defense workers, and to conserve thread, the company was forbidden from applying the decorative double arch stitching on the rear pockets of the jeans, which had by then become something of a trademark. (They had the arches painted onto the pockets for the duration of the war.)

As for the company’s founder – Levi Strauss died on September 26, 1902. Because he had never married and did not have a family of his own, Strauss left his business and estate to his four nephews, the children of his sister Fanny and her husband, David Stern. That estate was valued at \$6 million, or some \$160 million in 2013 terms. In addition to what he bequeathed to family members, he also bestowed gifts on the Pacific Hebrew Orphan Asylum, the Home for Aged Israelites, the Roman Catholic and Protestant Orphan Asylums and the Emanu-El Sisterhood, among other beneficiaries.

By 2010, Levi Strauss & Co., which had gone from being family-owned to being publicly shared, was once again a private company, controlled by relatives of Levi Strauss’ nephews. The firm employed more than 16,000 people worldwide, and raked in \$4.4 billion in revenues.

February 27 / A German Jewish feminist is born

Bertha Pappenheim, who served as a psychoanalytic case study for Freud, went on to found and lead the 50,000-strong League of Jewish Women.



Bertha Pappenheim in 1882 Photo by Wikipedia

February 27, 1859, is the birthdate of Bertha Pappenheim, the founder of the German Jewish feminist movement, a passionate social activist, Jewish cultural pioneer and, under the pseudonym “Anna O.,” may well have been the first documented patient to participate in the psychoanalytic talking cure.

Bertha Pappenheim was the third daughter of Sigmund and Recha (nee Goldschmidt) Pappenheim, a wealthy, Orthodox couple from Vienna. She was educated at a Catholic school, and when she finished, at age 16, she was expected to devote herself to domestic avocations, a fate that was imposed upon her because she was not a boy.

In mid-1880, Sigmund Pappenheim became extremely ill, and soon after, Bertha began to exhibit a wide variety of “hysterical” symptoms, which included partial paralysis, amnesia, aphasia (in her case, the ability to speak, at different times, only English, French or Italian), and severe anxiety and depression.

Late that year, Dr. Josef Breuer, a family friend, began to treat Bertha, by way of hypnosis and a vaguely defined talking therapy. Over the next two years (her father died in April 1881), her symptoms waxed and waned, and she was hospitalized several times. In general, however, she found relief from her symptoms by discussing the circumstances surrounding their initial appearance, a method she referred to as “chimney sweeping.”

In 1893, and then more fully in 1895, in the book “Studies on Hysteria,” Breuer and Sigmund Freud described the illness and therapy of the patient they identified as

“Anna O.,” and suggested that it was the “catharsis” allowed by discussion of her symptoms that caused them to dissipate. As such, Freud described Pappenheim as the “actual founder of the psychoanalytic approach.” In 1953, when the first volume of Ernest Jones’ biography of Freud was published, he identified Anna O. as Bertha Pappenheim.

In 1888, Bertha moved with her mother to Frankfurt am Main. There she became involved volunteering in a girls orphanage run by the Israelite Women’s Association, eventually becoming its director, a position she held for a dozen years, during which she introduced vocational training for the girls. She wrote extensively about the connection between education (and its lack) and poverty among Jewish women, and she also became involved in fighting institutionalized prostitution and trafficking in women.

Seeing the need for a self-help organization for Jewish women – one that would be like similar general feminist organizations in Germany, and separate from men’s organizations – in 1902 Pappenheim established the Care for Women Society (Weibliche Fuersorge) in Frankfurt, which ran a day-care center, a mother-and-child care station, did educational work with women in Eastern Europe, and generally advocated for equal civil rights for women – all with a leadership and a board comprised only of women.

Two years later, she started a national organization, the League of Jewish Women (Juedischer Frauenbund, or JFB), which she headed for the next two decades, and which at its peak had some 50,000 members. She caused quite a stir within Orthodox society when, at the group’s first assembly, in 1907, she declared that, “Under Jewish law a woman is not an individual, not a personality; she is only judged and recognized as a sexual being.”

Even as she guided national organizations – and brought the JFB into the general Federation of German Women’s Associations -- Pappenheim never ceased from carrying out “holy small deeds,” including working with children in a home for unwed mothers (many of them prostitutes) and advising teenage girls there. She was a strong opponent of Zionism, which she thought was oblivious to women’s issues, and even initially opposed removing Jewish children from Germany after the rise of National Socialism– until 1935, after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws, when she personally was involved in escorting Jewish children to an orphanage in Glasgow, and also expressed her support for Jewish emigration from Germany in general.

She also wrote extensively, and translated works of special interest to women, including the 17th-century diary of Gluckl of Hameln, a distant ancestor of hers, as well as the Ma’aseh Bukh, a medieval collection for women of Jewish folk tales and stories from the Bible and Talmud.

Pappenheim never married or had a family of her own. In a poem from 1910-1912, she wrote “Love did not come to me – / So I immerse myself in work, / Living myself sore from duty. / Love did not come to me – / So I gladly think of death, / As a friendly face.”

She did, however, have a close female companion, Hannah Karminski, during the last dozen years of her life, and it was Karminski who cared for her during the illness at the end of her life. Bertha Pappenheim died on May 28, 1936, in Frankfurt.

February 28 / Author known for novel on anti-Semitism in U.S. dies

Laura Z. Hobson, a Russian-Jewish immigrant to New York, wrote the 1947 novel 'Gentleman's Agreement.'



Dorothy McGuire and Gregory Peck from the trailer for the film 'Gentleman's Agreement.'
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On February 28, 1986 the writer Laura Z. Hobson, best known for her 1947 novel “Gentleman’s Agreement” about anti-Semitism in America, died at age 85.

Hobson, who lived nearly her entire life in or around New York, wrote nine novels, most of them topical, as well as short stories, journalism and advertising copy. She even edited word puzzles for the Saturday Review magazine for more than 25 years.

Hobson was born Laura Keane Zemetkin on June 19, 1900, together with a twin sister Alice. Their parents were the former Adella Keane and Michael Zemetkin, both Russian-Jewish immigrants to New York. Adella was a columnist for the Yiddish paper Der Tog, while Michael was an editor at the Yiddish Daily Forverts, as well as a mathematician and labor organizer.

Hobson worked her way through Cornell University. In 1930, she married Francis Thayer Hobson, president of the publishing house William Morrow. Before their divorce in 1935, the couple wrote Western novels together, with such titles as “Dry Gulch Adams” (1934). In her autobiography, Hobson wrote that a few years later she was engaged to Ralph Ingersoll, publisher of Time magazine, but that he broke off the relationship when he decided to devote his energies to launching a new newspaper, PM. (Ingersoll reportedly denied they had ever been engaged.)

As a single woman, Hobson adopted a son, Michael, and a few years later gave birth to a second, Christopher. So that Michael, the adopted son, wouldn’t feel less loved,

Hobson gave birth to Christopher under a pseudonym and then, under her real name, “adopted” him, too.

She first dealt with the subject of anti-Semitism in a 1932 short story in *The New Yorker*, while her first novel, “*The Trespassers*,” published in 1943, was about Jewish refugees from Hitler’s Europe who are turned away from the United States. That book was a failure, both critically and commercially. By the time she published “*Gentleman’s Agreement*” in 1947, about a gentile journalist who poses as a Jew to experience and expose America’s pervasive anti-Semitism, however, readers were apparently ready to contend with the topic.

The book hit the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list, was translated into 13 languages, and was made into a film that same year. Directed by Elia Kazan and starring Gregory Peck, “*Gentleman’s Agreement*” won the Oscar for Best Picture.

Daring as Hobson was in publishing “*Gentleman’s Agreement*,” there’s very little that’s Jewish about it. (The writer Ring Lardner Jr., joked that the moral of the movie was that “you should never be mean to a Jew, because he might turn out to be a gentile.”) The book does not, for example, mention the Holocaust. And when the Jewish Book Council offered Hobson its prize for best novel in 1947, she turned it down.

Late in life, Hobson, who never denied being Jewish but said she saw herself as “a plain human being who happens to be an American,” acknowledged with some regret having distanced herself from Jewish life and from Israel – two subjects she took up overtly in her 1979 novel “*Over and Above*.”

The first volume of Hobson’s autobiography appeared in 1983, and a second volume was published the year following her death from cancer in a New York hospital.

March 1 / Extra, Extra! Yiddish newspaper prints!

The first issue of Yiddishe Zeitung (Jewish Times) hit newsstands in New York City on this day in 1870.



Newsboys ready to deliver *The Forward*, another Yiddish newspaper. Photo by Wikimedia

On March 1, 1870, the first issue of the first Yiddish-language newspaper published in North America appeared in New York. Called the *Yiddishe Zeitung* (Jewish Times), its publisher J.K. Buchner, a Polish Jew, intended his paper to be a weekly and to offer its new-immigrant readers information on "all aspects of politics, religion, history, science and art." Although Eastern European Jews had started arriving in the United States in the 1850s, they were not yet coming in the vast numbers that they would several decades later; at the time, New York had only some 10,000 Jews from Eastern Europe.

Buchner's paper, which was printed by lithograph, and went for six cents a copy, ended up appearing irregularly at best, and it took many of its articles from Jewish journals from Europe. Its language was more German than Yiddish, but it did use Hebrew script. And to make it easier to read, the text appeared with vowels. Buchner had come to America by way of Germany and London, in both of which he had also published papers, and he made his living in New York by selling sewing machines on the installment plan. An enlightened and educated Jew, he also lectured – on such topics as Moses Mendelssohn, Hasidism and Reform Judaism – at the Cooper Union, at the time a tuition-free institution for adult education.

In Buchner's coverage of local affairs, he tended to take a populist viewpoint, and his paper supported efforts by workers to organize in unions. He also had a sense of humor: Historian Jacob R. Marcus describes an imagined letter that Buchner published from the Prophet Elijah, "who was then visiting America. Elijah informs the editors and the readers that, as an Orthodox Jew, he refuses to attend a Reform

synagogue. The prophet of old also assures Editor Buchner that he would read his Jewish newspaper; he does not read Gentile languages.”

In the seven years that the Yiddishe Zeitung existed, it came out no more than 15 times, generally just before an election, when political parties subsidized its publication. It was followed by a number of other short-lived Yiddish papers, until in 1881, the Tageblatt began publishing as a Yiddish daily. Its publisher Kasriel Sarasohn elected to have the paper traditional in its religious approach and sensationalistic in its news coverage. By 1900, it claimed to have a readership of 100,000. In 1897, The Forward, which would become the largest foreign-language paper in the U.S., began printing, and by 1912, it had reached a circulation of 120,000 – with a peak of some 275,000 nationally by the late 1920s. Today that newspaper publishes both in English (once a week) and in Yiddish (biweekly).

March 2 / Controversial French singer Serge Gainsbourg dies

Best known for the 1960s pop song 'Je t'aime' with Jane Birkin, Gainsbourg had a string of affairs but still managed to find time to pen dozens of hits.



Serge Gainsbourg Photo by AFP

On March 2, 1991, the French singer, songwriter and celebrity provocateur Serge Gainsbourg died, at the age of 62. Gainsbourg is legendary in France for his prodigious talent and lengthy career, for the many beautiful women he was involved with – though he himself was far from handsome in any standard sense – and for a lifetime of bad behavior in public.

Lucien Ginsburg, as he was named by his parents, was born in Paris on April 2, 1928. His parents, Joseph Ginsburg and the former Olga Bessman, were both born in the Russian Empire and had fled west to France at the time of the Bolshevik Revolution. Joseph was a classically trained musician who played piano in cabarets and casinos after arriving in Paris, and he trained his children to play as well.

Lucien was 12 when the Germans occupied Paris, and as a Jew the period of World War II weighed heavily on him throughout his life. His 1975 song “Yellow Star,” for example, recounted the painful memory of having to wear a symbol marking him as a Jew in the streets of Paris. Eventually, Joseph got himself to Limoges – which was marginally safer for Jews than the occupied zone – found work, and, using false papers, brought the family there.

After the war, Gainsbourg got a job teaching arts at a Jewish school outside Paris, for children whose parents did not return to France after being deported during the war. He himself studied painting at the Ecole Superieure Des Beaux Art, and later began

music school as well. After an obligatory year of service in the French military, and, frustrated that he wasn't an artistic genius, Gainsbourg began accepting music gigs from his father, and changed his name. Because he thought it sounded like a hairdresser, he switched "Lucien" to the more Russian-sounding "Serge"; "Ginsburg" became "Gainsbourg" in homage to the painter Thomas Gainsborough.

During his 40-year career as a songwriter, Gainsbourg went through nearly every style of popular music possible. After initially mocking the "ye-ye" ("yeah-yeah") pop ditty that hit France in the late 1950s, he became one of its top proponents. He also wrote in the styles of jazz, funk, reggae and even electronic, toward the end of his life. His lyrics were famously clever and punny, and often had sexual or morbid elements to them.

Gainsbourg was married twice, and also had two long-term relationships with women who bore him children – most notably with the British actress Jane Birkin, who spent a decade with Gainsbourg and is the mother of Charlotte Gainsbourg, today a popular French actress. He was also famously involved with Brigitte Bardot, who was the first to record the song "Je t'aime... moi non plus" with him, in 1967. When Bardot's husband became angry about the song, in which she and Gainsbourg are heard simulating the sounds of mutual orgasms over a romantic melody, she begged him not to release it. Gainsbourg consented and, two years later, rerecorded the song with Jane Birkin. The song, banned from broadcast in a number of countries, and condemned by the Vatican, naturally became an international hit.

Gainsbourg's final decades were plagued by alcoholism, and embarrassing public appearances that were sometimes fueled by drink. Appearing on a French TV show in 1986 with singer Whitney Houston, and irritated that the host was not accurately translating his words for Houston, Gainsbourg corrected him and said, in English, "I said, I want to f*** her."

Gainsbourg told an interviewer at one point, "There's a trilogy in my life," said Gainsbourg, "an equilateral triangle, shall we say, of Gitanes, alcoholism and girls – and I didn't say isosceles, I said equilateral. But it all comes from the background of a man whose initiation in beauty was art."

He directed four films, and wrote the soundtracks for 10 times that number.

When Gainsbourg died, on this date in 1991, he was praised by French president François Mitterrand as "Our Baudelaire, our Apollinaire ... He elevated the song to the level of art." He was buried in Montparnasse Cemetery, in the Jewish section.

March 3 / Birth of an Orthodox rabbi who let the 20th century in

Can a man sit next to, and in direct contact with, a woman on the subway? How about drinking milk produced on a Gentile American farm? Asked, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein would answer.



Can a divorced woman leave her hair uncovered on a date? Ask Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

March 3, 1895, is the birth date of Moshe Feinstein, the Orthodox rabbi widely recognized as one of the great rabbinic decisors of the 20th century.

Moshe Feinstein was born and raised in Uzda, near Minsk, Russia (today Belarus), the son of the town's rabbi, David Feinstein. He studied with his father until the age of bar mitzvah, after which he was sent to a series of yeshivot in other Belarusian towns before becoming the rabbi of Luban, a position he held for 16 years.

In 1936, Rabbi Feinstein, now married with four children, left Europe for the United States in response to pressure from the Soviet communist regime. After a brief period in Cleveland, he settled with his family on the Lower East Side of New York, where he became head of the Mesivta Tiferet Jerusalem yeshiva. He remained in that position for the next five decades, until the end of his life.

By the 1940s, Feinstein was recognized as a great Talmudist. His willingness to address a wide range of halakhic questions about contemporary life – contact between the sexes, medical and technological issues, and business and commercial disputes -- made him an address for petitioners from all over. Beginning in 1959, Feinstein's *responsa* were gathered into what eventually became nine volumes (two of them edited and published posthumously), called *Igrot Moshe*.

Among the thousands of questions Rabbi Feinstein addressed over the years were the following:

Could a man sit next to, and in direct contact with, a woman on the subway? (Yes, if there was nowhere else to sit).

Could milk from Gentile-owned farms be consumed if a Jew had not been present when the cow was milked? (Yes, since the United States had strict supervision of farms that would prevent the milk from being tampered with).

Can a divorced woman leave her hair uncovered while she is dating? (Yes, but she must tell suitors as soon as possible that she is divorced.)

He was uncompromising on not recognizing non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, to the extent that he ruled that one could not say “Amen” in response to a blessing said by a Reform rabbi. And he was very strict about the need to separate the sexes in contexts, such as at school, where the males could become aroused (apparently the subway was not one such venue).

Feinstein’s Orthodoxy was considered beyond reproach, but he did bring a sensitivity and realism to his rulings that suggested a willingness to recognize the contingencies of modern life. Jews were to be separated from non-Jews, Orthodox Jews were to be kept separate from non-Orthodox; and men and women were to be kept apart as much as possible, even so far as not shaking hands in greeting – but he did not perceive women as second-class Jews, nor was he opposed to their undertaking Jewish learning (and even insisted they have a formal public education).

And although he was adamantly opposed to heart transplants when these began in the 1960s, by the end of his life, he came to accept the necessity of organ transplants in general and the definition of death as correlating to the cessation of activity in the brain stem. (Feinstein’s son-in-law, Rabbi Moshe Tendler, a medical doctor and expert on medical ethics, is one of the principal sources of testimony on his state of mind on such matters.)

Rabbi Feinstein – known affectionately in the Orthodox world as “Rav Moshe” – died on March 23, 1986 at age 91, and was buried in Jerusalem.

March 4 / Owner of Egypt's grandest store brutally murdered in Cairo

Solomon Cicurel, who ran Les Grand Magasins, was stabbed to death in bed by four assailants.



Bulak Street in Cairo in the 1920s, site of Les Grand Magasins Cicurel.

On March 4, 1927, Solomon Cicurel – one of three brothers who, together with their father, owned and ran Cairo's leading department store – was brutally murdered in the master bedroom of his Giza villa.

Cicurel was born in 1881, the oldest of the three sons of Moreno Cicurel. Moreno had emigrated from Smyrna (today Izmir), Turkey, in 1870. His first Cairo business was a textile store he co-owned in Cairo's El Mousky district. After that, he opened the department store Au Petit Bazaar, which eventually became Les Grand Magasins Cicurel. Les Grand Magasins was Egypt's grandest emporium, the local equivalent to Galeries Lafayette in Paris.

After the death of Moreno in 1919, his sons – Solomon, Joseph and Salvator – continued to run the family business empire. Joseph (1887-1931) was a founder of Banque Misr and the group of companies owned by the bank, whose Jewish and Egyptian owners wanted to break the foreign grip on the country's economy.

Solomon was the senior partner in the Grand Magasins, and he lived in a mansion on al-Rihama Street, along the Nile in Cairo's exclusive Giza district. It was there that, in the early hours of March 4, Solomon was stabbed to death in his bed. Beside him was his wife, Elvire Toriel, who was unable to offer detectives much assistance since the assailants had rendered her unconscious with chloroform.

Because of the high standing of the Cicurels in Egyptian society, the case was given top priority and, within a day, four men had been arrested for the crime, which was apparently a burglary gone very wrong. (Elvire's jewels, kept in the bedroom, were gone when the police arrived.) Two men were Italian: the family's chauffeur, and a friend; a third was Greek, the driver for another Cairo family; the fourth was a local Jew.

At the time, Egypt still functioned under the "capitulations" system, by which foreign nationals were tried by their own states. And because neither Italy nor Greece had death penalties, it was only the Egyptian Jew, Dario Jacoel, who faced the gallows for the crime, which he was said to have masterminded.

For those looking for a more sensational explanation for the crime, it turned out that the Greek chauffeur, Anesthi Christo, had previously been employed by the Cicurels, and had been let go a short time before by Solomon.

Samir Rifaat, author of a 1994 *Ahram Weekly* article on the affair, reported in 2000 on an email he received from a supposed great-nephew of Dario Jacoel, living in Texas and bearing the same name. He claimed that he had been raised on a grisly version of the Cicurel murder, according to which his namesake had been having an affair with Mrs. Cicurel, and took revenge on her and her husband when she decided to break off. To add an even more bizarre twist, Texas court records published online in 2005 indicate that a Dario Jacoel had been convicted of three counts of sexual assault of a child and two counts of injury to a child.

Following the deaths of Solomon and Joseph Cicurel, their brother Salvator assumed leadership of the family holdings. Salvator, who captained the fencing team that represented Egypt at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam, was also, at various times, president of the Sephardic Community Cairo, a top official in various commercial organizations, and friend with some of the Free Officers who overthrew the Egyptian monarch in 1952. Only in 1957 did Salvator finally sell the Grand Magasins and join the rest of his family in Paris.

In 1933, Solomon Cicurel's daughter, Lili, married Pierre Mendès France, later prime minister of France.

March 5 / Religious Zionist Mizrachi movement is founded

The movement aimed to infuse the largely secular political movement founded by Theodor Herzl with a Torah-based spirit.



Religious Zionist pioneers found Kibbutz Ein HaNatziv, 1946. Photo by Wikipedia

March 5, 1902, is the day that the religious Zionist movement Mizrachi was officially founded, at a conference in Vilna (today Vilnius), in Lithuania.

The name “Mizrachi” in Hebrew means both “eastern,” literally, and is an acronym for “Merkaz Ruhani,” meaning “spiritual center.” And indeed, the movement aimed to infuse the largely secular political movement founded by Theodor Herzl with a Torah-based spirit. This was not something that could be taken for granted in the early decades of organized Zionism, since for many religious Jews, the formal return to Zion was not supposed to take place before the coming of the Messiah, and any human efforts to hurry that moment were blasphemy – an attitude that persists to this day, to varying degrees, among many ultra-Orthodox sects.

Mizrachi was founded by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines (1839-1915), an innovative educator from Lida, Lithuania (today Belarus), who had previously drawn fire for his attempts to combine secular education with Talmudic studies in the yeshiva he founded. Although Reines was not the first Orthodox leader to support the idea of a return to Zion (he was preceded by rabbis Yehuda Shlomo Alkalai, Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and Samuel Mohilever), it was he who answered Herzl's call to become involved in the political movement, and as such was a participant in the Third Zionist Congress, in 1899.

Although secular Jews continued to dominate the Zionist movement in general and Israeli politics in the first decades of the state, in Russia, with its highly traditional

Jewish population, Mizrahi was the most significant Zionist organization in the early 20th century.

In September 1904, the Mizrahi movement held its first world congress, in what is today Bratislava. It called for settlement in Palestine, and observance of religious law there. Important support within the Orthodox world came from Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who managed to reconcile Orthodoxy with the secularism that was predominant in the Land of Israel's nascent Jewish society. Kook claimed that secular Zionists, without even being aware of it, were "contributing to the divine scheme and actually committing a great mitzvah," so that they were helping to pave the way for the coming of Redemption.

Mizrahi established a youth movement, Bnei Akiva, in 1929, a network of religious schools in Palestine, and, in 1935, a religious kibbutz movement, which today has 19 member communities. On the political level, it was represented by two parties, Mizrahi and Hapoel Hamizrachi, the latter an Orthodox Labor Zionist grouping, which merged in 1956 to form the National Religious Party.

The NRP's focus on matters of religion, including its insistence that the Chief Rabbinate have exclusive authority over matters of personal status (among Jews) in Israel, and later on settlement, while being fairly flexible on matters of defense and foreign policy, allowed the NRP and its predecessors to be a member of every Labor-led government from 1948 until 1973. After 1977, when Likud came into power, it aligned with that. Today, what remains of the NRP has been incorporated into the Jewish Home party (Habayit Hayehudi), led by Naftali Bennett.

March 6 / Julius and Ethel Rosenberg go on trial for espionage

The Jewish duo from New York was tried for passing military technology to the Soviets throughout the 1940s; they were put to death in 1953.



Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, separated by wire screen, as they leave a U.S. courthouse after being found guilty by a jury. Photo by Wikipedia

On March 6, 1951, the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg began, in New York Southern District federal court, in Manhattan. The Jewish couple had been indicted the preceding August on charges of conspiring to commit espionage against the United States by delivering military secrets -- including information connected to the development of the atomic bomb -- to the Soviet Union.

Julius Rosenberg (born 1918) and Ethel Greenglass (born 1915) both grew up in New York, and were married in 1939 after meeting at a union fund-raising party. Long passionate about politics, Julius had joined the Young Communist League while studying at City College, where he earned an engineering degree. In 1940, he began working as a civilian employee of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Engineering Laboratories, at Fort Monmouth, in New Jersey. Ethel had been an aspiring actress, but settled for a job as a secretary with a shipping company after they wed.

A 2001 book by Aleksandre Feksilov, Julius' Russian spy handler, claimed that Rosenberg was recruited in 1942, and that he and his recruits passed on thousands of pages of documents related to military technology to the Soviets throughout the 1940s.

Although the U.S. and the Soviet Union were allies for most of World War II, the Americans did not share information about the Manhattan Project with the Russians.

So when the Soviet Union conducted its first test of a nuclear bomb, on August 29, 1949, the Americans were alarmed. The January 1950 arrest of Klaus Fuchs, a German refugee who had worked on the Manhattan Project, on suspicion of passing atomic secrets to the Soviets, started the chain reaction that led to the Rosenbergs' arrest.

Fuchs' courier had been Harry Gold, a Jewish chemist from Philadelphia. Gold in turn identified David Greenglass, a former U.S. Army machinist, and the brother of Ethel Rosenberg, who had worked at the Los Alamos labs where the bomb was developed, as a source. Greenglass claimed that he had been recruited by his brother-in-law and had turned over the material he had stolen to him. He said that Ethel too was involved in the plot. This last point was critical, because it was the only testimony directly linking Ethel to the espionage. In 2001, Greenglass admitted in a television interview that he had fabricated an account about Ethel typing up Julius' notes for the Soviets. He said that he implicated his sister to protect himself and his pregnant wife. (Greenglass spent 10 years in prison for his part in the conspiracy.)

FBI agents arrested Julius Rosenberg on July 17, 1950, and Ethel a month later. It later became clear that Ethel's arrest was intended to pressure her husband to name names of others involved in the spy ring. But Julius Rosenberg didn't crack: He never admitted his own role in the espionage and never gave up any accomplices. Ethel also refused to cooperate with the authorities, even when she found herself charged as a full-fledged conspirator.

Within days, a number of Rosenberg acquaintances were either arrested -- or disappeared. One of them was Morton Sobell, who escaped to Mexico, where he was soon kidnapped, apparently by "bandits" who then drove him north to the U.S. border and turned him over to FBI agents. Sobell, an electrical engineer, was tried with the Rosenbergs, and spent 17 years in prison. Yet he continued to proclaim innocence up until 2008, when at age 91 he granted an interview to Sam Roberts of the New York Times. In the interview, he finally admitted that Julius had been a spy, but said that what he passed to the Soviets was "junk."

Irving Saypol prosecuted the Rosenbergs, with the help of a 26-year-old U.S. attorney named Roy Cohn, who went on to a prolific career as red-baiter and legal fixer. Cohn later claimed that he had played a role in having Judge Irving Kaufman appointed to the case, and in encouraging him to sentence the Rosenberg couple to death. Emanuel Bloch defended the duo. He later helped care for Robert and Michael, the Rosenbergs' two sons, until they were adopted by Abel and Anne Meeropol.

The trial went to the jury on March 28, 1951. After only a few hours of deliberation, they voted to convict. On April 5, Judge Kaufman sentenced the Rosenbergs. In condemning both Julius and Ethel to death, he told them that, "I consider your crime worse than murder.... I believe your conduct in putting into the hands of the Russians the A-Bomb, years before our best scientists predicted Russia would perfect the bomb has already caused ... the Communist aggression in Korea, with the resultant casualties exceeding 50,000 and who knows but that millions more of innocent people may pay the price of your treason."

After more than two years of appeals, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were put to death in the electric chair at Sing Sing prison on June 19, 1953. They are the only people in American history to have been executed for espionage.

March 7 / CIA dirty trickster dies

Sidney Gottlieb oversaw much of the CIA's research - and at times operations - involving 'mind control' and poisons.



The seal of the Central Intelligence Agency is displayed in the foyer of the original headquarters building in Langley, Virginia, 2009. Photo by Bloomberg

On March 7, 1999, Sidney Gottlieb, who over a period of some two decades oversaw much of the CIA's research — and at times operations — involving “mind control” and poisons, died at the age of 80.

Gottlieb, born on August 3, 1918 in New York, was raised in an Orthodox home by Jewish immigrants from Hungary. He attended City College in New York, Arkansas Polytechnic, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin in 1940. He completed his doctorate in biochemistry at California Institute of Technology. During his studies in California, Gottlieb met Margaret Moore, the India-born daughter of Christian missionaries, whom he married in 1942.

Gottlieb, who was born with a clubfoot, was rejected for military service during World War II. In 1951, he was recruited by the CIA, where he was appointed head of the technical services staff of the chemical division. The period was one of extreme fear – almost paranoia – among U.S. officials, from the double threat of the Communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China. In particular, it was believed that both countries were developing methods of brainwashing or controlling the minds of human beings, a scenario depicted in the 1962 film “The Manchurian Candidate.”

Anxious to keep up, the CIA in 1953 initiated the “MK Ultra” program, with Gottlieb at its head, which over the next two decades undertook a total of 149 different studies intended to explore mind control. Subjects, who included prisoners, mental patients, and prostitutes and their customers, were exposed unwittingly to LSD, and observed for their reactions. CIA and armed service colleagues were also involuntarily

subjected to acid, sometimes with lethal consequences. Gottlieb later acknowledged that he himself took LSD hundreds of times. He also told a Senate investigation after his retirement that none of the testing yielded practical results.

After President Dwight D. Eisenhower gave tacit approval, in March 1960 Gottlieb also got going on developing methods for surreptitiously assassinating Fidel Castro, head of the pro-Soviet regime dug in some 140 kilometers off the coast of Florida. His brainstorming included a poisoned cigar, shoes infused with the highly toxic thallium, and a TV studio sprayed with LSD. The same year, Gottlieb concocted a blend of viruses to be injected into the toothpaste of Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, but by the time he delivered it personally to the CIA bureau in Kinshasa, the freedom fighter had already been deposed in a coup.

By the early 1970s, the CIA's dirty tricks came under increasing press and congressional scrutiny, and in 1973 agency director Richard Helms gave the order to destroy most of the extant records of the MK Ultra program. A year earlier, however, Gottlieb had retired.

Shortly after he left the CIA, Gottlieb went to India, where for 18 months he managed a leper hospital. Later, back in Virginia, where he owned a 15-acre goat farm, he worked with dying people in a hospice, and tried to organize a commune. The man with the clubfoot also spent his time folk-dancing, and, having suffered his entire life from a bad stutter, also completed a master's degree in speech therapy.

Gottlieb's death, on this date in 1999, was from unspecified causes.

March 8 / A self-taught nuclear physicist is born

Though he'd never been to university, Yakov Borisovich Zel'dovich was a natural to be tapped to build the Russian bomb.



A monument to the autodidactic particle physicist Yakov Borisovich Zel'dovich, co-father of the Russian bomb. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Theoretical physicist Yakov Borisovich Zel'dovich was born on March 8, 1914, in Minsk, Belarus. Though he received the highest academic position and honors a scientist could attain in the Soviet Union, Zel'dovich, who played a key role in the development of the USSR's nuclear-weapons program, was in fact largely self-taught, and never attended university.

Zel'dovich grew up in a Jewish family, although later in life, he declared himself atheist. He began his scientific career as a lab assistant at the Institute of Chemical Physics – situated first in Leningrad, later in Moscow -- at age 17. He remained associated with the Institute, part of the USSR Academy of Sciences, throughout his life.

By the time he was 22, in 1936, he had achieved the equivalent of a PhD for the work he did there, and the following year, he began doing research on the subjects of ignition, combustion and detonation. In 1939-40, together with Yuli Khariton, Zel'dovich studied the basic characteristics of fission chain reactions.

By December of 1942, Joseph Stalin had become convinced of the need for an accelerated program to build a bomb, and gave the order to make it a priority. Zel'dovich was a natural candidate for the team, joining such researchers as Igor Kurchatov, the lead scientist of the Soviet program, and Andrei Sakharov, the principal designer of the hydrogen bomb. By August 1949, the Soviets had tested their first bomb.

Zel'dovich was the first head of the theoretical department at Arzamas-16, the Soviet equivalent of the Los Alamos laboratory for the United States. There he began examining the possibility of inducing a fusion reaction – a far more powerful process than fission, and the basis for the hydrogen bomb.

By the 1950s, Zel'dovich had moved on to particle physics, and in the 1960s, he worked on questions in astrophysics and cosmology. His theoretical work on the radiation of black holes and quasars was later confirmed by empirical studies, and he did important research on the formation of galaxies.

Zel'dovich received most every award presented in the Soviet Union, including the Hero of Socialist Labor – three times. He also received the prestigious Bruce Medal (presented by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific) in 1983.

Yakov Zel'dovich died suddenly on December 2, 1987, at age 73.

March 9 / The 'father of public relations' dies

Edward Bernays got thousands of doctors to recommend Americans to start the day with bacon and eggs. That was just one of his stunts.



Illustration: Cigarette ad. Via creative commons.

On March 9, 1995, Edward Bernays, the man widely viewed as holder of the dubious title “father of public relations” in America, died at the age of 103. Bernays, a nephew of Sigmund Freud through both his mother and father, employed scientific methodology to achieve what he called the “engineering of consent” – persuading people through indirect means to believe in something they didn’t yet know was good for them.

An example was the post-World War I campaign to make it socially acceptable for women to smoke. Bernays, working for the American Tobacco Company, hired models to march in the 1929 Easter Parade on New York’s Fifth Avenue, smoking “torches of freedom.” Later, he engineered a campaign to make the color green more pervasive in American fashion – so as to help sales of Lucky Strike cigarettes, whose packages displayed both red and green.

Bernays was born in Vienna on November 22, 1891. His mother, Anna Freud Bernays, was the sister of Sigmund; his father, Eli Bernays, was the brother of Freud’s wife, the former Martha Bernays. The year after Edward’s birth, his family moved to New York, where he was raised and where, after attaining an agriculture degree at Cornell University in 1912, he opened an office in 1919.

One of Bernays’ first projects, even before hanging out a shingle, was to stir up public support for the American production of a French play called “Damaged Goods,” about the perils of syphilis, an episode described by Larry Tye in his 1998 biography of Bernays. To overcome American taboos about even discussing venereal disease, Bernays engineered an “educational” campaign to fight prostitution that was so

successful it elicited endorsements for “Damaged Goods” from John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Bernays’ brilliance was in getting the press to make his case for his client. Journalists’ stories were more credible than advertising, and cheaper. He solicited opinions from “experts” and organized surveys, whose conclusions would later be disseminated via press releases, another of his innovations. Working for a pork producer in the 1920s, for example, he came up with recommendations from thousands of doctors for Americans to start the day with a breakfast of bacon and eggs.

During World War I, Bernays worked with President Woodrow Wilson to build support for America’s participation in the war and later the Versailles peace conference. In 1924, he brought celebrities to the White House to have breakfast with Calvin “Silent Cal” Coolidge, a Bernays client, leading to a page 1 story in The New York Times the following day headlined “President Nearly Laughs.” In the 1950s, in the pay of the United Fruit Corporation, he built up support among Americans for the CIA-sponsored overthrow of the democratically elected government of leftist President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, of Guatemala.

In his 1965 autobiography, Bernays expressed some shock at learning in 1933 from an American journalist who had recently returned from Berlin how Nazi propaganda chief Josef Goebbels was consulting Bernays’ book “Crystallizing Public Opinion” to whip up hatred for Jews among Germans.

Edward Bernays died at his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on this day in 1995.

March 10 / Gur Hasidic dynasty founder dies in Poland

Yitzhak Meir Alter was known for his intellect, scholarship and the respect he earned from rabbis who were opposed to Hasidism.



Preserved building in Warsaw which housed the Yitzhak Meir Alter synagogue. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On March 10, 1866, Yitzhak Meir Alter, founder of the Gur Hasidic dynasty, died in the Polish town of Gora Kalwaria (Gur, or Ger, is the Yiddish name of the town).

Yitzhak Meir Rothenburg (he changed the family name to Alter in 1831) was born in 1799 in Magnuszew, Poland. His family was said to be descended from the medieval rabbinical commentators Rashi and Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg.

As a young man, Alter married Feigle Lipszyc and moved to Warsaw, about 25 kilometers southeast of Gora Kalwaria. The couple had 13 children, only four of whom lived to adulthood, and only one of whom outlived her father.

He was a disciple of Simha Bunem of Prshischa, and, after his death, of his student Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, who was married to the sister of Yitzhak Meir's wife. For all his brilliance, Menachem Mendel was not especially interested in being a communal leader; he saw his purpose in gathering a small coterie of students who would adhere to his teachings. During the last two decades of his life, Menachem Mendel lived in seclusion, and Yitzhak Meir served as something of a caretaker leader for both the Kotzk and Prshicha Hasidim.

When Menachem Mendel died in 1859, Yitzhak Meir officially took up leadership of the community. In 1860, he moved his base to Gora Kalwaria, which remained the center of his Hasidic dynasty until midway through the Nazi period, in 1939.

Although Hasidim were generally distinguished from other traditional Jews during his lifetime by their emphasis on the spiritual and mystical, as opposed to study exclusively, Yitzhak Meir was known for his intellect and scholarship, and for the respect he earned from rabbis who might otherwise have been Mitnagdim (“opponents,” as those who disapproved of Hasidism called themselves). In Warsaw at least, the sometimes bitter atmosphere of conflict that characterized Hasidic-Mitnagdic relations in this era was set aside during Yitzhak Meir’s lifetime.

Yitzhak Meir is also known as the “Hidushei Rym,” for the multi-volume work of rabbinic scholarship he wrote (“Rym” is an acronym for Rabbi Yitzhak Meir).

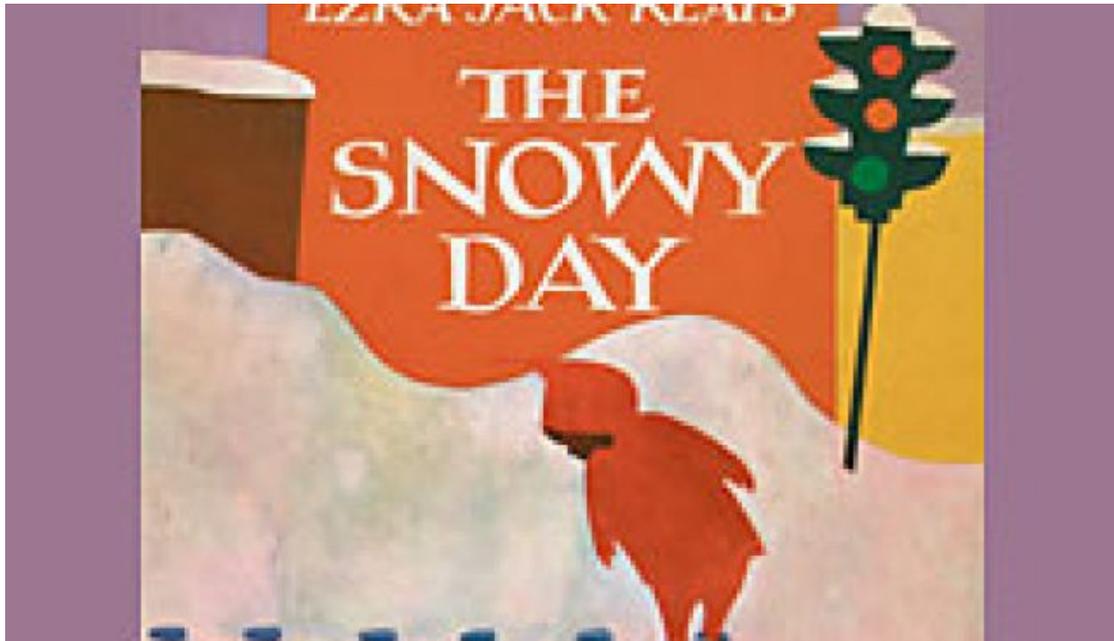
He also engaged with the secular authorities when necessary, leading the campaign against legislation that would have required Jews to give up their traditional clothing, a dictate that was supported by Enlightenment Jews. This activity even led to Yitzhak Meir’s brief imprisonment. He also came under suspicion by czarist authorities as a nationalist sympathizer during the Polish uprising of 1830.

The seven years during which he led the Gur community are referred to by the Hasidim as the “seven years of plenty.”

By the time of the Holocaust, the Gur Hasidim were probably the largest Hasidic group in Poland, and it is estimated that some 100,000 of them died during the years 1939-1945. Avraham Mordechai Alter, the third Gur Rebbe (known as the Imre Emet), escaped from Poland in 1940 and came to Jerusalem, where a Gur yeshiva had already been established in 1926.

March 11 / An artist who saw minority children is born

Ezra Jack Keats' landmark book 'The Snowy Day,' the first to feature a black child, changed the field of children's literature forever.



A Snowy Day Photo by Ezra Jack Keats

March 11, 1916, was the birthdate of American children's book author and illustrator Ezra Jack Keats. His 1962 "The Snowy Day" is considered a landmark of children's literature for being the first book to have a black child as its central character.

Keats was born Jacob Ezra Katz (he changed his name legally in 1947, in response to anti-Semitism), the third child of Benjamin Katz and the former Augusta Podgainski, Jewish immigrants from Poland. He grew up in the Brooklyn neighborhood of East New York.

The family was very poor, and his father tried hard to discourage Ezra, who showed artistic prowess from an early age and who began painting signs for money at age 8, from pursuing a career as an artist. Nonetheless, Ezra kept at his artwork, and while in high school, an oil painting of his depicting homeless people warming themselves around a fire won a national contest run by Scholastic Publishing.

Two days before Ezra graduated high school, in 1935, his father died of a sudden heart attack. The son had to identify Benjamin's body. Later, he recounted how he had opened his father's wallet and found the frayed clippings of newspaper articles reporting various awards Ezra had won.

“I found myself staring deep into his secret feelings,” he explained. “My silent admirer and supplier, he had been torn between his dread of my leading a life of hardship and his real pride in my work.”

After high school, Keats took art courses while making a living as a commercial artist. His jobs included working as a mural painter for the Depression-era government program the Works Progress Administration and drawing the backgrounds for the Captain Marvel comic strip for Fawcett Publications. During World War II, he designed camouflage for the U.S. Army.

Following the war, Keats fulfilled an ambition to spend a year in Paris and on his return to New York, worked as an illustrator for a number of magazines, as well as painting the covers of several books. When an editor for Crowell Publishing saw one of his covers in a 5th Ave. bookstore, she invited him to begin illustrating entire books. The first came out in 1954. Among the books he provided the artwork for were those in the “Danny Dunn” series.

The first book both written and illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats was “My Dog Is Lost,” co-written with Pat Cherr, and published in 1960. Its protagonist is a Puerto Rican child who has just arrived in New York, which he explores as he searches for his missing dog. In all of his books, the children are from minority groups.

Sensing the snow

“The Snowy Day” was the first book written by Keats on his own. Its inspiration was a 1940 series of photographs in Life magazine of a black child who was about to get inoculated.

In the story told by Keats, the child is called Peter, and we see him spending a day playing in the snow. The book’s uniqueness is not just its African-American hero, but also the collage method utilized by the artist, in which he fashioned together cutouts of paper, fabric and oilcloth, and ink applied with a toothbrush. The following year the book won the Caldecott Medal, the most prestigious honor awarded to an American children’s picture book. Just last year it was selected for an exhibition at the Library of Congress, “Books that Shaped America”.

The Library described “The Snowy Day” as having “changed the field of children’s literature forever.”

The plot was undramatic, to say the least, but the book has an emotional resonance that speaks to all ages. Keats later described his goal in the book as offering “a chunk of life, the sensory experience in word and picture of what it feels like to hear your own body making sounds in the snow. Crunch...crunch...And the joy of being alive.”

“The Snowy Day” was followed by another 20 children’s books by Keats, including six more featuring young Peter. As that series progressed, and its hero grew older, the plots became increasingly sophisticated, as Peter has to negotiate the challenges of growing up and the specific hazards of urban life. The artwork too became more complex and painterly, although Keats continued to utilize collage.

Ezra Jack Keats died on May 6, 1983, after a heart attack. He was 63. He had never married or had children, but the charitable foundation he established in 1964 has continued to benefit children, operating under the directorship of the artist's boyhood friend Martin Pope and his wife, Lillian Pope. It funds literacy and art-education programs, and has long supported various arts programs in Jerusalem.

March 12 / Nazi Germany annexes Austria

A significant majority of Austrians enthusiastically welcomed the Anschluss, which spelled the doom of the country's Jewish population.



Passers-by offering flowers to a German motorcycled soldier in a Vienna street of Vienna on March 15, 1938 after the Anschluss. Photo by AFP

March 12, 1938, is the date of the Anschluss, the annexation of Austria into the German Third Reich. Literally, “Anschluss” means “connection” or “political union,” and there is still disagreement among historians as to whether the occupation of Austria was indeed that – that is, a voluntary tying of that country’s fate to that of Germany – or whether the Austrians were, as they have often claimed, Hitler’s first victims, faced with no choice when the Fuehrer delivered an ultimatum to the Austrian government that it hand power over to the country’s Nazis a mere month after he had agreed to honor Austrian sovereignty.

On the one hand, it is correct that Germany did force a union onto Austria, a partnership that violated the peace treaties that ended World War I. On the other, the occupation was enthusiastically welcomed by a significant majority of the Austrian population.

The Austrian Republic had only come into existence in 1918, with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, at the end of the war. By 1934, the country had devolved into a civil war of sorts, which pitted the nationalists of the Christian Social Party, who favored independence, against the socialists, who pushed for economic if not political union with Germany.

In July 1934, Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was assassinated by Austrian Nazis, as part of a failed coup. The Christian Social party came out of the civil war victorious,

and the place of Dollfuss was taken by Kurt Schuschnigg, who abolished other parties and imposed a semi-fascist regime on the country.

The question of union with Germany remained alive, however, and the Nazis maintained a constant campaign of terror against the Christian Social regime. In 1936, Schuschnigg agreed to end the ban of the Nazi party in Austria and accepted Nazis into his cabinet.

This did not satisfy Adolf Hitler, who upped his demands for incorporation of Austria into the Reich – part of a general foreign policy of *Heims in Reich*, literally, “home into the Reich,” which called for bringing ethnic Germans living beyond the country’s borders under German sovereignty. In practice, this would include annexation of Austria, western Poland and Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland.

This was the prelude to the Anschluss, which was greeted by vocal protests from the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the Vatican, but not much more. On March 12, when German forces crossed the border into Austria, they faced no resistance, and were greeted with flowers. That same afternoon, Hitler arrived, crossing into the country at Braunau, his birthplace. Over the next few days, he toured the country, with the climax of his visit taking place in Vienna on March 15, where he appeared at a rally before some 200,000 people at the Heldenplatz.

A month later, a plebiscite on incorporation was held, and 99.7 percent of the population voted to approve. (By that time, some 70,000 potential dissenters had been rounded up and imprisoned.)

At the time of the Anschluss, Austria’s Jewish population was about 190,000 (the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum estimates the number at 225,000), most of them living in Vienna. On Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938), most of Vienna’s synagogues were destroyed, and 27 Jews murdered, following which Jews began to be rounded up and imprisoned. Even before 1938, the Jews had begun to emigrate from the country, but now the trickle became a torrent, so that by December 1939, by which point the Nazis had instituted restrictions on Jewish involvement in society, only 57,000 are thought to have remained in the country.

Mass deportations began in October 1941, with some 35,000 Jews being sent to ghettos in Poland and Eastern Europe, where they were killed by Einsatzgruppen, and another 15,000 finding their deaths in Auschwitz. Within a year, only some 5,000 Jews remained in the country: They were either smuggled out of Austria, or spent the rest of the war in hiding.

An estimated 65,000 Austrian Jews were murdered in the Holocaust – with the names of 62,000 of them being known.

March 13 / Mad cartoonist Al Jaffee is born

Jaffee worked with legendary cartoonists of his day and introduced some of Mad magazine's most enduring features.



Offices of Mad Magazine Photo by Cory Doctorow

Today is the 93rd birthday of the comic artist Al Jaffee, whose work has appeared in nearly every issue of Mad magazine since 1958. Jaffee is the man behind the satirical magazine's long-running "Fold-In" feature and legendary "Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions" column.

He was born Abraham Jaffee on March 13, 1921, in Savannah, Georgia. His parents, Morris Jaffee and the former Mildred Gordon, moved south from New York after Morris was hired by a Jewish merchant in Savannah to manage his pawnshop. Both parents were born in Zarasai, a village in Lithuania, from which they emigrated, separately, some years earlier.

Whereas Morris loved his new home, Mildred longed to be back in Zarasai and was especially unhappy in Georgia. Religiously devout, when each of her four sons was born, she insisted on covering up the crucifixes hanging on the walls of her hospital's maternity ward. Finally, when "Abe" (he only changed his name to Al in the 1940s, when he encountered anti-Jewish sentiment in the U.S. Army) was 6, Mildred Jaffee, accompanied by her four young sons, returned to Lithuania. For most of the next six years, Abe and his brothers lived in the very poor and very foreign Zarasai, sustained culturally and emotionally, he has said, by the newspaper comic strips their father sent over regularly from home.

In 1933, as Hitler was coming to power in Germany and anti-Semitism was rising in Lithuania, Mildred allowed Morris to take their three oldest children back to New York, where he was now living. She stayed in Zarasai with the youngest, whose father

only succeeded in rescuing him in 1940, shortly before the village's Jewish population — including, apparently, Mildred — was deported by the Germans.

After returning to New York, Abraham Jaffee was accepted to the first class of the High School of Music and Art, where classmates included future Mad colleagues Harvey Kurtzman, Al Feldstein and Will Elder. That was followed by army service, parts of which he spent as an art instructor and later doing graphic-art work in the Pentagon.

Jaffee began making his way into comics work in the late 1940s and early 1950s, taking commissions from pioneers like Will Eisner and Stan Lee. One of his early projects was a sort of anti-Superman he called “Inferior Man,” who worked as an accountant by day and fought crime at night.

Mad was founded by Harvey Kurtzman in 1952, and Jaffee first appeared in it in 1955. A year later, he followed Kurtzman when he founded a rival publication, Trump, for Hugh Hefner. When that failed, he joined Kurtzman at another short-live magazine called Humbug. Finally, he returned to Mad, by then edited by Al Feldstein, in 1958, and has been a regular contributor there ever since.

The Fold-In was Jaffee's budget-magazine answer to Playboy or National Geographic's fold-outs — with the twist that when the reader folded over the inside back cover as instructed, he saw a new image that poked fun at somebody.

The idea for the “Snappy Answers” column, he told an interviewer in 2010, came to him after an incident many decades ago, when he was balanced high on a ladder during a rainstorm, fixing an antenna that was falling off the roof of his Long Island home. He was scared of heights, and when his son, he recalled, “who I think must have been 10 at the time, says ‘Where's mom?’ And I'm distraught up there, and I said, ‘I have killed her and I'm stuffing her down the chimney.’”

Since in 1984, Jaffee, who is not religiously observant, has also drawn (at least through 2010) a regular column, called “The Shpy,” for the Chabad children's magazine Tzivos Hashem. Last year, the 92-year-old artist announced he would donate his artistic archive to Columbia University.

March 14 / First Jewish member of House of Representatives dies in hospital for insane

Lewis Charles Levin was infamous for his vehemently anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant stance.



Lewis Charles Levin, from a painting by Rembrandt Peale. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

Lewis Charles Levin, the first Jew to serve as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, died on March 14, 1860 – several years after being committed to the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane. He was perhaps the country’s shrillest voice of anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant incitement.

Little is known of Levin’s early life: In the 1880s, a fire in his childhood home destroyed most of the existing information about him and his family. He was born on November 10, 1808, in Charleston, South Carolina, a town that at the time had one of the country’s largest Jewish populations. He graduated from South Carolina College (today the University of South Carolina) in 1824, after which he worked as a schoolteacher in Mississippi, Louisiana and Kentucky. During this time, he was seriously wounded in a duel, and spent six months in prison for an unpaid debt.

Whatever cause Levin took on, he adopted without moderation or restraint. After his near-fatal duel, he became a passionate opponent of such armed contests. In 1839, he moved to Philadelphia. By now he was a trained lawyer, but he began to devote his energies to the cause of temperance. Levin saw alcoholism as being caused by poverty, and he therefore blamed it on “capitalists,” who became wealthy at the expense of working people. He was also opposed to other “licentious pleasures,” such as the theater.

From grave concern about alcohol, Levin moved on to focus on the threat of immigration. It was the era when victims of the potato famine in Ireland – Roman

Catholics – were pouring into the United States. Levin believed that the pope wanted to appoint a Catholic monarch to rule America, and that the best way to fight the threat from Rome was to compel Catholic children reading the Bible in school to use the King James Version, rather than the official Catholic translation.

In 1844, Levin was arrested and slapped with a fine, after inciting an anti-Catholic riot in Philadelphia. The same year, he was elected to Congress for the first of three terms as the candidate of what became the Native American Party (also known as the Know-Nothings). His platform called for increasing to 21 years the period required to become a naturalized American citizen.

By all accounts, Levin was an impressive speaker. Alexander Kelly McClure, a Philadelphia journalist, described him as “one of the most brilliant and unscrupulous orators I have ever heard. He presented a fine appearance, graceful in every action, charming in rhetoric and utterly reckless in assertion.”

If a Congressional colleague dared to challenge him, Levin would accuse him of being a “paid agent of the Jesuits who hang around this hall.” The representative from Pennsylvania’s 1st Congressional district even opposed a bill that would have mandated minimum-space requirements for steerage passengers on transatlantic vessels.

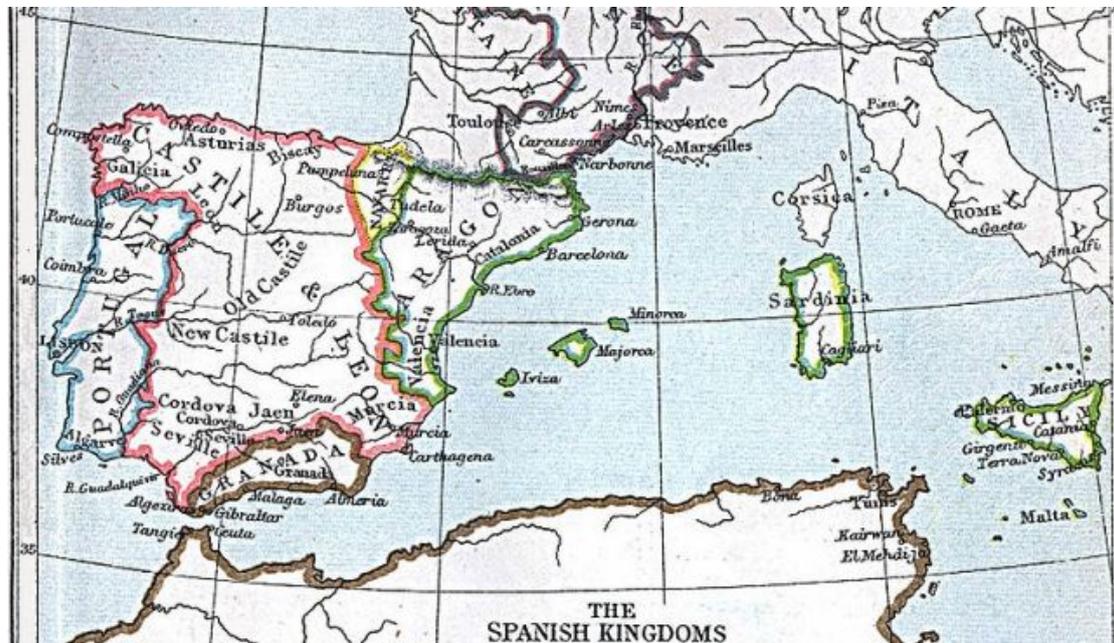
Levin was defeated in 1850 in a bid for a fourth term, but continued his work with the Know-Nothings, and attempted a run for the Senate in 1855, a campaign that led to his being investigated for attempting to bribe members of the state legislature (which then elected U.S. senators).

In 1856, while speaking at a rally at Philadelphia’s Independence Hall against Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont, Levin was pulled off the stage by Fremont supporters. Shortly after that, he suffered a nervous breakdown, which led to his being hospitalized in a Philadelphia mental institution. He died four years later. His wife tried to raise money for a monument for a grave, but someone in his circle stole the funds, and his grave was left without a marker.

In 1880, independent of one another, both Levin’s wife, Julia Gist, and his son, Lewis, converted to Roman Catholicism.

March 15 / Anti-Jewish rioting begins in Seville

The seeds of the Inquisition are sown on this day in 1391 when a fiery preacher in Seville, Spain incited months of violence against the city's Jews.



The Spanish kingdoms in 1360. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On March 15, 1391, anti-Jewish rioting broke out in Seville, Spain, initiating a cycle of violence and open hatred toward the Jews of Castile that culminated a century later in the Inquisition.

At the time of the riots, Jews were living peacefully in Seville where they were allowed to operate three large synagogues and 20 smaller ones. They and the city's Muslims were protected by the crown.

The immediate cause of the violence was the incitement of a Christian monk named Ferdinand Martinez, who preached regularly and for years against what historian Heinrich Graetz described as the Jews' perceived "hardened infidelity, their pride, their heaped-up riches, their greed and their usury."

The important role Jews played in Spain as money-lenders, and as advisors and even, when they converted, as marriage partners to royalty gave them unusual influence and power, but also made them subject to anger and resentment. When combined with the theological differences between Christians and Jews, and the preaching of a hate-filled cleric, the result could be lethal, and efforts by authorities to quell the popular violence sometimes had the opposite effect.

In the case of Martinez in 1391, the priest's harangues raised public expectations of a mass conversion of Jews, and sparked popular riots. Angry crowds entered the Juderia, the city's Jewish section, attacked its residents and pillaged their businesses. When the mayor of Seville had the ringleaders of the pogroms arrested and ordered

they be flogged, Archdeacon Martinez only upped his rhetoric and the crowd became all the more violent.

Three months later, on June 6, 1391, rioters re-entered the Juderia, blocked the two exits from the quarter, and set it on fire. An estimated 4,000 Jews were killed that day. Most of those who survived converted or left the city, so that by the time of the Expulsion, in 1492, there were few Jews remaining in Seville to be exiled. King Henry III then redistributed the property of the Juderia to various Christian nobles.

The rioting in Seville spread to other parts of Spain – to Castile, Aragon and Catalonia, followed by the island of Majorca. Murderous rioting continued for three months.

The significance of the 1391 rioting goes beyond the toll in life and property: It began a wave of conversions by Jews, estimates of which range between tens of thousands and 200,000 individuals – up to half of the country's Jews.

Those who converted included not only Jewish business and social leaders but also large numbers of rabbis. Sometimes entire communities would follow suit, and the phenomenon of mass conversions under duress led to the subsequent phenomenon of crypto-Jews, those who were suspected of continuing to practice their former faith in secret. The Jewish community that was finally sent into exile in 1492 was already a severely depleted and weakened one.

March 16 / Pogrom in York wipes out Jewish community

Four prominent citizens of the English town exploited the anti-Jewish atmosphere to have their debts to Jews erased.



The stone structure that today stands at the site of the wooden tower where the York Massacre took place. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On March 16, 1190, the Jewish residents of York, England, numbering some 150, were murdered or took their own lives after rioters besieged them in the keep of York Castle. This was but one of a series of pogroms – although the most notorious – against the Jews in a number of English communities that year.

Jews had begun appearing in England after the Norman Conquest in 1066; they received special status to work as moneylenders. Although moneylending, a profession denied to Christians, could be lucrative, it also entailed risks, not least the resentment of those who faced the challenge of repaying their loans.

A year before the York pogrom, Richard the Lionheart became king of England after the death of his father, Henry II. Richard was crowned on September 3, 1189, and announced his intention to lead a crusade to the Holy Land – what would be the Third Crusade. The excitement inevitably led to agitation against Jews.

Among those who came to London to show their respects to the new monarch were two prosperous Jews from York, Benedict and Josce. The two were not admitted to the coronation banquet at Westminster and found themselves attacked in anti-Jewish rioting. Benedict later died of his injuries, one of some 30 Jews who were killed in this London pogrom.

Before he departed from England, King Richard had instructed his subjects not to harm the Jews, but his order was ignored. By February 1190, Jews in a number of

towns around the country began to suffer such attacks, which reached York the following month.

Four prominent citizens of York, led by one Richard Malebisse, decided to exploit the anti-Jewish atmosphere to have their debts to Jews erased. Taking advantage of a fire that swept through the city (or perhaps having started the fire), the four men attacked the home of Benedict the financier and killed his widow and children.

Fearing that he might be next, Josce sought refuge in York Castle, which was then made of wood. He was followed by the rest of the town's Jews, numbering about 150. This was on March 15. By the following day, the castle keep (the site of what is today Clifford's Tower), where the Jews had barricaded themselves, was surrounded by a hostile crowd.

When the castle's warden left and later tried to reenter, he was refused admission by the Jews inside, who feared he intended to betray them. Angered, the warden appealed to the sheriff of York, who issued an order to expel the Jews by force.

Knowing they would soon face a choice of converting or being killed, the community's rabbi, Yom Tov Yitzhak, called on the prisoners to take their own lives. The men proceeded to kill the women and children before setting fire to the tower and killing themselves.

A contemporary chronicler, William of Newburgh, commented on the similarity between the "irrational fury of rational creatures against themselves" and the account of the siege of Masada in 73 C.E. that appears in Josephus' "The Jewish War."

The few Jewish survivors in York were killed by the crowd when they surrendered. The rioters then moved on the York Minster, the town's cathedral, where they found and destroyed the records of loans made to local residents by Jews.

Although this spelled the destruction of York's Jewish community, Jews were back in York within a few years. The son of Josce the moneylender, Aaron of York, became the lay leader of English Jewry in 1236.

March 17 / A visionary architect dies

Louis Kahn, whose buildings were known for their intellectual rigor and spirituality, was one of the 20th century's most influential architects.



Louis Kahn, one of the 20th century's most revered architects. Photo by Wikimedia commons

March 17, 1974 is the day Louis I. Kahn, one of the great – if not sufficiently recognized -- architects of the 20th century, died at the age of 73.

Intellectual, spiritually inclined and uncompromising in his work, Kahn had relatively few commissions during his lifetime; when he died, he was several hundred thousand dollars in debt. Yet he was an influential teacher who trained a number of architects who went on to become far more successful commercially, including Israeli Moshe Safdie (responsible for the renovated Yad Vashem and Jerusalem's Mamilla complex), Robert Venturi and Renzo Piano. Critical regard for Kahn's designs has increased exponentially in the nearly four decades since his death.

Kahn was born Leiser-Itze Schmuilowsky, in Parnu, Estonia, on February 20, 1901. When he was 5, the family, anticipating that his father might be drafted into the Russian army to fight in the Russo-Japanese War, moved to the United States, settling in Philadelphia. They changed their family name to Kahn in 1912.

Kahn was first exposed to architecture in a high school course and continued with formal studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Early in his career, he worked for the city of Philadelphia, as well as privately, and was involved in a number of public projects for both the city and federal government. Additionally, Kahn taught at both Penn and at Yale.

A trip to Europe in the 1950s, including a stay at the American Academy in Rome, had a decisive influence on Kahn. He spent considerable time studying the ancient

architecture of Italy, Greece and Egypt, and drawing the ruins of temples found in each place. In his subsequent designs, which he described once as “ruins in reverse,” he aimed to achieve both the monumental quality and the spiritual mystery embedded in these structures. He accomplished this with simple, often unburnished materials – in particular brick and concrete -- and through a subtle manipulation of light and space.

Kahn’s most acclaimed public buildings include the Indian Institute for Management in Ahmedabad (1962), the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California (1965), the Kimbell Art Gallery in Fort Worth, Texas (1972), the National Assembly Building in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1974) and the Yale Center for British Art (1974).

His design for a park commemorating the “Four Freedoms” address of Franklin D. Roosevelt was realized only recently and opened to the public in October 2012. Kahn had finished it shortly before his death but the project was put on hold when the City of New York went nearly bankrupt in 1975. Situated on the southern end of Roosevelt Island in the East River, it is Kahn’s only work in New York.

Kahn had a memorable visit to Israel shortly after the Six-Day War, when he was invited by Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek to rebuild the Hurva Synagogue in the Old City's Jewish Quarter. Kahn preceded his visit to the site with a sojourn in the Judean Desert and the design he later proposed seemed to embody some of quiet majesty he absorbed there.

Far from a reconstruction of the Ottoman-era building that had been destroyed by the Jordanians along with 47 other synagogues in the Old City during the Israel War of Independence, Kahn’s proposal was for a simple, temple-like structure covered in Jerusalem stone, and illuminated by natural light. It was to be linked to the Western Wall plaza by a route that he described as the “Street of the Prophets.”

Kahn died before the Hurva project could be realized, but the amount of opposition it elicited made it unlikely that it would have been built even if he had lived. In the end, after several more decades of debate, what did rise on the site was an exact reconstruction of the synagogue that had been blown up in 1948.

Although his architectural work often took him to such remote locations as India and Bangladesh, Louis Kahn lived nearly his entire life in Philadelphia, where he also taught and had a small office.

So it was something of a surprise when, a decade ago, filmmaker Nathaniel Kahn, in his documentary film “My Architect: A Son’s Journey,” revealed that he was the illegitimate son of Louis Kahn. It turned out that in addition to the daughter he raised with his wife, Kahn also had children with two other women, one of whom was Nathaniel’s mother, and that all three children grew up in Philadelphia unaware of the existence of the others.

Louis I. Kahn died of a heart attack after returning from a work trip to India. He was found in the men’s room at Penn Station, in New York, as he was preparing to board a train for Philadelphia. His body went unidentified for four days.

March 18 / Jews struggle to settle in the New World

In 1655, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Amsterdam tried and failed to keep Jews out of the "the colony that would later become New York.



A map of the Hudson River Valley, circa 1635 (North is to the right). Photo by Wikimedia

On March 18, 1655, Johannes Megapolensis, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church living in New Amsterdam, wrote to the senior leadership of the church asking them to prevail upon the Dutch West India Company to prevent Jews – “these godless rascals” -- from settling in the colony.

A half year earlier, on September 7, 1654, Megapolensis had joined Pieter Stuyvesant, the colony’s governor, on the docks as the ship the St. Catherine arrived, carrying, among others, 23 Jewish refugees from the former Dutch colony of Recife, in Brazil. They had left Brazil when it was reconquered by the Portuguese. Stuyvesant and Megapolensis tried to stop the Jews from disembarking from the vessel. Stuyvesant also wrote to his superiors at the West India Company asking what to do with the newly arrived Jews, whom he described as a “deceitful race” whose members practiced an “abominable religion.”

The directors of the company, some of whose investors included Jews, wrote back, in early 1655, instructing Stuyvesant to allow the Jews to remain. Objectionable as they were, the Jews should be permitted to “quietly and peacefully carry on their business ... and exercise their religion within their houses.” At the same time, it declared that the Jews would be responsible for their own poor, and would receive no assistance from either the company or the colony.

When Dominie (a clerical title in the church) Megapolensis made his written appeal to his superiors, a month after Stuyvesant had received his response, he claimed that the

Jews who had arrived the preceding summer had in fact become wards of the community, and that his institution had already “had to spend several hundred guilders for their support.” Megapolensis – who had arrived in the New World in 1642, and had distinguished himself as a missionary to the Mohawk Indians of New York, preaching to them in their own language – went on to describe his unpleasant encounter with some of his Jewish neighbors: “They came several times to my house, weeping and bemoaning their misery. When I directed them to the Jewish merchant [apparently Jacob Barsimson, a Dutch Jew who had arrived in New Amsterdam in August 1654, and is widely recognized as the colony’s first Jew], they said, that he would not lend them a single stiver.”

The minister expressed his concern that more of their co-religionists were on the way to New Amsterdam, and that this had caused “a great deal of complaint and murmuring” among his congregants. “These people” – that is, the Jews -- “have no other God than the Mammon of unrighteousness, and no other aim than to get possession of Christian property, and to overcome all other merchants by drawing all trade towards themselves.”

Considering that the colony already had to contend with the presence of “Papists, Mennonites and Lutherans . . . also many Puritans or Independents, and many atheists and various other servants of Baal among the English under this Government, who conceal themselves under the name of Christians,” argued Megapolensis, having the additional presence of Jews would be a source of “still greater confusion.” For that reason, he requested from “your Reverences to obtain from the Lords Directors that these godless rascals, who are of no benefit to the country, but look at everything for their own profit, may be sent away from here.”

In fact, the Jews were not expelled from New Amsterdam, although they had to contend with – and they often challenged in court – a number of restrictions concocted by Governor Stuyvesant. But the Jews fared better than other objectionable religious groups, such as Quakers and Lutherans, whom Stuyvesant expelled without requesting permission from Amsterdam. And as early as 1655, the Jews of the colony asked for and were granted permission to establish a cemetery there, a major step in making their presence permanent.

March 19 / Persian Jews given choice: Convert or die

Thousands of Mashhad Jews did convert to Islam, in appearance at least, after nearly 40 were murdered by their neighbors; most simply took their Judaism underground.



The shrine of Imam Ali Reda in Mashhad, Iran. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

March 19, 1839, is the date that the Jews of Mashhad, Persia, were given the choice of converting to Islam or dying, in an event that came to be known as the “Allahdad,” meaning “God’s Justice.”

The ultimatum was preceded by an attack by an angry crowd on the neighborhood where the city’s Jews resided, during which nearly 40 Mashhadi Jews were killed. Following that, the rest of their 2,400 or so brethren publicly accepted Islam – although most continued to practice their Judaism surreptitiously.

Jews had only resided in Mashhad -- in the far northeastern corner of Persia, and today Iran’s second-largest city -- since 1746, when Nader Shah, the empire’s king, moved his capital there and ordered 40 Jewish families to accompany him.

Mashhad was already a major object of Shi’ite pilgrimage and was known for the piety of its population, which did not welcome their new Jewish neighbors. Nonetheless, those Jews, who were confined to a ghetto-like neighborhood on the city’s outskirts, created a community, developed trading ties with other towns in the region and eventually with their immediate neighbors too, and grew to some 200 families.

The Allahdad began, as such events usually do, when rumors began to spread that the city’s Jews were mocking the Muslim religion, and on a holy day, no less.

The public appealed to their religious leaders, who turned to the town's political leader, who granted the crowd permission to vent their wrath on the Jews. They invaded the Jewish quarter, attacked homes and businesses, burnt books and destroyed the synagogue. Thirty-six Jews lost their lives that day.

The physical violence was followed by the demand that the surviving Jews convert. The community capitulated to the demand and its members became "Jadid al-Islam" – new Muslims. They took on Arabic names, began to publicly embrace the rituals of Islam, including making the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca.

At the same time, in a manner very similar to that of the crypto-Jews during the Spanish Inquisition, they also secretly continued to live as Jews. They gave their children second, Hebrew names, they fed the unkosher meat they openly bought to their animals, and carried out shehita (kosher slaughter) surreptitiously. They also established clandestine synagogues in their basements.

They reproduced by hand the sacred Hebrew books that had been destroyed during the Allahdad, and used them to continue teaching their children Torah. They even found a way to avoid having their children intermarry with non-Jews, by marrying them off to other members of the community while they were still very young, age 9 or 10, so that when inquiries came from the city's Muslims, they could say their children were already spoken for.

Only after the ascent of Reza Pahlavi, the father of the last shah, to power, in 1925, and the start of a period of social liberalization, which included freedom of religion, did the crypto-Jews who still lived in Mashhad return to openly practicing their faith. That period lasted until 1946, when anti-Jewish riots erupted in Mashhad yet again. At that point, the city's Jews began to leave en masse. They went either to Tehran, where they constituted a distinct community, served by 10 "Mashhadi" synagogues, or left Iran altogether.

Today, all the descendants of the Jews of in Mashhad are outside their native land. Most can be found in Israel, and there's a large contingent in New York - in Kew Gardens, Queens, and in Great Neck.

March 20 / Jews start boycott of Nazi Germany

But their efforts to persuade the world not to buy from Germany failed.



Nazi SA Storm Troopers in Berlin on April 1, 1933, with boycott signs, blocking the entrance to a Jewish-owned shop. Signs read “Germans! Defend yourselves! Don’t buy from Jews!” Photo by Wikipedia

On March 20, 1933, efforts got under way in both Poland and the United States to initiate economic boycotts of Nazi Germany. Within several years, boycott movements had been started by Jewish communities – although they were not limited to them – in a number of countries around the world.

Violence against Germany’s Jews began right after the Reichstag election of March 5, 1933, when a Nazi victory allowed Adolf Hitler, who had become chancellor on January 30, to consolidate his power. Various organs of the National Socialist party undertook to harass Jews across the country – boycotting their businesses, attacking presumed Jews in the streets, even breaking into and searching Jews’ homes.

News of the abuse quickly spread around the world, and Jewish organizations appealed to the new German government to come down hard on those who were doing the attacking. The response of Hermann Goering that, “I shall employ the police, and without mercy, wherever German people are hurt, but I refuse to turn the police into a guard for Jewish stores,” was a typical response, as well a harbinger of things to come.

On March 20, 1933, the Jewish community of Vilna, Poland, announced a boycott of German products to protest the abuse; within a week, Warsaw’s organized community joined in. Eventually, the Polish boycott went nationwide, but after Poland and Germany signed a mutual nonaggression pact – which was supposed to be valid for 10 years – in early 1934, the Poles were obligated to halt the boycott.

The fact that Germany insisted on an end to the Polish boycott as part of that agreement is evidence of how seriously the Nazis took the idea of economic boycott. They were in the midst of rebuilding their economy, and they were preparing for war. When one considers the almost supernatural powers that the Nazis ascribed to Jewish economic interests, one can more easily understand the regime's fear.

Also on March 20, in New York, the American Jewish Congress organized a meeting to discuss economic action by U.S. Jewry, with J. George Freedman of the Jewish War Veterans group proposing a boycott. So large was the turnout to the meeting at the Astor Hotel that 1,000 were reportedly turned away, and another conference was called for later in the month at Madison Square Garden.

While boycotts had also been organized by the end of March in France, Romania, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Greece, Latvia, Morocco and in several Latin American countries (in Britain, the movement began only in 1935), Jews were far from united in supporting this economic tool. At the time, the Zionist movement in Palestine was negotiating the Transfer Agreement with Germany, an arrangement that made it possible for German Jews to emigrate without having to leave the country penniless. They would buy German goods and equipment for export to the Yishuv, and be reimbursed for their outlays upon arrival in Palestine. One of the main reasons the Germans were willing to sign the agreement – in the summer of 1933 – was their hope of breaking the boycott movement.

Another German measure meant to fight Jewish boycotts was a one-day counter-boycott, on April 1, of all Jewish-owned businesses in Germany, enforced by the police. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels threatened to keep the boycott going if the anti-German boycotts were not dropped, and to maintain it, he said, “until German Jewry has been annihilated.”

In the end, of course, the boycotts of Germany did not stop the harassment of Jews there, nor did they prevent the horrors to come that were directed at the Jews of all the occupied countries. But they do merit remembering, if only as a corrective to the common perception that Western Jewry was naïve about Hitler and little disposed to act on behalf of their brethren in Germany.

March 21 / The rebbe who met with Freud

Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe who is credited with initiating Chabad's focus on outreach, traveled to Vienna to consult with Sigmund Freud. On this day in 1920, Schneersohn died.



Chabad-Lubavitch emissaries gathering in front of their world headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, Nov. 27, 2011. Photo by Tina Fineberg / Chabad.org

Rabbi Sholom Dovber Schneersohn, the fifth Lubavitcher rebbe, died on March 21, 1920, at the age of 59.

Schneersohn was born on October 24, 1860, in Lubavitch, the village in western Russia (in the Smolensk oblast) where the Chabad Hasidic sect was based for most of its early decades. He was the second son of Rabbi Shmuel Schneersohn, the fourth rebbe, who died in 1882. At the time, neither Sholom Dovber nor his older brother, Zalman Aharon, was prepared to take over the responsibility of leading the community, so they shared some of the duties, until 1892 when Sholom Dovber became the rebbe. He married his cousin, Shterna Sara Schneersohn, and their lone son, Yosef Yitzchok (born 1880), succeeded him as the sixth Lubavitcher rebbe.

Schneersohn moved from Lubavitch to Rostov-on-Dov in 1915 when fighting in World War I approached the former town, and died there five years later.

In the winter of 1902-1903, suffering from loss of feeling in his left hand – or, according to Chabad sources, from a “low spirit,” Rabbi Schneersohn traveled to Vienna to consult with Sigmund Freud, who was then in the thick of developing the principles of psychoanalysis. The two apparently had profound discussions about the relationship between the mind and the heart and Freud also treated the rabbi with electrotherapy, but the treatment brought only temporary relief. When Schneersohn returned home, the problem persisted.

It was the Rashab (an acronym for Reb Sholom Ber), as he is known within Chabad, who established the movement's first yeshiva, Tomchei Temumim, in Lubavitch, in 1897. That was followed by yeshivot in Palestine, in 1911, and one in Georgia, five years later, a reflection of his concern about the welfare of the so-called Mountain Jews. He maintained good relationships with other Orthodox rabbis, and was involved in promoting agricultural and other employment for Jews in Russia, but was a strong opponent of the Zionist movement.

According to the scholar M. Avrum Ehrlich, Sholom Dov Ber was significant for beginning the Chabad tradition of outreach, in which he made himself available not only to the already geographically divided followers of his sect (many Lubavitchers had already begun immigrating to the United States by the turn of the century), but also with non-Chabad Jews, who would often write him for advice. The establishment of yeshivot was also a major way of guaranteeing the training of a new generation of followers, and thus the future of Chabad. Ehrlich writes that the yeshiva in Lubavitch "was one of the first such institutions in Hasidic history, and therefore was important in establishing the Lubavitch sect as the dominant Chabad dynasty."

Rabbi Schneersohn also wrote extensively about Chabad philosophy. A 29-volume collection of his Hasidic discourses, "Sefer Hama'amarim" (book of articles), serves as an introduction to the movement's oral tradition and thought.

Schneersohn was buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery, in Rostov. In 1940, when a sports stadium was built on the site, some of his followers disinterred his body and moved it to the Rostov Jewish Cemetery, where it remains to this day, and is a site of pilgrimage. Chabad tradition says that the rebbe's body, though it had been buried 20 years earlier, showed no signs of decomposition when they removed it from its original grave.

March 22 / The officer who made waves in the Navy

Uriah Levy is remembered for his campaign to end flogging in the service, for his struggle against anti-Semitism and for his philanthropy.



Uriah Phillips Levy, the first Jewish Commodore of the U.S. Navy, veteran of the war of 1812 and a major philanthropist. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On March 22, 1862, Uriah Phillips Levy, commodore in the United States Navy, died at the age of 69. Levy, at the time the highest-ranking Jewish officer in the navy, is remembered for his campaign to end flogging in the service, for his struggle against anti-Semitism and for his philanthropy, which included initiating the process of buying and restoring the home of his hero, Thomas Jefferson, and donating it to his country.

Uriah Levy was born April 22, 1792, in Philadelphia, to Michael Levy and the former Rachel Phillips. His mother's father, Jonas Phillips, had emigrated from Germany to America in 1765, and fought with the Pennsylvania militia in the Revolution; a great-great grandfather, Samuel Nunez, a Jew of Portuguese descent, arrived in the colonies in 1733, and was among the founders of the city of Savannah, Georgia.

Family tradition says that Uriah left home at age 10 to become a cabin boy on the merchant ship *New Jerusalem*, returning home to Philadelphia for his bar mitzvah. Later, he trained as a sailor, and served on the naval ship the *Argus*, which was stationed in the English Channel during the War of 1812. The ship was captured by the British in 1813, with its entire crew imprisoned in Dartmoor Prison until the end of the war the following year.

Upon his return home, Levy continued his naval career, but faced numerous obstacles to advancement. Between his combative personality and the palpable anti-Semitism in the service, he found himself court-martialed six times, and even expelled twice from

the navy. His first trial came in 1816, after he was challenged to a duel by an officer who had insulted him. Levy fought the man and killed him, but was exonerated of any crime. Another fight, three years later, led to his dismissal from the navy, only to be reinstated at the order of President James Monroe.

Again, in 1842, Levy, by then commander of the U.S.S. Vandalia, was tried and dismissed because he insisted on punishing sailors who had violated rules verbally rather than by flogging. Non-corporal punishment was considered “peculiar” by the navy, and the court ruled to dismiss Levy. Again, presidential intervention, this time by John Tyler, who commuted the sentence to a one-year suspension, saved Levy from expulsion from the navy. Later, in 1850, he was instrumental in lobbying Congress to pass a bill limiting the use of flogging in the armed forces, although it took another dozen years for it to be outlawed completely.

For much of the period between 1841 and 1855, however, Levy was either on leave or awaiting orders. He used the time to settle in New York City, where he began investing in real estate, with great success. As a great admirer of Thomas Jefferson, who had died in 1826, Levy commissioned a sculpture of the late president during a visit to Paris, which he then donated to Congress. It stands today in the Capitol Rotunda. In 1834, he purchased a large portion of Jefferson’s Virginia plantation, Monticello, after Jefferson’s daughter had been forced to cover large debts by selling off parts of her inheritance. (Levy bought the Jefferson-designed house and 218 acres of the estate for \$2,700.)

Levy preserved and restored portions of Monticello, and on his death, willed it to the American people. Congress rejected the gift, as the Civil War was then raging, and Virginia was among the seceding states, which had seized Monticello. Eventually, due in large part to the family’s efforts, Monticello did become a national museum, although its role was downplayed by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation until very recently, because of anti-Jewish prejudice, some historians claim.

In 1855, after being informed that he was being retired from the navy, Levy went to court to pursue reinstatement. Eventually, he was given command of the warship Macedonian, and of the Mediterranean fleet, and promoted to the rank of commodore (the equivalent to an admiral today). When the Civil War began, in 1860, Levy, by now back in the United States, again offered his services to his country – as well as his considerable fortune. President Lincoln installed him on the court-martial board, in Washington, ironic, considering his own half-dozen trials.

Only at age 61 did Uriah Levy marry -- to his 18-year-old niece, Virginia Lopez. He died on March 22 (some sources say March 26), 1862, at his home in New York, and was buried in the Beth Olom Cemetery, in Queens.

Among the honors bestowed on Levy’s memory by the U.S. Navy have been the naming of a destroyer ship, the Levy, which hosted the surrender ceremony of the Japanese navy in 1945, and the dedication of a chapel and educational center at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD.

March 23 / Boy goes missing in Italy sparking blood libel

Two-year-old Christian boy called Simon goes missing in Trent, leading to torture and execution of eight Jews. Little Simon was later elevated to sainthood.



An early-16th-century portrayal of the blood libel of Trent. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On March 23, 1475, the Thursday before Easter, a two-year-old boy named Simon went missing from his family's home in Trent, Italy. On Easter Sunday, his body was found – according to the version that quickly passed through the community, in the basement of the home of a Jewish family.

Legal authorities in Trent rounded up the usual suspects – local Jews. It didn't help that that year Easter and Passover fell at the same time. For the Christians of Trent, the holiday had been preceded by the incitatory sermons of an itinerant Franciscan friar named Bernardino da Feitre, who harangued his listeners with tales of the blasphemous practices of the Jews. Thus the suspicion naturally arose that Simonino (Little Simon) had been kidnapped and murdered by Jews so that they could drain his blood for use in the baking of Passover matzah.

Historian Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia explains that the belief that Jews needed Christian blood for Passover had existed in Central Europe for at least a century, and Johannes IV Hinderbach, the prince-bishop who ruled Trent in 1475 was clearly aware of this myth. Later, when the suspects were in Trent, he sent an emissary to Germany to collect transcripts from investigations of similar episodes that had transpired there.

Eighteen Jewish men and five women were arrested and subjected to torture, which yielded the needed confessions. Eight of the men were eventually executed, and another killed himself in prison.

Johanes Hinderbach is also remembered as being a humanist, who created in Trent an important library of Latin manuscripts. It was he who not only insisted on rushing ahead with the trials and executions, but who also quickly connected a number of supposed miracles to the death of the young boy, and pushed for his canonization.

Hinderbach published, with the new printing technology, Trent's first book. Titled "Story of Christian Child Murdered at Trent," and illustrated with a dozen lurid woodcuts, the book was distributed widely around the continent. In general, a large percentage of the first books printed in Italy and Germany dealt with Simon. Hinderbach also used the property seized from the arrested Jews to finance a church dedicated to the nascent Simon cult.

In April 1476, Pope Sixtus IV ordered that Hinderbach postpone further judicial proceedings until representatives from Rome could arrive; he also rebuked the authorities in Trent for extracting confessions under torture. Hinderbach, however, did not back down, sending legates to the Vatican to offer a defense of his actions.

Hinderbach also collected testimony from witnesses attributed more than 100 different miracles to Simon, and pressed the pope, Sixtus IV, to elevate him to sainthood. Though the pope did not accede to that demand – that was left to his successor – he did acquit Hinderbach of any wrongdoing in the investigation and trial. In 1588, Pope Sixtus V saw the canonization of St. Simon of Trent.

Two hundred years later, in 1758, Cardinal Gaganelli, later Pope Clement XIV, prepared a report that cleared the Jews of any role in the death of Simon, a decision that cast doubt on his sainthood, but it was not until 1965, in the context of the Second Vatican Council that Pope Paul VI removed Simon from the Catholic Calendar of Saints. Nonetheless, a superficial check on the Internet reveals that there are many Catholics who still venerate Simon, and the belief that he was the victim of a ritual murder by his Jewish neighbors still has wide currency, nearly 600 years after his death.

March 24 / Death of great halakhic scholar Rabbi Joseph Caro

Best-known as compiler of the *Shulhan Arukh*, Caro became the leading Jewish authority of the 16th century.



Grave of Rabbi Joseph Caro in Safed Photo by Wikimedia Commons

March 24, 1575 saw the death of Rabbi Joseph Caro, the great authority on, and codifier of, Jewish law. As the leading halakhic scholar of his day, Caro responded to inquiries from around the Jewish world, and is best remembered for his systematic compilation of law – the *Shulhan Arukh*.

Joseph ben Ephraim Caro was born in 1488, in Portugal or Spain – according to some, in Toledo. When the Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, his family emigrated east, first to Nicopolis (in modern-day Greece) and then to Adrianople (today Edirne, in Turkey). Caro's early rabbinic education was provided to him by his father, Ephraim.

By 1536, Caro had settled in Safed, Palestine, where his teacher was the great rabbi Jacob Berab. Berab aspired to establish a supreme Jewish legal authority, and to have it based in Safed. To that end, he sought to reinstitute the practice of *semikha* (ordination), by which authority would be passed on from one rabbi to another. Caro was one of those who received ordination from Berab.

Caro seems to have been the most respected halakhic authority of his day, and he was asked by communities around the Jewish world to respond to legal queries. For example, when Jews from Carpentras, France, were subject to an adverse ruling on matters of taxation, they appealed to Caro for relief. His opinion in their favor served to convince the Carpentras community to reverse its original ruling.

In Safed, he was not only a community leader but also apparently headed an important yeshiva, and himself bestowed semikha on selected students.

Caro's major written works include not only the Shulhan Arukh but also his Beit Yosef and Maggid Mesharim. Beit Yosef ("house of Joseph"), which was begun in 1522 while Caro was still in Adrianople, and only completed two decades later, aimed to be a definitive compilation of all the oral law, tracing each law from its first mention in the Talmud through the major commentators. Such a work seemed necessary in the wake of the Expulsion from Spain, with communities being uprooted and individuals moving from country to country, each bringing with them their respective practices.

In cases where rabbinical authorities differed on the interpretation of a law, Caro tried to offer a definitive conclusion, setting out his reasoning. In terms of organization, Beit Yosef based itself on an earlier legal code, the Arba'a Turim of Jacob ben Asher.

The Shulhan Arukh ("set table"), completed in 1555 and first published in 1565, was meant to be a concise accompaniment to Beit Yosef, and was intended for students, whereas the latter was scholarly in nature. Its extremely widespread distribution was in part due to its being one of the first works published on Safed's printing press.

Although the Shulhan Arukh represented the worldview of Sephardic Jews when it touched on custom, a few years after its appearance, Moses Isserles came out with an appendix of sorts – the Mappa ("tablecloth"), which complemented the Shulhan Arukh with a compendium of Ashkenazi customs.

Caro also kept a personal diary about his mystical life, which isn't otherwise reflected in his writings. Written over perhaps 50 years, and published only after his death, the Maggid Mesharim ("preacher of righteousness") recounts Rabbi Caro's encounters with a mystical voice – his "maggid" – that he believed was the incarnation of the Mishna itself.

Caro's maggid would criticize him when his behavior was lax, and would update him about what they were saying about him in heaven. It even urged him to spend more time on the study of kabbala.

Rabbi Joseph Caro died on this day in Safed, in 1575, at the age of 86 or 87.

March 25 / Fire breaks out at New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory

The worst industrial disaster in New York City's history took the lives of many Jewish and Italian immigrants, and led to a massive overhaul in the city's labor laws.



Horsedrawn fire engines en route to the fire. Photo by Wikimedia

March 25, 1911 is the day that fire broke out at New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, trapping and killing 146 workers inside. It was the worst industrial disaster in the city's history, and the public outrage that resulted from the negligence that characterized the conditions in the factory led to the passage of a number of laws meant to improve industrial safety in New York.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory ("shirtwaist" is a term that refers to a woman's tailored shirt) was owned by Max Blanck and Isaac Harris, and was situated on the eighth, ninth and 10th floors of a building at the corner of Greene St. and Washington Place, in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. It employed some 1,000 people – although the number working that day was about half that -- most of them young Jewish and Italian immigrant women who earned between \$5 and \$12 for a six-day workweek. The oldest victim of the fire was 43; the youngest two were 14.

Triangle was a non-union shop, and had been the site of a massive drive for union recognition by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union two years earlier. The owners responded to that drive by firing most of the women who joined the union.

The day of the fire was a Saturday, and as it turned out, the factory's owners were actually visiting the site that day, together with their children. The cause of the fire, which broke out on the eighth floor at 4:40 P.M., is unknown, though it was likely a

smoldering cigarette butt or dropped match – although smoking was prohibited in the plant. Many on the eighth floor were able to escape, but those on the ninth floor found themselves trapped. There was no fire alarm in the building, and of two sets of stairs that could have been used to exit, one was inaccessible because of the fire, and the other was locked. A fire escape buckled from the heat, and two elevators used to evacuate employees quickly became unusable. Sixty-two people tried to save themselves by jumping from the roof of the 10-story building.

One witness, who had been sitting in the nearby Astor Library, described some years later what he saw that day: “Horried and helpless, the crowds — I among them — looked up at the burning building, saw girl after girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the pavement below ... Occasionally a girl who had hesitated too long was licked by pursuing flames and, screaming with clothing and hair ablaze, plunged like a living torch to the street. Life nets held by the firemen were torn by the impact of the falling bodies.”

Most of the deaths in the disaster were caused by asphyxiation, burns or the impact of falling – or a combination of the three. In addition to the 146 dead – 129 women and 17 men – 71 people suffered injuries. Six of the victims, whose bodies had been buried in a common grave, were identified only a century later.

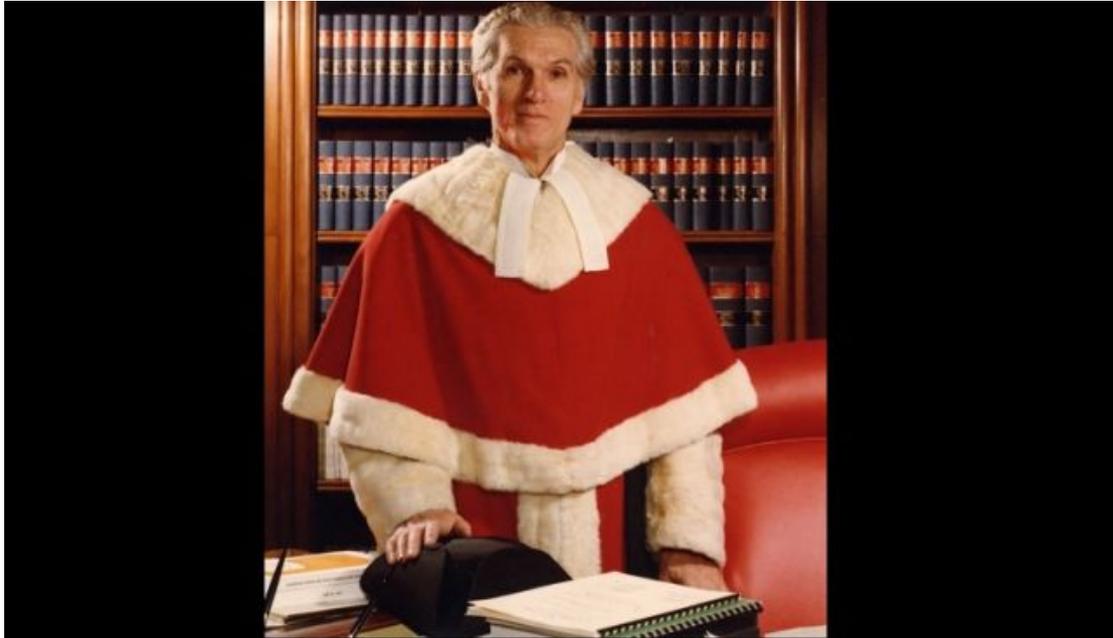
The ILGWU organized large rallies in response to the fire, and a silent demonstration held on April 5, the day when the unidentified victims were buried, drew some 500,000 mourners.

Although Blanck and Harris were both indicted on charges of manslaughter, they were both acquitted at trial. In a subsequent civil case brought by the families of 23 victims, both were ordered to pay compensation of \$75 per victim. Their insurance reimbursed the owners for some \$60,000 more than their reported losses.

In the years that followed, New York adopted some 60 new labor laws that regulated both physical and employment conditions in the state’s factories. Buildings had to have extinguishers and fire alarms, improved toilet and food facilities, and of course accessible exits for emergencies. New limits were placed on the number of hours that women and children could work. And regular commemorations of the fire of that day have remained rallying cries for employees’ rights and to protest the exploitation of migrant workers.

March 26 / The first Jew to serve on Canada's top court dies

Bora Laskin was a liberal among conservatives and often found himself in the role of dissenter, even as chief justice.



Bora Laskin Photo by Supreme Court of Canada

On March 26, 1984, Bora Laskin, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, died, at the age of 71.

Bora Laskin was born October 5, 1912, in Fort William, in northern Ontario. (Fort William merged in 1970 with its twin city, Port Arthur, and became Thunder Bay -- whose first mayor, incidentally, was Bora's younger brother Saul). His parents, Max Laskin and the former Bluma Zendel, called their first son "Raphael," in Hebrew, and for an English name, they turned for inspiration to the progressive Republican U.S. senator from Idaho, William E. Borah, who was perceived to be a defender of the Jews.

Max and Bluma were both Russian-born Jews who had immigrated to Canada in the early years of the century. Bora grew up speaking Yiddish at home. At Fort William Collegiate Institute, he was a star student and athlete, the valedictorian of his class. He also was president of the local Young Judea branch, having been raised in a staunchly Zionist household. His biographer, Philip Girard, describes Fort William as a culturally diverse and tolerant city, with minimal anti-Semitism.

In 1930, Laskin enrolled at the University of Toronto, where he studied in the honors law program led by the charismatic W.P.M. Kennedy. He received his B.A. in 1933, and followed that with further legal studies at U of T, at Toronto's Osgoode Hall Law School, and with a year at Harvard University. Yet when he looked for work in Toronto, he could not find a position. At the time, law firms were either Gentile or

Jewish, and there was no mixing between the groups. Nor was Laskin offered a job at a Jewish firm. Instead, he went to work for the Canadian Abridgement, a law casebook, writing legal abstracts, and he was also involved in editing the Revised Statutes of Ontario.

In 1940, Laskin began teaching at the University of Toronto, remaining there until 1965, except for a brief period in the late '40s, when he taught at Osgoode Hall while the law faculty at U of T reorganized as an accredited school. He was one of those rare law professors who was expert in several fields – in his case, constitutional law, labor law and real estate law. He also was a strong civil libertarian, who worked with the Canadian Jewish Congress in laying the ground for the country's human rights laws.

In 1965, Laskin was appointed to the Ontario Court of Appeal, and five years later, on March 19, 1970, he became Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's first appointee to the Supreme Court – which also made him the first Jew to serve on Canada's top court.

Laskin was a liberal among judicial conservatives, and an activist among colleagues who took a narrow view of the law. As a consequence, he often found himself in the role of dissenter, even after he became the court's 14th chief justice, on December 27, 1973. Not only was Laskin not the senior-most member of the court when he became the chief, he was actually the most junior sitting justice.

Laskin was a strong advocate of increased power for the federal government, and a strong civil libertarian. Although he played an important role in Canada's adoption in 1982, of its Charter of Rights and Freedoms (a bill of rights), which greatly expanded the possibility of judicial review, he had little actual opportunity to hear many appeals based on the charter, because of his early death.

Laskin had been in ill health through much of the final years he was on the bench; he died on this date in 1984 of pneumonia. He was buried in a private ceremony, after his family turned down the possibility of a state funeral. His wife, the former Peggy Tenenbaum, followed him in death two months later.

March 27 / Elizabeth Taylor converts to Judaism

The film icon became a public advocate of Jewish causes, once going so far as to offer to take the place of the Israeli hostages of the Air France flight hijacked to Uganda.

On March 27, 1959, 27-year-old film star Elizabeth Taylor underwent conversion to Judaism in a ceremony at Temple Israel in Hollywood, California. The ceremony was the end of a nine-month process undertaken by Taylor under the supervision of Reform Rabbi Max Nussbaum.

Although it is commonly thought the British-born star converted to marry a Jewish man, the truth is, Taylor began the process after the death of her third husband, Michael Todd, and nearly a year before her marriage to singer Eddie Fisher. Both men were Jews.

Taylor was born February 27, 1932, in London, to two American parents from Kansas who were living in the United Kingdom. Her father, an art dealer, and mother, a former stage actress raised her as a Christian Scientist. Shortly before the start of World War II, the family returned to the United States and settled in Los Angeles.

There, family friends urged the parents to arrange a screen test for their unusually beautiful daughter with the thick eyelashes and violet eyes. Taylor's mother was initially reluctant to see her daughter relinquish her childhood to the life of a professional actress. But when Taylor's career began to take off and she expressed a desire to give it up and return to a normal life, her mother supposedly told her that she had a responsibility to her family and the world to continue with her work.

In 1943, after a less than a year with Universal Studios, Taylor was fired and moved to MGM, the glamorous studio that claimed to have "more stars than there are in heaven." Her first hit came in 1944 with "National Velvet," which led to a long-term contract with the studio for the 12-year-old. She worked throughout the decade, by the end of which she was playing adult roles, most notably in "Father of the Bride," in 1950 and "A Place in the Sun," which she began filming in 1949.

That period coincided with Taylor's first marriage, a short-lived union with Conrad "Nicky" Hilton of the hotel family. With her second husband, actor Michael Wilding, whom she was married to from 1952 to 1957, Taylor had two children. Between 1957 and 1960, she was nominated for four times for an Academy Award for Best Actress, winning the Oscar finally for "Butterfield 8."

Taylor's third marriage was to film producer and entrepreneur Mike Todd, who had been born Avrom Hirsch Goldbogen to Jewish immigrants from Poland. The couple was married in February 1957, in a small civil ceremony in Acapulco, Mexico, with their best friends Eddie Fisher and his wife Debbie Reynolds among the few in attendance. A newspaper account said they had planned to follow the civil vows with a Jewish ceremony but were unable to find a rabbi in the vicinity.

Thirteen months later, Todd was killed when his private plane crashed in bad weather in New Mexico in 1958. He and Taylor had one child, a girl.

It was apparently in the period following her husband's death that Taylor decided to convert. Rabbi Nussbaum, a Bukovina (Romania)-born Holocaust survivor, had her attend services over the course of a year and assigned her a number of secondary sources about Judaism to read, including Milton Steinberg's "What Is Judaism" and Abram Leon Sachar's "History of the Jews." She took the Hebrew name Elisheba Rachel.

Two months later, on May 12, 1959, Nussbaum performed the marriage ceremony of Taylor and Eddie Fisher, in Las Vegas. The couple had begun their relationship in the wake of Todd's death, and it caused a very public scandal, considering that it led to the dissolution of Fisher's marriage to actress Debbie Reynolds. Fisher and Taylor were together until 1964, when she divorced him and married Richard Burton, whom she had met during the making of "Cleopatra" (1963), in which she played the title role and he portrayed her lover Mark Antony. (Taylor and Burton were married and divorced twice; she married and divorced two more times after him.)

Egypt banned her from filming locations for "Cleopatra" in 1962, announcing that "Miss Taylor will not be allowed to come to Egypt because she has adopted the Jewish faith and supports Israeli causes." The ban was lifted after the film was completed and Egyptian officials decided it would be good for the country's image.

Many of Taylor's more than 50 biographers have devoted copious attention to the question of her connection to Judaism. One of them, Kitty Kelley, quoted her as explaining her feelings in the following manner: "'I felt terribly sorry for the suffering of the Jews during the war. I was attracted to their heritage. I guess I identified with them as underdogs.'"

There is certainly little evidence that Taylor became a traditionally pious Jew or even a regular attendee at her Reform synagogue. It has even been reported that she continued to wear a cross for much of her life. However, Taylor identified as a Jew and became involved with very public support for Israel and a variety of Jewish organizations.

When Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and helped Israeli Air France passengers in Entebbe, Uganda, in 1976, Taylor approached the Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Simcha Dinitz, and offered to take the place of the hostages. Dinitz later revealed that he politely turned down the offer but told the star that "the Jewish people will always remember it."

Taylor visited Israel a number of times, publicly condemned the UN General Assembly's "Zionism is Racism" resolution of 1975, raised money for Israel Bonds and the Jewish National Fund and served as the narrator for a Simon Wiesenthal Center film about the Holocaust, among many other public actions that linked her to Jewish causes.

Elizabeth Taylor died on March 23, 2011, at the age of 79. She was buried in a multi-denominational ceremony, presided over by Rabbi Jerry Cutler of the self-styled

“unorthodox” Creative Arts Temple in Los Angeles. At Taylor’s request, the ceremony began 15 minutes later than its scheduled starting time in accordance with her desire to be late to her own funeral.

March 28 / An alternative Jewish homeland is founded, almost

Birobidzhan was intended as a national home for Jews in the Russian Far East. The foundation was laid but the project never really got off the ground.



Birobidzhan, in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast of Russia, on the Chinese border. The region was intended to serve as an alternative homeland for the Jews. Photo by Wikimedia commons

On March 28, 1928, the presidium of the General Executive Committee of the Soviet Union approved the establishment of a Jewish national region in the country's Far East. Informally referred to as Birobidzhan, after the name of the district's capital city, the region, which borders Manchuria, was meant as a homeland for the Jews of the USSR, with Yiddish serving with Russian as one of two official languages.

At the time, the government of Joseph Stalin encouraged the development of national identities for the different ethnic groups that made up the country's population. Although religious practice was strongly discouraged by the communist regime, the Jews were perceived as a cultural group united principally by a common language and Birobidzhan was to be a national home.

A land of their own would also afford the Jews with an opportunity to become "productive," considering their tendency to persist in their traditional livelihoods as merchants and craftsmen, and their difficulty integrating into the communist economy. In the period following the Russian Civil War, a Jewish agricultural movement had already led to the creation of 79 distinct Jewish farming colonies in the country. In allocating Birobidzhan to the Jews, the intention was that it would become the largest of these colonies.

A Jewish homeland in the Russian Far East would also serve as an alternative to Zionism for the more than 2.5 million Jews of the Soviet Union, and its strategic location would help to secure the border region against the expanding Japanese empire. In fact, an effort was made to raise moral and financial support internationally for the project from Jewish socialists and Yiddishists.

And indeed, as Nazism began its rise in Germany, the Jewish national project in Birobidzhan attracted increasing interest and support globally, although the Zionist organizations understandably did not join in the support.

By 1934, the homeland was upgraded to the status of a “Jewish Autonomous Region,” and Jewish culture was thriving in its capital, which is situated some 6,000 kilometers from Moscow. There was a Sholom Aleichem Theater, a Yiddish newspaper and schools whose language of instruction was Yiddish.

Although Birobidzhan never possessed the romantic or historical allure of Palestine for Soviet Jews, who were more likely to want to move to Moscow or Leningrad than to a rural area near the Chinese border, nonetheless during the 1930s, and again in the period following the Holocaust, there were thousands who migrated to the region. Migration began as early as April 1928; in the decade that followed, 43,000 Soviet Jews moved to Birobidzhan – although only 19,000 of them actually remained. Additionally, another 1,200 Jews immigrated there from outside the country including from the United States, South America and even Palestine.

It was the changing political winds at the national level that doomed Birobidzhan. The political purges of 1936-39 were accompanied by an official disappearance of support for the project, and the destruction of the political leadership of the region and many of its cultural institutions.

Following World War II, despite an initial wave of renewed immigration to the region, the now more blatantly anti-Semitic policies of the Stalin regime devastated the already weakened Jewish national project in Birobidzhan. Now, the state began to actively suppress the Jewish cultural institutions there that 15 years earlier it had helped to nurture. The use of Yiddish was now prohibited in public institutions, the Jewish theater shut down, and many Jewish writers imprisoned.

Officially, the region is still called the Jewish Autonomous Oblast (“oblast” is a political subdivision in Russian), but Jews constitute only about 1 percent of its population today; most of those who remained left for Israel by the 1990s. And yet, there has been a renewed interest in Jewish culture in recent decades. The Birobidzhan National Jewish University teaches Hebrew and other Jewish subjects, Bar-Ilan University has been offering a summer Yiddish program in the capital city since 2007, and there are again grade schools offering instruction in Yiddish.

March 29 / The founder of Reform Judaism is born

Isaac Mayer Wise rejected messianism, didn't feel the Talmud is binding and didn't shy from brawling to protect his view of the liturgy.



Isaac Mayer Wise, founder of Reform Judaism, 1819-1900. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

March 29, 1819, is the birthdate of Isaac Mayer Wise, the central figure in the founding and organization of the Reform movement in the United States.

During his long life and career, Wise founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873), the Hebrew Union College (1875) and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (1889) – the central institutions of what is today America's largest Jewish denomination.

The son of Leo and Regina Weiss, Wise was born in Steingrub, Bohemia (today Lomnicka, in the Czech Republic). Leo Wise was a rabbi and teacher, and it was he who gave his son his initial training.

That was followed by education with his grandfather, a physician, and attendance at (though no degree from) the Universities of Prague and Vienna.

Ordained as a rabbi at the age of 23, Wise worked as a rabbi-teacher in Radnitz, Bohemia, for two years before leaving his homeland in 1846. In the interim, in 1844, he married Theresa Bloch, with whom he had 10 children.

Jews living in Bohemia were subject to numerous restrictions – they were limited in where they could live, were not permitted to own land, and had to pay special taxes. These were behind Wise's decision to move to the United States.

Reaching New York City, Wise was almost immediately recommended for the position of rabbi at a congregation in Albany, New York, and the family moved there. Very quickly, he established himself as a prophet of religious reform.

As he wrote in his autobiography, years later, “The reforming spirit was innate in me.... I was an enthusiast on the subjects of America and freedom, and was convinced that every one thought and felt just as I did.” Attending a debate in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1850, Wise found himself confronted by a traditional rabbi, who asked him, “Do you believe in the personal Messiah? Do you believe in bodily resurrection?” To both questions, Wise responded emphatically in the negative.

Wise’s efforts to change the liturgy at his synagogue, among other changes, encountered resistance. Two days before Rosh Hashanah in 1850, he found himself fired from Beth El synagogue. When he showed up nonetheless to lead New Year’s services, he ended up in a fistfight with the congregation’s president.

A short time later, Wise and his supporters founded a new congregation, Anshe Emeth – “people of truth.”

By the time Wise moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, then the third largest city in the United States, to take up the leadership of Congregation Bnai Jeshurun, he already was committed to the idea not of establishing a new denomination, but rather of uniting all of the country’s Jews in a single religious movement. This of course was never to happen. But what did emerge from Wise’s efforts were the beginnings of American Reform. He wrote a Reform prayer book, “Minhag America,” in 1847, and the following year called for the formation of a union of Reform congregations – an ambition that was realized only in 1873.

Later, when the Union Prayer Book was published, in 1894, he voluntarily retired his own volume from his synagogue.

One God, zero Talmud

On the ideological level, Wise laid out what he felt were the basic principles of Judaism as follows: Belief in one God, belief that man is created in the image of God and is accountable to God for his actions, and belief that the Jews were chosen by God to promulgate his truths. Beyond that, however, Wise preached that the rules and practices that derived from the Talmud were not binding on Jews, and wrote that “I must a thousand times pity” those who believed otherwise.

On the practical level, Bnai Jeshurun synagogue, where he remained until the end of his life, regarded men and women as equals – women were counted in a minyan, and seating was mixed. At the festive banquet to celebrate the ordination of the Hebrew Union College’s first class of rabbis, nonkosher food was served – including shellfish and a mixture of meat and milk – which immediately meant that traditional Jews would not be involved with the college.

On the question of slavery, Wise was equivocal: Though he found it distasteful, he wrote that “we are not prepared, nobody is, to maintain it is absolutely unjust to purchase savages, or rather, their labor.” Instead, he proposed the biblical injunctions

related to the treatment of slaves, by which the servant “is a free man, excepting only the fruits of his labor,” as a model that might serve the United States.

Isaac Mayer Wise published a large number of books about Judaism and its beliefs and history, and also published a number of novels as well as a weekly Jewish journal, *The Israelite*. His dream of an American seminary was realized in 1875, with the opening of the Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati.

Wise died on March 26, 1900, in Cincinnati.

March 30 / Sephardi chief rabbi recognizes 'lost' tribe of Indian Jews

Members of Bnei Menashe allowed to undergo conversion and be considered eligible for immigration to Israel.

On March 30, 2005, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, then-Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, published a ruling determining that the members of the northeastern-Indian group calling themselves Bnei Menashe were descended from the original tribe of Menashe (Menasseh), the son of Joseph. This paved the way for members to undergo conversion under the auspices of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, and to be considered eligible for immigration to Israel.

The people identifying as Bnei Menashe come from the Mizo, Kuku and Chin peoples, who live in what are today the Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram. Though these tribes have no written history, oral traditions say they had to leave their original homeland, called Sinlung or Chhinlung. Anthropologists believe this was in what is today the Chinese state of Hunan, and that their exodus to the southwest began some 6,000 years ago. Their languages are Tibeto-Burman in origin.

In the 19th century, the region where the Mizo, Kuku and Chin now live was frequented by Christian missionaries, who converted most of them. Previously, they had been animists; their new religion combined elements of both their native traditions and Christianity.

Hebrew University anthropologist Shalva Weil has suggested the idea that their origins were in the Lost Tribes of Israel – who were sent into exile at the time of the Assyrian conquest of the Kingdom of Israel, in the eighth century, B.C.E. – was adopted by the Bnei Menashe after their exposure to the Bible. They could have been encouraged in the belief by the fact that Christian missionaries were often on the lookout for communities that could be remnants of the Lost Tribes. Genetic testing done a decade ago, however, did not suggest a Middle Eastern origin for members of the Bnei Menashe.

More recently, when Israeli rabbi Eliyahu Avichayil made his initial visits to the region of India near the border with Burma (or Myanmar), he observed similarities between their traditions and the three pilgrimage festivals of Ancient Israel, as well as in customs related to birth and death. It was Avichayil who suggested calling them “Bnei Menashe,” in consideration of the pre-Christian tradition among some of the group that they are the descendants of a forebear named Manmasi.

Additionally, the Hmar spring harvest festival (the Hmar are a sub-tribe of the Mizo, Kuku and Chin peoples) has long been accompanied by recitation of a song that describes events bearing similarity to the biblical Exodus from Egypt. The “Sikpui Song” begins, for example, with the following lines: “While we are preparing for the Sikpui Feast / The big red sea becomes divided; / As we march along fighting our foes / We are being led by pillar of cloud by day...”

When Rabbi Avichayil, founder of the organization Amishav – which seeks out other communities with claims to Jewish heritage and a desire to adopt normative Orthodox Judaism and move en masse to Israel – came to Manipur and Mizoram states, he began helping them prepare for formal conversion. The 2005 ruling by Rabbi Amar gave an impetus to the process, and led to the construction of several synagogues and mikva'ot (ritual baths) in their villages. More recently, the Shavei Israel organization – led by Michael Freund, a former colleague of Avichayil's – has been very active in working with the Bnei Menashe.

In the 1990s, some 900 Bnei Menashe had made aliyah, but the process came to a standstill in 2003, after then-Interior Minister Avraham Poraz decided to disallow them from immigrating. That decision was reversed by successive governments, and by January 2013 there were some 2,000 Bnei Menashe living in Israel, with up to another 7,000 in India said to be studying for conversion and preparing for aliyah.

Many of the new immigrants have been sent directly to West Bank settlements. Before the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, Bnei Menashe made up the largest group of immigrants in the Strip's Gush Katif settlements.

March 31 / The Spanish monarchy turns on the Jews

On this day in 1492, the Spanish monarchs gave the Jews four months to convert or leave.



An image of the Alhambra decree. Photo by Wikipedia

On March 31, 1492, the joint monarchs of Spain, King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile, signed the Alhambra Decree, also known as the Edict of Expulsion, which gave the Jews who remained in their domain four months either to convert or to go into exile.

The expulsion of the Jews was made possible by the “reconquest” of most of Iberia from the Muslim Moors by the Catholic monarchs. But it was really the culmination of a century of severe persecution of Jews, which included murderous riots across much of Iberia that resulted in massive conversions and also voluntary emigration of tens of thousands of Jews.

Spain was far from the first country in Europe to rid itself of its Jews: By 1492, Britain, France, parts of Germany, Naples, Lithuania, Hungary, Austria, among others, had already done the same.

For Ferdinand and Isabella, the expulsion was a response to reports that Jews who had nominally converted to Catholicism were secretly continuing to practice their original faith, and even attempting to lure other conversos to do the same. For this reason Ferdinand requested permission from the pope in 1478 to establish a commission of inquisition to investigate such charges.

Granada was the last outpost of Moorish rule in the Iberian Peninsula. With its fall in January 1492, a large number of Muslims and Jews came under the domain of the king and queen. (A similar expulsion of Muslims took place a decade later, in 1502.)

Although a year earlier, Isabella had signed a treaty guaranteeing the Jews and Muslims of the Emirate of Granada religious freedom, by 1492, she had changed her mind.

The Alhambra Decree – named for the Moorish-era palace in Granada that was surrendered by Boabdil to Ferdinand and Isabella in January 1492 – was the legal expression of that reversal of policy.

Permission to take their possessions

The decree outlines the historical developments that required the monarchy to take such a drastic step as expulsion, whose purpose is to make it impossible for Jews to continue causing Christians to “Judaize.” Unfortunately, the monarchs wrote, it had become clear that ordering Jews to live in separate quarters from their Christian neighbors had been insufficient to stop the former from trying “to subvert their holy Catholic faith and trying to draw faithful Christians away from their beliefs.”

Furthermore, although a dozen years of inquisition had turned up many cases of Jews who had “perverted and enticed” Christians to “hold and observe the laws of Moses,” it too had not succeeded in ending the practice. Hence the decision to “to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back.”

The monarchs explained in the decree how they would offer the Jews four months’ worth of protection to finish up their business and clear out. And it very generously explains how the departing Jews need not leave empty-handed, as they were to be permitted to “export their goods and estates out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land” – so long “as they do not export gold or silver or coined money.”

Jews not departed from the kingdom by July 31 - which worked out to be the day before Tisha B’Av - faced a death penalty, without trial, and any Christians who helped them avoid departure would be punished by confiscation of all their property and loss of hereditary privileges.

The estimate of the numbers of Jews who fled Spain in the wake of the decree ranges from 150,000 to 800,000. A good percentage are presumed to have gone to Portugal initially. The remainder went to Northern Africa and to other parts of the Ottoman Empire, principally Greece and Turkey.

Portugal appointed its own inquisition in 1536, so that Jews who had fled there or to that country’s possessions (including in the New World), were soon forced into exile again. Many of them then moved to Amsterdam.

It is estimated that 50,000 to 70,000 of Spain’s Jews chose the option of converting. One recent genetic study of Spanish men suggests that as many as 20 percent of them have direct patrilineal descent from Sephardic Jews.

Although the Spanish Constitution of 1869 established religious freedom in the country, it was only on December 16, 1968, that the Alhambra Decree was officially revoked. Today, there are estimated 50,000 Jews living in Spain.

April 1 / 'Madame' Helena (born Chaya) Rubinstein dies

Intuitively savvy about human psychology, Rubinstein had a tendency, when a cosmetic product was not selling well, to raise its price.



Helena Rubinstein, who insisted that everyone call her "Madame." Photo by Wikimedia

On April 1, 1975, Helena Rubinstein, founder and driving force behind the international cosmetics firm bearing her name, died at the age of 94. Remembered for her classic maxim, “There are no ugly women, only lazy ones,” Rubinstein offered women who weren’t lazy a wide variety of products and treatments that could be used to make the best of whatever hand nature had dealt them.

She was born Chaya Rubinstein on December 25, 1870 in Krakow, then part of the Russian Empire, now in Poland. Her father, Naftoli Herz Rubinstein was, depending on what source you consult, either a shopkeeper or a dealer in kerosene or eggs. Her mother was the former Gittel Sheindel Silberfeld. Chaya was the eldest of eight surviving daughters.

In 1894, Rubinstein, wanting to escape a match proposed by her father with a wealthy widower, sailed to Australia, where her mother’s brother owned a shop in Coleraine, in western Victoria state. After quarreling with the uncle, she went off on her own, first taking a job as a governess and later working as a waitress in Melbourne.

Rubinstein had arrived in Australia, at least according to the legend, with 12 pots of “Krakow crème,” as she called the face cream concocted by a chemist friend of her mother’s. In 1902, with the help and encouragement of a sister who had arrived from Krakow and a friend, she opened a salon in Melbourne, where she began selling what she now called Crème Valaze. Her cost was tenpence, and she sold it for six shillings

– a markup of more than 700 percent. The Melbourne shop was followed by the Valaze Massage Institute in Sydney.

Legend also said that Crème Valaze contained “rare herbs from the Carpathian mountains,” and that Rubinstein’s expertise in skin care derived in part from her time spent in medical school in Zurich – which she had left only because sick people made her squeamish. Rubinstein liked referring to herself as a “beauty scientist,” and being photographed in a white lab coat.

Success in Australia was followed by expansion, first to New Zealand, then to London, where she moved in 1908, and Paris. That same year, Rubinstein married Edward William Titus, a Polish Jewish journalist whom she had met in Melbourne. He wrote her advertising copy and was the father of her two sons. (Titus later opened a small publishing company in Paris, one of whose titles was “Lady Chatterley’s Lover.” Many years later, according to biographer Lindy Woodhead, Rubinstein complained to her assistant about her husband’s clients: “How was I to know all those writers were worth a sou? I never had a moment to read their books. To me, they were meshuga -- and I always had to pay for their meals!”)

Rubinstein divorced Titus in 1937, and the next year married the self-styled Prince Artchil Gourielli-Tchkonia, of Georgia.

Having expanded to the United States during World War I, Rubinstein – all of whose employees referred to her as “Madame” — sold the American business to Lehman Brothers in 1928 for \$7.3 million, and a short time later, after the onset of the Depression, bought it back for under \$1 million. Intuitively savvy about human psychology, Rubinstein had a tendency, when a product was not selling well, to raise its price.

Helena Rubinstein was a great friend of Israel. Her foundation provided the money for what is now the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art, a branch of the Tel Aviv Museum, and for a variety of art scholarships (in Australia as well as Israel) and medical and scientific research.

When she died on April 1, 1975, the value of her business was estimated at \$60 million. Since 1988, it has been owned by the French cosmetics giant L’Oreal.

April 2 / The man nobody remembers who coined 'Zionism' dies

Nathan Birnbaum embodied myriad aspects of the early 20th-century Jewish experience, from Orthodoxy to political Zionism and back to Orthodoxy.



Nathan Birnbaum Photo by Wikicommons

On April 2, 1937, Nathan Birnbaum, a thinker and activist whose ideological transformations ran the full gamut of the Jewish experience in the half-century before the Holocaust – but who is as little remembered today as he was influential during his lifetime – died, at the age of 72.

Birnbaum was born in Vienna on May 16, 1864, and grew up in a religiously observant family. However, by the time he arrived at the University of Vienna, in 1883, where he pursued philosophy, law and Near Eastern studies, he had moved away from Orthodoxy. It was there, in 1883, that Birnbaum and two fellow students started Kadima, a campus Zionist organization that functioned before the Zionist movement as such even existed.

During 1885-1894, Birnbaum also published and wrote much of the contents of a journal he called *Self-Emancipation!*, which is where he coined the term “Zionism” in 1890 – five years before Theodor Herzl wrote “*Der Judenstaat*.” (He also was the first to use the term “political Zionism,” in the same periodical.)

For his early advocacy of political Zionism (in 1893, for example, he published an article on the subject of “The National Rebirth of the Jewish People in its Homeland as a Means of Solving the Jewish Question”), Birnbaum was elected secretary-general of the Zionist Organization, at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. He soon resigned the position, however, as by that time, he was already moving toward Jewish cultural

nationalism, which foresaw a Jewish national rebirth in Eastern Europe, and through the Yiddish language – rather than a renascent Hebrew.

In 1908, Birnbaum was the chief organizer of the Yiddish Language Conference, which convened in Czernowitz, where Yiddish was declared to be “a” – although not “the” – Jewish national language. A year earlier, he had run for the Austrian parliament as a candidate from Buzacz, in East Galicia. Campaigning with the support of Ukrainians in the district, he actually won a majority of the votes, but he was deprived of his seat by political maneuvering by his Polish nationalist opponents.

The final station in Nathan Birnbaum’s ideological-spiritual journey was a return to his Orthodox roots, beginning in 1912. So thorough was his transformation that in 1919 he was invited to become the secretary-general of Agudath Israel, the Orthodox, non-Zionist political body of European Jewry. He also founded his own organization, Olim (“ascenders,” in Hebrew), which focused on the Jews’ spiritual rebirth. To this end, he advocated for a de-urbanization of the Jews, and the establishment of agricultural colonies, where they could rid themselves of their “pagan” tendencies.

According to historian Jess Olson, who published a biography of Birnbaum last year, Birnbaum’s “turn to politicized, conservative religious Orthodoxy... was his most radical transformation” – one that Olson characterizes as “an impossibly rare and daring decision for the early 20th century.” In retrospect, Birnbaum was on the wrong side of history (as opposed to the Zionists), and for Olson, this helps explain why historians have largely ignored Birnbaum until now.

In 1933, Birnbaum fled Berlin, where he’d been living since 1911, for the Netherlands. There, in Scheveningen, he died of illness on this date in 1937.

April 3 / Death of a musical genius

Composer Kurt Weill was best known for "Mack the Knife," but the range and sophistication of his artistic creations became more fully appreciated after his death.



Kurt Weill Photo by Courtesy Milken Archives

Composer Kurt Weill died on April 3, 1950, at the age of 50. Although Weill – who may be best known for the song “Mack the Knife,” originally written for his “Threepenny Opera” – achieved significant popularity and success during his lifetime, particularly in his native Germany, it is only in the half-century that has followed his death that he has become more fully appreciated for both the wide range of musical genres in which he worked, and the sophistication of his artistic creations.

Kurt Julian Weill was born on March 2, 1900, in the Jewish quarter of Dessau, Germany, where his father was a cantor from a family of rabbis and Jewish scholars with roots that can be traced back to the 13th century. By the age of 13, Weill had composed a setting for the Hebrew text of “Mi Addir,” a wedding song; three years later he wrote “Ofrahs Lieder,” a cycle of melodies for translations of five poems by the medieval Hebrew poet Yehuda Halevi.

After studying and working in several different locations, by 1920, Weill had settled in Berlin, where he studied composition with Ferruccio Bersoni, and composed not only his first symphony and other orchestral pieces, but also his first work of musical theater. It was in Berlin that he became caught up in the city’s cultural and political ferment, and joined a group of left-wing artists that called themselves the Novembergruppe.

A positive review he wrote of Bertolt Brecht’s radio play “Man Equals Man” earned him a dinner invitation by the radical playwright, a meeting that led to the beginning

of collaboration between the two. Most famously, composer Weill and librettist Brecht created “The Threepenny Opera” (1928) and “The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny” (1930).

Weill’s operas met with both critical and popular success, but both the musical style and the social criticism integral to much of his work – not to mention the fact that he was Jewish – guaranteed that he would face opposition with the rise of Nazism. By March 1933, after he learned that he and his wife, actress Lotte Lenya, were about to be arrested, he fled Germany, with his first stop being Paris.

Two years later, he moved again to the United States, where he and Lenya, who had divorced in the meantime, were reunited and married for a second time. Lenya, who was not Jewish, not only performed in many of Weill’s shows, but also became his collaborator and, after his death, the head of the foundation that worked to preserve and promote his work. (As an actress, Lenya is probably best remembered for her 1963 performance as the sharp-toed villain Rosa Klebb in the James Bond film “From Russia with Love.”)

Once in the U.S., Weill resolved to become American and to work in English. Later, he noted that “my success here (which people usually subscribe to ‘luck’) is mostly due to the fact that I took a very positive and constructive attitude towards the American way of life and the cultural possibilities in this country.” After a few years of struggle, he began writing for Broadway – with plays like “Johnny Johnson,” “Knickerbocker Holiday” (a collaboration with Maxwell Anderson) and “Lady in the Dark” (with lyrics by Moss Hart and Ira Gershwin). He also wrote scores for a number of Hollywood movies.

The war also turned Weill into a Jewish patriot, as well as an American one, who felt compelled to use his art to raise awareness of what was happening to the Jews of Europe. Weill famously participated in three big Jewish-themed pageants, the first being “The Eternal Road” – which is what initially brought him to New York, in 1935 – a spectacle about the history of the Jews, with a special emphasis on their persecution, written by Franz Werfels and directed by Max Reinhardt. The opera-oratorio, which put 245 people on the stage, and ran for 135 performances in 1937 (but was only revived in 1999), offered the idea of a reborn Jewish state in Palestine as the solution of the plight of the Jewish people. In 1943 and 1946, respectively, Weill collaborated with Ben Hecht on two other works, “We Will Never Die” and “A Flag Is Born.” The former, which was intended to awaken public opinion to support efforts to rescue the Jews of Europe, played before 40,000 people in one day in two performances at Madison Square Garden. The latter, which starred Marlon Brando and Paul Muni, overtly espoused the Revisionist Zionist cause, and was performed both in New York and on tour.

Kurt Weill died of a heart attack, shortly after his 50th birthday. His gravestone bears a text by Maxwell Anderson (based on a quote from the Venerable Bede), taken from the musical “Lost in the Stars”: “This is the life of men on earth:/ Out of darkness we come at birth/ Into a lamplit room, and then –/ Go forward into dark again.”

Since his death, Weill’s work has been widely rediscovered and revived. A wide range of artists have given new interpretations to much of his material. The fact that

he wrote for different genres, and that his work can be understood as both “popular” and “classical” has made it the object of critical controversy, but there is little doubt that he is one of the 20th century’s most influential composers.

April 4 / An inventor sets up shop in Canada

German-born inventor Emile Berliner, who largely lived in the U.S., helped develop the telephone and recording industries.



Emile Berliner with disc record gramophone. Photo by Wikipedia

On April 4, 1904, German-born inventor Emile Berliner incorporated his Berliner Gramophone Company of Canada in Montreal. Berliner, a multi-faceted and largely self-trained engineer and entrepreneur, played a key role in developing both the telephone and the recording industries, as well numerous other technological products, but his involvement in these nascent, potentially lucrative industries guaranteed that much of his time would be spent in legal battles over patents and manufacturing rights. His decision to move his business to Canada was precipitated by an injunction in the United States, where he lived, preventing him from manufacturing or selling his phonograph there.

Emile Berliner was born on May 20, 1851, in Hannover, in what is today Germany, to a Jewish family with a long history in the city. His formal education ended at age 14, when he began to work to help support his family. By 1870, just prior to the start of the Franco-Prussian War, and facing possible conscription into the Prussian army, he accepted the offer of a family friend to travel to the U.S. He settled in Washington, D.C., which remained his long-term home, although, in his initial years in the States, he worked in a number of different businesses and moved around as opportunities presented themselves.

During a stint as a janitor in a New York laboratory, Berliner began taking night classes at the Cooper Institute, and became interested in acoustics and telephony. It was at this time, in 1876, that Alexander Graham Bell patented his telephone. Berliner worked independently to improve both the microphone and the transmitter of the Bell phone, developments that, after lengthy negotiations, he sold to Bell. Matters were complicated by the fact that Bell was competing in the fledgling field with Western

Union, which used technology developed by Thomas A. Edison. Berliner went to work for Bell Telephone, but in 1878 and 1879, he suffered two nervous breakdowns, for which he had to be hospitalized.

In 1881, Berliner married Cora Adler, another German immigrant, whom he had met a decade earlier, on his second day in Washington. The two eventually had seven children. In the same years, Berliner moved on to develop a linoleum-backed floor covering he called the Parquet Carpet, and then into the new field of sound recording. Whereas Edison's Speaking Phonograph Company depended on the use of a cylinder for the reproduction of sound with its "graphophone," Berliner pioneered the invention of a flat disk that played sound from a horizontal, rather than vertical, groove. This was the technology that eventually prevailed in the market, both through Berliner's collaboration with the Victor Talking Machine Company and his own Berliner Gramophone firm. (It was Berliner who convinced Victor to purchase the rights to use the image of the dog Nipper listening to "His Master's Voice" on a gramophone, painted by English artist Francis Barraud, for its marketing efforts in the U.S.)

When a serious dispute with his sales agent in the U.S. led to the injunction against him, Berliner moved his business to Canada, in 1904. During the first decade of the new century, he also became interested in vertical flight. This led him to begin extensive work on building a helicopter (his Gyro Motor Company produced the rotary engine he invented). He also developed acoustic tiles and a high-performance loom.

When not preoccupied with business, Berliner took on social and humanitarian issues. After one of his children nearly died from an intestinal disorder, he became an advocate for clean milk for children. Berliner also wrote health pamphlets for children, he provided the money for establishment of a tuberculosis sanatorium in Washington, and set up a university research scholarship program for women. As a musician, he wrote the melody for "The Columbian Anthem," which was even considered as a possible national anthem for Berliner's adoptive home.

He also was an early advocate of Zionism in the U.S., writing a number of publications on the subject, including "Zionism and the American Spirit," and another called "A Study Towards the Solution of Industrial Problems in the New Zionist Commonwealth."

Berliner died on August 3, 1929, and was buried at Rock Creek Cemetery, in Washington, D.C. His instructions for his funeral directed his family to make it modest, because "elaborate funerals are a waste of money.... Give some money to some poor mothers with babies and bury me about sunset."

April 5 / A flawed U.S. Supreme Court justice dies

Justice Abe Fortas was a brilliant and progressive lawyer who was unable to distance himself sufficiently from power or resist his own desires for financial gain.



U.S. Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas. Photo by Wikimedia commons

Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas died on April 5, 1982, at the age of 71. Fortas was the fifth Jew to serve on the court, and the only one of them to resign in scandal.

Abraham Fortas was born June 19, 1910, in Memphis, Tennessee, the youngest of five children in an observant Jewish family. His father, a cabinetmaker, had emigrated from England.

Fortas attended college in his hometown and then Yale Law School, where he was editor of the law review. He then taught at Yale, before serving in a number of positions with the U.S. government. In 1946 he and Thurman Arnold founded a law firm in Washington, D.C. (today it is the giant firm Arnold and Porter), where his clients included Lyndon Johnson, who asked Fortas to help him refute vote-tampering charges in his run for the U.S. Senate in Texas in 1948. Other clients included the Chinese studies scholar Owen Lattimore, accused by Sen. Joseph McCarthy of being a Russian spy, and Clarence Earl Gideon, whose case, which reached the Supreme Court, established the precedent guaranteeing legal counsel for indigent criminal defendants.

The beginning of Fortas' downfall came in 1964, when his friend and client, Lyndon B. Johnson, now the president, decided he needed Fortas on the Supreme Court. Johnson feared that some of his social reforms, known collectively as the "Great Society" measures, would be overturned and wanted an insider at the top court who

could keep him informed of developments there. Johnson persuaded Arthur Goldberg, who had held the “Jewish seat” on the court since 1962, to resign his position and to accept nomination as ambassador to the United Nations. In his place on the court, Johnson named a reluctant Fortas (who had earlier turned down an offer to become attorney general), whom the president informed of his decision only moments before announcing it before the press.

In his tenure on the court, Fortas wrote landmark decisions in several cases that helped establish juvenile rights before the law, overturning a number of state laws that didn't extend the same constitutional rights to children guaranteed to adults.

Fortas continued his dialogue with Johnson while on the court, often consulting with him on political matters. This became a public issue in 1968, when Johnson nominated him to succeed Earl Warren as chief justice of the court. In hostile hearings before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Fortas' acceptance of a large speaking fee, paid by private corporations, for a series of lectures at American University, also became an issue of contention. In the end, after conservative senators conducted a filibuster to delay a vote on the nomination, Fortas asked Johnson to withdraw his name from consideration.

Fortas continued at the court until the following year. By then Richard Nixon was president, and he was determined to remove Fortas from his position. When it was revealed that Fortas had an arrangement with the family foundation of a former client, Louis Wolfson, a Wall Street financier, for an annual cash retainer to continue for his wife even after his death, Fortas came under pressure from some of his colleagues to resign from the court. There was some evidence that the businessman expected Fortas' help in arranging a presidential pardon for criminal charges he faced. (Wolfson did not receive a pardon, and did spend time in prison after being convicted.)

Although Fortas initially resisted – he feared the damage his resignation would do to his wife, both personally and to her legal career – he eventually decided to leave the court, resigning on May 14, 1969. When Johnson heard the news, he felt personally responsible, saying, “I made him take the justiceship. In that way, I ruined his life.”

With the departure of Fortas from the court, the “Jewish seat” remained unfilled until the swearing-in of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in 1993.

Arnold & Porter rebuffed a request by Fortas to return to his old firm, although his wife, Carolyn Agger, continued to work there. For his part, Fortas started a new firm, in Washington, where he continued to practice law until his death. He turned down a publisher's offer to bring out his memoirs, and when Lyndon Johnson's widow asked him to donate his correspondence with the late president (Johnson died in 1973) to the Johnson presidential library, he refused, citing the need to maintain lawyer-client confidentiality.

In the years following his death, Fortas has been the subject of several biographies. He is depicted as a tragically flawed figure – a brilliant and progressive lawyer who was unable to distance himself sufficiently from power or to resist his own desires for financial gain. He also was in part a victim of political processes that were pushing

the Supreme Court in a conservative direction, after the years of the progressive Warren court. Once Richard Nixon, with the assistance of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, had decided that Fortas had to go, there was little likelihood that he would be able to save himself.

April 6 / Ottoman authority orders Jews to evacuate Tel Aviv

A total of 1,500 Jewish evacuees are thought to have died after heading north and being forced to lead a nomadic existence.



Ahmed Jemal Pasha, on the banks of the Dead Sea Photo by Wikimedia Commons

April 6, 1917 was the day set by the Ottoman authorities then ruling Palestine for the evacuation of the civilian population of Tel Aviv and Jaffa. Although the Muslims who were expelled were permitted to return to their homes within days, the Jews were not able to come back to the city until after the British conquest of Palestine, later that same year.

Ottoman Turkey entered the Great War, on the side of the Central Powers, in November 1914. At the time, there were those among the Jewish residents of Palestine who had become Ottoman citizens, among them Meir Dizengoff, who at the time was head of the Tel Aviv planning commission, and would later be its first mayor.

Many of the new Jewish residents were recent arrivals from the Russian Empire, however, and their sympathies lay with Russia and its allies. They were a source of concern for the Turks, who feared they would become a fifth column when the front arrived in Palestine. Hence, as early as November 1914, Turkish authorities began going door-to-door in Tel Aviv and Jaffa, checking who did and didn't have Ottoman citizenship. The following month, 750 in the latter group – Russian-born Jewish immigrants – were deported to Alexandria, Egypt.

By January 1917, British forces were poised to begin their invasion of southern Palestine from Sinai. On March 28, Ahmed Jemal Pasha, the Ottoman military governor of Syria (which included the Land of Israel), called together the leaders of

the Jewish community in Tel Aviv and told them of his decision to evacuate them from the city. They were given a week to organize themselves and make arrangements for resettlement. Dizengoff, in his memoirs, recounted how Jemal explained that the move was being made for their own safety, and how he himself was dubious of that justification. There was apparently no resistance on the part of those being expelled.

April 6, Passover Eve, was the date by which the city's estimated 10,000 civilian residents had to be gone. The first group went to Petah Tikva or Jerusalem. By the end of Pesach, a week later, the Turks ordered the evacuees to head further north. The remainder went on to Kfar Sava, Zichron Yaakov and Haifa, transported by wagon, and to Tiberias, which they arrived at by taking a train to Tzemah, at the southern end of Lake Kinneret. Some even ended up in Damascus.

Despite the assistance of local and American charities, and some cooperation from other Jewish communities in hosting the Jews of Tel Aviv, the deportees suffered high mortality rates. The poorest of them, who had no fixed place to resettle, found themselves forced into a nomadic existence. Many fell victim to typhus, or to hunger and the cold weather. A total of 1,500 are thought to have died, with many of them being buried in unmarked graves.

In an article in Haaretz Hebrew Edition in 2007, Nadav Shragai described historical research that uncovered the testimony of Ephraim Keter, who was a boy of 12 when his family was expelled from Tel Aviv. Both his parents died during the summer of 1917, and were buried in unmarked graves in Yavne'el. After the war's end, he and his brother and other orphans among the evacuees were gathered in Sejera. Ephraim's brother, Yehoshua Yona, contracted rubella and was taken to a hospital, where he died. Ephraim was never told where he was buried.

By December, 1917, the British had conquered Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and the city's Jewish residents began making their way back to the city. The Turks only surrendered on October 31, 1918, with the war ending in Europe on November 11.

April 7 / Escape from Auschwitz takes shape

Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler's first-hand accounts of the camps resulted in a detailed report on the Nazi mass murder.



Visitors from around the world passing under the infamous Arbeit Macht Frei 'Work Sets You Free' sign over the main gate at the former Nazi death camp Auschwitz, in Poland. Photo by AP

April 7, 1944, is the day on which Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler began their escape from Auschwitz, a process that resulted in a detailed report that provided the world with a first-hand account of the systemic mass murder taking place there.

Rudolf Vrba (originally Walter Rosenberg, 1924-2006) and Alfred Wetzler (1918-1988) were both Slovak Jews who had been arrested in 1942 and ended up in the Auschwitz II camp, also known as Birkenau. They recognized one another from home, and decided to escape together.

In the memoirs that Vrba wrote after the war, he explained how he had attempted to commit to memory the numbers of transports arriving in Auschwitz, and their places of origin, how he had discussed the way in which Jews were killed with Sonderkommandos who worked in the camp, and how, in early 1944, a Polish kapo told him that the camp was expecting the imminent arrival of one million Hungarian Jews, for whom a new rail line, heading directly to the gas chambers, was being constructed. He also heard German SS troops saying how they looked forward to receiving Hungarian salami from the anticipated arrivals, who would be told they were coming to work at a labor camp, could be expected to arrive with provisions.

On April 7, the two men snuck into the area between the two fences marking off the camp's inner and outer perimeters. They knew from others' earlier escape attempts that guards would continue to search for an escaped prisoner for three days after his reported disappearance. For that reason, Vrba and Wetzler hid for the next two days under a woodpile, emerging only on April 10.

They then headed by foot toward the Polish-Slovakian border, 130 kms away. Crossing into Slovakia on April 21, they got in touch with the local Judenrat (Jewish council), whose head, Dr. Oscar Neumann, interviewed them separately over three days, extracting every detail they could recall about Auschwitz. By April 27, they had prepared an extensive and carefully edited document in German and Hungarian. It included sketches of the layout of the various camps that made up Auschwitz-Birkenau, lists detailing the arrival of transports they had witnessed, and the operation of the gas chambers and crematoria. Most of what they reported was later corroborated by Holocaust historians.

On November 26, 1944, the Vrba-Wetzler Report, together with two other eyewitness accounts from Auschwitz – that of Arnost Rosin and Czeslaw Mordowicz and the “Polish Major’s report” of Jerzy Tabeau – were published by the U.S. War Refugee Board, in a document that became known as the “Auschwitz Protocols.” The same day, it received detailed coverage in the New York Times. Long before then, however, the Hungarian government had begun deporting the country’s Jews, 100,000 of whom were sent to Auschwitz between May 15 and May 27, most of whom were killed on arrival.

There is disagreement about exactly who within the Hungarian Jewish community received early notice of the Vrba-Wetzler Report, but it seems clear that Rudolf Kastner, of the Budapest Rescue and Aid Committee, had a copy of it in hand by early May. At the time, Kastner was negotiating with Adolf Eichmann for the ransoming of Hungarian Jews from the Nazis – the country’s Jewish community was 800,000-strong. Neither Kastner nor other members of the Hungarian Jewish Council made the Vrba-Wetzler Report public, presumably because they didn’t want to jeopardize negotiations with the Germans. In the end, Kastner and Eichmann arranged for the release of 1,684 Jews, and their safe passage to Switzerland.

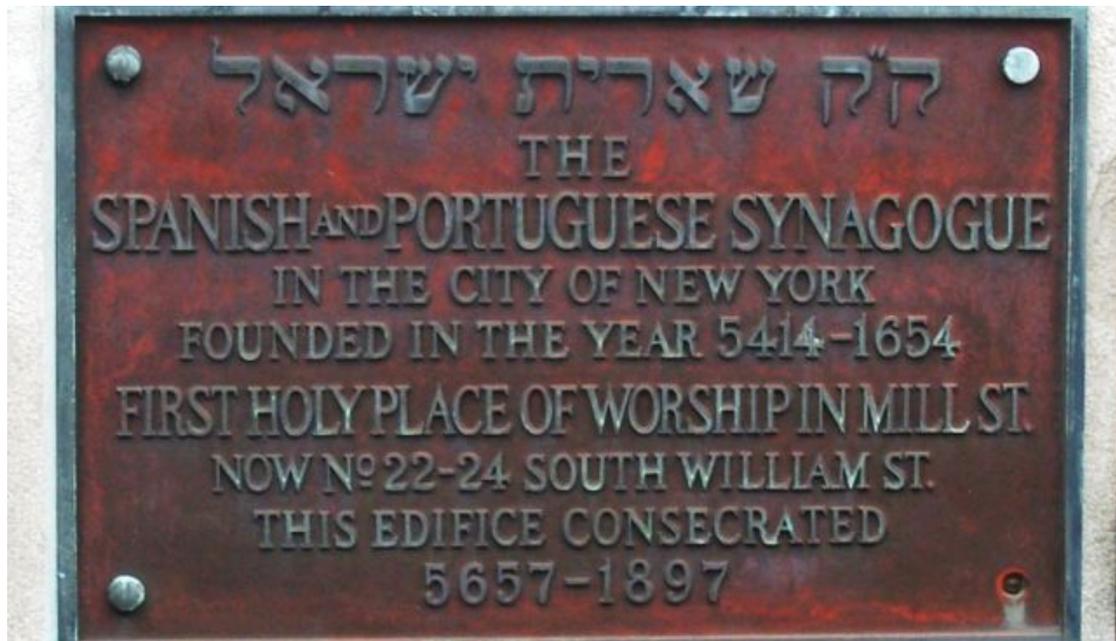
Only after Rosin and Mordowicz, also Slovakian prisoners, escaped from Auschwitz, on May 27, and the full Auschwitz Protocols were smuggled into Switzerland, did pressure begin to mount on the pro-Nazi Hungarian head of state Miklos Horthy not to cooperate with the German demands for the Jews’ deportation. Requests from Washington and the Vatican apparently led to Horthy’s decision on July 7 to halt the deportations of the Jews of Budapest (by then Jews from the rest of the country had already been murdered). The halt was only temporary, however, since Horthy’s government was overthrown by the Arrow Cross Party in October, which established a Nazi puppet government.

After the war, Vrba received a doctorate in chemistry and biochemistry, and eventually made his way to Vancouver, Canada, where he died in 2006. He published journalistic accounts of his experiences in 1961, but when he offered to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann that same year, the Israeli government declined, saying it could not pay his travel expenses. Instead, he submitted written testimony.

Wetzler returned to Bratislava, Slovakia, after the war, where he worked as an editor and later on a farm. He also wrote up his memoirs, under the pen name of Jozef Lanik. He died in 1988.

April 8 / The first synagogue in the U.S. is consecrated in New York City

Shearith Israel was founded in lower Manhattan more than a century before American independence, and it still exists today.



Landmark plaques of Congregation Shearith Israel. Photo by David Shankbone / Wikicommons

On April 8, 1730, Congregation Shearith Israel, in New York, America's first synagogue, consecrated its home, the first structure custom-built for a Jewish house of worship in the country. The small building, on Mill Street – what is today South William Street, in the Wall Street area of Lower Manhattan – was dedicated on the seventh day of Passover.

The first Jews in North America are believed to be 23 refugees from Recife, Brazil, who fled the formerly Dutch outpost when it was reconquered by the Portuguese in 1654, and ended up in New Amsterdam. Although they were not permitted to pray in public, they established a formal community, and in 1656, set up a cemetery. The location of that burial ground is unknown, but the graveyard that followed it, at St. James Place, still stands, the only remaining 17th-century structure in the city.

Until 1818, Shearith Israel was the city's only synagogue, with a membership that was both Sephardi and Ashkenazi in origin. (That remains the case with the synagogue today, although its prayer services follow the Sephardi rite.) In its early decades Shearith Israel rented space for its sanctuary: A map dated 1695 indicates a home on Beaver Street. From 1700, a rented space on Mill Street served the function.

It was only in 1728 that the congregation bought a parcel of land, also on Mill Street, for the construction of its own building. As historian Jonathan Sarna has pointed out, the design of the Mill Street synagogue reflected some of the lessons learned by the Jews regarding their presentation to others over centuries of Diaspora life: “to practice

great discretion on the outside, not drawing excessive attention to themselves, while glorying in their faith on the inside, where tradition reigned supreme.”

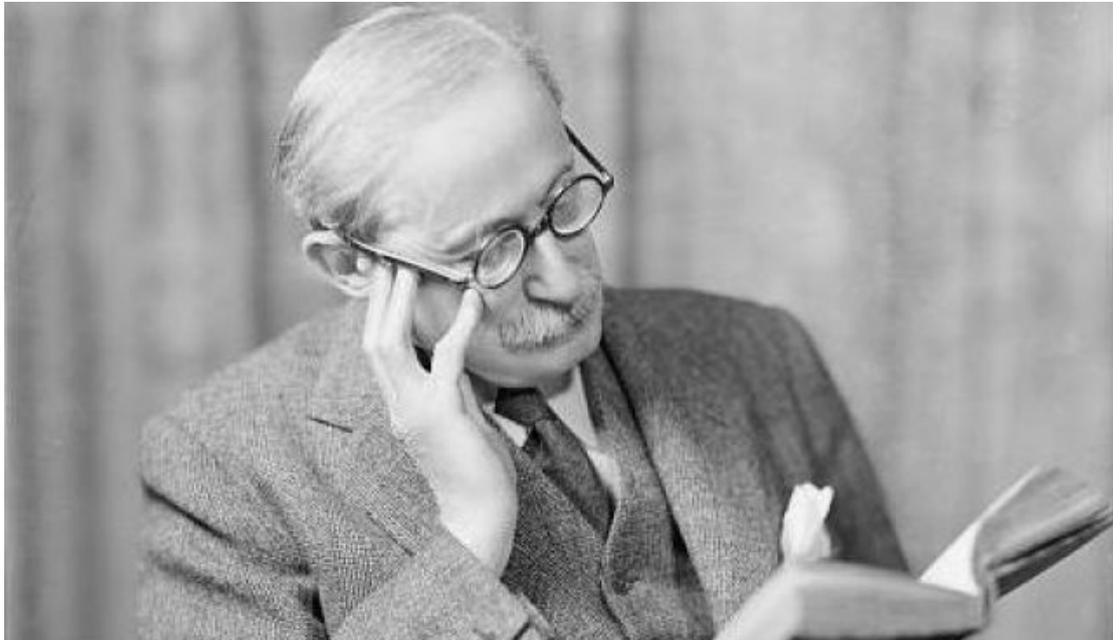
Women were separated from men, as in all Orthodox synagogues, and seated in a cramped upstairs gallery behind a screen. But whereas in Sephardi congregations in Amsterdam, London or Recife, unmarried women generally did not attend, in New York it was customary for all women, including those were single, to attend Sabbath and holiday services, much as their female Protestant neighbors were expected to attend church. This made for crowding, and especially, to a tendency among single women (or sometimes their fathers, on their behalf) to push for a seat in the first row of the gallery, so as to be seen. A 1744 visitor to the synagogue noted, for example that Shearith Israel’s women, “of whom some were very pritty [sic], stood up in the gallery like a hen coop.”

Finally, in 1792, the congregation passed a resolution that barred any “unmarried lady except Rachel Pinto [who was 70 years old and rich]” from taking a seat in the front gallery.

In 1818, having outgrown its home, the congregation erected a new building on the same site, a brick and stone edifice with 167 seats for men and 133 for women. The women’s section was upstairs, but it was open. It moved again in 1834, in response to a push northward by congregants, to Crosby Street, in what is today SoHo. Since 1897, Shearith Israel – also known as the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue – has been in its current structure, at 70th Street and Central Park West.

April 9 / France's first Jewish prime minister is born

Leon Blum, who was arrested by the pro-Nazi Vichy regime and sent to two concentration camps, served as France's leader on three separate occasions.



Leon Blum. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

April 9, 1872, is the birthdate of Leon Blum, the first Socialist – and Jewish – prime minister of France. Blum actually served in the position on three different occasions, the first time being in 1936-37.

Blum grew up in Paris, the second son of an Alsatian Jewish father who owned a successful silk and ribbon business. Leon studied law at the Sorbonne, and was profoundly influenced by the Dreyfus affair, probably as much for the threat it constituted to the French ideals of justice and equality as for its anti-Semitic nature. Blum joined the Socialist Party in 1904, and became a follower and assistant to its leader, Jean Jaures, who was assassinated in 1914, in response to his attempts to prevent the outbreak of World War I. As Blum became increasingly involved in the party, he also edited its newspaper, for which he continued to write throughout his life.

Blum was first elected as a Socialist member of the Council of Deputies in 1929; in 1935, in response to the rise of Hitler, and the spread of fascism in France, Blum convinced the Communists, Socialists and Radicals to unite in an alliance, which called itself the Popular Front. He became premier after the Front's victory in legislative elections in May of the following year. His rise elicited strong waves of anti-Jewish sentiment in France; even before his election, he was attacked and beaten by members of a right-wing royalist organization. (One popular political slogan of the time was "Better Hitler than Blum.")

Once in power, the Socialists established a 40-hour work week and nationalized both the Bank of France and the country's arms industry. But when Blum changed his mind about supplying arms to the Republicans in Spain during that country's civil war, instead maintaining France's neutrality in that conflict, he lost the backing of the Communists. After he also failed to gain support from the Senate for his request for emergency powers to take on France's economic crisis, he resigned in June 1937.

By the time Blum became premier a second time, for less than a month in 1938, he did ship arms to the Republicans in Spain, something he had always personally supported. But his government fell almost as soon as it took office.

After the Germans invaded France, Blum tried escaping to the country's south, where he was arrested by forces connected to Marshal Philippe Petain, head of the pro-Nazi Vichy regime. He was indicted for treason, but his defense embarrassed the regime to the extent that his trial was called off and he was handed over to the Germans. Beginning in 1943, he was imprisoned in Buchenwald concentration camp, and later at Dachau. Blum was saved from execution only by the arrival of Allied forces of liberation in May 1945.

Following World War II, Blum largely played the role of elder statesman, although he did head an all-Socialist caretaker government for a month, starting in December 1946. He helped arrange for an American loan of \$1.37 billion for reconstruction after the war, and he also headed France's delegation to Unesco.

Leon Blum died at his home outside Paris, on March 30, 1950, at age 77.

Kibbutz Kfar Blum, in the Upper Galilee, was named in his honor, upon its founding, in 1943.

April 10 / A Russian farming school for Jewish boys is founded in America

Taking as its model the wave of Jewish farming in Russia, the National Farm School was opened to help boys understand that 'living meant working and creating under the open sky.'



There are ways to grow wheat and there are Russian ways to grow wheat. Photo by Bloomberg

On April 10, 1896, the National Farm School in Doylestown, PA, received its charter. Known today, in the form of its successor institution, as the Delaware Valley College, the school was originally intended to provide agricultural training to young men, particularly recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and Russia.

The founder of the National Farm School was Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf (1858-1923), a Prussian-born Reform rabbi from Philadelphia. In 1894, at the height of Jewish emigration from the czarist empire, Krauskopf, who from the beginning of his career had been interested in child welfare and other aspects of social justice, visited Russia to study the conditions of his brethren living in the Pale of Settlement. After witnessing the enthusiasm of Jews who were permitted to live their lives as farmers, he requested to meet with the czar in the hope of persuading him to allow more of them to move outside the Pale and buy land.

The czar did not receive him, but Krauskopf did visit with Count Leo Tolstoy at the latter's estate, Yasnaya Polyana. Tolstoy, who had started a number of schools for Russian serfs, urged him to counsel urban Jews in the United States to move to the countryside, where they could exploit the agricultural instincts they had supposedly acquired in biblical times.

At Tolstoy's suggestion, Krauskopf visited the Jewish Agricultural School in Odessa and was so impressed with what he saw that when he returned to America, he decided

to establish a similar institution, which he saw as "one of the best means of securing safety and happiness to the sorely afflicted of our people."

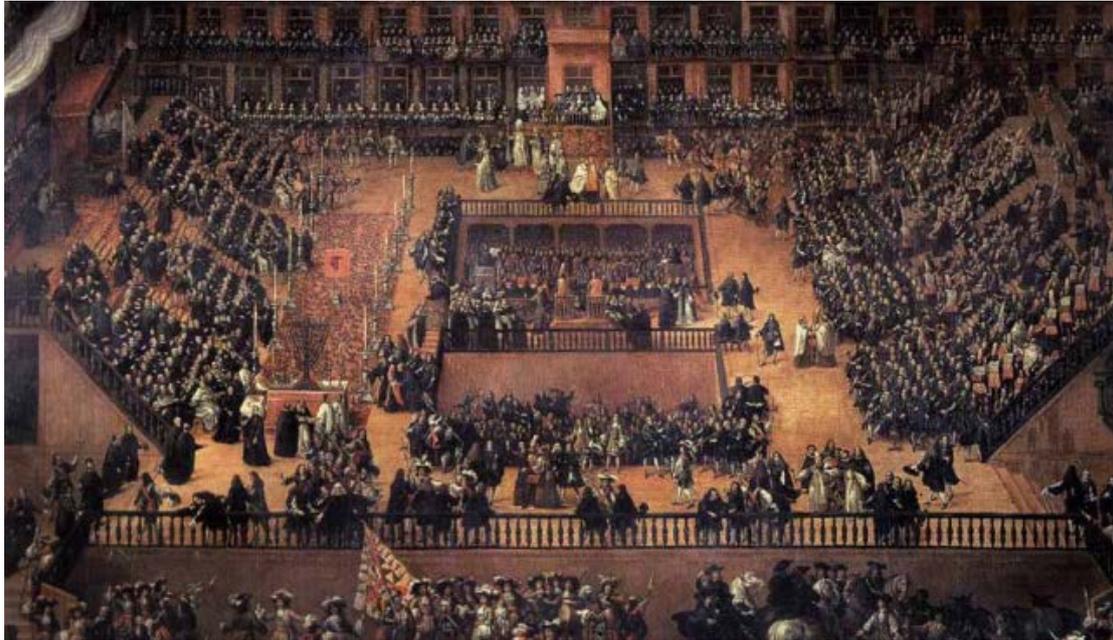
The school he imagined "was not to be a sanitarium or reformatory," said Krauskopf. "We wanted the best the city could offer us in mind, in body, and in spirit. We wanted the boys with ideals and dreams who felt that living meant working and creating under the open sky."

Krauskopf bought an abandoned 118-acre (roughly 480 dunams) farm in Bucks County, PA, with \$3,500 from his own bank account and \$26,500 raised during a series of lecture tours. On it he built a single, multi-purpose building and purchased the needed equipment. The first class of students, comprised of 10 boys, none of whom paid anything to attend or live at the school, arrived in September 1897. Although its founder, whose motto was "science with practice," was looking to provide relief for urban Jewish boys, the National Farm School was open to young men of all religions and backgrounds.

The name of the school changed several times over the decades; since 1989, it has been the Delaware Valley College. In 1946, it became a junior college, and two years later, a four-year senior college. In 1969, it began accepting women. Today, it has three locations, offers both bachelor's and master's degrees in a wide variety of fields and has more than 2,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

April 11 / Violent public penance for secret Spanish Jews

On this day in 1649, the Catholic Church staged a large, public event in Mexico in which those convicted of secretly practicing Judaism were burned.



A 17th century depiction of an auto de fe - a public ceremony condemning those found in opposition of the church. Photo by Wikimedia commons

On April 11, 1649, the Catholic Church held an *auto-da-fe* in Mexico, the largest such event ever held in the New World, in which 13 people convicted of “Judaizing” were executed, their bodies then burned along with the remains of 57 others who had died awaiting trial. They were among 109 convicts punished in the day’s auto-da-fe, all but one of whom had been tried on grounds of secretly practicing Judaism. Those who were not executed received lesser sentences, including, in some cases, deportation from New Spain.

The term “auto-da-fe” is Spanish for “act of faith,” and refers to the process by which those convicted of crimes against the Catholic faith were brought before the public and punished. The most serious sentence was to be burned alive, but in most cases, those who were burned had already been strangled to death.

Although the Spanish prohibited *conversos* – Jews who had publicly converted to Christianity -- from settling in their colonies in the Americas, down to their fourth-generation descendants, many Jews who had fled the Spanish and later the Portuguese Inquisitions did end up in the New World. Many worked as artisans and small merchants, but others played key roles in the international commerce that linked Europe and the Americas.

Many conversos, despite having nominally joined the church, continued to practice Judaism in one way or another and pass it on to their children. To ferret them out, the Spanish established an office of the Inquisition in Mexico in 1,572. Detailed records were kept of arrests and interrogations, including information about their secret beliefs and rituals – records that remain available to historians today.

Some 1,500 residents of New Spain were interrogated on charges of being crypto-Jews during the 16th and 17th centuries; ultimately, 100 of them were executed and another 200 died in prison.

The auto-da-fe ceremonies were grand public affairs, with some 30,000 spectators from as far away as Mexico City (80km away).

One of the defendants was Tomas Trevino de Sobremonte. Among other accusations against him was one from his 13-year-old son, who testified that his father had scolded him when he prayed to the Virgin Mary to make it stop raining. According to the records of the Inquisition, Tomas told his son: “Shut up, you horse, God has no mother; if He created us, how could He be born? ... Everything the Church believes is nonsense.” Given the opportunity to repent before his execution, and to kiss the cross, Tomas refused, and so was not afforded the privilege of being strangled before being set afire. He reportedly told his executioners, as the flames were being ignited, “Throw more wood on this fire, you wretched ones, because I am paying for this fire.”

April 12 / A modest Torah teacher who invented interactive study dies

Nehama Leibowitz, quintessential morah, taught through personal interaction, by snail-mail.



Nehama Leibowitz Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 12, 1997, Israeli Torah teacher Nehama Leibowitz died, at the age of 92.

Known for her modesty (she identified herself to all as “Nehama” and, despite impressive academic credentials, asked to be referred to on her tombstone simply as “morah” – teacher), warmth and generosity, Leibowitz developed a method of popular textual study that was “interactive” before people had heard of an Internet.

Each week, she would mail out copies of questions she had prepared on the Torah portion being read that Shabbat in the synagogue to pupils who requested it. Then she would personally go over each of the sets of responses sent into her and send them back with comments to the students.

Nehama Leibowitz was born on September 3, 1905, in Riga, Latvia, into a family that embraced both Jewish and secular studies, as well as Zionism. (Her older brother, Yeshayahu, was a scientist and philosopher of renown in Israel, who spoke out frequently – and often quite provocatively -- on ethical and political issues.) In 1930, on the same day she received her doctorate on the subject of comparative Bible translations from the University of Marburg, Leibowitz and her husband, Yedidyah Lipman Leibowitz, moved to Mandatory Palestine. Yedidyah was also her uncle, the younger brother of her father. The couple never had children.

Leibowitz taught for 25 years at the Mizrahi Women Teachers Seminary before beginning to teach at Tel Aviv University, in 1957. But also from her arrival in

Palestine, she began teaching in less formal venues, as she traveled around the country to kibbutzim and schools, meeting with new immigrants, soldiers and other non-scholars. Later, she also appeared regularly on Israel Radio.

It was in 1942 that, in response to the requests of students who wanted to continue the conversation begun by Nehama's lessons, she began sending out her "gilyonot" – worksheets – which included commentaries that she had compiled, but which were largely otherwise unknown, as well as questions written by her. These she mailed out to anyone who requested, both in Israel and abroad, asking only that students include additional postage when they returned their answers to her. By 1986, she had personally marked more than 40,000 individual worksheets.

Leibowitz's method focused on the pshat – the literal text of the Scriptures. For understanding, she turned to the medieval commentators, with a special emphasis on Rashi, the most central of these, and also to the Midrashic works of interpretation.

Her analysis was literary. She wasn't interested in archaeological or historical findings.

As her biographer Yael Unterman has written, "Leibowitz believed that the teacher should focus on the narrative's important ethical and theological lessons while not wasting time with 'trivial' information."

Leibowitz taught only in Hebrew, although she allowed her collected Torah teachings to be translated into a number of languages – and she refused all invitations to leave Israel to teach in communities abroad. She was in favor of women studying Talmud, hardly a given in the Orthodox world, but in no way did she support efforts to extend to women the commandments incumbent upon men in traditional Judaism. She eschewed housework and cooking for herself, but in no way disparaged women who chose the traditional life, saying, "Do you think I'd be writing these gilyonot if I had children?"

And accessible as she was to her public of pupils, she was not interested in being a celebrity herself, turning down requests for journalistic interviews or even to allow people to attend her lessons for the sake of meeting her, declaring, writes Unterman, "I am not a museum!" (In these respects she differed from her brother, Yeshayahu, who would speak to anyone on any topic, and frequently invited people into his home for conversation.)

Leibowitz's "Iyyunim" her collected studies on the Five Books of Moses, are all available in English, and many of the gilyonot in translation are also available online.

April 13 / Birth of a brain behind 'Singin in the Rain'

Filmmaker, dancer and choreographer Stanley Donen is best known for that that work with Gene Kelly, as well as 'Take me out to the ballgame' and 'Charade.'



April 13 is the birthday of filmmaker Stanley Donen, who dabbled in many genres during a directing career that spanned over four decades, but whose reputation rests largely on the movie musicals he was involved in, including “On the Town,” “Singin’ in the Rain,” “Funny Face” and “Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.”

Stanley Donen (the family name is pronounced “dawn-en”) was born on April 13, 1924, in Columbia, South Carolina. His father, Mordecai Moses Donen, was a dress-shop manager, whose family came from Eastern Europe. His mother, the former Helen Cohen, came from a family of German Jews. Although Columbia had one of the oldest Jewish communities in North America, Donen described being taunted and tormented while growing up for being Jewish. In his 1996 biography of Donen, “Dancing on the Moon,” Stephen M. Silverman, quotes him as saying that “to be

Jewish in South Carolina was to be considered a freak, to be thought of as contemptible, a devil, and a cheat.”

In 1995, Donen said his one regret in life was not having giving his father the satisfaction of seeing his son become bar mitzvah. At the time, however, he began preparing for the ceremony by studying Hebrew, and was disappointed to be learning by rote. Years later, he recounted to Silverman that, “I was learning to make these noises -- *huch, achad, hech* -- and not being given the faintest idea of what I was talking about. Finally, I went home and said to my mother, 'Really, this is silly. I could be going to the movies.'”

Indeed, Stanley Donen spent many afternoons of his youth at the movies. His favorite was the 1933 musical “Flying Down to Rio,” with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. One day he came home and announced to his parents that he wanted to become a tap dancer. They thought the request was a little odd, but found him a teacher. After graduating high school, at age 16, Donen headed off to New York to look for work as a dancer. He quickly found a job in the chorus of the Broadway play “Pal Joey,” directed by George Abbott and starring Gene Kelly, in 1940.

By 1943, the 19-year-old Donen had moved to Hollywood. Initially, he worked as a dancer, but reconnecting with Kelly, he began to assist him in movie choreography, joining him at MGM studios, where they worked with the producer Arthur Freed. After the pair filled in for an intoxicated Busby Berkeley on choreographing a number of scenes in “Take Me Out to the Ballgame” (1949), Freed hired the pair to co-direct “On the Town,” the first movie musical to be filmed on location (in New York).

Donen and Kelly joined forces in 1952 for “Singin’ in the Rain” and for a final time three years later with “It’s Always Fair Weather.” (They also served as co-choreographers on another four movies.) By 1955, however, as the far-younger Donen became more recognized and more confident, they began quarreling, and their collaboration and friendship came to an end.

Donen was making films until 1999, although his last success, either commercial or critical, had been three decades earlier: In 1967, he directed “Two for the Road” and “Bedazzled,” the first with Albert Finney and Audrey Hepburn (a Donen favorite), the latter a hilariously sly, updated version of the Faust legend with Peter Cook (who also wrote it) and Dudley Moore. His biggest commercial hit was probably the 1963 “Charade,” with Hepburn and Cary Grant.

This past December, there were reports that Donen and Elaine May had held a reading for potential investors of a film script they had written, to be produced by Mike Nichols. May is Donen’s longtime life partner, following his five earlier marriages that ended in divorce.

April 14 / Jews of Antwerp are attacked

In the early years of World War II, the local citizens of Antwerp, spurred by sympathy for the Nazis and a lack of interference from the police, looted Jewish shops, attacked two synagogues and ransacked the home of a local rabbi.



The city of Antwerp. Photo by Wikimedia

April 14, 1941, was the day when pro-Nazi citizens of Antwerp attacked residents and property in the city's Jewish quarter, an event that has become known as the "Antwerp Pogrom." The crowd, encouraged by the German occupying forces, first looted and damaged Jewish-owned shops before turning their rage on two synagogues and the home of a local rabbi.

At the time the Germans began instituting anti-Jewish measures in Belgium (in October 1940), the Jewish population of Antwerp, near the country's northern border, numbered 29,500, constituting more than half of Belgium's Jewish population. Initially, Jews were subject to a curfew from dusk to dawn, and Jewish-owned businesses had to carry special markings. Following that, in the winter of 1940-41, some 3,000 Jews who had migrated to Antwerp after 1938 were moved to a rural region of Belgium.

Support for the Nazis was especially high in the ethnically Flemish city, and the attack of April of 1941 was organized by several pro-German organizations, which included the Vlaams Nationaal Verbond (Flemish National Union), De Vlag (the Flag), and De Algemeene SS-Vlaanderen (Germanic SS in Flanders). April 14 was Easter Monday that year, and the offensive followed a screening of the viciously anti-Semitic German film "The Eternal Jew." Armed with sticks and iron bars, the rioters, who numbered about 200, struck, and badly vandalized, both the Van den Nestlei and the Oostenstraat synagogues, and burned a number of their Torah scrolls.

Additionally, many stores owned by Jews were burned, and the home of Antwerp's chief rabbi, Marcus Rottenberg, was attacked.

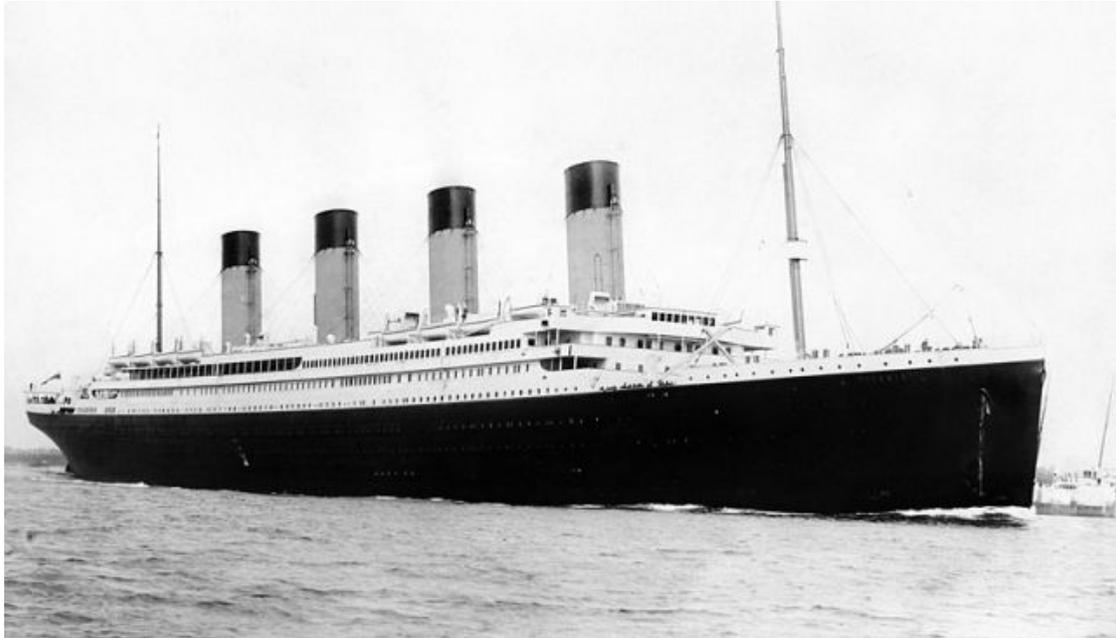
Although the rioting was allowed to proceed without interference from the police, who were unarmed, or the fire brigade, the indignant public reaction to the attacks led the city council to take responsibility for the pogrom (which was followed by another attack three days later), and to offer compensation to the Jews who suffered damage. But the Germans blocked this decision from being implemented.

A year later, all of Belgium's Jews were required to wear a yellow star, and by the summer of 1942, they became subject to mass arrests. Detainees were taken to a transit camp in Mechelen, and from there deported to the death camps. For the Jews of Antwerp, most of whom were not Belgian citizens, the principal roundup took place on the night of August 28, 1942, which was Shabbat. For those with citizenship, who had been spared a year earlier, a second wave of arrests was carried out in September 1943.

By the time Belgium was liberated, on September 4, 1944, only about 800 Jews remained in Antwerp; they had survived with the help of the local population. In statistical terms, 67 percent of Antwerp's Jews suffered deportation, as compared with 37 percent of those living in Brussels.. The much higher rate of deportation in Antwerp is generally attributed to the fact that so many of the city's Jews were immigrants from Eastern Europe, to their concentration in a limited number of neighborhoods, and to the high level of sympathy for the Nazis among the city's population.

April 15 / An esteemed Jewish couple goes down with the Titanic

It's not known how many Jews died on the famous passenger liner, but among the most well-known were Isidor and Ida Straus.



The Titanic before its unfortunate accident. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

April 15, 1912, was the day that the S.S. Titanic sank in the north Atlantic, after hitting an iceberg. Of the 2,225 passengers and crew on board the “unsinkable” British passenger liner on its maiden voyage, only 713 survived.

It is not known how many of the Titanic’s passengers were Jewish, but as a ship sailing from Europe to New York during the height of the period of great emigration from Eastern Europe to North America, it is safe to assume that many of those sailing in steerage were immigrants (It has been estimated that one million of the Jewish migrants who made their way from Eastern Europe to the U.S. between 1880 and 1914 had stop-overs in the United Kingdom.) Additional proof is the fact that the Titanic, like a number of other trans-Atlantic vessels at the time, had a kosher kitchen to serve passengers who observed Jewish dietary laws.

Among the most well-known Jewish passengers to go down that night were Isidor and Ida Straus. Isidor was one of four children of Lazarus Straus, who had emigrated from Bavaria to Georgia, in the United States, in 1852. After the Civil War, Isidor and his younger brother Nathan moved north to New York. They began selling glassware and china at the department store R.H. Macy’s in the 1870s, and together bought the store in 1896. Three years earlier, they had also bought the Abraham and Wechsler dry-goods store in Brooklyn, which they renamed Abraham & Straus. Both stores became highly successful department-store chains.

Isidor Straus (born 1845) was active in public life in New York, and even served for a year in the U.S. Congress, in 1894-1895. He and his wife, the former Rosalie Ida Blun, spent the winter of 1912 in Europe, visiting family in Germany, but spending most of the time in Cap Martin, France, as Isidor was recovering from illness.

In the meantime, Nathan Straus (born 1848) traveled to Palestine that winter. Whereas Isidor was a committed secularist and was strongly opposed to Zionism, Nathan was extremely interested in the Jewish national movement. In 1912, he traveled to Palestine together with Judah Magnes, who later became the founding president of the Hebrew University.

Legend has it that the two brothers were planning to return to New York together that spring, and that Isidor booked tickets for them and their wives aboard the Titanic. But when the ship left Brighton on April 10, Isidor and Ida were aboard, and Nathan was still in Palestine. As the ship began to sink, and Isidor understood that there were not enough lifeboats for all the women and children, he declined an offer of rescue. Ida, in turn, was unwilling to part from her husband, and so the couple died together. Their death was a major news event in the United States. Tens of thousands attended a memorial service at the Educational Alliance in New York, and the 5,000 employees of Macy's contributed money to a plaque that hung for many years inside the store, reading "Their lives were beautiful and their deaths glorious."

Nathan Straus was deeply moved by his brother's death. Feeling he had been spared, he intensified his involvement in the Zionist movement, and devoted much of the last two decades of his life to philanthropic activity. Already deeply involved in the movement to provide clean, pasteurized milk to children in New York, Straus set up a pasteurization plant, child-welfare stations, a medical infirmary, a girls' school, and a number of other institutions in Palestine.

When he died, in 1931, Nathan Straus left two-thirds of his estate to causes in Mandatory Palestine. Four years earlier, when it was founded, the city of Netanya had been named in his honor.

April 16 / A pioneer of DNA research dies

Rosalind Franklin, British physical chemist who helped discover the structure of DNA, died of ovarian cancer at the age of 37.



Rosalind Franklin. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 16, 1958, Rosalind Franklin, the British-Jewish physical chemist whose experimental findings played a significant role in the discovery of the structure of DNA, died, at the tragically young age of 37.

Rosalind Elsie Franklin was born July 25, 1920, in London, the second of her parents' five children. Her father, Ellis Arthur Franklin, from a prominent Jewish family (his uncle Herbert Samuel was the first British high commissioner of Palestine), was a merchant banker and a teacher. Her mother was the former Muriel Frances Waley. With a strong social conscience, family members, including Rosalind, helped during the 1930s in the resettlement in Britain of Jewish refugees from Europe.

Rosalind was encouraged to pursue an education, and with a strong independent streak, showed interest in both sports and science. She attended Newnham College, one of two women's colleges at Cambridge, where she received her bachelor's in chemistry, and in 1945, finished her Ph.D. from the university. Her thesis was connected to war-related research she had done on the physical properties of coal.

Franklin spent three happy years, 1947 to 1950, working in the Paris lab of Jewish-Russian chemist Jacques Mering, where she picked up her knowledge of X-ray diffraction, a method then used for discerning the molecular structure of crystals. Partly because of family pressure, however, she returned to Britain, where she found a position on the team of physicist John T. Randall, at King's College, London. He gave responsibility to Franklin for researching the structure of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), a complex organic molecule that was already understood to contain the coded genetic information that forms the basis of development of all organisms.

Unfortunately, Randall failed to make it clear that Franklin would have to work together with a veteran researcher, Maurice Wilkins, whom she could not stand. At her insistence, apparently, they did their work separately.

At the same time, Linus Pauling, at Caltech, and James Watson and Francis Crick, at Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge, were also in the race to come up with the structure of DNA. Franklin's style was very methodical, so that she would not publish until she had conclusive empirical results to prove a thesis.

Watson and Crick, on the other hand, were highly intuitive and also gregarious. They tried several times to get Franklin to cooperate. She always rebuffed them; one of those times, in January 1951, Watson then ran into Wilkins, who showed him "Photograph 51," an X-ray image of DNA made the year before by Franklin.

Watson immediately understood that the image depicted a double-helical form. He rushed back to Cambridge, and within a month, he and Crick had come up with their now-legendary model of DNA's double-helix form, and published it in a brief article in *Nature*. In 1962, they received the Nobel Prize for their discovery, together with Wilkins.

Franklin was not eligible: She had died five years earlier.

Rosalind Franklin learned in 1956 that she had ovarian cancer, and over the next two years, she went in and out of remission, before dying on this date in 1958.

Because it was many years before Watson, in his 1968 book "The Double Helix," acknowledged Franklin's role in his and Crick's discovery - they never even told her that they had been given access to Photograph 51 behind her back - and because his description of her in that book is otherwise condescending and sexist, many have seen her as something of a feminist victim, who was denied proper credit for her work because of her gender.

Reviewing Brenda Maddox's biography of Franklin in *The New Yorker*, however, in 2002, Jim Holt noted that though Franklin made Photograph 51, she had gone nine months without appreciating its significance when Watson laid eyes on it. Even when he and Crick announced their theory of the double helix, Franklin pooh-poohed it. Furthermore, Franklin was a respected researcher who received much recognition for her work during her lifetime, even if denied the Nobel Prize.

In recent decades, Rosalind has received many posthumous honors, and been a subject of both books and dramatic presentations.

April 17 / An early donation for Brown University

In 1770, Moses Lindo, a successful Jewish dye expert, donated to the new institution which had pledged access to all students, regardless of religious affiliation.



University Hall at Brown University, 1795. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 17, 1770, South Carolina farmer and trader Moses Lindo wrote to the College of Rhode Island offering his financial support. The willingness of the English-born Lindo to make a donation to a school in another colony, one that he himself had not attended, was based, he said, on the college's stated policy of admitting students without regard to their religious background.

Lindo, born in 1712, arrived in North America from London in 1756. He was already recognized as an expert in the trade of indigo dye when he settled in Charleston, where he became a producer of the indigo plant (and slave-owner) as well as a major trader in what became one of the colony's most important crops. After 48 of his fellow citizens, all of them Christians, petitioned the governor of South Carolina colony on his behalf, Lindo was appointed the "Surveyor and Inspector-General of Indigo, Drugs, and Dyes," in 1762. He held that position until 1772.

Rhode Island College received a charter from King George II in 1764 (Its named was changed to Brown University in 1804.) In keeping with the spirit of Rhode Island Colony, from the beginning, the college had a policy of being a "liberal and catholic institution" that would never subject candidates for admission to "any religious tests, but on the contrary, all the members hereof shall forever enjoy full, free, absolute, and uninterrupted liberty of conscience."

In 1770, Rev. Hezekiah Smith, a Baptist minister, traveled in South Carolina and Georgia soliciting funds for the new college, which that same year took up residence in Providence, Rhode Island. Moses Lindo was one prospective donor he met with.

Lindo had studied at the Merchant Taylors School in London, but as a Jew, had not been permitted to formally enroll. Presumably remembering that insult, Lindo offered to pledge 20 pounds to Rhode Island College.

The archives of Brown University provide the following record, from September 6, 1770, of its transaction with Lindo:

“The sum of twenty pounds having been reported as a subscription from Mr. Moses Lindo... it was thereupon ‘Voted, That the children of Jews may be admitted into this Institution, and entirely enjoy the freedom of their own religion without any restraint or imposition whatever. And that the Chancellor and President do write to Mr. Moses Lindo of Charleston, South Carolina, and give him information of this resolution.’”

Apparently, the trustees of the college had reasons to hope that Lindo’s generosity would exceed that original gift, as he had written explaining that if their admissions policy was indeed as he had been informed, “my donation shall exceed beyond the bounds of th’ir imagination.”

There is no evidence that Lindo bestowed an additional gift on Rhode Island College. Nor is there evidence that the college had a Jewish student before 1894, when one Israel Strauss entered the freshman class at Brown.

In 1928, Dean Otis E. Randall informed a new Jewish fraternity that it could not operate on campus, as “we do not want at Brown any fraternity organized on the basis of race or religion.” This was in spite of the fact that the existing fraternities at the school refused to accept Jewish students. Only after protests from Jewish organizations did the trustees of Brown overrule the dean, and the Pi Lambda Phi fraternity was permitted to have a branch at the university.

April 18 / A founding father of economics born in London

David Ricardo became one of Britain's richest men, thanks to opportune trading around the outcome of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.



Portrait of David Ricardo by Thomas Phillips, circa 1821. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

April 18, 1772, is the birthdate of David Ricardo, the brilliant scion of a family of Portuguese Jews in England who became a founding father of the modern science of economics.

Ricardo was the third of the 17 children of Abraham Israel Ricardo and the former Abigail Delvalle. The father's family had left Portugal for Italy, probably in 1593, when the Grand Duke of Tuscany invited Iberian Jews to immigrate to Leghorn. They later moved to Amsterdam.

David was born in London, where his businessman father had moved in 1760. Abigail's family, also Sephardi, had long been established in England.

Toward the end of his life, Ricardo told a biographer that he had received a very limited education, as his father "thought reading, writing and arithmetic sufficient" for the man of business David was "doomed" to be. At age 14, he had already begun to work with his father, in the City of London.

Ricardo broke dramatically with his parents at age 21, when he married a Quaker woman and joined the Unitarian church. His father disowned him – although they reconciled, before his father's death – and his mother never spoke to him again.

British economist Ronald Max Hartwell wrote of Ricardo that, when he married, he “was a poor man; at the time of his death, 30 years later, his total estate was worth between £675,000 and £775,000. How did he make such a large fortune? In three ways: As a Stock Exchange jobber, as a labor contractor, as an investor in land and French bonds.”

At the time of the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, Ricardo, with advance news of the French defeat by the British, sold off his British securities quite openly, leading others to panic and do the same. He then repurchased the same shares at bargain-basement prices, and watched their value escalate after news of Wellington’s victory over Bonaparte became widely known. Overnight, he became one of England’s wealthiest men.

Around that same time, finding himself “sufficiently rich to satisfy all my desires and the reasonable desires of all those about me,” as he wrote to his friend James Mill, Ricardo bought a 5,000-acre estate in Gloucestershire (today owned by Princess Anne), and took up the life of gentleman farmer.

In 1799, after reading Adam Smith’s seminal economics text “The Wealth of Nations,” Ricardo began a serious study of the subject. He discussed his ideas with friends like Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Malthus and Mill (father of John Stuart Mill), the latter encouraging him to write them down.

In many articles, and such books as “On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation,” Ricardo explored the relationships between policy and economics. Probably his most significant contribution was his opposition to protective tariffs, and his belief in free trade and the concept of “comparative advantage,” by which he insisted that each country should specialize on one product for export, and depend on other states for other things.

Though many of Ricardo’s laissez-faire principles have long since been superseded, he is an economist who was long studied by both those who agreed with him and those who didn’t, including Karl Marx.

In 1819, Ricardo entered Parliament, having bought himself a “rotten borough” in Ireland, a common and legal practice then. He served until 1823, when illness made him retire.

He died on September 11 of that year, after an infection of the middle ear turned into blood poisoning.

Ricardo and his wife had eight children, two of whom became MPs. He was universally respected for his personal integrity, which included his advocacy of economic reforms that would have an adverse effect on his own personal situation.

April 19 / Daring escape from an Auschwitz-bound train

With the help of three Belgian resistance fighters, 116 people ultimately escaped. Simon Gronowski, who was 11 at the time, was one of them.



Simon Gronowski, age 9, is on Avenue Louise, Brussels with his parents in 1941 before Occupation, near the building that the Gestapo headquarters later used in 1942. Photo by Archival photo courtesy of Simon Gronowski

On April 19, 1943, members of the Belgian resistance attacked a transport train carrying Jewish deportees from the Mechelen transit camp to Auschwitz. It was the most significant rescue action taken during World War II of a train taking prisoners to the Nazi death camp in occupied Poland.

During the years 1942-1944, 28 transports left the Dossin Barracks in the town of Mechelin, in north-central Belgium, heading east, generally to Auschwitz. They carried more than 25,000 Jews and more than 350 Roma. (Another 5,000 people, approximately, were deported by way of Drancy transit camp in France.) The transport that departed the evening of April 19 (the same day that the month-long Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began) was Convoy XX, and it was the first to carry the prisoners in cattle cars -- whose small windows were blocked with barbed wire -- rather than via third-class passenger carriages.

The attack on Convoy XX was carried out by three members of the Belgian resistance, who had received advance information of the train's intended departure. Armed with a lone pistol and pliers, they wrapped a storm lantern with red paper and placed it on the track between Mechelen and Leuven, as if it were a warning signal. When the train came to a stop, the three resistance fighters -- Robert Maistrau, Georges Livschitz and Jean Franklemon -- were able to pry open the doors to one of the wagons. Five people immediately escaped. (Another account says 17 escaped.)

After the train began moving again, the prisoners within began to use tools that they had hidden in the straw before their departure. With these they opened additional escape routes, and many more began to jump from the moving train.

In total, 231 deportees fled from the train that night. Twenty-six of them were killed during their flight, and another 116 were recaptured – a total of 116 were successful in their escape.

The youngest of those who got away was Simon Gronowski, who was 11 at the time. He was traveling with his mother, Channa (his father was in hiding, and his older sister, Ita, had for the time being been spared deportation), after two months of confinement at the Mechelen camp. He told reporter Sarah Ehrlich, in a story for the BBC, how he had used the time to prepare for an escape by practicing jumping from the top bunk of his bed. When the train slowed down, his mother helped him to make his jump from a running board. He wanted to wait for his mother, but the German guards were shooting, so he ran.

Gronowski entered a forest and walked through the night. When he arrived in the village of Berlingen, the following morning, he knocked on the door of a house. The family inside turned him over to a Belgian constable, who returned him to safe refuge in Brussels. There he was reunited briefly with his father, and was hidden for the rest of the war by several different families. He never saw his mother or sister again, and his father died in July, 1945.

Convoy XX arrived in Auschwitz on April 22. Of the 1,031 deportees who were still on it, only 521 received ID numbers, meaning that the remainder were presumably sent to their immediate deaths. Of those, 150 are known to have survived the war.

Gronowski, the lone survivor from his family, became a lawyer after the war. Today he is 81, and he lives in Brussels.

The documentary "Transport XX to Auschwitz," featuring Simon Gronowski, can be seen in its entirety [here](#).

April 20 / In Germany, the start of a wave of massacres

Jews in south central Germany suffered a twist on the blood-libel charge: desecration of the host.



A woodcut of Nuremberg from the Nuremberg Chronicle, which tells about some of the massacres. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 20, 1298, the Jews of Roettingen (today in northern Bavaria) suffered the first of a series of massacres that spread through the region. Over the coming months, what came to be called the Rintfleisch massacres were perpetrated against the Jewish communities of 146 towns in Bavaria and Austria. They were the first significant anti-Semitic persecutions to take place in Europe since the First Crusade two centuries earlier.

The Rintfleisch massacres are named after the leader of the attacks known only by this epithet; *Rindfleisch* is the modern German spelling for the word beef, so there is speculation Rintfleisch was a butcher. The massacres were a response to a rumor of “host desecration.”

Like the blood-libel charges that began to surface a short time earlier — in which Jews allegedly killed a Christian to drain his blood and use it in Passover matza — host desecration attributed a no-less bizarre crime to Jews: the purchase or theft of Eucharist wafers in order to abuse and torture them.

Since the host is equivalent to the body of Christ, its torture is tantamount to a repeat of the crucifixion of Jesus, a capital blasphemy that was a key element of medieval Christian theology vis-à-vis the Jews.

In her book “Gentile Tales,” historian Miri Rubin draws on medieval chronicles — both Christian and Jewish — and official records to describe the events. She portrays

the period as one of unusual political instability that was resolved only after the Battle of Goellheim, on July 2, 1298, and the return of the local noble, King Albert of Habsburg, to his throne in nearby Rothenburg.

Another modern historian, Robert Chazan, writes that the Rintfleisch massacres “highlight the unfortunate combination in Germany of accelerating anti-Jewish sentiment and deteriorating political authority.”

April 20, 1298, was a Sunday, two weeks after Easter. According to a lengthy lament of the events that appears in the contemporary Nuremberg Chronicle, a Jewish source (as rendered by Rubin), the Christians “conspired with their plots and added treachery / to that bloody bread, so vile and disgusting.”

According to this source, the Jews of Roettingen were charged with pulverizing the wafer until it began to bleed, and then they “split him and hung him on a frame.”

In Roettingen, 21 Jews are said to have been killed on this day by Rintfleisch and his banner-waving mob. They then moved on to other towns in the Tauber River Valley on the way to Nuremberg. Even after King Albert returned to his throne and called for peace, the killings did not immediately subside.

The Nuremberg Chronicle lists 146 individual communities where pogroms took place and names some 5,000 Jews who were killed. Only in Regensburg and Augsburg were the Jews spared, as the local authorities took them under their protection.

The killings continued until as late as 1303. Another source, Rudolf, the Dominican prior of Schlettstadt, describes the people of Moeckmuehl coming upon a pit containing five hosts hung on string. In revenge, the mob locked up 76 Jews in a house, which was set on fire by Rintfleisch when he arrived in the town.

Rudolf, explains Rubin, perceived a conspiracy by local Jews, made possible by the infinite ability of Eucharist wafers to multiply and transform. Hence, even if a single wafer was purchased in the initial crime, it could have been used in one place after another.

As another chronicler, Sifried of Balhuisen, put it: “Recovery was difficult, since the host had been distributed and variously abused, but miracles brought about through the particles led to the discovery of the pieces ... and to the killing of the Jews of many places.”

April 21 / A great Jewish philanthropist dies

Baron Maurice de Hirsch was one of the wealthiest men of the 19th century, and also one of the most generous.



The Jewish school in Moises Ville, the first colony established by Baron Hirsch. Photo by <http://turismo-argentina.net/santa-fe-moises-ville/>

On April 21, 1896, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, one of the 19th century's wealthiest men and one of the great Jewish philanthropists of all time, died at the age of 64. During his lifetime and that of his widow, they distributed an estimated \$100 million to educational causes and to the establishment of agricultural colonies, principally in Argentina, intended to improve the lot of impoverished Eastern European Jews.

He was born Moritz von Hirsch auf Gereuth on December 9, 1831, in Munich, Bavaria. His grandfather had been the first Jew in Bavaria to own land and was invested heavily in various international trading businesses; his father was a banker, and his mother, too, came from a distinguished banking family. Maurice had a traditional Jewish education and a secular one as well, and although he was recognized as clever and quick, he was not especially taken with his studies.

Hirsch once told Theodor Herzl that he thought the Jews' problem derived from their overly cerebral tendencies: "We have too many intellectuals, my aim is to discourage this tendency to push among Jews," he said.

In 1851, Hirsch began working in the banking firm of Bischoffsheim & Goldschmidt, in Brussels; four years later, he married Clara Bischoffsheim, the daughter of the bank's principal owner. Even before that, at the age of 17, Hirsch had begun investing in a variety of business ventures, including speculation in the copper and sugar trades. Later, he received the concession to build a railway through the Balkans to Constantinople, a major project that he executed in the face of widespread skepticism, thus making a name for himself as a visionary and daring businessman. He was able

to finance his interest in the Oriental Railway with the combined wealth brought from Clara's dowry and from his inheritance from his own family.

It was his work on the railway project that brought Hirsch into direct contact with the condition of Jews in the Ottoman Empire, who suffered from a lack of practical education and an ability to support themselves. Through the existing Alliance Israelite Universelle, he began funding trade schools in European Turkey. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, he funded field hospitals for both sides, and a decade later he gave Austrian emperor Franz Joseph a gift of 500,000 pounds for the creation of primary and trade schools in Galicia and Bukowina.

It was the state of the Jews of the Russian empire, however, that posed the greatest philanthropic challenge to Hirsch. Initially, he offered the Czarist government 2 million pounds for the establishment of a system of secular education for the empire's Jews, who were at the time still restricted to the Pale of Settlement, and had very limited means of supporting themselves. The Russians were willing to accept the gift, but would not allow a foreigner to be involved in controlling its use, a condition that was not acceptable to Hirsch.

Eventually, he concluded that emigration was the only real solution for Russia's Jews. To this end, he established, in 1891, the Jewish Colonization Association, whose goal, as Hirsch himself described it, was "to assist and promote the emigration of Jews from any part of Europe or Asia – and principally from countries in which they may for the time being be subjected to any special taxes or political or other disabilities ... and to form and establish colonies in various parts of North and South America and other countries, for agricultural, commercial and other purposes."

The most significant effort was expended on the purchase of land and establishment of colonies in Argentina. At the time of Clara's death, in 1899, three years after that of her husband, the capitalization of the fund was 11 million pounds sterling, which may have made it the world's largest philanthropic foundation at the time.

Baron de Hirsch was convinced that farming and other practical pursuits would provide the answer to the challenge of Jewish survival – he was convinced, as he put it, that the Jews had not "lost the agricultural qualities that their forefathers possessed" – and he oversaw his enterprise in a way intended to distribute the emigres in a number of different places, so as not to make their presence a burden to their adoptive countries. Besides Argentina, he also set up colonies in Canada, the United States, Brazil and Palestine, although he rejected requests from Herzl to become involved in political Zionism, which he saw as delusional.

Baron de Hirsch loved the good life, and owned residences in Paris, London, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. He also was part owner, together with the Prince of Wales, of a stable of racehorses, and devoted his significant earnings from that to his charitable activities too.

Hirsch died at his estate, in Pressburg, Hungary (modern-day Bratislava), of a stroke.

April 22 / U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum opens in Washington

The building was designed by American architect James Ingo Freed, himself a German-born Jew evacuated from Germany in 1938.



U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 22, 1993, the opening ceremony of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum took place in Washington, D.C., in the presence of numerous dignitaries, including U.S. President Bill Clinton and Israel's president, Chaim Herzog.

The opening of the museum, a national shrine on government land on the Washington Mall – site of the Smithsonian art and history museums, as well as the Washington Monument – was the culmination of a process that had begun 15 years earlier, on November 1, 1978, when then President Jimmy Carter announced the appointment of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. That body was entrusted not only with making recommendations about the establishment of a memorial to the victims of the Shoah, but also with proposing a way to fund its activities with donations and an appropriate manner to commemorate the Holocaust each year.

It was also understood that there were plans afoot in a number of other locations in the United States for institutions to commemorate the Holocaust, some of which presumed to become the “national” memorial. Now was the time to act, if a museum was to rise in the nation's capital.

The commission appointed by Carter was headed by Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate who had survived Buchenwald and written extensively about the Holocaust. On the basis of its recommendations, a council was established two years later that began planning the museum. The U.S. government provided 1.9 acres (0.77 hectares) of land on the Mall, near the intersection of Independence Avenue and 14th

Street. The \$200 million budgeted for the museum's creation was raised from private sources.

Politics came into play almost immediately, as the planners debated the intended scope of the museum, a process described by Edward T. Linenthal in his 1995 book "Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum." Was the Holocaust uniquely Jewish, and would the mission of the museum be compromised by including in its coverage not only the six million Jewish victims of the Germans, but also the estimated five million other noncombatants murdered by the Nazi regime? These were issues that people felt strongly about, and they held important political implications for the White House, too. Not surprisingly, the museum that eventually opened turned out to be a compromise between the two positions.

Groundbreaking took place only in 1985. The museum building was designed by American architect James Ingo Freed, himself a German-born Jew who was evacuated from Germany at age 8, in 1938. Its permanent exhibition covers the history of the Holocaust chronologically, and it has regular temporary shows as well. The museum also includes a scholarly research center and an educational center that creates materials for schoolchildren, and its website hosts a Holocaust encyclopedia and offers information in a number of languages, including Arabic, Persian, Mandarin Chinese and Urdu. The USHMM receives some two million visitors annually, fewer than 10 percent of whom are thought to be Jewish.

April 23 / Kabbalist Rabbi Chaim Vital dies

Rabbi Chaim ben Joseph Vital helped pass down the teachings of Lurianic kabbalah, a school of Jewish mysticism.



The grave of Rabbi Chaim Vital. Photo by shaar-binyamin.com

April 23, 1620, is the date on which Rabbi Chaim ben Joseph Vital died, according to the Julian calendar in use at the time (May 3, 1620, by the Gregorian calendar). Considered the most significant student of Rabbi Isaac "the Ari" Luria, creator of the school of Jewish mysticism known as Lurianic kabbalah, Vital and his writings ensured that the Ari's teachings were passed down to successive generations.

Chaim Vital was born in Safed in 1543. His father was Rabbi Joseph Vital, a Torah scribe who was known for the tefillin he produced. The son studied the revealed Torah with Rabbi Moshe Alshech, and later kabbalah with Rabbi Moses ben Jacob Cordovero, an important thinker in the field. In 1569, Vital began writing a commentary on the essential kabbalistic text, the Zohar, based on the teachings of Cordovero. The following year, however, two important things happened that affected the direction of Vital's life: Rabbi Cordovero died, and Isaac Luria arrived in Safed from Cairo.

The death of Cordovero left his circle of students bereft of a teacher, and it seems that Luria filled that hole. Vital himself was in Damascus at the time of Luria's arrival in Safed, but he soon returned. Legend has it that Luria, acknowledged at the time as the greatest scholar of mysticism, also came to Safed specifically to work with Chaim Vital.

Vital's conversion to the mystical school of Isaac Luria was not immediate. He wrote that his initiation came during a voyage on a boat across Lake Kinneret together with Rabbi Luria. "At a point opposite the arches of the Old Synagogue of Tiberias," wrote Vital, "my teacher dipped a cup into the water and gave it to me to drink. He told me

that now I would be able to grasp this wisdom [the teachings of kabbalah] for I had just drunk water from the Well of Miriam [which is buried in the lake]. From that time on I began to enter the depth of this wisdom.”

The two men had only 22 months to study together before Luria died, at the age of 38. The Ari had never committed any of his work to paper, and after his death, Vital began to redact what he and his fellow students remembered of his teachings. Everything that we know today about Luria comes to us from the voluminous records prepared by Vital.

In 1590, Vital received rabbinical ordination in Jerusalem from his former teacher Rabbi Alshech, who then had him appointed a rabbinical judge there. After several years in Jerusalem, he returned to Safed, before moving to Damascus in 1594. There he lectured on kabbalah, and it was there that he died in 1620.

During the period he was back in Safed, Vital was sick for an extended period. According to legend, it was during that time that his student Rabbi Yehoshua bin Nun bribed Vital's younger brother, Moshe, to borrow the collected writings of the Ari, as compiled by Vital. Moshe gave him 600 pages, and Yehoshua then employed 100 scribes to copy as much of the texts as they could in three days.

Later, after Chaim Vital's death, his son Shmuel corrected and reorganized the manuscripts, preparing a finished version in 1660. His version comprised eight sections, which are known collectively as “Etz Hahayim” (“The Tree of Life”), also called “The Eight Gates.”

Another edition of Vital's writings was prepared by several followers of his, Abraham Azulai and Yaakov Tzemach, who exhumed from his grave the manuscripts that Rabbi Vital had asked to have buried with him.

Among other works written by Rabbi Vital was “Sha'arei Kedushah” (“Gates of Holiness”), the only known textbook published on kabbalistic meditation in that period. Its fourth section, which explicitly details technique, has never been published, owing to the “dangerous” nature of its contents were they to reach the wrong hands.

April 24 / Bob Dylan lays down his first track

The answer to the recording debut of Bob Dylan came, my friends, by blowin' into a harmonica.



Bob Dylan. Photo by Getty Images

April 24, 1961, is a landmark date in the musical career of Bob Dylan: the day he participated in his first professional recording session, playing harmonica on the song “Midnight Special,” with folk singer Harry Belafonte.

Belafonte, who was born in New York in 1927, is the son of a Jamaican mother and a father from Martinique. In the 1950s, he reached musical superstar status in America with several albums of Calypso tunes, music that had its origins in Trinidad and Tobago. His most successful recording, the 1956 LP “Calypso,” which included the songs “Jamaica Farewell” and “Banana Boat Song,” spent 31 weeks atop the Billboard best-selling album chart.

“Midnight Special” was Belafonte’s 12th album; its nine songs were all traditional or well-known country numbers, including “On Top of Old Smokey” and “Michael Row the Boat Ashore.” The album’s title song is a traditional, thought to have had its origins among prisoners on a labor detail in the American South. The name refers to a train that would pass by in the night, shining “her ever-loving light on me.” Some of the words of the song appear in other prison work songs, and various music historians have disagreed on where and when the song had its origins.

By April of 1961, the 19-year-old Bob Zimmerman had not yet legally changed his last name to “Dylan,” but he was living in New York, picking up gigs at various folk clubs in Greenwich Village. When he was asked to participate in Belafonte’s album by the singer and his producer, Hugo Montenegro, he had not yet been signed to a record contract. That happened in October 1961, when John Hammond signed him to an exclusive contract with Columbia Records, which is why, when “Midnight

Special” was released in March the following year, Dylan is credited as appearing “Courtesy Columbia Records.”

The title song opens the album “Midnight Special,” and the harmonica-playing is prominently featured in the production. But it turned out to be the only song of the album’s nine numbers that Dylan participated in. According to Anthony Scaduto, author of a 2001 biography of Dylan, he went off to the studio “ecstatic,” and left “dejected, annoyed, angry. Belafonte is a total professional ... He will work on a song, do it again and again ... until he has it exactly the way he thinks his record should sound. To Dylan ... the perfection Belafonte sought was too much. He stamped back to the Smiths’ place [where he was staying at the time] afterward and announced that he had quit after one song.”

The same month that Belafonte’s “Midnight Special” was released, the eponymous “Bob Dylan” was released by Columbia. During the recording of its 13 songs, Dylan refused to do more than one take on a song, and the entire process was completed in three short sessions. In its first year, it sold only 2,500 copies in the United States.

April 25 / U.S. recalls Jewish consul from Tunisia

U.S. Secretary of State James Monroe said the reason was the discovery of Mordechai Manuel Noah's Jewish identity, but it was more about paying pirates too much.



Mordechai Manuel Noah Photo by Courtesy of Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.

On April 25, 1816, U.S. Secretary of State James Monroe wrote to Mordechai Manuel Noah, the American consul in Tunis, informing him that he was being recalled from his position because it had become known that he was a Jew. However, the real motivation for sacking Noah was his paying too much ransom for American hostages captured by pirates, and his religion became a cover story.

In his letter, Monroe explained to Noah that supposedly, when he had been appointed, in 1813, “it was not known that the religion which you profess would form any obstacle to the exercise of your consular functions. Recent information, however, on which entire reliance may be placed, proves that it would produce a very unfavorable effect.” As a consequence, President James Madison, wrote Monroe – who himself would succeed Madison in the position the following year – “has deemed it expedient to revoke your commission.”

Mordechai Manuel Noah (1785-1851), who was born in Philadelphia into a family of Sephardi descent, and spent much of his youth in Charleston, South Carolina, had a fascinating life that included work as a journalist-publisher, playwright, sheriff of New York and Jewish utopian (More about him in a later column.)

He had never made any secret of his Jewish heritage, quite the contrary. When he began his professional career, it was as a diplomat in 1811. At that time, he appealed to the secretary of state to appoint him to represent the United States in a foreign posting because of his background. Noah believed that his being a Jew would actually

be of advantage to the young republic on the international stage, as, he wrote to Monroe, it would "prove to foreign powers that our government is not regulated in the appointment of their officers by religious distinction."

And indeed, after turning down an offer to serve in a consular post in Riga, Latvia, Noah was appointed consul in Tunis in 1813. For many years, European and American ships had been plagued by raids by the Barbary pirates, operating out of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. The pirates seized not only the vessels' cargos, but also their Christian crews, who were then sold into slavery around the Muslim world. Already under the presidency of George Washington (1789-1797), it had been the practice to send Jewish Americans to negotiate for the release of captive slaves, as they were believed to have more in common, historically and theologically, with Muslims (there were at the time, for example, more Jews living in Tunis than in the United States).

Mordecai Manuel Noah, who left for Tunis in May 1813, was authorized to spend up to \$3,000 per person to ransom the American slaves held there. That sum, however, was far below what the standard ransom then was, and Noah was forced to up his offer. When he informed his employers that he had negotiated the liberation of six Americans from bondage for the price of \$25,910, President Madison was appalled and decided to bring Noah back home, figuring that he could justify the move by pinning it on "the ascertained prejudice of the Turks against his Religion" – although there was no evidence of such a prejudice in this case.

For his part, Noah was shocked by the recall. When he returned to the United States, he wrote up a long report on his mission, called "Travels in England, France, Spain and the Barbary State." In it, he expressed outrage at his treatment: "I thought I was a citizen of the United States, protected by the constitution in my religious, as well as in my civil, rights. My religion was known to the government at the time of my appointment, and it constituted one of the prominent causes why I was sent to Barbary. If, then, any 'unfavorable' events had been created by my religion, they should have been first ascertained, and not acting upon a supposition, upon imaginary consequences, have thus violated one of the most sacred and delicate rights of a citizen."

Noah also engaged numerous other public figures, both Jews and non-Jews, to write letters to the White House, now occupied by James Monroe, trying to ascertain the real reasons for his dismissal. One of those letters, from Reform religious leader Isaac Harby, argued to the president that Jews "are by no means to be considered as a religious sect, tolerated by the government. They constitute a portion of the People. They are, in every respect, woven in and compacted with the citizens of the Republic."

Eventually, an investigation by the U.S. attorney general cleared Noah of any malfeasance, he was reimbursed by the government for his expenses, and President Monroe did write to him, assuring him that his actions had not been motivated by anti-Semitism.

April 26 / Expulsion from Brazil

Fleeing the Inquisition in Portugal, Jews who settled in Brazil got a breath of freedom under the Dutch. Then the Portuguese kicked them out again.



The restored Zur Israel synagogue in Recife, Brazil. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On April 26, 1654, the last Jewish residents of the Brazilian town of Recife departed the Portuguese colony after being given an order of expulsion.

When the Inquisition was initially implemented in Portugal in 1497, all Jews were forced to undergo baptism, and were forbidden from emigrating. Many continued to practice their Judaism clandestinely, and when they were able to leave, one favored destination was Brazil. There, they made up a good percentage of the 50,000 Europeans who had settled there by 1624, working in commerce and other professions (even as priests), and setting up sugar plantations and mills.

During the 17th century, the combined Spanish-Portuguese monarchy was involved in an ongoing conflict – the Eighty Years War -- with the Netherlands. The war extended to the New World, where the forces of the Dutch East and West India Companies battled with the Portuguese and for a period took possession of Portuguese colonial outposts. By 1630, the Portuguese colony in Recife, Pernambuco, on the Atlantic coast, was among the parts of northeastern Brazil conquered by Dutch forces.

Under the brief period of Dutch rule, converso Jews were permitted to openly practice their faith. During this time, Jews were involved in building infrastructure (roads, bridges, sewerage system) in the colony, in slave trade, and also in the profitable sugar production industry. By 1645, according to Dutch historian Franz Leonard Schalkwijk, there were 1,630 Jews living in Recife, a number equal to the Jewish population of Amsterdam at the time.

The prominence and economic success of Brazil's Jews stirred up resentment among the colony's Christians, who participated in the ongoing Portuguese campaign to push out the Dutch. That campaign went from 1645 until January 26, 1654, the date the Dutch capitulated to Portuguese liberation forces.

In the interim, probably in 1636, the Jews had established a synagogue – Kahal Zur Yisrael – in Recife, the first in the New World. The Jewish community supported a primary Talmud Torah school and a more advanced Gemara school, and a charitable fund.

A book of records that survived provides evidence of all of the services provided by the community, and outlines the customs and regulations by which it functioned. For example, the synagogue had assigned seats, which no one was permitted to change, and on Shabbat Nahamu, the first Sabbath after Tisha Be'Av, funds were collected for the Jewish community in the Land of Israel. This "minute book" lists signatures of 171 members, providing a valuable source of the names of some of the Jewish residents of Brazil. Many of the families involved in the founding of the Shearith Israel Sephardi synagogue in New York could trace their roots back to Recife by way of the minute book.

The transition back to Portuguese rule in 1654 was orderly, and gave Dutch and Jewish residents three months to liquidate their assets (they were permitted to take property with them) and leave. Most Jews went to Amsterdam, some settled on other islands in the Caribbean Sea, including Curacao, and another 23 famously made it to New Amsterdam, later known as New York. Those New Christians who dared to remain in Brazil found themselves pursued by the Inquisition and were sometimes shipped back to Portugal for trial before the Inquisition there.

The two-story building that housed the Kahal Zur synagogue, in the Street of the Jews, was torn down early in the 20th century. Later, it was reconstructed and reopened as a museum of Jewish history in Brazil in 2001.

April 27 / Founder of first Reform synagogue in England dies

Isaac Goldsmid, British financier opposed to the divisions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, cofounded the West London Synagogue in 1842.



The West London Synagogue in the 1800s. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

April 27, 1859, is the date on which Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, a prominent British financier, philanthropist and social reformer, died, at the age of 81.

Goldsmid was born in London on January 13, 1778. He was the eldest of the six children of Asher Goldsmid – whose father, the Dutch-born businessman Aaron Goldsmid, was the first family member to settle in England – and his wife Rachel, nee Keyser.

Following education at Dr. Hamilton's School in London, Goldsmid began working at Mocatta and Goldsmid, the bullion brokers led by his father, and buying a seat on the London stock exchange. His domestic investments, in such fields as railroads and dock construction, brought him minimal returns; rather, it was Goldsmid's loans to foreign states that made him an extremely wealthy man. His successful efforts to settle a financial dispute between Portugal and Brazil (two of the countries he did business with) also led to his being named the Baron of Palmeira by Portugal in 1846. Five years earlier, he had become the first professing Jew to receive a hereditary title in England, when he was named a baronet.

Goldsmid is remembered, however, less for his professional career than for his substantial contributions to British society. As the man who, in 1825, purchased the land on which the University of London, later University College, was built, he helped establish the first university in England that didn't base admissions on a

student's religion. He also assisted in the founding of the University College Hospital (1834), and served for 18 years as its first treasurer.

As a Jew, Goldsmid had two, interconnected causes. He was opposed to the divisions between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews, and was one of the founders of the West London Synagogue, which did not distinguish between the two communities. West London, the first Reform synagogue in England, was established in 1842. But the diaries of Sir Moses Montefiore show that, as early as 1830, Goldsmid had threatened to set up a non-Orthodox synagogue if the British board of Jewish deputies did not support the campaign for Jewish emancipation, i.e., equality before the law.

A first effort, fostered by Goldsmid, to pass a "disabilities law," which would have finally allowed Jews to be elected to the House of Commons, took place, and failed, in 1830. After that, the board of deputies withdrew its support for the bill, partly out of concern that emancipation would lead to assimilation. Goldsmid continued to put his weight behind the cause, until the law was finally changed, allowing a Jew to take an oath of public office without needing to declare his faith as a Christian, in 1858. In the meantime, however, he had also made good on his threat to quit the Orthodox Great Synagogue, in Aldgate, and establish a Reform synagogue.

Isaac Goldsmid married his cousin Isabel Goldsmid, daughter of his Uncle Abraham, in 1804: They had two sons and five daughters.

He died at his home, St. John's Lodge, on this date in 1859, and was buried in the cemetery of West London Synagogue. The very lengthy inscription on his headstone proudly declares that he was "associated with every movement for the social progress of mankind," including "the agitation for the removal of the civil disabilities of the Jews ... which became triumphant a few months before he breathed his last."

April 28 / The first photojournalist is born

News shutterbug Erich Salomon created 'photojournalism' by wedging himself into great events - and shooting their images.



The cover of "Erich Salomon: Portrait of an Age." Photo by Amazon.com

April 28, 1886, is the birthdate of pioneering news photographer Erich Salomon, whose ability to insinuate himself into political and social events, as well as courtrooms, in pre-World War II Europe enabled him to capture candid images of the individuals who shaped world history in the early decades of the 20th century. He also coined the term “photojournalist” to describe his job, and helped shape the emerging profession.

Salomon was born into a prominent Jewish family in Berlin: His father was a banker and member of the stock exchange, his mother came from a family of publishers. Erich studied zoology and engineering before earning a law degree, in 1913. He served with the German army in World War I, but early on was captured by the Allies at the Battle of the Marne. He spent four years in a prisoner-of-war camp, where he became proficient in French, a skill that served him well when he began photographing diplomatic events.

After the war, as the German economy descended into chaos, and the Salomon family fortune began to dissipate, he undertook several business ventures of his own. Though none of them succeeded, advertisements for his car-rental agency, in which he offered his services as a chauffeur who could give clients legal advice while he drove them, piqued the interest of the publishing company Ullstein. In 1925, the firm, which published both books and periodicals, gave Salomon a job in its promotions department, eventually making him head of the billboard advertising division.

Salomon became interested in photography almost by chance, as described by his son Peter Salomon (a.k.a. Peter Hunter), whose biography of his father appears on the

website of Comesana Press Photographers. Erich Salomon first picked up a camera to shoot pictures of billboards owned by Ullstein to be used as evidence in legal proceedings against property owners who were not abiding by the terms of their contracts with the company. From this, Salomon went on to shoot photographs to accompany feature articles in Ullstein magazines and papers.

His great innovation was to turn away from the standard, bulky box camera used by news photographers at the time, and to begin using an Ermanox plate-loaded device that was similar in size to a 35-mm camera. Not only was the camera more handy, it was also more suitable for low-light situations, even indoors. (In 1932, he switched to a Leica.) In 1928, Salomon entered the Berlin courtroom where the trial of a man charged with killing a policeman was taking a place, with a camera concealed in his bowler hat, in which he had cut a small hole. With this, he merged with sensational photos of the proceedings. Later in the trial, when a guard caught on to him and demanded his film, he turned over unexposed plates, leaving the courtroom with the exposed film safe in his pocket.

Salomon was on his way, and during the next three years, he became a well-known personality in his own right. With an unthreatening appearance, and an urbane and sophisticated manner, he gained entry to proceedings of the League of Nations, for example, and even endeared himself to the politicians whom he captured on film in candid and emotionally revealing poses. At the opening of one international gathering, French Foreign Minister Aristide Briand was heard to say, "Where is Dr. Salomon? We can't start without him. The people won't think this conference is important at all." And if Salomon wanted to cover an event where the press wasn't welcome, he rigged up various subterfuges to smuggle a camera in and obtain his images.

In November 1931, French Prime Minister Pierre Laval insisted to President Herbert Hoover that Salomon be permitted entry to the White House. As Time magazine reported back then, "Like Benito Mussolini, Ramsay MacDonald, and Chancellor Brüning [of Weimar Germany], Pierre Laval has become convinced that Dr. Salomon's spontaneous snapshots are historic documents to be preserved for posterity..." He also made it to Hollywood, where he photographed such stars as Marlene Dietrich. In general, Salomon's images of Charles de Gaulle, Albert Einstein, Neville Chamberlain, Maxim Litvinov, and royalty, musicians, intellectuals and more, continue to this day to provide insight into a fascinating if highly dangerous and unstable era in the history of the modern world.

Shortly after the Nazis' rise to power in Germany, Salomon moved with his family to the Netherlands, his wife's birthplace. He continued working throughout the 1930s, traveling frequently to the United Kingdom and to the U.S., so that he was caught unawares when the Germans invaded Holland, having turned down offers to emigrate while it was still possible. The family went into hiding, but were discovered when a gas-meter reader noticed an unusual level of consumption at a location that was supposed to be vacant. After imprisonment at the Dutch transit camp Westerbork, the family spent five months at Theresienstadt, before being deported to Auschwitz.

Erich Salomon was last seen on a transport to Auschwitz on May 27, 1944. Red Cross records indicated that he was murdered there on July 7 of the same year. His wife and

one son also died there, while a second son, Peter, survived. He later became a photographer himself, and died in 2006.

April 29 / Serenity now! Comic Jerry Seinfeld is born

The man behind the iconic TV series that is still quoted by legions of fans was born on this day in 1954.



Jerry Seinfeld. Photo by AP

April 29, 1954, is the birthday of Jerry Seinfeld, stand-up comic, who between 1989 and 1998 played a character based on himself in the American television sitcom “Seinfeld.” Earlier this month it was reported that the show’s 180 episodes have earned a total of \$3.1 billion in syndication revenues since the airing of the final episode on May 14, 1998 – with some \$400 million each going to the show’s two co-creators, Seinfeld and Larry David.

Jerome Seinfeld was born in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up in the Long Island suburb of Massapequa. His father, Kalman Seinfeld, who died in 1985, was of Austrian Jewish background. His mother, the former Betty Hesney, is the daughter of Syrian Jews from Aleppo who described themselves as Turkish when they came through Ellis Island.

Seinfeld recently told a New York Times interviewer that his family was “pretty Jewish” – “Went to temple, kept kosher, two sets of dishes.” Before he attended college, in 1971, Jerry spent a summer in Israel, spending most of the time volunteering at Kibbutz Sa’ar, in the north near Nahariya. Fifteen years ago, a reporter from Yedioth Ahronoth visited the kibbutz and tracked down Seinfeld’s adoptive family there, Emanuel and Shoshana Pereg. The couple showed the journalist the green flowered tablecloth they received as a present from the volunteer, which they were still using nearly three decades later.

Seinfeld graduated in 1976 from Queens College, where he studied communications and theater, and where he did an independent study course on the subject of stand-up comedy, for which he wrote a 40-page paper on the topic, among other things. He

began appearing as a stand-up himself shortly after that, and an appearance at a New York club led to some television work, including a regular, but short-lived role as Frankie on the sitcom “Benson,” which starred Robert Guillaume. Frankie is a delivery boy who is always trying out comedy routines, but whom no one pays any attention to.

In 1988, Seinfeld and TV writer Larry David teamed up to write the pilot for a new comedy series they called “The Seinfeld Chronicles.” It aired July 5, 1989, on NBC, and it was picked up for the regular season, its name was changed to “Seinfeld,” to avoid confusion with another show, the short-lived “Marshall Chronicles.” Although the show was praised by critics, it wasn’t until its fifth season that it began scoring top ratings, being the third-most popular show that year. During its last four seasons, it was either the number one or number two top-rated series.

“Seinfeld” came to its end in 1998 with the four regular lead characters, the friends Jerry Seinfeld, Elaine Benes, George Costanza and Cosmo Kramer, behind bars after they have been convicted of breaking a newly enacted “Good Samaritan” law, which requires passersby to come to the aid of someone in mortal danger. In their case, a private plane that was flying them to Los Angeles, where Jerry and George have finally been offered a regular TV show, has to make an unscheduled landing in a small Massachusetts town and they do nothing to help a man being carjacked at gunpoint. As a consequence, they are put on trial, in which most everyone who has ever known them is called to the stand by the prosecution as a character witness. After that devastating testimony, they are each sentenced to a year in prison.

In the 15 years since “Seinfeld” went out of production, Jerry Seinfeld has continued working continuously as a stand-up comic. (He also made a successful animated film, “Bee Movie,” and a less successful reality show called “The Marriage Ref.”) Last year, he averaged two shows per week, and travels around the U.S. to do them, sometimes appearing unannounced in small clubs, other times filling large theaters. He is a perfectionist who sometimes spends years honing a joke to perfection, and is constantly refining his material. He also keeps his act “clean,” refusing to use obscene language in his shows, saying that it makes for cheap laughs.

Seinfeld married at age 45; his wife, Jessica Sklar, a public-relations executive and now a children’s book writer, met him just after returning from her honeymoon with her then-new husband Eric Nederlander, a theatrical producer. She divorced Nederlander, and married Seinfeld in November 1998. They have three children.

April 30 / Theodor Herzl finishes his novel 'Old-New Land'

His utopian vision included a warm welcome for Jews by local Arabs and a secular nation with equal rights for all. Not all embraced his notions.



Jaffa Port, 1906. Photo by A.E. Breen

On April 30, 1902, Theodor Herzl noted, in a single, short entry in his diary, that “today I finished my novel ‘Old-New Land.’”

In 1896, in his short work “The Jewish State,” the Viennese-born journalist who was the visionary of the Jewish state presented a brief justifying his proposal for a political solution to the “plight of the Jews.” But it was in “Altneuland,” written two years before his death, that he composed a utopian novel offering a portrait of how a society established in a Palestine resettled by the Jews might appear.

By 1902, the 41-year-old Herzl had been obsessed for some six years with the idea of providing a remedy to the dire plight of the Jews of Eastern Europe – one of poverty, of being subjected to violent hatred, of a lack of control over their destiny. He had been running from one capital to another trying to enlist the support of world leaders to agree to his idea.

The year after publishing “The Jewish State,” Herzl had convened the First Zionist Congress, in Basel, establishing a foundation for advancing the Zionist project. The year after that, in 1898, he paid his only visit to Palestine, then part of the Ottoman Empire.

“Altneuland” was meant to serve as his crowning achievement – an emotionally convincing portrait of the type of society that could be created by the Jews in their

return to the ancient homeland. It would be technologically advanced, and egalitarian and socialistic, a place where Jews and Arabs lived harmoniously and all citizens had equal rights.

The framework for this portrait was to be a literary novel, and Herzl went to great lengths to draw flesh-and-blood characters with whom the readers could identify.

In the novel, Herzl's protagonist, Friedrich Loewenberg, a newly minted Viennese lawyer who has been disappointed and disillusioned by life and love, joins an eccentric millionaire, Adelbert Kingscourt, in sailing for the South Seas, where they intend to live the rest of their lives removed from modern civilization. On the way to the Pacific, their vessel docks in the port of Jaffa, where they disembark and spend a few days touring the land.

The Palestine they glimpse is the one that Herzl encountered on his 1898 visit: barren, destitute, gray, backward.

Twenty years later, Kingscourt and Loewenberg sail back to Palestine for a visit. Again, they dock in Jaffa, and again, they decide to take a look at the "forsaken" country. Of course, what they see is a land transformed.

The best of European civilization

The capital of "Palestine," as the new country is called, is Jerusalem, but its business and cultural center is the new deep-water port city of Haifa. Economically, the country is a blend of collective ownership of resources and state welfare with the encouragement of free enterprise. Culturally, it offers the best of European civilization, and the languages spoken are Yiddish, Hebrew and German. A canal has been built from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, and fresh water is available to all. And Palestine is demilitarized.

Although "Altneuland" is indeed a homeland for the Jews, it is a secular country. Citizenship is open to all – although the visitors encounter a nationalist rabbi, Dr. Geyer, who would like to limit immigration by non-Jews. The European-educated Muslim intellectual they meet, Dr. Reschid, tells them how much better life is now that the Jews have returned to the land.

When Kingscourt asks him if he doesn't view the Jews as "intruders," Reschid replies: "You speak strangely, Christian. Would you call a man a robber who takes nothing from you, but brings something? The Jews have enriched us, why should we be against them?"

The Temple, which they visit on the Sabbath, has been rebuilt in Jerusalem, but apparently sacrifices are no longer offered up there; instead, it is a symbol of a high-minded, spiritual and ethically based Judaism.

Not surprisingly, both Loewenberg and Kingscourt decide to stay in Palestine.

In its translation into Hebrew, by Nahum Sokolow, the book was called “Tel Aviv,” which of course became the name of the new city established adjacent to Jaffa seven years later.

The book did have an impact on the Zionist movement, but it also elicited a violent response from the Cultural Zionists, led by Ahad Ha’am, who attacked the book for imagining a society that had very few “Jewish” components to its cultural identity, as well as for its naiveté regarding the response of the native Arabs of Palestine. Today, it is read largely as a curiosity, with special attention paid to the similarity between certain inventions imagined by Herzl and the reality that exists in the real-life State of Israel.

May 1 / American Jewish World Service is established

The AJWS' activities include grant-making to small communities in the developing world, women's empowerment and sustainable agriculture.

On May 1, 1985, the American Jewish World Service, a nongovernmental organization that runs and raises money for programs intended to relieve hunger, poverty and disease in the developing world, was established.

The AJWS was founded by two men, Lawrence Phillips, the then-chairman and CEO of the giant clothing manufacturer Phillips-Van Heusen (his great-grandfather was the company's founder), and Laurence Simon, an expert on international development who then was employed by Oxfam (today he is a professor at Brandeis University's school for social policy and management). Larry Phillips later explained that he was concerned, as a member of Oxfam's board, that the global antihunger organization did not have enough Jewish representation on its board. He and Simon, together with a small group of rabbis and Jewish communal leaders, dedicated AJWS to *tikkun olam*, a kabbalistic term that refers to socially beneficial acts that help "repair the world."

The organization's first emergency response action was taken in Armero, Colombia, where a volcanic eruption in November 1985 killed two-thirds of the town's 29,000 residents. The AJWS provided aid to survivors. In 1986, it began a cooperative agriculture program with members of the exiled Tibetan community in India. Within several years, it was active in every part of the world.

Today, the Service's activities include grant-making to small communities in the developing world, both urban and rural, with an emphasis on human rights, women's empowerment, sustainable agricultural development, and health and education. The beneficiary communities also provide opportunities to participants in a variety of AJWS volunteer programs to do work in the field in India, Central America, Africa and Southeast Asia. (Needless to say, although the AJWS is a Jewish organization, it provides assistance wherever it feels it is needed, and because it has no formal connection to Israel it can work in countries that do not have ties with the Jewish state.) One of its volunteer programs is intended specifically for rabbinical students.

In the United States, the AJWS lobbies the federal government to adopt policies designed to reduce conflict in war zones and to respond effectively to disaster situations. It was the AJWS that in 2004, in concert with the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, organized the Save Darfur Coalition, intended to provide relief in that province of Sudan and to apply pressure on the regime in Khartoum to halt its atrocities against Darfur's non-Arab population.

The final component of the organization's work is educational. In the United States, it prepares educational material, often Jewish-themed, to encourage members of the Jewish community to see it as a religious obligation to become involved in social-

justice and relief projects. At the same time, the AJWS has not been above using the services of filmmaker Judd Apatow to make a short end-of-year fundraising film, as it did in 2010, featuring a number of well-known celebrities, both Jewish and non-Jewish, playing on every imaginable stereotype about Jews – all tongue-in-cheek, of course – to express their support for the organization.

Among those starring in the clip were comedian Sarah Silverman, who praises the AJWS for giving away \$22 million the previous year. She notes that the figure “really throws a wrench in the ‘Jews are cheap’ premise. I mean, if you think that’s cheap, there’s no way you’re Asian, ’cause you’re really bad at math.” The short film drew more than 1.5 million viewers in the month and a half after it was posted to YouTube.

Ruth Messinger, a former Manhattan borough president, has been the president of the AJWS since 1998, the year after her unsuccessful bid for the mayoralty of New York. Under her leadership, the organization has grown to raise nearly \$49 million in 2011, with more than 85 percent of that going to programming. It consistently gets top rankings from Charity Navigator, which looks at the transparency, efficiency and management of America’s largest charities.

May 2 / An anti-Zionist rabbi dies in Jerusalem

Rabbi Moshe Hirsch's arranged marriage to the daughter of the leader of an anti-Zionist sect helped him to become a surprising confidant of Yasser Arafat.



Rabbi Moshe Hirsch with Yasser Arafat. Photo by fanawatch.com

On May 2, 2010, Rabbi Moshe Hirsch, a longtime leader of the Neturei Karta sect, died in Jerusalem. Deeply committed to the anti-Zionist ideology of his group, with something of the showman about him, Hirsch gained great notoriety for his decision to serve as the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's "advisor on Jewish affairs," and for sending a delegation of Neturei Karta representatives to Tehran in 2006 to participate in a Holocaust-denying conference.

Hirsch was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1923. He grew up in an Orthodox – though not ultra-Orthodox – home, and according to his cousin, longtime Jerusalem Post journalist Abraham Rabinovitch, was a good-natured and witty redhead who liked to play punchball, a baseball-like game played with a rubber ball and the hand in place of a bat. As an excellent student, when he reached college age, Hirsch went to study for rabbinic ordination at the prestigious Lakewood Yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey. Legend has it that a roommate there was Shlomo Carlebach, who later gained fame as the "Singing Rabbi."

According to Rabinovitch, who eulogized Hirsch in his paper after the rabbi's death, the turning point in his life came when the head of the Lakewood Yeshiva was asked by Jerusalem Rabbi Aharon Katzenellenbogen to choose his best student and send him to Israel to serve as a groom for Katzenellenbogen's daughter.

Aharon Katzenellenbogen, as it happened, was one of the two founders. The other was Rabbi Amram Blau, of Neturei Karta (literally, "guardians of the city," in

Aramaic). The Mea She'arim-based group had split off in 1937 from the ultra-Orthodox political Agudat Yisrael, which was seen as being too lenient in its anti-Zionism. Neturei Karta is a non-Hasidic sect, with its members descendants of students of the Vilna Gaon, the 18th-century leader of the opposition to Hasidism. In the 1950s, Holocaust survivors set up Neturei Karta communities in New York, France and England, but Jerusalem is the center of its institutions, all of which are called, collectively, Torah Veyira (Torah and Fear of God).

The opposition of Neturei Karta to the State of Israel is less the fact that it is a secular state, not run according to Jewish law, but rather that the act of establishing the state was a rejection of a basic tenet of Judaism, that redemption would come with the coming of the Messiah, when the Jews would be restored to their homeland. According to one Talmudic passage, the Jews had promised God not to try to prematurely end their exile, or to rebel against the nations of the world, so that the decision to create a Jewish state was an act of impudence and rebellion.

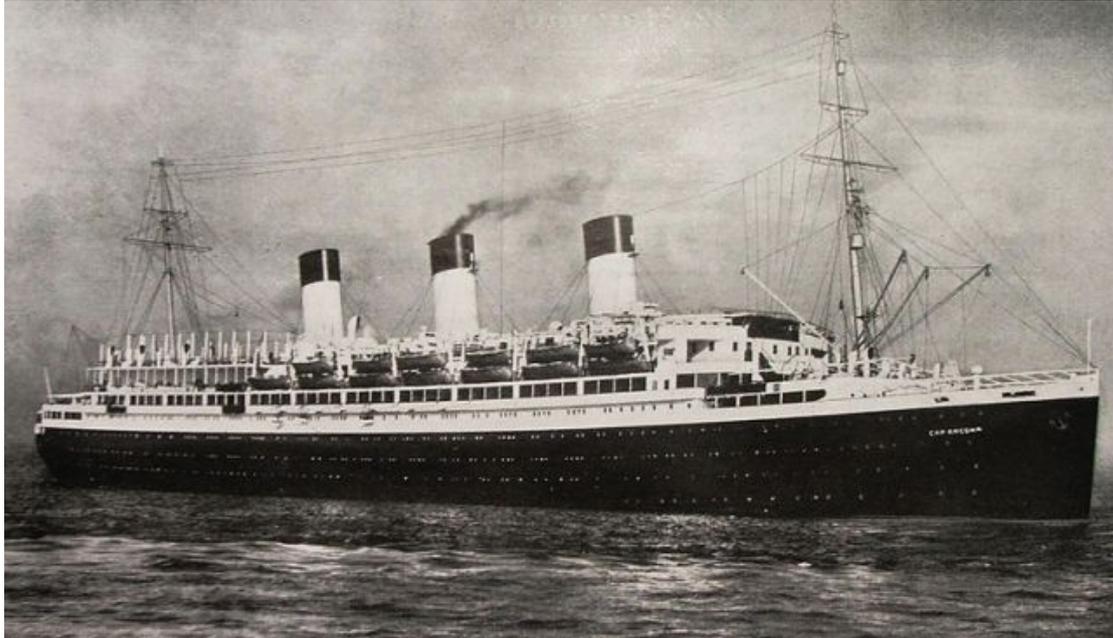
Hirsch did indeed move to Jerusalem, where he married Rabbi Katzenellenbogen's daughter, but he never became a citizen of Israel. He lived in Mea She'arim, and made a living as a dealer of etrogim (citrons) for the Sukkot festival. Unlike other anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox groups, Neturei Karta gave their opposition a very public political complexion, reaching out to the Palestinians and other enemies of Israel to express their support in the struggle against Zionism. This was where Rabbi Hirsch was a specialist, and the hatred that his activities stirred up among other Jews, in particular in Israel, only seemed to inspire him to keep up his efforts – even after an opponent threw acid in his face in the 1990s, causing him to lose an eye.

His fine English and his outgoing personality led him to become the unofficial “foreign minister” of Neturei Karta. In 2004, while Yasser Arafat lay in a coma in a Paris hospital for two weeks, Hirsch, who had already become a confidant of the PLO leader while the latter was still in exile in Tunis, led a delegation to France to hold an extended prayer vigil for his recovery. (Arafat died that November, and Hirsch and a number of associates were in attendance at his funeral in Ramallah.)

By the time of Hirsch's death, three years ago, he had been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for some time, and his eldest son, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hirsch, had taken over many of his responsibilities.

May 3 / Allied forces' catastrophic attack

After the Nazis had all but surrendered to the Allies, they packed several ships with Jewish prisoners, in a last-ditch effort to kill them. The Royal Air Force accommodated, attacking the ships and killing more than 7,000 innocents.



The SS Cap Arcona. Photo by Wikimedia

May 3, 1945, is the day of the British Royal Air Force attack on Luebeck harbor, where the Germans had packed some 8,000 concentration camp prisoners, the vast majority of them Jews, into three vessels. Seven thousand and five hundred of the prisoners were killed, making it one of the largest maritime disasters in history.

By May of 1945, the Axis forces were nearly vanquished. Adolf Hitler had killed himself on April 30, the city of Berlin had surrendered two days later, and on May 7, in Rheims, France, German forces would surrender unconditionally to the Allies. It was in this context that Reichsfuehrer SS Heinrich Himmler gave the order that no civilian prisoners held by the Nazis were to emerge from the war alive. Prisoners from Neuengamme, the largest concentration camp in Germany, and several others, were sent on a death march northward.

On April 19, 1945, some 11,000 prisoners who survived the march (half the number that began the journey) arrived at Luebeck, on the Baltic Sea, some 60 km northeast of Hamburg. A detailed website about the Luebeck disaster hosted by the University of Hamburg explains that the prisoners were made to board three ships in the harbor – the Cap Arcona, the Athen and the Thielbek – for the express purpose of having them die at sea. The ships were unmarked, and not fit for sailing anywhere. Prisoners had no food or water. After the war, witnesses spoke of plans either to scuttle the ships, of having German forces attack them by air or by U-boats, or of simply blowing them up. The direct order to transfer the prisoners to the ships came from Karl Kaufmann,

the gauleiter (Nazi party chief) of Hamburg, and German officers who tried to refuse were threatened with execution.

At midday on May 3, after a first flyover of British warplanes, Captain Nobmann of the Athen was ordered to return to Luebeck and pick up additional prisoners who had arrived from Stutthof concentration camp on barges. He refused, but because the Athen was at harbor when the attack came, the nearly 2,000 people on board were spared from death.

The largest of the ships, the SS Cap Arcona, had started life in 1927 as a German luxury liner in the Hamburg-South America line (in 1942, it was used in a German film about the Titanic as a stand-in for the “unsinkable” British vessel). By the end of World War II, it had been retired from use as a troop transport, and was supposed to be out of service. The Thielbek and the Athen were both smaller vessels.

On May 2, the International Red Cross received information that 7,000-8,000 prisoners were being held on ships in Luebeck harbor. That information should have been passed on to the Allies. Yet, the next day, Typhoon fighter-bombers from five RAF squadrons attacked the ships. First hit was the Arcona, at 2:30 P.M. Prisoners who were held below deck were shot by their captors; those who jumped into the ice-cold sea and tried to swim to shore were shot in the water. Of 4,500 prisoners on board, 350 survived. Some 490 of the 600 crew and soldiers were rescued.

The Thielbek was hit next, about an hour later. Only 50 of its 2,800 prisoners survived the RAF attack, and most of its German crew were killed as well.

Although an investigation by a British officer into the disaster later concluded that “it appears that the primary responsibility for this great loss of life must fall on the British RAF personnel who failed to pass to the pilots the message they received concerning the presence of KZ [concentration camp] prisoners on board these ships,” there has never been any official British apology for or acknowledgment of the unnecessary loss of innocent lives, nor is it clear why the attack was carried out. Records of the event are to remain classified until 2045.

Bodies of the dead continued to appear on the shore for months and more after the disaster. The last body of a prisoner who died that day is believed to have washed ashore in 1971.

May 4 / 4 shot dead by National Guard in Vietnam war protest

Three of the dead at Kent State University were Jewish students, two of whom were bystanders in the wrong place at the wrong time.



Jeffrey Glenn Miller lying face down after being shot at the Kent State University war protest, May 4, 1970. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 4 is the 44th anniversary of the shooting deaths of four students by National Guardsmen at Kent State University, in Kent, Ohio. The shootings of May 4, 1970, occurred during an ongoing series of antiwar protests on campus, sparked by the April 30 announcement of President Richard Nixon that American forces had begun an “incursion” in Cambodia.

The four students who lost their lives that day were Allison Krause, Jeffrey Glenn Miller, Sandra Scheuer and William Knox Schroeder. By what seems to be nothing more than a surprising coincidence, three of the four were Jewish – surprising, because the percentage of Jews in the Kent State student body never exceeded five percent. In addition to the four deaths, the 67 rounds fired by the troops over the course of 13 seconds wounded another nine people, one of whom ended up paralyzed.

The extension of the Vietnam War to neighboring Cambodia, where Communist troops had taken up a presence with impunity, was not anticipated by the American public, as there was a general perception at the time that the war was winding down. On Friday May 1, the day after President Nixon’s television address, some 500 students demonstrated on the Kent State campus against the widening of the war. That night, there was violence in the center of Kent, with some storefront windows being broken and bottles thrown at police; some students were apparently involved.

The next day, Kent's mayor, LeRoy Satrom, declared a state of emergency and asked Ohio Governor James Rhodes to send troops from the state's National Guard to the town to maintain order. Rhodes consented, but the soldiers arrived only late that Saturday night. In the meantime, protests continued on campus, and the local ROTC (Army Reserve Officer Training Corps) office was set on fire.

Governor Rhodes arrived in Kent on Sunday, where at a press conference he declared the student protesters "the worst type of people that we harbor here in America." They were, he elaborated, "worse than the brown shirts and the communist element, and also the night riders and the vigilantes," and he promised, "We are going to eradicate the problem."

On the Monday, although university officials tried to prevent another antiwar demonstration from taking place on campus, some 2,000 students gathered at the university's commons. The Guard tried several times to make the crowd disperse and started making arrests. They also used tear gas. A little before 12:30 P.M., as a standoff took place between members of the university population and the troops, members of the National Guard began firing.

Krause and Miller had been participants in the protest. (It is Miller's body that we see in the iconic photograph, made by photojournalism student John Filo, of a young woman screaming over a body lying face down on the ground. Filo won the Pulitzer Prize for the image.) Scheuer and Schroeder were bystanders, who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. All were shot with National Guard M1 Garand rifles, but despite many different investigations of the day's incident over the years, it has never been firmly established who gave the orders to shoot or who shot whom.

The killings at Kent State sparked additional protests across the country, with some 900 colleges and universities closing down in the wake of student strikes. Not that Americans were of one mind about the meaning of the deaths: A Gallup poll performed shortly after May 4 revealed that 58 percent of respondents blamed the students for the violence, and only 11 percent saw the National Guard as responsible.

May 5 / The poet who called out T.S. Eliot's anti-Semitism is born

The celebrated British poet Emanuel Litvinoff wrote eloquently about his life between the World Wars and advocated fiercely for Soviet Jews.



British poet Emanuel Litvinoff. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 5, 1915 is the birthdate of Emanuel Litvinoff, an English-Jewish poet and writer who defended the Jews again and again throughout his long career. Most famously, Litvinoff is remembered for an evening in 1951 when he read publicly a new poem harshly criticizing T.S. Eliot for the anti-Semitism evident in his poetry – in the presence of Eliot himself.

Emanuel Litvinoff was born in London's Whitechapel section, the second of four children to a mother and father who had emigrated from Odessa, Ukraine. They had hoped to make it to New York, but didn't get further than London's East End. When Emanuel was 2, his father went back to Russia to fight with the Bolsheviks – and never was heard from again. His mother, a seamstress, remarried and had five more children, and the family lived in great penury.

As the only Jewish child at Cordwainer's Technical College in London, Emanuel was subjected to frequent taunting and beatings by classmates and teachers, and left school at age 14. He took on menial jobs and later reported, "I was so often so hungry that I would hallucinate. We fought every day for our lives." He found work as a "fur nailer's apprentice," was active in Communist activities and, briefly, tried to organize a youth group of the local Zionist Revisionist movement. He succeeded in recruiting only a younger brother.

When World War II began, it was Litvinoff's intention to declare himself a conscientious objector, until he considered what a successful German invasion of the British isles would mean for the Jews. He wrote to the War Office, asking to be called up. He was, but because of poor eyesight, he was assigned to a civilian position in the Pioneer Corps. It was during this time that his first collection of poetry, "The Untried Soldier," was published. When a local officer familiar with Litvinoff's poetry discovered him working as a cook in Northern Ireland, he decided he should be sent off for officers training, which is how Litvinoff ended up overseas, in both North Africa and the Middle East. By the end of the war, he had reached the rank of major.

Litvinoff considered himself – until the end of his life – an admirer of T.S. Eliot. But in 1948, when Eliot published a collection of "Selected Poems," and included his 1920 poem "Burbank With a Baedeker: Bleistein With a Cigar," the younger poet was shocked. Eliot's poem included the following description of a character he called Bleistein: "A saggy bending of the knees / And elbows, with the palms turned out, / Chicago Semite Viennese. / A lustreless protrusive eye / Stares from the protozoic slime / At a perspective of Canaletto. / The smoky candle end of time/ Declines. On the Rialto once./ The rats are underneath the piles. / The Jew is underneath the lot./ Money in furs. The boatman smiles. ..."

Litvinoff recognized that in the 1920s, when that poem was written, anti-Semitism was socially acceptable in English society. In 1948, after a world war and the revelation of the horrors of the Holocaust, that was no longer the case, he felt. When Litvinoff was invited to present a new poem at the inaugural evening of a poetry series at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, he decided to read a work called "To T.S. Eliot."

As Litvinoff was called to the podium to read his new poem, the evening's host, Sir Herbert Read, who knew only that the verse was about Eliot – a tribute, he apparently believed -- noticed that none other than Eliot himself, who had won the Nobel Prize for Literature three years earlier, had just entered the hall. Read commented to Litvinoff that "Tom" had just arrived.

Litvinoff was unnerved, to say the least, but proceeded to read the poem to a shocked audience. It included the following lines: "I am not one accepted in your parish./ Bleistein is my relative and I share/ the protozoic slime of Shylock, a page/ in Stuermer, and, underneath the cities,/ a billet somewhat lower than the rats./ Blood in the sewers. Pieces of our flesh/ float with the ordure on the Vistula."

The poem continued, "Let your words/ tread lightly on this earth of Europe/ lest my people's bones protest."

When Litvinoff finished, members of the audience shouted out angrily at him for daring to attack the eminent T.S. Eliot. The catcalls continued until, from the back of the hall, a voice was heard to say, "It's a good poem. It's a very good poem."

That voice came from T.S. Eliot.

In the years that followed, Litvinoff worked as an editor on the Zionist Review and several other Jewish journals. He lived for some time in Berlin and then wrote a

novel, "The Lost European," about a Jew who returns to that city after the war, and began writing plays for production on television. He published more than 20 books, including his most well-known, a memoir called, "Journey Through a Small Planet," about his own life in the East End between the wars. Another work, a story called "Enemy Territory," described his schooling at Cordwainer's, where the teachers were no less prejudiced against Jews than the pupils.

Litvinoff's first wife, Irene Pearson, was a successful English fashion model, who went by the name Cherry Marshall. (She was said to have the smallest waist in London.) In 1955, he accompanied her to a fashion show he had organized for her in the Soviet Union, thus walking "50 yards into the Jewish problem," as he later put it. Litvinoff subsequently became deeply involved in publicizing the plight of Soviet Jews.

Emanuel Litvinoff died on September 24, 2011, at the age of 96.

May 6 / An aspiring banker marries up

Jacob Schiff fell in love with the boss's daughter; he would eventually run his father-in-law's firm and become one of the leading figures in the American banking world.



Jacob Schiff. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 6, 1875, is the day Jacob Schiff, a 28-year-old investment banker at Kuhn, Loeb & Co., married the boss' daughter, Therese Loeb, in Manhattan. The couple knew each other well, having met numerous times at Sunday dinners at the home of Therese's parents, Solomon and Betty Loeb. Their union was said to be based on love. That being said, it also resulted in Jacob's soon becoming a full partner in his father-in-law's firm, whose management he took over a decade later.

The groom had been born on January 10, 1847, in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, into a prominent family that traced its presence in the city back 500 years. (Actually, Jacob Schiff could trace his lineage back to no less than King Solomon.) Many of his ancestors were rabbis, but his father was a financial broker for the Rothschilds. Wanting to make a name for himself independent of his father, and seeing post-Civil War America as a land of unbound opportunity, Jacob sailed to New York, arriving in August 1865.

Although Schiff became a U.S. citizen in 1870, three years later he returned to Germany, after being offered a position at the Hamburg bank M. Warburg. Shortly after that, Jacob's father died, and Jacob returned to Frankfurt to be with his mother. It was there, about a year later, that Abraham Kuhn, a German-born banker visiting from New York, offered him a job as a partner in the investment firm he and Solomon Loeb had founded in 1867.

Schiff returned to New York (some accounts say in 1874, some 1875), and as he began working at Kuhn, Loeb, he also began to receive invitations to the Loeb

residence in Manhattan's Murray Hill section. Solomon's wife, Betty, quickly determined that he would make a good match for her 20-year-old stepdaughter, Therese. In his book "Our Crowd," Stephen Birmingham writes how in Jacob Schiff, "Betty began to sense a kindred spirit, a will as strong as hers own, and an ambition as huge as hers." At the Sunday dinners Betty famously hosted, she regularly seated Jacob next to the "cameo-faced, blue-eyed, small, and dainty" Therese, who "blushed prettily when Jacob spoke to her."

Once Jacob had determined to marry Therese, he wrote to his mother back in Frankfurt telling her of his decision. "You might think her uncultured and even a feminist," he wrote to Clara Schiff, "but don't think that of the girl I've selected. She might have been brought up in the best of German families."

As noted, the marriage took place on May 6, 1875, after which the couple moved into a brownstone residence at Park Avenue and 53rd Street, a wedding present from the bride's parents.

Jacob Schiff ended up becoming one of the leading figures in the American banking world during this period when the country's economy burgeoned. Both before and after he took over the running of Kuhn, Loeb (whose name he left intact out of respect for his father-in-law, even after he became the firm's senior partner), Schiff became deeply involved in raising capital for the railroads that were spreading across the continent. As a Jew dismayed at the condition of his brethren in the Russian empire, particularly after the Kishinev pogroms in 1903, he came to the aid of the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, floating a \$200 million loan on their behalf.

Schiff refused to do business with companies whose owners were openly anti-Semitic, and as a philanthropist he gave money to settlement houses for Jewish immigrants, and helped establish both the Montefiore Hospital and Home for the Aged, and the 92nd St. YMHA. He also supported both Conservative and Reform Judaism. New York's Jewish Museum, a division of the Jewish Theological Seminary, is situated in the Fifth Avenue mansion that belonged to Schiff's daughter, Frieda Warburg.

Frieda was one of Jacob and Therese Schiff's two children; the other was Mortimer Schiff, who became a partner at Kuhn, Loeb but also devoted much of his time to the Boy Scouts of America. (Mortimer's daughter Dorothy Schiff was the owner and publisher of The New York Post from 1939 to 1976.)

Jacob Schiff died in 1920; Therese lived until 1933. After her husband's death she became more involved in the many charities that the couple had contributed to during Jacob's lifetime.

May 7 / Dramatist who created role of 'good Jew' dies

Richard Cumberland gave life to Sheva as an antidote to the Jewish character who is solely a 'spectacle of contempt, and a butt for ridicule.'



Richard Cumberland's 1794 play 'The Jew.' Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 7, 1811, the English dramatist and civil servant Richard Cumberland died. In his 1794 play “The Jew,” Cumberland provided London audiences with a depiction of a virtuous and charitable Jewish moneylender, a man who is moved by the misfortune of others – even when they are not his co-religionists – and it is his generosity that saves the day for the young couple in the drama.

Richard Cumberland was born February 19, 1732. His father, Denison Cumberland, was an Anglican cleric who served as bishop of two Irish dioceses. His mother, Joanna Bentley, was the daughter of Richard Bentley, a classical scholar at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Cumberland was educated at schools in England, and at age 14 began studying mathematics at Trinity College. Early in his career, he served as private secretary to the Earl of Halifax, who was president of the board of trade. He held other government positions as well, and in 1780 was sent secretly to Spain to try to negotiate a separate peace between that country, which was actively supporting the American colonies in their War of Independence, and Britain. His mission apparently failed over the inability of Spain and Britain to agree on the future ownership of Gibraltar.

Cumberland began writing even while he was a government official, and over a prolific career he wrote 54 plays (not all of which were produced), including four operas. He fits into the sentimental, humanist tradition that came into vogue in this era, and he himself acknowledged that he was interested in characters from “the

outskirts of empire,” so that he wrote with sympathy about colonial subjects of Britain.

Several of Cumberland’s plays offer depictions of Jews. The earliest of these, a comedy called “The Fashionable Lover” (1772), included a moneylender named Naphtali, who, although a minor character, possessed some of the less flattering stereotypical attributes of a Jew. The writer also engaged in a polemical discussion about the merits of Christian versus Jewish theology with a self-educated scholar named David Levi, who had himself responded to the efforts by the theologian (and chemist) Joseph Priestley to convince Jews to convert.

Even at his least sympathetic, however, Cumberland was never hostile to Jews, and in the moneylender Sheva, in “The Jew,” he actually set out to produce a character who would serve as an antidote to the device of a Jew being brought to the stage solely to be made a “spectacle of contempt, and a butt for ridicule.”

Sheva is a usurer who is so moved by the plight of a young couple in love, Frederick and Eliza, that he secretly invests money in Eliza’s name, and then presents her with a gift of 10,000 pounds, so that Frederick’s father will give his blessing to their match.

Sheva was based on an earlier Cumberland creation, a moneylender named Abraham Abrahams, who featured in a series of stories he wrote a decade earlier. It is Abraham himself – apparently channeling his creator — who notes that “I verily believe the odious character of Shylock has brought little less persecution upon us, poor scattered sons of Abraham, than the Inquisition itself.”

“The Jew” premiered in May 1794 at London’s Drury Lane Theater, and it soon toured the United States. It was also translated into several languages, including German, French and Yiddish, and has also been staged with the title “Sheva, the Benevolent.”

Richard Cumberland died in London on this day in 1811. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

May 8 / The first Mishna is printed

Joshua Solomon ben Israel Nathan Soncino, the first member of the distinguished family of printers, completed publication of the work in 1492.



Pages from the Soncino Talmud. Photo by [accordancebible.com](https://www.accordancebible.com)

On May 8, 1492, Joshua Solomon ben Israel Nathan Soncino completed publication of what is believed to be the first printed edition of the Mishna. The text is accompanied by Maimonides' commentary on the Mishna, in Hebrew translation.

Joshua Solomon Soncino (died 1493) was the first member of the distinguished Soncino family of printers to publish a book, a tractate of the Talmud (Berakhot), which he created in 1484. (Johannes Gutenberg had produced his first block-printed Bible in 1455.) The family took its name from the Italian town of Soncino, in northern Italy, east of Milan, where it lived for some time, but it could trace its origins to a German Jew called Moses of Speyer, in the 14th century.

The family moved its press around frequently, depending on the political situation it encountered, so that Soncino was just one of its homes. For example, Joshua Solomon Soncino was based in Soncino from 1483 to 1488 and in Naples from 1490 to 1492, when the Mishna was published. That year, many Jews expelled from Spain found a refuge in Naples, whereas by 1495, Naples was under French control, and things were far less comfortable for Jews. By 1510, Spain had conquered the city, and began expelling the Jews outright. By then, however, the Soncino press was operating out of Pesaro, to the southeast, on the Adriatic coast.

The most prolific and accomplished member of the family was Gershom ben Moses Soncino (died in 1534), the nephew of Joshua Solomon. He set up a press in Thessaloniki in 1527, and another in Istanbul three years later. Gershom published

more than 100 different volumes, branching out from Hebrew into Greek, Latin and Italian. The last book produced by the family was issued in Cairo in 1557.

The Mishna comprises part of the book we know today as the Talmud. It is a collection of rabbinic commentaries and explications of the commandments as delineated in the Torah, and was redacted (edited) early in the 3rd century C.E., by Rabbi Judah Hanasi. Its six “orders” break down into 63 tractates that organize the commandments according to topic, for example Sabbath or the laws related to sacrifices in the Temple.

During the three centuries that followed the completion of the Mishna, the rabbis supplemented the Mishnaic text with additional commentaries. These commentaries constitute the Gemara. Together the Mishna and the Gemara make up the Talmud, which was edited into two versions, the Jerusalem -- or Palestinian -- Talmud, finalized around the year 400, and the more definitive Babylonian Talmud, completed about a century later.

The 1492 Soncino Mishna also contained the commentary of Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, who lived 1135 to 1204. The Rambam’s Commentary on the Mishna was composed in Judeo-Arabic, and finished in 1168. In it, he takes into account not only the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds, but also the Tosefta and midrashic works.

The Soncino Naples edition of the Mishna was followed by a Prague version, edited by Yom Tov Lipman Heller, with his own commentaries, in 1614-17. But the basis for most Mishnaic study today is the Romm publishing house edition, published in Vilna in 13 volumes in 1908.

May 9 / An execution in Iran

Prominent Iranian businessman Habib Elghanian was executed after an Islamic court convicted him of being a 'Zionist spy.'



Habib Elghanian. Photo by Screenshot

On May 9, 1979, Habib Elghanian, the most prominent Jewish businessman in pre-Islamic Revolution Iran, was executed by firing squad after an Islamic court convicted him of being a “Zionist spy” and of “making war against God and his Prophet.”

His death was the first post-revolution execution of a Jew or a leading businessman, and it contributed to the departure of more than three-quarters of the country’s 80,000 Jews.

Habib Elghanian was born on April 5, 1912, in the Udlajan section of Tehran, to a father who was a tailor and a mother who was a grocer’s daughter. One of eight children, he attended the Alliance Israelite Universelle School until he was 15, when he began working at a hotel owned by an uncle.

In 1936, after completing military service, he married Mah Soltan, a first cousin from his mother’s side, and opened a business in the Tehran bazaar, importing watches and women’s hats. He and his brothers later opened a larger importing business. As Iran’s oil revenues, and its middle class, grew, so did the demand for foreign-made products such as textiles, washing machines and kitchen appliances, and the Elghanians’ firm continued to expand.

In 1948, Elghanian began manufacturing plastic items. He began simply, with combs and buttons. Petroleum was cheap and this business too flourished. By the early 1960s, Plascokar, as the company was called, was using between 60,000 and 70,000 tons of polyvinyl chloride, or PVC, every day in its factories.

The Elghanian brothers diversified constantly, investing in mining and in real estate as well as in other types of manufacturing, including plastic pipes, steel and textiles.

At the same time, Habib Elghanian took a leadership role in Iran's Jewish community — he was chairman of the Jewish Association of Iran for nearly two decades — and as a philanthropist. With his brothers, he established a family philanthropy to support the country's Alliance Israelite schools, to work together with the American Joint Distribution Committee to provide for Jewish poor and to fund hospitals, among other causes. He was also active in pushing for women's rights, and worked with the Association of Iranian Jewish Women to have the law changed so that women could inherit property.

Elghanian had close ties with Israel, and investments here. He and his brothers built the first skyscraper in Ramat Gan's Diamond Exchange, the Shimshon Tower.

His success made Elghanian a target even before the Islamic Revolution: In 1975, he was arrested, and even briefly imprisoned, as part of a government campaign to battle inflation.

So patriotic was Elghanian (who partnered with Muslims and with Armenians in different ventures) that, even after the Shah fled the country and Elghanian sent his wife and children to the United States, he decided to return to Iran, if only to try and sell his businesses before leaving the country permanently.

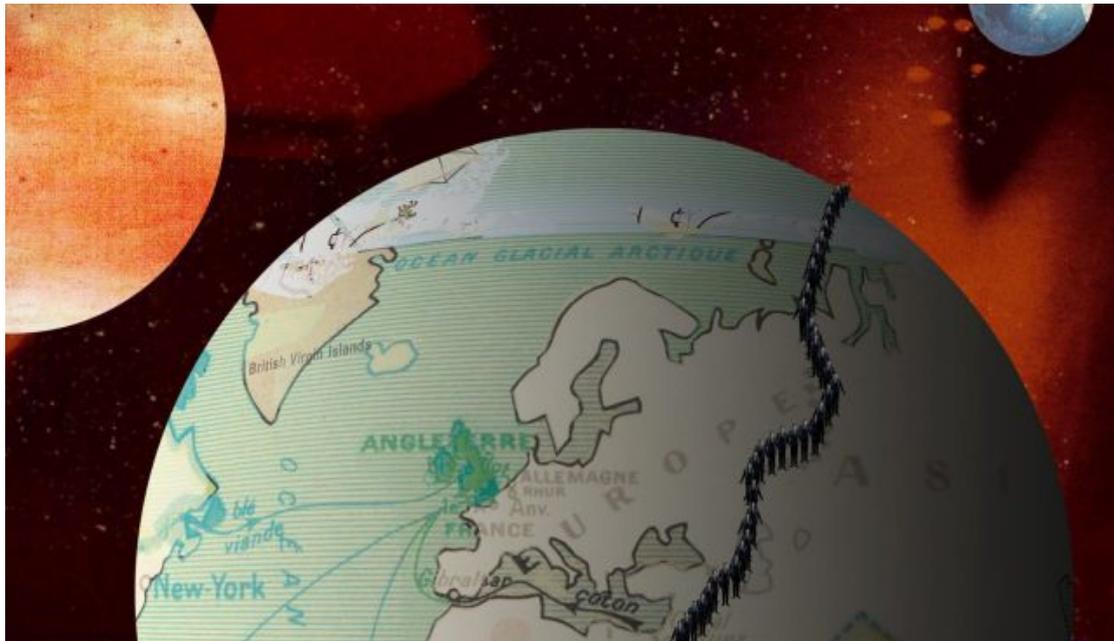
Family members urged him not to return, but he declared that he had nothing to fear.

Elghanian was arrested on March 16, 1979, after returning to Iran. On May 8, he was tried (according to his granddaughter, his trial lasted less than 20 minutes) and convicted of a number of crimes, including meeting with Israeli leaders. He was sentenced to death, with his execution carried out before dawn the next day. All of the property belonging to the Elghanian family in Iran was confiscated by the state.

Elghanian's death contributed to the departure of more than three-quarters of the country's 80,000 Jews.

May 10 / Lest we destroy earth: The first green philosopher is born

Humans should 'take responsibility for the earth as if the future of human life depended on it', urged Hans Jonas, a great fan of Hannibal.



This is our planet. Humans must take care of it, urged Hans Jonas, making green history.
Illustration by Ayala Tal

May 10, 1903, is the birthdate of the German-born philosopher Hans Jonas, who believed that the way a philosopher conducted his life was the best test of his doctrine. He also called on human beings to take responsibility for the earth as if the future of human life depended on it, thus becoming a father of the environmental movement.

Jonas was born in the town of Moenchengladbach, near the Dutch border, to Gustav Jonas and the former Rosa Horowitz. He studied philosophy and theology at the Universities of Freiburg, Berlin, Heidelberg and Marburg, at the latter of which he earned his PhD in 1928.

Jonas was too young to be able to fight in World War I, leaving him hungry for the opportunity to undertake heroic action. In his memoir, he noted how unfortunate he felt to "have been born into a period and a world where everything was in tip-top order and the only real excitement was to be found in history books and occasionally also in the paper."

He took offense at anyone who spoke insultingly about the Jews, and decided that his favorite hero was Hannibal, "because he was the great 'Semitic' general who had given the 'Aryans' a good thrashing, who'd shown them that you can't just push the 'Semites' around."

Soon enough, Jonas learned that things weren't really in tip-top order, especially for the Jews, and he became a Zionist. In 1933, he fled Germany, in direct response to the decision by the German Association for the Blind to expel its Jewish members. He vowed not to return, "except as a soldier in a conquering army."

His first stop was England, followed in 1934 by Palestine. There he met the woman who in 1943 would become his wife, Lore Weiner, and served briefly in the Haganah before volunteering for the Jewish Brigade of the British Eighth Army in World War II. (He served as an artilleryman, turning down the opportunity to serve in a physically safer intelligence unit.)

After the war, he returned to Moenchengladbach, where he learned that his mother had been murdered in Auschwitz in 1942. He then left Germany again, this time resolving never to return.

How to destroy humanity and everything else

Back in Palestine, he fought in the War of Independence in 1948, and taught briefly at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1950 he moved to Canada, where he taught briefly at Carleton University, in Ottawa, before finally settling down in New York City. He began teaching at the New School for Social Research, where he was a professor of philosophy from 1955 through 1976. He also was a fellow at the Hastings Center, a think tank devoted to questions of bioethics.

Jonas' earliest work revolved around Gnosticism, the dualistic religious philosophy with its roots in the ancient Middle East. But after World War II, he became increasingly concerned with an ethics of responsibility for human beings.

Concerned that both philosophy and science were "value free," and could just as easily be employed in the service of murderous ends as beneficial ones, he became a pioneer in the nascent field of bioethics. Before most others, he understood that human beings had the capacity to destroy not only their own species, but the very existence of life on earth in general.

His conclusion was that the existentialism of many philosophers before him, including his teacher Martin Heidegger, had proved to be a failure.

In 1964, participating in a conference at Drew University, in New Jersey devoted to the career of Heidegger, Jonas was asked to address the relationship between Christian theology and Heidegger's philosophy. He quoted the Prophet Micah who called on people to "do justice, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God," and argued that Heidegger's work did not "provide a norm by which to decide how to answer such calls." That was because Heidegger, who remained in Germany during the Nazi years, had given his own answer, telling "the students of Germany: 'Not theorems and ideas be the rules of your being. The Fuehrer himself and alone is the present and future German reality and its law. Heil Hitler!'"

Shortly before his death, which occurred on February 5, 1993, Jonas received the Premio Nonino literary prize, in Italy. In his acceptance speech, his last public statement, he spoke of how the "excessive exploits of human inventiveness"

threatened all life. This he called the “latest revelation”: “the outcry of mute things themselves that we must heed by curbing our powers over creation, lest we perish together on a wasteland of what was creation.”

May 11 / Phil Silvers, funnyman who played scheming Sgt. Bilko, is born

U.S. comedian got his big break after emceed the TV and Radio Correspondents' Dinner in 1952, in front of President Eisenhower.



Phil Silvers as Sgt. Ernie Bilko. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 11, 1911, is the birthdate of Phil Silvers, the comic actor who created the character of Sgt. Bilko for television. Although “The Phil Silvers Show,” in which Silvers portrayed an irrepressible con man-cum-army sergeant always scheming (though never succeeding) to make it rich, lasted only four seasons from 1955-59, it made Bilko immortal in reruns, and earned Silvers a reputation as one of Hollywood’s great funnymen.

Philip Silver was the youngest of the eight children of Saul Silver and the former Sarah Hendler, both immigrants to the United States from the Russian Empire. Known within the family as “Fischl,” Silver (the “s” was added to his name when he began performing) grew up in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

With a beautiful soprano singing voice, Phil began his showbiz career at age 11, singing in movie theaters when the projector broke down. At age 13, he was discovered by vaudeville performer Gus Edwards, who heard him singing for free on the beach at Coney Island. Edwards offered Phil a part in his revue. Silvers accepted, and quit school.

When Silvers’ voice cracked, he stopped singing, but continued performing, now with the vaudeville act of Flo Campbell and Joe Morris: Silvers would sit in the audience, posing as Morris’ son, and shout out insults at him.

Silvers performed in the Borscht Belt – the Jewish summer colony in New York’s Catskill Mountains – in the 1930s, worked with Minsky’s Burlesque, had a number of roles in Vitaphone film shorts, before his 1939 Broadway premiere, as the most memorable part of a short-lived play called “Yokel Boy.”

During the next decade, Silvers had a number of other roles on stage, and performed in nightclubs and on radio, but also began working in movies. But the parts were generally skimpy, and his real break didn’t come until 1952, when he returned to Broadway to star (and win a Tony) in “Top Banana,” a musical – with songs by Johnny Mercer – about the host of a TV variety show, apparently based on the era’s top television entertainer, Milton Berle.

In 1954, Silvers was invited to be the emcee at the TV and Radio Correspondents’ Dinner, in Washington, D.C. The audience included President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon, as well as numerous other officials and politicians.

When Silvers came on stage, he stood at the podium, alternately shuffling papers absentmindedly and glancing up at the audience over some 15 seconds before looking up and saying to the president, “My goodness, who’s minding the store?”

The line brought down the house, and also led, a few days later, to a call from CBS-TV offering Silvers his own sitcom on the network. The show that emerged was “You’ll Never Get Rich,” later called “The Phil Silvers Show,” but popularly known as “Sgt. Bilko,” created and written by Nat Hiken.

In it, Silvers played a motor pool master sergeant in a fictional army base in Kansas who’s always trying to outsmart the army’s bureaucracy, but whose scams never quite succeed.

Bilko was the pinnacle of Silvers’ career, though he continued performing until nearly the end of his life, even after a stroke in 1972.

In addition to bad health, Silvers had an inveterate gambling addiction, and his two marriages ended in divorce. With his first wife, Jo-Carroll Dennison, Miss America of 1942, he had no children, but Evelyn Patrick, his second wife, bore Silvers five daughters.

Phil Silvers died on November 1, 1975. At his funeral, his friend and fellow performer Red Buttons said of Silvers that he had taken “a comic spark and ignited it into a comic brilliance. He found what all truly great comedians have been able to discover in themselves – a rhythm of movement and speech that complemented their physical being.”

May 12 / A Polish suicide to protest Allied indifference to the Jews' fate

Shmuel Zygielbojm gave up his own life as a symbol of frustration at the Allies' inaction in the face of the slaughter of the Jews.



Captured Jews being led by German troops to the assembly point for deportation following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 12, 1943, Shmuel Zygielbojm, one of two Jewish members of the Polish government in exile in London, killed himself, in despair and in protest of the insufficient action being taken by the Allies to end the ongoing German campaign against European Jewry. His death came a few days after he received news that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which had begun on April 19, 1943, had been successfully suppressed by the Germans, and that his wife, Manya, and son Tuvia, had been killed there.

Shmuel Mordechai Zygielbojm was born February 21, 1895, in the Polish village of Borowica (then part of the Russian empire). Growing up in an impoverished family, he left heder (Jewish school) at age 10 to work in a factory that manufactured apothecary boxes, and two years later moved to Warsaw, where he worked a number of menial industrial jobs.

Shortly after the start of World War I, he moved with his family to Chelm, where he became involved in the labor movement. In 1917, he represented Chelm at the first convention of the Polish Bundist (workers) movement. In 1920, he was appointed secretary-general of the Polish Jewish metalworkers union.

By 1924, Comrade Arthur, as he was known in the labor movement, was a member of the Bund's Central Committee, and was involved in organizing Jewish workers both in Warsaw and later in Lodz. When World War II broke out in 1939, he returned by

foot from Lodz to Warsaw, and was now the movement's senior official. When the Germans occupied Warsaw, he served briefly as a member of the Judenrat, the Jewish council that acted as a liaison with the occupying forces. When the Germans decided on the establishment of a ghetto to house all of the city's Jews, and demanded that the victims themselves carry out its creation, Zygielbojm opposed cooperating with the order. When his colleagues on the Judenrat voted to respond favorably to the Nazi demand, he resigned from the body, declaring, "I feel that I would not have the right to continue living if the ghetto is carried through." He also spoke before a large body of some 10,000 Polish Jews outside the headquarters of the Jewish Council and urged them not to voluntarily enter the ghetto.

When Zygielbojm's activities led to his being summoned to Gestapo headquarters in Warsaw, he went into hiding until the Bund succeeded in smuggling him out of occupied Poland. He went first to France, and later traveled on to the United States, where he worked with the local branch of the Bund and went around the country lecturing about what was happening to the Jews of Poland.

In 1942, Zygielbojm went to London and joined the Polish National Council, the government in exile, as the representative of the Bund. Although the movement was traditionally non-Zionist, and had tense relations with the various Zionist groups in Poland, after Zygielbojm learned more and more about the actions being taken against Polish Jews, he became committed to cooperating with other Jewish organizations of all political stripes in order to save Jewish lives. He quickly understood that rescuing Jews was not a high priority – neither for the Polish government in exile nor for the Allied leaders with whom they were working. Even when politicians from the Alliance met in Bermuda in late April to discuss the problem of Jewish refugees, they could not agree on raising their quotas for the admission of any Jews who might be able to escape from Europe. This, too, was dispiriting news for Zygielbojm.

On May 11, 1943, Shmuel Zygielbojm addressed a letter to Wladyslaw Raczekiewicz and Wladyslaw Sikorski, respectively the president and prime minister of the Polish government in exile. In it, he explained his inability to "continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry, whose representative I am, are being murdered." He backed up his claim by quoting Bund figures suggesting that of the 3.5 million Polish Jews who were alive before the war, and the 700,000 Jews who had been deported to Poland since the start of the World War II, only 300,000 remained alive in April 1943.

He acknowledged, he wrote, that "the Polish Government contributed largely to the arousing of public opinion in the world," but argued that "it still did not do enough. It did not do anything that was not routine, that might have been appropriate to the dimensions of the tragedy taking place in Poland."

His death, wrote Zygielbojm, was meant to be understood as an act of protest.

At the same time, he sent a cable to Emanuel Nowogrodski, the general secretary of the International Jewish Labor Bund, who was in exile in New York, for the purpose of "[taking] leave and saying good-bey [sic] to all comrades and all people I love." He expressed his belief that, while his brethren were dying in Poland, "I was unable to

save asigle [sic] soul of them Stop I have a debt to pay to all I left behind when escaped from Warsaw in 1940.”

Having heard of the mass suicide of much of the ghetto uprising’s leadership on May 8, he continued, “I cannot survive them,” and thus, “I am going away as a protest against the democratic nations and governments not having taken any steps at all to stop the complete extermination of the Jewish people in Poland. Perhaps my death will cause what I didn’t succeed while alive.”

Zygielbojm committed suicide by turning on the gas in his apartment. His body was cremated, and his ashes placed in a storeroom in a Jewish cemetery in Golders Green, London. In 1959, they were discovered by a surviving son. He arranged for them to be transferred to the United States, where they received proper a Jewish burial – despite Zygielbojm’s suicide and despite his decision to be cremated – in the New Mt. Carmel Cemetery, in New York.

May 13 / Harry Schwarz, South African lawyer who fought apartheid, is born

Years after fleeing Germany with his family as a child, Harry Schwarz went to law school with Nelson Mandela, who became a lifelong friend and colleague.



May 13 / Harry Schwarz, South African lawyer who fought apartheid, is born. Photo by Wikimedia Commons.

May 13 is the 90th anniversary of the birth of Harry Schwarz, the Jewish South African lawyer and politician who courageously fought apartheid for more than four decades and served as South Africa's ambassador to the United States after his country's transition to multiracial democracy.

Heinz Schwarz was born in Cologne, Germany, on May 13, 1924, the son of Fritz and Alma Schwarz. Fritz was an activist in the Social Democratic party, who fled Germany for South Africa the night that Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933. He was joined the following year by his family, which by that point included a second son, Kurt.

During their first years in South Africa, the Schwarzes lived in Cape Town. It was there, in October 1936, that the SS Stuttgart docked, carrying Schwarz's grandparents on the last boat allowed to bring Jewish refugees from Germany into South Africa. He later recalled how, as a boy of 12, while waiting for his grandparents to disembark, he witnessed an anti-refugee demonstration take place shipside. It was led by H.F. Verwoerd, a future prime minister of independent South Africa and the architect of apartheid.

The family later moved to Johannesburg, where Heinz completed high school. In 1943, he volunteered for the South African air force. He saw action as a navigator with the 15th squadron, over North Africa, Crete and Italy. In 1944, his squadron joined other Allied planes in attacking and sinking the SS Giulio Cesare, the same ocean liner that had brought him to Cape Town a decade earlier. During his service, Schwarz changed his first name to Harry.

After the war, Schwarz studied law at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, and also completed a BA he had begun as a soldier, at the University of South Africa, in Cape Town. One of his law school classmates was Nelson Mandela, who became a lifelong friend and colleague. Although Schwarz never joined the African National Congress, and remained steadfast to his belief that change in South Africa had to be achieved without violence, he devoted his career to working toward the same goals as Mandela.

In the 1963 Rivonia trial of 10 defendants (including Mandela) accused of working with the ANC, Schwarz aggressively defended South African lawyer Jimmy Kantor, and succeeded in having the charges against him dropped. Following the trial, Schwarz stopped working as a trial lawyer, and devoted himself to commercial law and to political work fighting apartheid.

Beginning in 1951, Schwarz served successively in the Johannesburg city council, the Transvaal provincial council, and eventually in the South African parliament. He began with the United Party, but was expelled in 1975, after drafting, together with Zulu chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the Mahlabatini Declaration of Fatih, in which they laid out their vision for a post-racial South Africa.

Together with other United Party colleagues, he formed the Reform Party, which, several mergers later, became the Progressive Federal Party, which was the official opposition party after 1977. Schwarz was known for his effectiveness as an opposition leader, in particular when he served as shadow finance minister.

In 1991, when it was clear that, under President F.W. de Klerk, the country was on the way to eliminating apartheid, Schwarz became South Africa's ambassador to Washington, holding the position until after Mandela's election as president in 1994 and his visit to Washington that November. Schwarz was responsible for overseeing the lifting of U.S. sanctions and arranging for a \$600 million aid package to South Africa.

During the remaining 15 years of his life, Schwarz continued with his private law practice; set up a charity trust together with his wife, Annette (with whom he had three sons); and was active in South African Jewish affairs.

Harry Schwarz died on February 5, 2010, at age 85.

May 14 / An under-appreciated composer dies

By all accounts a brilliant musician, Fanny Mendelssohn was always overshadowed by her brother Felix.



Fanny Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Hensel. Photo by Wikimeida Commons

May 14, 1847, is the date on which composer Fanny Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Hensel died, at the age of 41. May 14, 1847, is the date on which composer Fanny Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Hensel died, at the age of 41.

Fanny Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg, Germany, on November 14, 1805. She was the first of four children of Abraham Mendelssohn and the former Lea Salomon. Abraham was the son of Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the Enlightenment intellectual who tried to reconcile life as a traditional Jew with the idea of being integrated into modern secular society. Moses succeeded famously in his own life, but of the six of his 10 children who survived to adulthood, only two continued practicing Judaism.

Abraham Mendelssohn, a highly successful banker, felt that integration required giving up the Jewish religion, and he and Lea decided not to have either of their sons, Felix and Paul, circumcised at birth. Even before converting, Abraham raised his children as Protestants. When Fanny was confirmed, in a Protestant church in 1820, her father wrote to her, “We have educated you and your brothers and sisters in the Christian faith, because it is the creed of most civilized people today.”

Abraham and Lea themselves underwent baptism in 1822 and changed their family name from Mendelssohn to Bartholdy, which was the surname that Lea’s brother, Jakob, had adopted, taken from a piece of property he purchased. Although Abraham was convinced, “There can no more be a Christian Mendelssohn than there can be a Jewish Confucius,” Felix (1809-1847), who became a world-famous composer, called

himself “Mendelssohn Bartholdy,” as did Fanny, until her marriage, when she took the surname of her husband, Wilhelm Hensel.

The great tragedy of Fanny’s life is that, by most accounts, she was as great a musical talent as her brother Felix, but was denied the opportunity to reach her full potential. She played the piano and was a prolific composer, but she published very little of her more than 460 compositions under her name during her lifetime. Society, and in particular, her family, prohibited women from having professional lives (even for a man, being a musician was not a highly respectable undertaking). According to her father, writing to Fanny in 1820, “Music will perhaps become his [Felix’s] profession, while for you it can and must be only an ornament, and never the fundamental bass-line of your existence and activity.”

As a child, Fanny had the same elite education as her male brothers, and she and Felix studied music with the same teachers. (When Goethe met her, in 1822, he described Fanny as “Felix’s equally gifted sister.”) At times, he even published some of her songs under his name, a practice that led to some embarrassment when he met Queen Victoria, who expressed a desire to sing him her favorite of his songs, “Italien.” Felix had to admit that his sister was its composer.

Fanny married Wilhelm Hensel, a court painter, in 1829, and the following year, had her only child, Sebastian Ludwig Felix Hensel — named for her three favorite composers. She revived a Sunday musical salon initiated by her mother, held at the Bartholdy family mansion on Leipziger Strasse in Berlin, and sometimes performed there. The only time she performed in public was at a Berlin charity concert in 1838, playing her brother’s G-minor piano concerto. In 1846, she published a collection of her songs, but generally, resisted the temptation, at the urging of Felix.

On May 5, 1847, Fanny Hensel suffered a stroke while rehearsing an oratorio by her brother for performance at the Sunday salon. She died later that day. Felix also died of stroke six months later.

May 15 / May Laws punish Russia's Jews

After a period of liberalization, in 1882 Russia imposed harsh restrictions on Jews living in the Pale of Settlement, pushing millions to flee.



Czar Alexander III. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 15, 1882, the Russian Council of Ministers – with the approval of the czar, Alexander III – enacted a series of laws intended to restrict the freedom of Jews living in the Pale of Settlement.

Accompanied by pogroms and followed by a number of additional restrictions in the years that followed, the May Laws, as they were called, played a large role in pushing some two million Jews to leave the Russian Empire in the period between 1881 and 1914.

On March 13, 1881, Czar Alexander II was assassinated by Russian revolutionaries. He was succeeded by his son, who became Alexander III. The son reversed many of the reformist policies of his father, including measures that had canceled or eased some of the restrictions on the empire's Jews.

At the same time, pogroms – violent disturbances directed at Jewish communities – broke out throughout southern Russia, apparently with the consent of the government. Even socialist and anarchist revolutionaries were supportive of the pogroms, as they hoped they would bring a general uprising closer.

A commission appointed by Alexander III to investigate the causes of the violence against the Jews concluded they had brought it upon themselves through their “exploitation” of Russian society. The proper response was to put the Jews back in their place.

Under Alexander II, the categories of Jews that had been permitted to reside outside the Pale of Settlement were expanded, their right to buy land and hold official positions within the Pale was affirmed, and entry to the universities and professions was eased, resulting in greater integration of Jews into society at large. The May Laws were intended to end all that.

The laws of May 15 stated that Jews could live only within the “towns and townlets” (as opposed to villages or the countryside) of the Pale, which had been established 90 years earlier in the western part of the empire.

All Jews living in villages had to resettle in towns. They also could not receive mortgages, hold leases or manage any land outside of the towns. And they were restricted from operating any businesses on Sundays or Christian holidays.

The May Laws were written as temporary measures, but in fact, they remained in effect until the Russian Revolution in 1917. Not only that, but in the years that followed 1882, a number of additional laws in the spirit of the May Laws were implemented.

They imposed increasingly strict quotas on the numbers of Jews that could study in high schools and universities. So harsh did the quotas become that there were many towns within the Pale where classrooms stood half-empty. No more Jews were permitted to be admitted, but there were no non-Jewish candidates to take their place.

Limits were placed on the numbers of Jews who could work as doctors and lawyers, and Jews were expelled from government jobs.

Although it is not known if Konstantin Pobedonostsev, the reactionary top government official overseeing the Russian Orthodox Church, actually made the remark in 1884 often attributed to him, the goal of seeing “one-third of the Jews convert, one-third die, and one-third flee the country” certainly reflected the attitude of the czar’s government.

May 16 / Sammy Davis Jr. dies

One of the greatest entertainers of the 20th century died on this day in 1990 at the age of 64.



Sammy Davis Jr. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 16, 1990, entertainer Sammy Davis, Jr. died, at the age of 64. Davis was a versatile singer, dancer and actor who achieved great stardom in mainstream American show business in an era when, as a black man, he was not permitted to stay in some of the hotels he performed in. He may also have been the most famous convert to Judaism of his era.

Samuel George Davis, Jr. was born December 8, 1925, in New York, and grew up in Harlem. His father, Sammy Davis, Sr., was a vaudeville performer, and his mother, Elvera Sanchez, was a Cuban-American dancer, who, among other things, performed in the chorus line at the Apollo Theater.

Sammy, Jr. never attended school, and by the age of 3, was already touring and tap-dancing with his father and dancer Will Mastin in a trio named for the latter. The threesome, which renamed itself "Will Mastin's Gang, Featuring Little Sammy," performed on-and-off together up to the 1960s. One of the off times came in 1943, when Davis was inducted into the U.S. Army. He served until the end of World War II, performing for troops in an entertainment troupe.

It was during the 1950s that his career really began to take off, with appearances at nightclubs and on screen and television, as well as recording. By 1956, he was starring on Broadway in the musical "Mr. Wonderful," in which he played the title role. The play also featured both his father and Mastin.

In November 1954, while driving from Las Vegas to a recording session in Los Angeles, Davis was in a serious car accident. He survived, but lost his left eye. He

was soon back to performing, but wore an eye-patch for some months, until he was fitted for a glass eye, which, together with his jutting jaw and broken nose, lent him a distinctive appearance.

While he was recuperating in a San Bernardino, Calif., hospital, Davis was visited by the performer Eddie Cantor. Cantor spoke with him about the similarities between Jewish and black culture, and this evidently sparked Davis' imagination. He began reading about Jews and Judaism, and sometime after he began the process of converting. According to Rabbi William M. Kramer, who officiated at the 1961 wedding of Davis and Swedish actress May Britt, although Davis was known publicly and famously as a Jew since the mid-50s, it was only in 1961 that he underwent a formal conversion – quietly, under the tutelage of Rabbi Harry Sherer in Las Vegas. Davis had been referred to Sherer by Rabbi Max Nussbaum, of Reform Temple Israel in Hollywood, who had been asked to officiate at the couple's wedding and to oversee May Britt's conversion.

Kramer writes that news of the couple's plan to marry at Temple Israel elicited numerous threats against the synagogue – Britt is a white woman – whose trustees asked Nussbaum not to allow the ceremony to take place there. This put Nussbaum into an uncomfortable situation, not wanting to offend either his employer or Sammy Davis. Kramer was then Nussbaum's deputy at Temple Israel, and he writes, in somewhat deadpan style, "All I know was that my senior colleague was suddenly called out of town and that I would be asked to cover for him at the ceremony, which was transferred out of the Temple into Sammy Davis' home in the Hollywood hills.

"If marrying the two of them was dangerous," Kramer continues, "I was evidently regarded as expendable. For my part, I was delighted." He also notes that he did indeed receive "hundreds of life-threatening phone calls and letters. Thank God, nothing happened."

Davis liked to describe the time he was playing golf with Jack Benny and was asked what his handicap was. As he described it later, in an article in *Ebony* magazine, he responded: "Handicap? Talk about handicap — I'm a one-eyed Negro Jew." In terms of career, Sammy Davis, Jr. reached about as high as an entertainer could go during the 1960s. He had his own TV variety show; he performed on Broadway and in several films, sometimes with his best pals Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Peter Lawford, among others, who together were dubbed the "Rat Pack" by journalists. He had best-selling records and was a headliner in Vegas. He also participated in the Civil Rights Movement and was a generous donor to Jewish causes. But all of his biographers have noted that Davis, who published four memoirs while he was alive, was involved in a lifelong battle for acceptance. As the writer Lev Grossman noted in *Time* in 2003, when reviewing a new biography of the entertainer, "Davis was a howling void of insecurity that drowned out all other emotion. He craved affection, especially from white people, preferably famous, preferably Frank [Sinatra]."

By the time he died, of throat cancer, on this date in 1990, Davis, though still young, was long past his prime. His illness had taken his voice, and he owed \$5 million to the Internal Revenue Service. After his death, dozens of his personal possessions were sold at auction – a white satin jumpsuit with matching boots went for \$825, \$55 less than a Snoopy calendar owned by Davis fetched. One item that didn't get picked up

was a Hanukkah menorah that Davis had received in 1965 after a benefit performance in Las Vegas for the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies. It was put up for auction again four years ago, but when it didn't receive an offer equal to the recommended bottom price of \$15,000, it remained unsold.

May 17 / A 14th-century neighborhood watch begins

In response to groups of slaughter-hungry marauders intent on murdering Jews, the Bishop of Strasbourg formed a local band to track down the perpetrators.



Strasbourg, France. Wikimedia Commons.

On May 17, 1338, disturbed by an ongoing series of murderous attacks on Jews in the Alsace region of France, the Bishop of Strasbourg formed an alliance of locals to track down the armed band carrying out the assaults.

The chain of attacks on Jews had begun two years earlier, after a nobleman in Northern Bavaria announced that he had been visited by an angel calling upon him to kill Jews. He organized a group of *Judenschlaeger* (Jew-beaters) and began to follow the so-called angel's orders.

The following year, the same mission was adopted by a former innkeeper from Alsace, John Zimmerlin, who similarly led a group of marauders from town to town, killing Jews as they went.

Zimmerlin girded his arms in leather straps, rather than armor, and his comrades did the same, leading to his being called King Armleder. They carried out attacks in the towns of Thann, Ensisheim and Rouffach. And when the people of the city of Colmar offered protection from the gang to their Jewish citizens, Zimmerlin laid siege to that city and its surroundings.

The people of Colmar requested assistance from the Holy Roman Emperor, Louis IV, who sent his army there. By the time they arrived, Armleder and his gang had fled to the west, only to return to Colmar when the Imperial Army departed. At this stage, a group of prominent Christians from Strasbourg – the city's bishop, Berthold II of Bucheck, various noblemen, and the magistrates of a number of 12 surrounding towns – joined together to take on the *Judenschlaeger*, signing an agreement of alliance on this date in 1338.

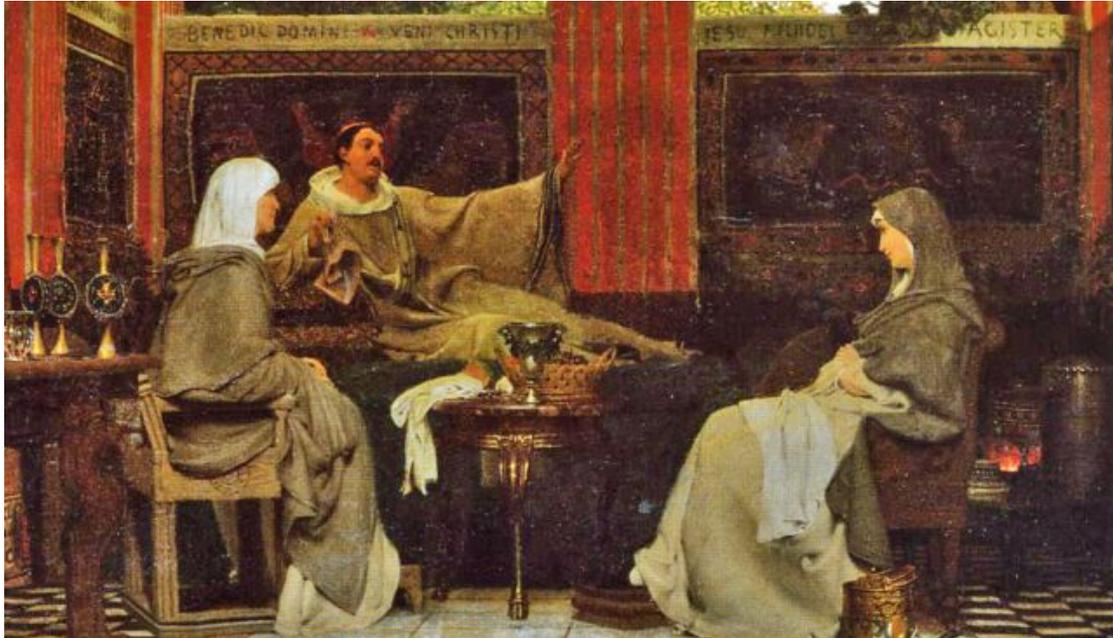
Even their efforts, however, did not succeed in stopping Zimberlin. It was only the following year that a knight named Rudolf of Andlau took a different tack, and achieved results: On August 28, 1339, he persuaded Zimberlin to sign an agreement, by which, in return for amnesty, he and his fellow combatants promised not to carry out attacks on Jews over the next 10 years.

The agreement did lead to the temporary cessation of attacks, but the Jews of Alsace had to pay for the protection. For example, a 1338 document from Strasbourg shows that 16 Jewish families of that city had agreed to pay a sum of 1,072 marks in return for a guarantee of safety for the next five years. Of that sum, 1,000 marks were to go to the authorities in Strasbourg, 60 to Emperor Louis IV, and the remainder of 12 marks to Bishop Berthold II. The document also granted the Jews permission to engage in money-lending.

By 1348, the Black Death began to stretch across Europe, and the Jews of Alsace, along with those in many other places, again became the focus of attacks. On February 14, 1349, for example, 900 Jews were slaughtered in Strasbourg – a preventive measure, apparently, since at that date, the city had not even been struck by plague.

May 18 / Hundreds of Jews choose baptism over exile from French town

Those unwilling to convert to Christianity apparently left the southern town for Marseille, on the Mediterranean coast.



The historian Venantius Fortunatus, who penned an ode commemorating Avitus' actions. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 18, 576, more than 500 Jews in the city of Clermont, France, requested to be baptized. The request was a response to an ultimatum given to the town's Jews by Avitus, the bishop of Clermont: either convert or be expelled.

The Auvergne region of southern France was at the time part of the Frankish kingdom. The first reference to the presence of Jews in France is in 470 C.E. in Clermont – found in letters of the Gallo-Roman churchman Sidonius Apollinaris.

Avitus was appointed bishop of Clermont by King Sigebert in 571, succeeding Bishop Cautinus. The historian Gregory of Tours writes with disapproval of the overly warm relations that Cautinus had with the Jews of his town: “He was dear to the Jews and was much attached to them.” Another historian, Audigier, even suggests that his comfortable relationship with the Jews derived not with the goal of “enlightening them, but in order to buy his furniture and jewels cheap from them.”

Avitus had a different approach to the Jews from the start of his tenure as bishop, making overtures to them to convert. They did not. Rather, the general atmosphere was one of tolerance, with Jews serving as doctors, judges and military men, and even intermarrying with Christians.

Avitus made his move after the death of Sigebert, in 576. On Easter Day, April 5, he succeeded in converting a single Jew. When the convert, dressed in white robes,

participated in a procession around Clermont, he had rancid oil spilled upon him by another Jew. According to the histories of the period, the townspeople wanted to avenge this insulting act by stoning the Jews. Avitus stepped in to calm tempers.

The other shoe was soon to drop, however. Forty days later, on Ascension Day – May 14 – Avitus issued his ultimatum to Clermont’s Jewish population: Convert or leave. To assist the Jews in making up their minds, they were subjected to violence. As quoted in “Reckless Rites,” by historian Elliott Horowitz, “when the bishop [Avitus] processed with psalm singing from the cathedral to the basilica [of St. Illidius], the entire crowd following fell upon the synagogue of the Jews and leveled it to the ground, so that the spot resembled a bare field.”

Thus, on May 18, most of the Jews of Clermont requested to be received into the church. Those who were unwilling to undergo baptism apparently did leave the town for Marseille, to the south.

The historian Venantius Fortunatus wrote a poem praising, if not vindicating, Avitus for the episode. In it, he suggests that the Jews decided to convert only when they realized they were not in a position to fight. According to Venantius, Avitus acted out of a desire to see the people of his town united, addressing the Jews with the words: “You are the sheep of one God, also, why do you not go in unity? As there is one shepherd, so I urge, let there be one flock.

“The shepherd gained his wish,” Venantius continued, “for he united them in one sheepfold and he found joy in his flock of snow-white sheep.”

May 19 / Famed German salon hostess, deeply conflicted about her Judaism, is born

Rahel Levin often said her Jewish background - like her gender - was an obstacle to social integration, something imposed on her from birth that always stood in her way.



Rahel Levin, German-Jewish salon hostess. Wikimedia Commons

May 19, 1771, is the birthdate of Rahel Varnhagen, the German Jewish writer and intellectual salon hostess who was friend and interlocutor to some of the most notable artists and thinkers of her day.

Born in Berlin as Rahel Levin, she was the first child of Markus Levin, a jeweler and financier, and Chaie Levin. She was given an excellent education at home, where, by the late 1790s, she was hosting a regular salon. Attendees included such writers and thinkers as poet-philosopher Friedrich von Schlegel, Romantic writer Ludwig Tieck, naturalist Alexander von Humboldt and comic writer Jean Paul.

Napoleon's defeat of Prussia in 1806 and his occupation of Berlin, with its woeful economic implications for Germany, led to the end of Rahel Levin's salon. In the meantime, she had had two engagements that were broken off, both for reasons of money and her Jewish background. Finally, after a six-year courtship, she married Karl August Varnhagen von Ense in 1814. Varnhagen, a soldier and novice diplomat, was 14 years her junior, but the couple, who would have no children, were intellectual companions and deeply attached and devoted to each other.

Several days before her marriage to Varnhagen, and following the death of her mother, Levin converted to Christianity and took the name Antonie Frederike. (She had already followed the lead of a brother, and changed her surname from Levin to Robert.) She had not come from a religiously observant family, and she commented

frequently that her Jewish background – like her gender – was an obstacle to social integration, something imposed on her from birth that always stood in her way.

In 1795, in a letter to the writer David Veit, Rahel confessed that she imagined that at her birth, “some supramundane being ... plunged these words with a dagger into my heart: ‘Yes, have sensibility, see the world as few see it, be great and noble, nor can I deprive you of restless, incessant thought. But with one reservation: Be a Jewess!’” Going on to say that “now, my life is one long bleeding,” she declared defiantly that nonetheless, “I shall never accept that I am a schlemiel and a Jewess.”

While Karl August was in the Prussian diplomatic corps, he and Rahel lived in Vienna, Frankfurt am Main and Karlsruhe. In 1819, after he was forced to retire because of his liberal politics, they moved back to Berlin, where, for the next dozen years, they hosted a renewed salon, whose regular guests included Heinrich Heine. The couple also did much to introduce the writer Goethe to the reading public.

In addition to keeping an intellectual diary, Rahel corresponded with some 300 different people, and is believed to have written some 10,000 letters during her lifetime, of which about 6,000 survive. After her death, her husband published several volumes of her letters, as well as other memorial volumes.

According to one of the books compiled by Karl August Varnhagen, Rahel, in her final words on her deathbed, expressed gratitude that she had been born a Jew, a “fugitive from Egypt and Palestine,” as she put it: “The thing which all my life seemed to me the greatest shame, which was the misery and misfortune of my life — having been born a Jewess — this I should on no account now wish to have missed.”

May 20 / Fans say goodbye to comic Gilda Radner

Gilda Radner, who left an indelible mark on a generation of 'Saturday Night Live' fans with her classic characters, succumbed to cancer at 42.



Gilda Radner. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 20, 1989, comedian and actress Gilda Radner died, at the age of 42. Radner was one of the first – if not the first – performers cast for the premier season of TV’s “Saturday Night Live,” in 1975.

During her six years on the show, she became identified – some would say eternally – with the characters she created and played, which included television advice columnist Roseanne Rosennadanna, nerdy teenager Lisa Loopner, and the hard-of-hearing, opinionated master-of-the-malapropism Emily Litella. Then there was Baba Wawa, a parody of TV interviewer extraordinaire Barbara Walters, whom Radner lampooned for her speech impediment. Walters recently revealed that she grew to appreciate the character, and even signed her name as “Baba Wawa” when she wrote Radner’s husband, Gene Wilder, a condolence note upon her death.

Gilda Radner was born June 28, 1946, and grew up in Detroit, Michigan, the daughter of successful businessman Herman Radner and the former Henrietta Dworkin. Gilda was close to her father, who owned a hotel in Detroit, the Seville, which hosted many performers when they came to town. He also would take his daughter to plays in New York, inspiring her interest in a career on the stage. He died when Gilda was 14.

She had a difficult relationship with her mother, and, at the age of 9, began manifesting eating disorders, which plagued her throughout her life. In her 1989 memoir, “It’s Always Something,” Radner wrote: “My weight distressed my mother and she took me to a doctor who put me on Dexedrine diet pills when I was ten years old.”

Radner began her professional career as a weather girl for the radio station at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, where she was studying drama. She left college during her junior year, moving with her then-boyfriend to Toronto. There, in 1972, she was cast in a local production of the musical "Godspell," before joining the cast of the Second City comedy troupe. (Second City originated in Chicago in 1959, but a spin-off branch opened in Toronto in 1973.) In 1974, Radner began performing with the nationally syndicated radio program "National Lampoon Radio Hour," together with such future Saturday Night Live stars as John Belushi, Bill Murray and Chevy Chase.

The freshman group of comedians hired by Lorne Michaels for the first season of "Saturday Night" (later, "Saturday Night Live," before becoming simply "SNL") were called the Not Ready for Prime Time Players, and included Belushi and Chase, as well as Dan Aykroyd, Laraine Newman and Garrett Morris.

Emily Litella had her origins in the Fairness Doctrine, the policy governing U.S. broadcasting that required TV stations to devote a certain number of minutes each week to "opposing points of view" on public issues. The elderly, short-sighted Litella would appear regularly on SNL's "Weekend Update" news show, to weigh in on the subject of the day, with her comments generally shaped by her misunderstanding of what the topic itself was. She had strong opinions on "endangered feces," "presidential erections" and the vexing question of whether to "make Puerto Rico a steak." On the last point, she warned that, "the next thing you know, they'll want a baked potato with sour cream."

Radner's characters and impressions could be sharp, and were often scatological, but there was always something unthreatening about them, and lovable about their creator.

Radner was married for several years to a musician on "SNL," and she reportedly had an ultimately painful relationship with co-star Bill Murray, and then finally, in 1984, she married comic actor Gene Wilder, whom she met on the set of the film "Hanky Panky." She had left "SNL" in 1980, devoting her time to film and theater work, including a 1979 one-woman show called "Gilda Radner – Live from New York."

The year after she and Wilder married, she began having a variety of disturbing medical symptoms. It took nearly a year for her to get a correct diagnosis – of ovarian cancer – which was followed by difficult treatment. She later was told that she was in remission, but several months later, the cancer reappeared, and she died on this date in 1989, at the age of 42.

After her death, Gene Wilder established the Gilda Radner Ovarian Cancer Detection Center at Cedars-Sinai Hospital, in Los Angeles, which was dedicated to screening women in high-risk population groups, such as Ashkenazi Jewish women. He also was involved in the establishment of Gilda's Club, a network of support institutions around the United States for cancer patients and their families. Its name came from a remark made by Radner, who was quite public about her illness, that "Having cancer gave me membership in an elite club I'd rather not belong to."

Last year, several of the branch chapters of Gilda's Club announced they were changing their name, having realized that many of the people in their target cohort had been born after Gilda Radner's death, and did not recognize her name. As the director of Gilda's Club in Madison, Wisconsin, told the Wisconsin State Journal, "We want to make sure that what we are is clear to them and that there's not a lot of confusion that would cause people not to come in our doors."

May 21 / Two teens kidnap and murder their neighbor

Teenagers Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb kidnapped and murdered a neighbor and gained notoriety in their subsequent trial, defended by Clarence Darrow.



Darrow, seated in center, surrounded by Leopold and Loeb. Photo by murderpedia.org

On May 21, 1924, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, two privileged young Jewish men from Chicago, aged 19 and 18, respectively, kidnapped and murdered Robert Franks, a 14-year-old neighbor of theirs, for no other reason than a shared desire to commit the “perfect crime.” In fact, their perfect crime was cracked by police almost immediately, and within 10 days both men confessed. Their subsequent trial was an event of national notoriety, both because of the bizarre nature of their undertaking and because both were represented by Clarence Darrow, the most noted defense attorney of the day.

Both Leopold and Loeb had grown up in Kenwood, a well-off enclave on Chicago’s South Side, the same neighborhood where President Barack Obama’s family has its home today. Nathan’s father was both the head of a shipping company and a manufacturer of cans and boxes; the son, born in 1904, was so gifted that he had matriculated at the University of Chicago at age 15. His passion was ornithology, and though not yet 20, he was said to be America’s leading expert on the Kirtland warbler. Richard, born in 1905, was the son of a Sears, Roebuck and Company vice president, and he too had begun college at age 15, first at the same school as Nathan, before transferring to the University of Michigan. By 1924, both men were graduate students at the University of Chicago, Nathan in law, Richard in history.

Despite his abilities, Richard Loeb was troubled, an alcoholic and a petty thief; Nathan Leopold, on the other hand, was convinced of his intellectual superiority, and

as an amateur reader of Nietzsche, believed that he was a “superman” whose abilities privileged him to be above the law. It has often been stated that the two were lovers, but there is no definitive evidence of this.

Over a period of months, the two discussed the idea of carrying out a crime so well-planned and executed that they would escape detection. They settled upon the idea of kidnapping the child of wealthy parents – although neither of them wanted for money – and murdering him, too, so that he would not be able identify them. Bobby Franks was the young man they settled upon that day because he happened to be walking home from school at the appointed hour, 5 P.M. on May 21. Loeb knew Bobby, who was both his neighbor and second cousin, and like them, Jewish and the son of a millionaire.

They lured Franks into their car, a rented Willys-Knight. One of them drove, while the other sat in the back seat, where, soon after picking up Franks, he bashed open the boy’s head with a chisel. (Later, when they confessed, each accused the other of carrying out the actual killing.) They then drove south to Indiana, where they pulled over in a marshland, removed the clothes from Bobby’s body and poured hydrochloric acid over it, so as to make identification harder. They headed back toward Chicago and deposited the body in a drainage culvert. Later, they burned the boy’s clothes in the basement of Loeb’s home.

The men immediately made contact with the Franks family, and demanded \$10,000 for his return. Already by the next morning, however, police had found the body, and instructed his father, Jacob Franks not to deliver the ransom.

It was a small but crucial detail quickly led police to Leopold and Loeb. When the two were dumping Franks’ corpse, a pair of eyeglasses that Leopold had been carrying fell out of his shirt pocket, without his noticing. The frame of the glasses was held together with an unusual hinge (carrying patent number 1,342,973), and a quick investigation revealed that only three people in Chicago had glasses employing that mechanism. One of them was Nathan Leopold.

Leopold tried to claim that he had lost the glasses while bird watching, but this and the other alibis he and Loeb offered to police quickly fell apart during questioning.

The “trial of the century” got under way on July 21, 1924. Clarence Darrow, then 67, and a well-known opponent of capital punishment, set out to save his clients not from a guilty verdict – both men had confessed to the kidnapping and killing – but from execution. He had them both plead guilty, asked for trial before a judge (rather than a jury), and then undertook to prove that they were mentally ill and thus not responsible for their actions.

The Leopold and Loeb trial was one of the first in the U.S. in which both prosecution and defense trotted out expert psychiatric witnesses to testify to the defendants’ mental illness, or lack of it. The president of the American Psychiatric Association testified on behalf of Leopold and Loeb; the head of the American Neurological Association, for the prosecution.

The public was bewildered by this parade of witnesses, two teams of supposed experts, each arguing for opposite conclusions. The New York Times complained, in terms that today sound refreshingly naïve, that, "Instead of seeking truth for its own sake and with no preference as to what it turns out to be, they are supporting, and are expected to support, a predetermined purpose....That the presiding Judge is getting any help from those men toward the forming of his decision hardly is to be believed."

When Judge John Caverly announced sentencing, on September 10, 1924, he accepted the guilty plea, but because of their respective ages, ruled that the defendants should be imprisoned for 99 years each, rather than sent to the gallows. This was a victory for both young men and for their elderly attorney.

After initial incarceration at Joliet Prison, both Loeb and Leopold were sent to Stateville Penitentiary, also in Illinois. In 1936, Richard Loeb was assaulted by a fellow prisoner and stabbed to death. Nathan Leopold lived to be paroled after 33 years, in 1958. While in prison, he had been a teacher, and he also volunteered to participate in a medical study that required he be infected with malaria.

After his release, he married a widowed florist named Trude Feldman, to whom he had been introduced at a Passover seder, and moved to Puerto Rico. There he spent his time working in a hospital under the supervision of a church organization. He also published a bird-watching guide, "Checklist of Birds of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands," in 1963. He died of a heart attack in 1971, at the age of 66.

May 22 / Harvey Milk, U.S.'s first openly gay elected official, is born

Though he was in office for less than a year before being assassinated by a fellow city supervisor, Milk made his mark as an inspiration to gay people nationwide to stand up for their rights.



Harvey Milk with his sister-in-law in front of Castro Camera in 1973. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 22, 1930, is the birthdate of Harvey Milk, one of the first — if not the first — openly gay elected officials in the United States. Milk was elected to the board of supervisors in San Francisco, in November 1977, and was assassinated, together with Mayor George Moscone, on November 27, 1978.

Harvey Bernard Milk was born in Woodmere, New York, on Long Island, the younger of two sons, to William Milk and Minerva Karns Milk. William was the son of Morris Milk, who had immigrated to the U.S. in 1896 from Lithuania, and opened a department store, Milk's, in Woodmere two years later. Morris Milk was also one of the founders of the area's first synagogue, Congregation Sons of Israel.

Harvey attended Bay Shore High School, where he played football and was known as something of a class clown, and following that, Albany State College for Teachers (today the State University of New York, Albany), from which he graduated in 1951. Harvey apparently acknowledged his homosexuality to himself while still a teenager, but it would be many years before he was ready to present himself as gay publicly.

Milk joined the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, serving as a diver on the submarine rescue ship USS Kittiwake, and later as a diving instructor. He was discharged in 1955, as a lieutenant, junior grade.

He worked briefly as a teacher, at Woodmere High School, then as an insurance actuary, and also as a stock analyst at a Wall Street investment firm. He also worked on the stage crew of the Broadway musical “Hair.” His politics at the time were conservative: In 1964, he volunteered for the losing presidential campaign of Sen. Barry Goldwater.

In 1972, Milk and his then-partner, Scott Smith, decided to move to San Francisco, which was not just a center of American counterculture in general, but, specifically, a city drawing very large numbers of gays and lesbians. The couple settled in the Castro district where, the next year, they opened a photo shop, Castro Camera. He was a popular merchant, and the store became something of a gathering place for neighborhood residents.

The rapid growth of the gay population elicited pushback from some of the city’s politicians, including its mayor, Joseph Alito, and fairly quickly, Harvey Milk, who had in the meantime come out of the closet, decided to run for the San Francisco city and county Board of Supervisors, the local equivalent of a city council.

The local gay establishment perceived him as an upstart, and withheld its support from Milk. Instead, he had to begin at the bottom, which in his case meant losing election to the board twice before winning handily in November 1977. He took office on January 9, 1978.

Though he was in office less than a year, Harvey Milk made his mark as a coalition builder, as a savvy politician, and also as an inspiration to gay people nationwide to stand up for their rights and demand equality before the law. He worked closely with George Moscone, who was elected mayor in 1975 and, initially, also had a good relationship with fellow supervisor Daniel White, a former police officer and firefighter. When Milk changed his position on an issue in which White was invested, however, the latter became his sworn enemy.

Early in November, White, who was having financial difficulties, resigned his seat on the board of supervisors. Within days, he changed his mind — but Moscone was unwilling to reinstate him to the position. On November 27, the day the mayor was scheduled to appoint White’s replacement, White entered city hall with a revolver. In succession, he shot and killed, first Moscone, then Milk.

During his trial, in 1979, White claimed that an excessive intake of junk food the night before the killings had caused him to suffer from “diminished capacity.” The jury accepted his defense, and convicted him of voluntary manslaughter of both men, rather than murder. In 1985, a year and a half after his release from prison, White killed himself.

May 23 / The Rambam comes to Israel

Moses ben Maimon, known better as Maimonides or the Rambam, was born in Spain and died in Egypt, but along the way he spent a brief sojourn in the ancient Israeli city of Acre.



An 18th-century portrait of Maimonides. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 23, 1165, Moses ben Maimon – better known as Maimonides, or the Rambam – arrived in the Holy Land. He landed in the ancient port city of Acre for what would be a brief sojourn in the country, and his only time here at all before he and his family moved on to settle permanently in Egypt.

The Rambam, a rabbi and philosopher, medical doctor and codifier of Jewish law, is widely considered the most significant thinker in Jewish history, and certainly of the Middle Ages. He was also a highly prolific writer, leaving behind timeless works that combine a delineation of Jewish law, commentary and philosophy. He also wrote numerous medical works, including one on hemorrhoids and another on aphrodisiacs.

Maimonides was born in 1135 in Cordoba, Spain, which was then under Moorish, Muslim rule. When the Almoravid dynasty ruling Spain at the time was replaced by the Almohads in 1148, the Jews lost their protected *dhimmi* status, and the Rambam's family was among those that went into exile from the city. There is some evidence that Ben Maimon, who was 13 at the time, underwent a forced, but fake, conversion to Islam before leaving Cordoba.

There is no written testimony about the family from the next eight or nine years, although they are presumed to have moved around Spain, and possibly been in Provence as well. In 1160, Maimonides showed up in Fez, Morocco. Morocco was under Almohad rule, but the now-elderly ruler, Abd al-Mumin, had become more tolerant toward Jews than he had been a dozen years earlier. In Fez, Maimonides studied at the University of al-Karaouine.

Evidence of his journey to the Holy Land comes from a note that was attached to the commentary that the Rambam wrote on the Mishnaic tractate Rosh Hashana, and which was supposedly copied from the original version, in his hand, that appeared at the end of the book. It suggests that he sailed directly from Morocco to Acre. In it, he describes how “On Saturday night, on the fourth day of the month of Iyar, I embarked by sea, and on Saturday, the 10th of Iyar, in the year 25 ... of the creation” – which is assumed to be Hebrew year 4925, secular year 1165 – “a wave arose, threatening to sink us, and there was great fury in the sea.”

Maimonides says that he undertook a fast, and ordered family members who were with him to do so as well. They were saved, and three weeks later, on the 3rd of Sivan, “I disembarked in peace, and we arrived in Acre. I had escaped the religious persecution, and we had reached Palestine! I vowed that that day would be a day of joy and feasting... for me and my household forever!” (translation by Herbert A. Davidson, from his 2005 work “Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works”).

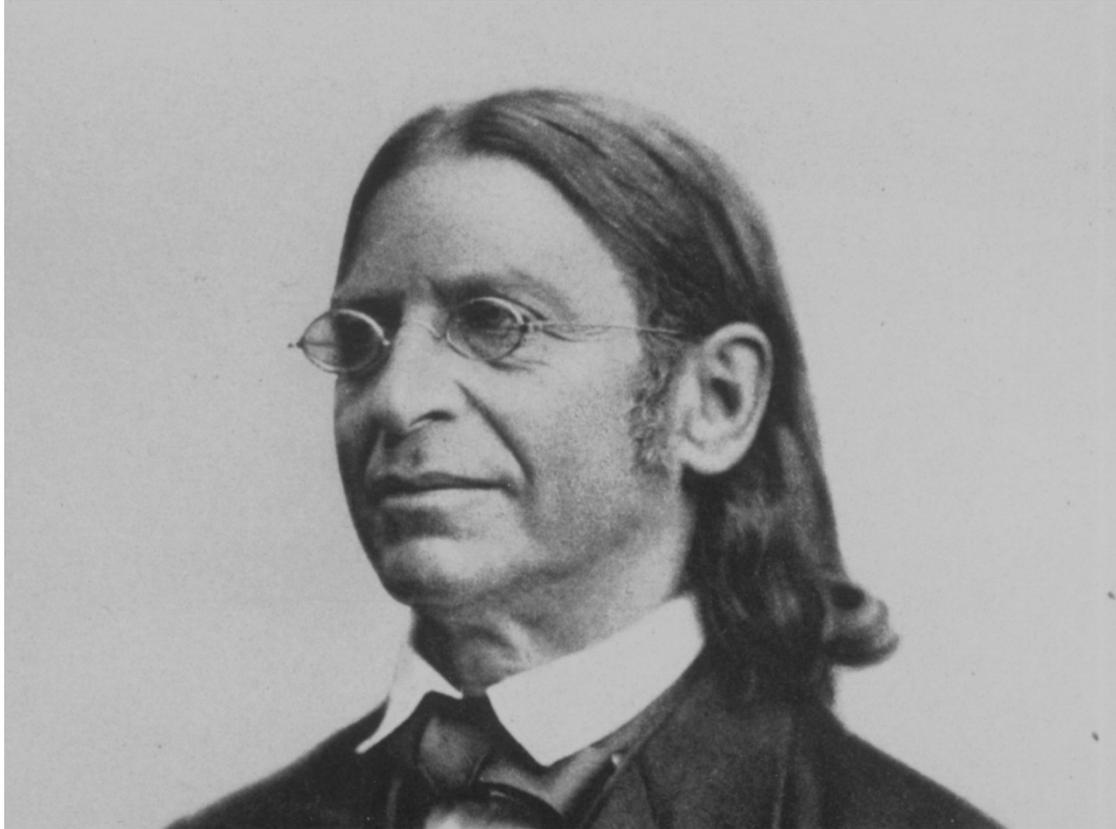
Although Professor Herbert Davidson presents both the note quoted above as well as a biography of the Rambam by the 15th-century scholar Saadia Ibn Danan (who says Maimonides sailed to Acre by way of Alexandria, not directly from Morocco), as evidence of the details of the sojourn in Palestine, he also demonstrates how neither source can be considered reliable. Hence, even though the note that accompanied the commentary on Rosh Hashana also describes the Rambam’s visit to Jerusalem, “where I entered the great holy house” (the Temple) as well as to Hebron, where he went to “kiss the graves of my fathers”(that is, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), Davidson concludes that nothing certain can be said about the sojourn in the Holy Land other than the fact that it occurred. He also rejects the suggestion that Maimonides ordered a personal fast for himself and his family, and dismisses the possibility that he would have stepped foot on the site of the destroyed Temple.

We also know about the journey to Palestine because of a letter that the Rambam wrote many years later to Japhet ben Elijah, a rabbinic judge who had hosted the family during their stay in Acre. The letter refers only to three male members of the Rambam’s family – understood to be his father and his brother David – and no women. It may be that the women remained behind in Fez. There are no other details of the visit.

A short time later, probably in 1168, Maimonides settled in Fustat, in what is today Cairo, where he lived until the day he died, December 12, 1204.

May 24 / A founder of Reform Judaism is born

May 24, 1810 is the birth date of Abraham Geiger, the German rabbi and scholar who was one of the key founders of Reform Judaism.



Abraham Geiger. Wikipedia

Geiger understood Judaism to be a constantly evolving, rather than fixed, faith that had an essential moral message for all of humanity. He strived to rid it of its particularistic and national elements, which he considered partly responsible for causing anti-Semitism, and to de-emphasize Jewish law and commandments for the sake of Judaism's universal ethical components.

Abraham Geiger was born in Frankfort-am-Main to Rabbi Michael Lazarus Geiger and Roeschen Wallau. He was educated from a very young age in Hebrew, Bible and the Oral Law, but also in secular studies, such as Greek, Latin and history. At his bar mitzvah, which took place shortly before his father's death, Abraham gave not only the traditional speech about his Torah portion in Hebrew, but also spoke in German, itself a concession to the surrounding culture that was controversial within the Jewish community.

At age 19, Geiger decided to attend a German university, first at Heidelberg and then at Bonn, and to study philology (the historical study of languages) and Syriac, along with Hebrew and Arabic. He completed his doctorate at the University of Marburg, writing his thesis about the Jewish content, specifically rabbinic law, that had been

adopted into Islam and the Koran. His essay “What has Mohammed taken from Judaism” was a landmark in the history of European study of Islam, and was controversial for its sympathetic view of the Prophet Mohammed and the faith he founded.

Geiger was also involved in studying the Jewish sources of Christianity, and proposed that both it and Islam were basically vehicles for transmitting Jewish monotheism to pagans.

Because Jews were not welcome in teaching positions in German universities, Geiger, after earning his doctorate, worked as a rabbi, taking a job in Wiesbaden. But he continued with his secular studies, and was involved in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the “critical,” scholarly study of Judaism and its texts.

Geiger’s philosophy can be understood in the context of the reform (with a lower-case “r”) movement taking place within Judaism in the 19th century, which in itself emerged from the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) and the Emancipation of Jews in much of Western Europe. In Geiger’s case, he wasn’t necessarily looking to create a separate stream with Judaism, but rather hoped to bring all Jews along with him, out of a belief that making Jews more modern and rational, and reducing their “strange” practices, would reduce levels of anti-Semitism.

In trying to eliminate signs of national uniqueness among Jews – including the concept of being the “Chosen People” -- the Reform movement was not supportive of Zionism. In terms of ritual practice, it allowed for the use of vernacular, in this case German, in prayer services, and the introduction of an organ and choir in the synagogue. Geiger accepted these, and also concurred with the Reform decision to remove prayers that aspired to the rebuilding of the Temple from the liturgy. On the other hand, Geiger, at least, had his red lines: He did not agree with the idea of moving the Jewish Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, a practice that was adopted in some Reform communities, and although he

Although Reform’s radicalism may have appeared to be in its rejection of so many external symbols of traditional practice, for Geiger, at least, Reform “was not a rejection of earlier Judaism, but a recovery of the Pharisaic halakhic tradition, which is nothing other than the principle of continual further development in accord with the times, the principle of not being slaves to the letter of the Bible, but rather to witness over and over its spirit and its authentic faith-consciousness.”

Interestingly, Geiger’s main disputes were with rabbis involved in the emerging Conservative movement, rather than with mainstream Orthodoxy. Although he had a role in the creation of the Jewish Theological Seminar, in Breslau, Germany – where he served as chief rabbi of the community -- in 1854, he was not appointed to a faculty position there. In 1863, he left Breslau, and became a leader of several different Reform communities, first in Frankfurt and later in Berlin. The last part of

his career was spent in the latter city at the newly formed Reform seminary, the Hochschule fuer die Wissenschafts des Judentums.

May 25 / First pro baseball player born in New York

Lipman Pike played the game for 22 years, earning a reputed \$20 when he started playing for the Philadelphia Athletics in 1866.



Lipman Pike Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 25, 1845, is the birthdate of Lipman Pike, the first known professional baseball player (which also makes him the first known Jewish pro player). In a career that stretched from 1866 to 1887, “Lip” Pike earned a reputation as an effective hitter, a fast and graceful runner (who once beat a horse in 100-yard dash) and as a player who was “always gentlemanly on and off the field” as one obituary eulogized him.

Lipman Emanuel Pike was born in New York to Emanuel Pike and the former Jane Lyons. His father was an immigrant from the Netherlands, where he was born in 1820, and his mother a New York native. Lipman, Boaz and Israel were the three males who survived to adulthood, and all three are believed to have played baseball in the game’s early days as a professional sport.

Lipman is believed to have begun playing baseball shortly after his bar mitzvah, in 1858. By 1866 he was playing for the Philadelphia Athletics, when a report appeared in a local newspaper that he (and possibly two others) was receiving \$20 a week for his efforts. The National Association of Base Ball Players, the amateur game’s organizing league, summoned him to a hearing on the charges. Neither Pike nor any of the league’s officials showed up for the hearing, and he continued to play. In a July 16 game that same year, Pike was recorded as hitting six home runs, leading the Athletics to a 67-25 victory over the city’s Alert club.

At the end of the same season, the Athletics decided to expel “nonnative” players – those not from Philadelphia – and Pike returned to the New York area, playing, in succession, for the Irvingtons of New Jersey, the New York Mutuals (owned in part by the notorious Mayor William M. “Boss” Tweed), and the Brooklyn Atlantics.

By 1871, the first all-pro baseball league – the National Association of Professional Base Ball Players – was established. It was succeeded in 1876 by the National League. Between 1871 and 1875, Pike played for four teams, part of that time serving as manager as well as player. He played in 160 games, and had a .321 batting average.

Pike was so fast that when it was announced he would run a 100-yard race against a trotting horse – on August 16, 1873, at Baltimore’s Newington Park – 400 people bought tickets to watch the event. Pike defeated Clarence, the horse, and won himself a \$250 purse.

Over his career, Pike played for 14 different teams in the rapidly changing game. In August 1881, he joined the Worcester Ruby Legs. He participated in only five games before a September 3 contest against Boston, in which Pike made three errors in the ninth inning. The team immediately suspected him of throwing the game, and suspended him, a verdict upheld by the National League, whose owners voted to suspend him for a year. There’s no evidence that Pike deliberately lost the game, nor has it been suggested that anti-Semitism played a role in his treatment.

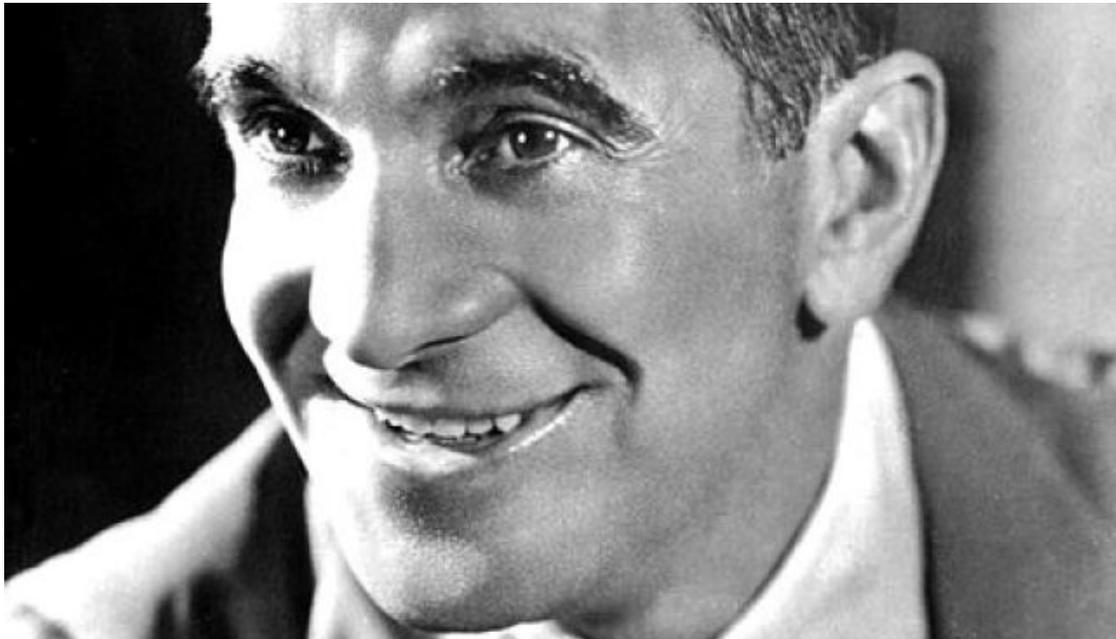
Although Pike came back to play a single game, in 1887, with the New York Metropolitans, his career was basically over, and he went to join his father in the latter’s successful Brooklyn haberdashery. From then until the end of his life, he continued to play amateur ball, and he also worked as an umpire for several seasons.

Pike died of heart disease in Brooklyn, on October 10, 1893. He was 48.

In lamenting his passing, the Sporting News noted that before being “called out by Umpire Death,” Pike had been “one of the few sons of Israel who ever drifted to the business of ball playing. He was a handsome fellow when he was here, and the way he used to hit that ball was responsible for many a scene of enthusiasm...”

May 26 / 'The world's greatest entertainer' is born

Al Jolson was one of the most popular American entertainers of the earlier 20th century, and the son of a rabbi and cantor was also a proud Jew.



Al Jolson. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 26, 1886, is the date on which Al Jolson – one of the most popular American entertainers of the first half of the 20th century, and the first to openly identify as a Jew – celebrated his birthday.

The singer, actor and comedian was born Asa Yoelson in the shtetl of Srednik (today Seredzius), near Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania. The son of a rabbi and cantor, Moshe Reuben Yoelson, and his wife, the former Naomi Cantor, Jolson never knew his actual date of his birth, but decided to mark it on May 26. (A recently found record of births from his home town, however, suggests that he was born on June 9, 1886.)

In 1894, having himself moved to the United States three years earlier, Moshe Yoelson found a job at a synagogue in Washington, D.C., and could afford to bring the rest of the family over. Late that same year, Naomi Yoelson died, leaving Moshe to raise Asa and his three older siblings on his own. Asa and his brother Hirsch became fascinated with performing and show business, and began singing in the streets of the capital. They used the small change they earned buy tickets to local theaters. The brothers soon Americanized their names to “Al” and “Harry,” and eventually changed their family name to “Jolson.”

Al Jolson’s first onstage appearance came in September 1899, as an extra in a production of Israel Zangwill’s “Children of the Ghetto” in Washington. His desire to be onstage soon drove him to leave home several times during the early years of the 20th century. In 1898, for example, he and Harry were in New York performing for

the 15th Pennsylvanian Volunteer troops drafted to fight in the Spanish-American War; in 1902, he signed up with Walter L. Main's Circus, where his obvious talents landed him a role as singer in the circus' "Indian Medicine Side Show."

Jolson's first use of blackface apparently took place in 1904, during a vaudeville performance at Keeney's Theater, in Brooklyn. He was then playing the comic character in a trio together with his brother and a third performer, Joe Palmer, but the role made him feel self-conscious. Making up his face with burnt cork gave him a freedom to express himself in an unrestrained manner, and it was popular with audiences. Though eventually blackface became unacceptable when used to make an ironic statement about racial stereotypes, when used in vaudeville, it wasn't necessarily racist in intent, and minstrel shows actually served to indirectly introduce white audiences to certain aspects of African-American culture. A number of historians have even suggested that minstrel shows could serve as a statement of identification by Jewish performers with blacks and their culture of suffering. (When playwright Samson Raphaelson, who later wrote Jolson's most well-known play and film, "The Jazz Singer," saw him in blackface in the stage play "Robinson Crusoe," he said that he thought to himself, "My God, this isn't a jazz singer. This is a cantor.")

In 1906, Jolson showed up in San Francisco, just after the city was hit by its massive earthquake and fire, and he liked to say he was cheering up the suffering people of the city. It was then that he introduced the line, "You ain't heard nothin' yet," which he uttered at every appearance until the end of his life. By now, he and brother Harry had split up as an act, and in 1908, Al was married for the first of four times.

Back in New York, Jolson became a regular in a show called Dockstader's Minstrels, appearing in blackface. This brought him to the attention of theatrical producer J.J. Shubert, who in 1911 hired him to perform on Broadway in a revue known as "La Belle Paree," again in blackface. By 1920, after a number of successful stage performances, Jolson was Broadway's most popular star, so much so that in 1921, Lee Shubert named his newest hall "Jolson's Fifty-Ninth Street Theater." It opened with Jolson's highly successful show "Bombo," which went on to have a national tour with the star.

Jolson had first appeared on screen in 1916, but his first big role was the one that made him a legend to this day, "The Jazz Singer," in 1927. It is in effect the story of Jolson himself, though his character is called "Jakie Rabinowitz." Although not fully a "talkie," it was one of the first films that utilized sound, combining dialogue presented with written titles with four musical sequences. Jakie is a cantor's son who ignores his father's dream to see him follow in his footsteps, and instead pursues a career in vaudeville, singing such numbers as "Mammy." He becomes a star, and is scheduled to open in his own show on Broadway on ... the eve of Yom Kippur. That same day, he learns that his father is on his deathbed, and has asked for Jakie to take his place chanting the *Kol Nidre* service in the synagogue. Jakie indeed fills in for his father (his producer agrees to postpone opening night of his play), but afterwards resists the call to stay and replace his father as a liturgical singer.

"The Jazz Singer" was a tremendous success, commercially and critically, both at home and in Europe, and reportedly grossed \$5 million in the U.S. Jolson followed it with such movie roles as "The Singing Fool" (1928) and "Wonder Bar," the 1934

screen version of a stage play he had also starred in. In 1946, Jolson supplied the vocals for producer Harry Cohn's "The Jolson Story," in which actor Larry Parks played the title role. Jolson even appeared in one scene onscreen, performing his blackface number "Swanee," which was filmed in a long shot. This film was followed in 1949 by "Jolson Sings Again."

Although Jolson, who returned to the stage while continuing to start on screen, was initially reluctant to appear on television – which he called "smell-o-vision," he was eventually persuaded to accept an offer to star in a special about himself, to be called "You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet," in 1950. His death that year occurred before the project could come to fruition.

Jolson performed regularly for troops throughout World War II (during which he contracted malaria and had a lung removed), and when the Korean War began, in 1950, he supposedly called the White House to announce that "I'm gonna go to Korea." When Jolson was told that the U.S.O. didn't have the funds to finance a tour, Jolson offered to finance the trip himself. In September 1950, he flew to Korea, giving 42 shows in 16 days. He returned to the United States by way of San Francisco, where he suffered a heart attack and died, on October 23, 1950. His last words were said to have been, "Boys, I'm going."

It's hard to overstate just how big and beloved a star Al Jolson was during his lifetime. He was popular among African-American audiences as well as white ones. And he was unapologetically Jewish in his identity. He recorded in Hebrew and was very involved in raising money both for refugees after World War II and for the newly-found State of Israel.

Though married four times, Jolson never had biological children, although with two of his wives, Ruby Keeler and Erle Galbraith, he adopted a total of three children.

May 27 / Hurva Synagogue reduced to rubble

In a tragic act of the War of Independence, this house of worship in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter was blown up by the Jordanians in 1948.



The renovated Hurva synagogue in 2010. Photo by AP

On May 27, 1948, the Hurva Synagogue in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter was reduced to rubble by troops from the Arab Legion of Jordan, shortly after they conquered the Old City during Israel's War of Independence. As the tallest structure in the Old City, the Hurva was a symbol for Jews and Arabs alike of the Jewish presence in Jerusalem. Its destruction, after a showdown between Haganah fighters holed up in the synagogue and the Arab soldiers, came to symbolize the loss of the Jewish Quarter by the fledgling state. In fact, it was but one of 34 synagogues in the Old City blown up after the fall of the Jewish Quarter to the Jordanians.

The name "Hurva" means "ruin," but the name became associated with this synagogue not in 1948, but after 1720. At that time, an earlier synagogue built on the site was set afire by Arab moneylenders who had run out of patience with the Jewish creditors to whom they had provided funds to pay for its construction. Those Jews were members of a group of Ashkenazi (European) Jews who had emigrated from Poland with Rabbi Judah the Hasid two decades earlier.

After the destruction of the original synagogue, the Ottoman authorities banished the Ashkenazi newcomers from Jerusalem, and they resettled in Safed, Hebron and Tiberias. It was nearly another century before Ashkenazi Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem, after the statute of limitations on the synagogue loans expired.

In 1856, after a very lengthy series of diplomatic efforts, the sultan, Abdulmejid I, granted a permit for the rebuilding of the Hurva, giving the assignment to his official architect, Hassan Effendi. This is why the rebuilt Hurva had a design very similar to a Turkish mosque, with the structure topped by a dome spanning the entire prayer

space. Funding for the new synagogue was provided by philanthropist Sir Moses Montefiore and by Shlomo Zalman Zoref, a Lithuanian-born rabbi and silversmith.

The height of the synagogue, to the top of the dome, was 24 meters, making it one of the tallest structures in the walled city, and a balcony that wrapped around the dome gave visitors an outstanding view over the city. The interior was decorated with ritual objects donated by different Jewish communities in Europe, and the Holy Ark, which could store up to 50 Torah scrolls, had come from the Nikolaijewsky Synagogue in Kherson, Russia.

From 1856 until 1948, the rebuilt Hurva served as the unofficial center of Jewish life in Palestine, with important ceremonies such as the installation of Abraham Isaac Kook as chief rabbi of the country taking place there in 1921.

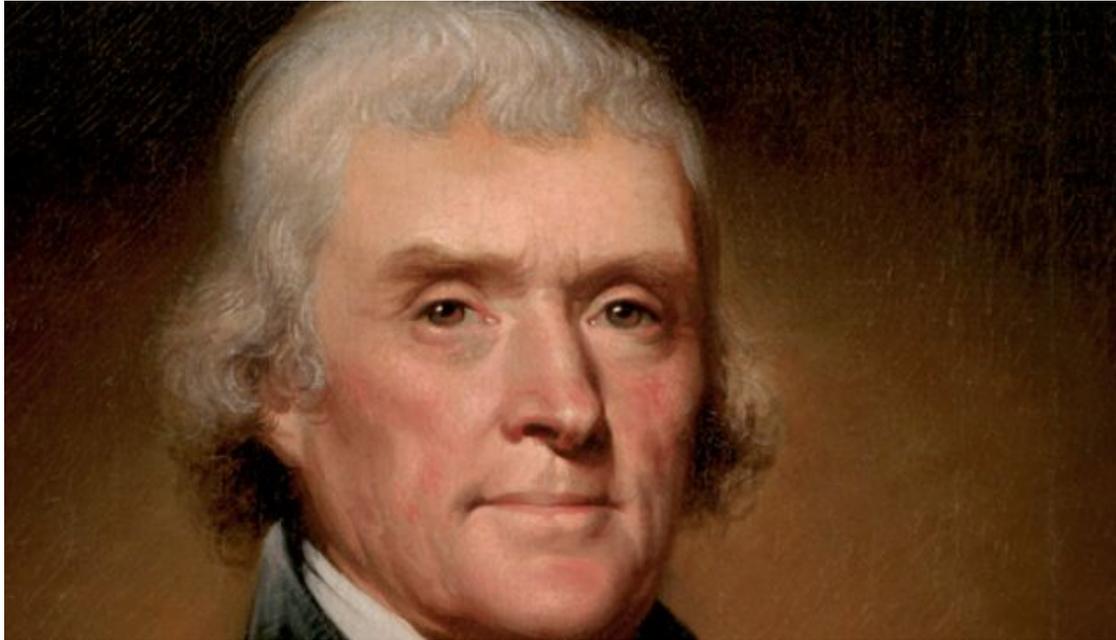
On May 25, 1948, during the battle for Jerusalem, the head of Jordanian Arab Legion, Major Abdullah el Tel, warned the Red Cross that he would attack the synagogue if members of the Haganah, the pre-state Jewish militia, did not abandon their positions there. The head of Haganah forces in the city, Moshe Russnak, knew that loss of the Hurva was tantamount to loss of the Jewish Quarter in general, and refused to leave. The Jordanians laid siege to the synagogue, and after finally taking control and raising the flag of Jordan from its dome, proceeded to destroy it, together with the adjacent Etz Chaim Yeshiva.

After Israel's reconquest of East Jerusalem, and the Old City in particular, in the 1967 Six-Day War, there was almost immediate discussion about the possibility of rebuilding the Hurva. Probably the most prominent plan proposed came from American-Jewish architect Louis Kahn, who visited the city at the invitation of Mayor Teddy Kollek and drew up a proposal for an entirely new structure that would have provided a visual link, in terms of its design, and physical link as well, to the newly liberated Western Wall. Kahn's design was controversial and he died before it could ever be realized; eventually, an arch reaching to the height of the destroyed synagogue was raised at its former location, marking both ruin and the inability of the Jews to agree on a plan for reconstruction.

Finally, in 2000, the government approved a plan by Jerusalem architect Nahum Melzer to build an exact replica of the 1856 structure. Funding was provided by the government of Israel and by two wealthy Russian-Jewish businessmen. The reconstructed Hurva was finally opened to the public on March 15, 2010.

May 28 / Jefferson's call to put Judaism 'on equal footing'

The third president's written response to Noah remains to this day an important and eloquent statement of his philosophy regarding the role of the state in protecting religious freedom.



Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 28, 1818, Thomas Jefferson, former president of the United States, responded to a letter he had received from Mordecai Manuel Noah by setting out his philosophy of religious freedom.

In his letter to the distinguished American Jew, Jefferson pointed to the case of the Jews as an example of a people who had been oppressed simply because of others' prejudices, and who needed to have their religion put "on equal footing" by law with other faiths.

By 1818, Noah (1785-1851) was a former U.S. diplomat, a journalist and a spokesman for the Jewish community of the young republic. On April 17 of that year, he spoke at the consecration of the new home of Congregation Shearith Israel, the Sephardi synagogue that had been founded in New York in 1654. There Noah spoke of the Jews' desire to reestablish their own homeland, but declared that, "until the Jews can recover their ancient rights and dominions," the United States would serve as their "chosen country," where they could "rest with the persecuted of every clime, secure in person and property, protected from tyranny and oppression, and participating [in] equal rights and immunities."

Noah sent a copy of his remarks to three former American presidents: John Adams (in office 1797-1801), Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809) and James Madison (1809-1817). All three responded graciously to him, even Madison, despite the unpleasantness that

had been caused in 1815, during his presidency, when Noah had been recalled from his position as U.S. consul in Tunis. That year, the secretary of state alleged that he had not known that Noah was a Jew, and wrote him that his religious identity was deemed to be “an obstacle to the exercise of [his] consular function” in a Muslim country.

Jefferson’s written response to Noah remains to this day an important and eloquent statement of his philosophy regarding the role of the state in protecting religious freedom for all. Writing from Monticello, his Virginia plantation, Jefferson first thanked Noah for sending him a copy of his “Discourse,” which he said taught him “some valuable facts in Jewish history which I did not know before.”

Jefferson pointed to the case of the Jews and their sufferings as “a remarkable proof” of the universal intolerance that every religious sect seemed to possess for others, an intolerance “disclaimed by all while feeble, and practiced by all when in power.” To the president-farmer, it is only the law that can serve to protect a people’s religious and civil rights, “by putting all on an equal footing.”

Nonetheless, he continued, Americans, though “we are free by the law, we are not so in practice. Public opinion erects itself into an inquisition, and exercises its office with as much fanaticism as fans the flames of an Auto-da-fé.”

Formally, Jefferson was a member of the Episcopal Church, but he was dubious of organized religion, and philosophically, shared certain ideas with Deism, which embraces rationalism and the belief in the universe being governed by natural laws, rather than by an omnipotent god. In his letter to Noah, writing as a Christian, he referred to Judaism as “your section of our religion altho’ the elder one.”

Its particular doctrines, like those of any other religion, wrote Jefferson, are the business of nobody other than its specific followers. The best way to further the cause of toleration and pluralism, he suggested, is through “the more careful attention to education, which you recommend, and which, placing its members on the equal and commanding benches of science, will exhibit them as equal objects of respect and favor.”

Jefferson closed his communication by praising Mordecai Manuel Noah on his own letter, which he deemed a “fine specimen of style and composition.”

In 1986, the late Ludwig Jesselson, then the retired chairman of the Philipp Brothers metal traders and a major collector of Judaica, paid \$396,000 for the original of Jefferson’s letter at auction at Sotheby’s in New York.

May 29 / Hungary enacts first anti-Jewish law

Under pressure from the Nazis, the country gradually limited Jews' access to universities and professions and barred them from marrying or sleeping with non-Jews.



Jews in Budapest in 1944. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 29, 1938, Hungary enacted its first anti-Jewish law. Although the country had not been occupied or annexed by Nazi Germany, under pressure from the Nazis, it began to adopt restrictions on its Jewish population similar to the Nuremberg Laws adopted in Germany in September 1935. In Hungary, the first law set quotas on the numbers of Jews who could be employed in a range of commercial and professional fields.

Hungary in the 1930s was beholden to Hitler's Germany. The Treaty of Trianon, signed at Versailles, France, following World War I, had stripped the Kingdom of Hungary of some two-thirds of its territory, and a similar fraction of its population. Gone were most of the non-Hungarian ethnic groups that had comprised the country's population when it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The only minority group that remained was the Jews, who constituted about five percent of the population.

In absolute numbers, the Jews, who had achieved equality before the law in Hungary only in 1867, were inconsequential, but they wielded disproportionate influence. More than 25 percent of university students in Hungary in the 1920s were Jews, as were the majority of stock exchange members and currency brokers. Many of the country's industrial enterprises, too, were owned by Jewish bankers.

Admiral Miklos Horthy, the "regent" who became the country's ruler in March 1920, openly declared himself an anti-Semite and wrote that he found it "intolerable that here in Hungary everything, every factory, bank, large fortune, business, theater,

press, commerce, etc., should be in Jewish hands, and that the Jew should be the image reflected of Hungary, especially abroad.”

When Germany began redrawing borders in central Europe, first by agreement, then by force, it restored to Hungary lands it had lost at Versailles: part of Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus, northern Transylvania and part of Yugoslavia. In return, Horthy was expected to impose incrementally worse restrictions on the Jews, even the 100,000 of them who had converted to Christianity.

As early as 1920, Horthy had imposed a *numerus clausus* in Hungary, the first in Europe, limiting the percentage of university students who could be Jews to their ratio of the general population — 5 percent.

The Jewish law of May 29, 1938, put a limit of 20 percent on the fraction of physicians, lawyers, journalists and engineers who could be Jews — a dramatic decree, considering that some 60 percent of doctors and 50 percent of lawyers were Jews by religion.

Less than a year later, on May 5, 1939, the second Jewish law was introduced: It barred Jews from government employ and lowered the quotas allowed in many professions, as well as in commercial enterprises. Most significantly, like Germany, it gave Jewishness a racial definition, so anyone with more than one Jewish grandparent was defined as a Jew.

Eventually, Jews were disenfranchised and barred from military service (while able-bodied Jewish men were forced to do hard labor), and marriage and sex between them and non-Jews was criminalized. Nonetheless, when Hitler demanded that Horthy deport the country's Jews (beyond some 20,000 who had been exiled and murdered in 1941), he refused. For that, and for other reasons, Germany occupied Hungary in March 1944, and quickly undertook to deport and kill its Jews. By the end of World War II, some 600,000 of the country's 860,000 Jews had been murdered.

May 30 / Father of, and advocate against, the atomic bomb

Leo Szilard was part of the team that developed the atomic bomb. Later, he campaigned heavily to prevent its use.



Physicist Leo Szilard. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On May 30, 1964, physicist Leo Szilard, who helped discover nuclear fission and was both a father of the atomic bomb and an early leader in the campaign to prevent its use and proliferation, died.

Szilard had a remarkably nimble and fertile mind, and in this, he was at least in part responsible for the invention of the cyclotron, the electron microscope, the nuclear accelerator, and the very idea of the nuclear chain reaction. Along with Albert Einstein, he also designed a refrigeration engine with no moving parts.

Leo Szilard was born in Budapest on February 11, 1898 to Louis Spitz, a civil engineer, and the former Thekla Vidor. He was raised and educated in the city, receiving a religious as well as secular education. In 1916, he was the winner of a national mathematics prize. He began studying engineering at Budapest Technical University, only to have his education interrupted by conscription in 1916 during World War I. He was spared being sent to the front when he came down with influenza, and was eventually discharged without seeing action.

The unstable political situation in Hungary following the war and the rise of the fascist regime of Nicholas Horthy in 1920 led Szilard to emigrate. He continued his studies in Berlin, switching soon after his arrival from engineering to physics. He received his PhD in physics from Humboldt University in 1923.

In the decade before Hitler came to power, Szilard taught and did research at several different institutions in Berlin. In 1933, when, as a Jew, he had to resign his academic positions in Germany, Szilard moved to London. There he read an account of a speech by English physicist Ernest Rutherford in which he mocked the idea that the splitting of atoms, and nuclear energy in general, could ever have any practical application. Szilard was irked. According to Rutherford, “anyone who looked for a source of power in the transformation of the atoms was talking moonshine.”

Szilard’s anger at Rutherford’s dismissal supposedly gave rise to his epiphany, while crossing a London street, of a nuclear chain reaction, in which sub-atomic particles could be used to bombard an atom’s nucleus, thus causing a self-sustaining process that would yield vast amounts of energy.

In 1938, Szilard accepted an offer to come to Columbia University, in New York. The following year he heard about a successful experiment in nuclear fission (the splitting of the nucleus of an atom) in Germany. This, and his own research, filled him with apprehension that the Nazi regime would succeed in developing a weapon of unprecedented power based. An early experiment conducted with Enrico Fermi at Columbia led him to the conclusion that “the world was headed to grief.”

In August 1939, Szilard and physicist Eugene Wigner wrote a letter to then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt, signed by Albert Einstein, of the danger inherent in Germany’s pursuit of a nuclear bomb, urging the United States to begin its own nuclear-weapons program and stockpile uranium for the purpose. (Szilard was instrumental in convincing the Belgian government not to allow uranium to be exported from the Belgian Congo.)

The Manhattan Project was the consequence of the Szilard-Wigner letter and it culminated in the testing of the first atomic bomb in Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16, 1945.

By then, Szilard had become convinced that no good could come from actually detonating a bomb over civilian sites, and he urged the U.S. administration to offer the Japanese a demonstration of the bomb’s potential, so that they could surrender before being subjected to nuclear attack. President Harry Truman rejected the idea, and in August of that year, the United States dropped atomic bombs on both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, thus bringing the war in the Pacific to a rapid close.

Following World War II, Szilard switched from the study of physics to the field of molecular biology. He also became a campaigner for nuclear disarmament. He correctly anticipated an arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, and he realized that the United States, having twice used a bomb in war, would have a hard time convincing the other major power to voluntarily set aside its own nuclear aspirations. He wrote widely on the subject and, in 1962, he founded the Council for a Livable World, which continues today to advocate in Washington for disarmament.

In 1962, Szilard became sick with bladder cancer. He took charge of his own treatment with Cobalt-60 radiation, though his doctors warned that the therapy was not safe. He recovered from the cancer, and when he died on this day in 1964, at age 66, it was from a heart attack in his sleep.

May 31 / A historian who didn't support the invasion of Iraq is born

Bernard Lewis, the controversial, classically trained scholar, was also tried in France for denying the Armenian genocide and fined one franc.



Bernard Lewis, historian who revised his position on the Armenian genocide. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

May 31, 1916, is the birth date of Bernard Lewis, the British-born historian of Islamic religion and culture. Although highly regarded for the sweep of his scholarship and the accessibility of his writing, Lewis has also served as a lightning rod in recent decades for attacks by scholars and political analysts who view him as an apologist for Israel and the West. He is also seen as an instigator of the Allied invasion of Iraq in 2003.

Bernard Lewis was born in London's Stoke-Newington section to Jewish parents - his father dealt in real estate, and his mother minded the home. He has said that his interest in the Middle East began during his preparation for his bar mitzvah. His family was only moderately traditional, but encouraged his fascination with languages and history.

Lewis earned both his bachelor's degree and his Ph.D., in 1936 and 1939, respectively, from the School of Oriental Studies, at the University of London (today called SOAS, the University of London). During World War II, he served in the Royal Armoured Corps and the Intelligence Corps, as well as in the British Foreign Office, before returning to SOAS to teach. In 1949, he became the head of the school's department of Near and Middle Eastern history.

In 1974, Lewis moved to Princeton, New Jersey, where he accepted a joint position at both Princeton University and at the Institute for Advanced Studies. He remains an emeritus professor at Princeton to this day.

As a classically trained scholar, Lewis approached his studies of the region through philology, with expertise in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. His earliest work was on medieval Arab history, and his first scholarly article on medieval professional guilds in Islam.

After 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel, it became very difficult for Jewish scholars to work in the Arab world: Lewis refocused his gaze on the Ottoman Empire and the origin of modern Turkey, becoming one of the first Western academics to gain entry to the Ottoman archives. Because the empire had covered most of the Middle East until after World War I, this also meant having access to records from all over the region.

Lewis has published more than 30 books, many of which became popular best-sellers, both because of the author's highly readable prose and also because of his frequent attempts over the past two decades to look at the conflict between the Muslim world and the West, and to understand it in the context of Islamic history.

Because Lewis has dared to hold the Arab world itself responsible for its backwardness, rather than placing blame exclusively on Western colonialism and exploitation, he has earned himself a number of foes, not only in the Middle East, but among left-leaning Western intellectuals too.

As a scholar who frequently advised and was quoted by members of the Bush administration after 9/11 and in the early years of the Iraq War, he also drew significant fire from early opponents of the war, even though he never was the advocate many have portrayed him as being.

Waffling on genocide?

Lewis, who remains active even at age 97 – the birthday he celebrates today – has been at the center of frequent controversies since the late 1970s. He was one of the central villains depicted in the late Edward Said's 1978 study "Orientalism," which portrayed early generations of Middle Eastern scholars as providing academic cover for the West's imperialist efforts in the region, and of lacking objectivity. Lewis he accused of "demagogy and outright ignorance."

Lewis denied the charges, and pointed to the history of Oriental studies as predating European political domination of the Middle East, and starting with philological studies that "did nothing to advance the cause of imperialism."

Although early editions (in 1961 and 1968) of one of Lewis' groundbreaking books, "The Emergence of Modern Turkey," spoke about "the terrible holocaust of 1915, when a million and a half Armenians perished," in later editions, the wording was changed to refer to "the terrible slaughter of 1915," and lowered the estimate to one million Armenians, as well as mentioning "an unknown number of Turks, killed by Armenians. Lewis explicitly argued that, although the Turks massacred countless

Armenians, there is no evidence that they operated according to a centralized policy of genocide, and that calling the killings that had the effect of diminishing the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust.

Lewis' revisionism on the Armenian question led to his being charged and tried in France for denial a genocide, a crime there, and in the mid-1990s, he was ordered by a French court to pay one franc in damages after losing a case. Three other lawsuits against him in another French court, however, failed. But Lewis faced a great deal of criticism, including from a number of Jewish and Israeli scholars, for his "denial" of the Armenian genocide.

Shortly before September 11, 2001, Lewis published an essay and then a book that pointed to Osama bin-Laden and Al Qaida as a significant threat to the West. He also accused misinterpreters of Islam within the religion of distorting the meaning of "jihad," and of using it to justify suicide bombings and other acts of terror that had "no antecedents in Islamic history, and no justification in terms of Islamic theology, law, or tradition."

But despite the fact that Lewis was often quoted by such people as President George W. Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney, he has long denied that he supported the invasion of Iraq or that he believed the democracy could be imposed on Iraq from outside. That hasn't stopped his opponents from depicting him as an ideological architect of the war, and they point to a number of appearances and statements of his early on in the war as giving credence to the charge.

Among Lewis' most well-known books are "The Arabs in History" (1950), "Semites and Anti-Semites" (1986), "What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East" (2002) and "The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror" (2003). His most recently published book, from 2012, was a memoir, "Notes on a Century: Reflections of a Middle East Historian."

June 1 / Birthday of legendary Yiddish performer Molly Picon

New York-born actress appeared in some 200 productions written by husband Jacob Kalich in the 1920s, later starring opposite Topol in 'Fiddler on the Roof.'



Molly Picon. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 1, 1898, is one of two birthdays that were claimed by Molly Picon, the beloved performer best known for her work in Yiddish theater, whose career spanned more than eight decades. (One version says that her actual date of birth was February 28, and that her grandmother invented June 1 so that Molly could celebrate her birthday twice each year.)

Margaret Pyekoon was the daughter of Clara Ostrovsky and Louis Pyekoon, both immigrants to New York's Lower East Side from what is today Ukraine. Clara was a wardrobe seamstress in the theater, and the little-present Louis a shirtmaker who had neglected to divorce his first wife before leaving for America. Molly later described her father as being "just 'anti': anticapitalist, antireligion, antilabor, and antigirls," until he finally "faded out of our lives."

At the age of 5, Molly competed in and won a talent show at a theater in Philadelphia, where the family had moved after her father's departure. As a teenager, she gave up her studies at William Penn High School so she could perform with a Yiddish repertory troupe and help support the family – Clara and her mother, and Molly's sister, Helen. The company switched between Yiddish and English, depending on the composition of their audience.

The decisive event in her life came in 1918, when Picon answered an ad in a newspaper in Boston, where she was on tour, from a writer and director named Jacob

Kalich, who was seeking a *flaam feierdig soubrettin* (“lively ingenue”) for his company. She joined up with him professionally and, the following year, personally as well, when they were married in the back of a Philadelphia grocery store.

Picon and Kalich remained married until his death in 1975. They were unable to have children, although they adopted several, one of them a teenage boy from Belgium who had been orphaned during the Holocaust.

During the 1920s, after several years spent performing in Europe – where Picon was able to brush up on her Philadelphia-accented Yiddish – she featured in some 200 productions written and produced by Kalich, in New York’s Second Avenue Yiddish-theater district. Songs were often supplied by Joseph Rumshinsky, and by Picon herself.

Picon’s first role in a film still extant was in the 1923 silent movie “East Meets West,” about an American girl who returns with her father to meet their relations in Galicia, Poland. Other early films included “Yiddle with the Fiddle” (1937), about a girl who dresses as a boy (a frequent gimmick in her work) in order to work as a klezmer musician, and “Mamale” (1938), the last Yiddish film made in Poland before the German occupation. In that, the 40-year-old Picon portrayed a 12-year-old girl.

Picon and Kalich performed before troops during World War II, in displaced-person camps in Europe in its aftermath, and later in the newborn State of Israel. The couple lived in rural Mahomac, New York, in a home they dubbed “Chez Schmendrick.”

Her success was not limited to the Yiddish language. Picon appeared on Broadway in the 1940 play “Morningstar” (the show was not a hit, but Brooks Atkinson, in *The New York Times*, wrote about her: “To coin a phrase, she is a darling”); the musical “Milk and Honey” (1961); in the film version of “Come Blow Your Horn” (with Frank Sinatra, 1963); and also as Yente in the 1971 film adaptation of “Fiddler on the Roof.” TV roles included recurring appearances in “Car 54, Where Are You?” and even an appearance on “Gomer Pyle, USMC.”

Picon’s final screen appearances were in the movies “The Cannonball Run” and its sequel “Cannonball Run II,” in 1981 and 1984. She died on April 6, 1992, at the age of 93 (or 94).

June 2 / The beginning of the end of Iraq's Jewish community

The potent mix of British rule, Nazi influence, and a domestic struggle for power set the stage for a violent attack on Baghdad's Jews.



Iraqi Jews standing by the purported tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel, Kifel, Iraq, 1932. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 2, 1941, was the second and final day of the anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad that became known as the Farhud. The Farhud (literally, “violent dispossession”) not only took the lives of hundreds of Jews, and wounded many more; it also spelled the beginning of the end of Iraq’s ancient Jewish community, nearly all of whose 135,000 members had left the country within a decade.

Iraq, under British mandatory rule since 1921, had become semi-independent in 1932, although it remained under British supervision. But by the spring of 1941, it had also become a focus of German efforts at destabilization, as the Third Reich attempted to dominate the Middle East on a number of fronts. Conquest of Iraq would have given the Germans access to the country’s vast oil fields, and might have proved decisive in the war, at a time when the Allied fortunes were at low ebb.

On April 2, 1941, a military coup, led by an anti-British politician named Rashid Ali al-Kailani, overthrew the pro-British government of Abdul Ilah, the regent, and began to challenge the British right to maintain troops in the country. On May 25, Hitler announced his intention to “move forward in the Middle East by supporting Iraq.”

Already, for nearly a decade, the German Embassy in Baghdad had sponsored efforts to expose the Iraqi populace to Nazi messages, and had been inviting intellectuals and military officers for visits to Berlin. A newspaper bought by the embassy actually

published "Mein Kampf" in Arabic. Also advancing German interests in Baghdad was the presence of Haj Amin al-Husseini, the former mufti of Jerusalem and a radical Palestinian nationalist; he served as a liaison between Rashid Ali and Berlin, and was considered dangerous enough by parts of the Jewish community back in Palestine that the Irgun concocted a plot with the British by which David Raziel, one of the underground paramilitary group's founders, would fly a mission into Iraq and kidnap Husseini. At the same time he would bomb and destroy the country's oil refineries, thus denying this vital resource to the advancing German army. Raziel's mission was ended when a German plane shot him down.

The British organized a counter-coup, and on May 30, Rashid Ali and his colleagues fled from Baghdad, while Regent Abdul Ilah planned to return to the city to resume his leadership. It was important to the British that the move was not being imposed from outside, and although their forces had effectively reoccupied the country, they did not accompany Regent Ilah when he re-entered the capital on May 31.

June 1, 1941, coincided with the celebration of Shavuot, and the Jews of Baghdad, who comprised about 90,000 of Iraq's 135,000-strong Jewish population, felt secure enough to celebrate the festival openly. There are several different theories as to what set off the riots of the Farhud, but the result was that on June 1, soldiers and policemen who had been loyal to Rashid Ali, together with members of the Futtuwa, an Iraqi version of the Hitler Youth, began to attack Jewish neighborhoods. They were joined by ordinary Iraqi civilians. Their goal was to kill, but they also looted and destroyed Jewish-owned homes and businesses.

The official Iraqi report on the Farhud concluded that between 130 and 200 Jews were murdered during the rioting, but British diplomatic records suggested that the number was as high as 600. Efforts to arrive at verifiable estimates were made more difficult by the Iraqi refusal to let the Jews bury their dead according to Jewish custom, and instead the bodies of the victims were interred in a mass grave. Another 600 people were wounded, and untold numbers of women were raped, while more than 1,500 businesses and homes were attacked and looted.

The destruction was able to continue for two days because of the explicit decision by the British ambassador, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, to keep British troops out of Baghdad. It was also Cornwallis who had not taken measures to purge the Iraqi government of its pro-Nazi elements after the escape of Rashid Ali and the return of Regent Ilah. Cornwallis also neglected to make anything other than cursory mention of the rioting in his own dispatches back to London.

Israeli historian Esther Meir-Glitzenstein has written that the readiness of Iraqis to attack the country's Jews, who had lived peacefully and productively in the land since the time of the destruction of the First Temple, can be attributed to a perception of Jews as both supportive of the British and as pro-Zionist. In fact, active involvement in the Zionist movement really only picked up during the decade that followed the Farhud. Indeed, for the Jews themselves, the Farhud was a shocking event, one that led to a growing sense of physical insecurity.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, in 1948, the atmosphere only became more uncomfortable for Iraq's Jews, and it was perhaps inevitable that they would

depart the country for Israel. The government fired many Jews from the civil service, and Jews found themselves on trial for espionage. The Zionist administration in Palestine stepped up its efforts to bring Iraqi Jews to Israel, and Operations Ezra and Nehemiah did just that between 1950 and 1952.

June 3 / Shoah survivors found a 'kibbutz' in Germany

Kibbutz Buchenwald was one of what came to be 35 pre-aliyah training farms in post-war Germany.



The Nazi camp of Buchenwald, upon its liberation in 1945. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 3, 1945, a group of Jewish survivors left the recently liberated Buchenwald concentration camp for a farm near the German town of Eggendorf. There they established an agricultural-training community they called Kibbutz Buchenwald, which was meant to prepare them for eventual immigration to Palestine.

Kibbutz Buchenwald was one of what came to be 35 training farms set up in post-war Germany, with names like Kibbutz Nili and Kibbutz Lochamei Hageeta'ot al Shem Tosia Altman. In many cases, the displaced persons directed to them had been active in Zionist movements in the period before the war, whereas for others, it was simply the most attractive option available to them, and one that seemed like it could lead to a certificate that would allow them to immigrate to the Land of Israel.

When World War II ended in Europe, in the spring of 1945, there were some 200,000 Jewish survivors in Germany and Austria, nearly half of whom were under 25. Many had been driven westward in death marches from Nazi camps in Poland and other parts east as the Germans saw their impending defeat. Some of the inmates in Buchenwald, a large concentration camp near Weimar, Germany — both religious and secular, with youth-movement backgrounds — had talked well before liberation about establishing a training farm.

With the help of two U.S. army chaplains, rabbis Herschel Schacter and Robert Marcus, they were given the use of an abandoned German farm in Eggendorf. A short time later, as this part of Germany was transferred to Soviet control, it was

decided to move the training farm deeper into the American zone, to Geringshof, outside Fulda, where there had been a Zionist hakhshara (training) farm before the war. Schacter and Marcus were instrumental in acquiring clothing, food, tools and eventually immigration certificates for the young Zionists.

According to historian Avinoam Patt, coeditor of a 2010 book, “We Are Here,” on displaced persons in Germany, the readiness of large numbers of young Jewish DPs to move to such farms “was vital in informing the diplomatic decisions that led to the creation of the State of Israel as international observers representing the United States, Britain, and the United Nations weighed the desires of the large refugee population in Europe.”

Kibbutz Nili was established in September 1945, on the grounds, near Pleikersdorf, of what had been the estate of Julius Streicher, publisher of the Nazi newspaper *Der Sturmer*.

Kibbutz Buchenwald was in operation until the summer of 1948, although a first group left for Palestine as early as August 1945. Former residents of the farm were among the founding members of Kibbutz Netzer Sereni, which was established in 1948 in central Israel.

In her 1997 book “Kibbutz Buchenwald: Survivors and Pioneers,” historian Judith Tydor Baumel (her father was one of the survivors who founded the farm) quotes Itka Cheresch, one of the young residents of the kibbutz, describing the high level of motivation among these survivors: “We spoke for hours about every topic in the world, and for me, as a girl of thirteen and a half, who lost seven brothers and sisters and was left alone in the world, those idealists appeared to me as the ultimate example of perfection.”

When David Ben-Gurion visited DPs in the American zone, in October 1945, there were five “kibbutzim”; by the following June, there were 35.

June 4 / A radical theater founder is born

Judith Malina, the unconventional German-born actress who co-founded the alternative Living Theater, turns 87 today.



Judith Malina in The Living Theatre production of Maudie and Jane. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 4, 1926, is the birthday of Judith Malina, actress, non-violent political radical and co-founder of the Living Theater, America's oldest alternative-theater company.

Malina was born in Kiel, Germany, to Max Malina, a Conservative rabbi, and Rosel Zamojre, a Polish-born actress who gave up her career when she married Max. When Judith was 3, the family moved to New York, where Rabbi Malina had been sent to raise funds for needy rabbis living in Jerusalem. Max Malina understood early on the threat Germany's Jews faced, and he spent much of his time during the period leading up to World War II trying to convince politicians of the need to have the United States admit more Jewish refugees fleeing Europe. At the age of 7, Judith appeared at an anti-Nazi rally at Madison Square Garden, and she later recalled how, as a young child, she would stuff leaflets entitled "Do You Know What Has Happened to Your Jewish Neighbors?" into packets being sent into Germany. She also was present when her father was visited by Albert Einstein, with whom he worked on a proposal to ransom German Jews for \$5,000 a head, a plan opposed by the Roosevelt administration.

Rabbi Malina died at age 42, in 1940, of leukemia. Rosel took a job in a factory, before becoming ill herself, and Judith dropped out of high school to work, before a grant from a fund for the families of deceased rabbis made it possible for her to finish her studies. She had inherited a love of the theater from her mother, and knew from a young age that she wanted to be involved in the arts, specifically in theater.

In 1943, Judith met Julian Beck, a painter and drop-out from Yale University. Two years later, she began attending the New School for Social Research, where she studied theater with the director Erwin Piscator at his Drama Workshop. Piscator viewed what he called “epic theater” as an agent of social and political change. Comparing Piscator’s style to that of another leading acting teacher, Malina told writer Lehman Wechselbaum in 2011, “Stella Adler would say, ‘Quieter, more refined,’ Piscator would say, ‘Louder, stronger.’”

Malina and Beck were married in 1948, the same year they founded the Living Theater, and they were together until Beck’s death, in 1985. Like their work, though, their marriage was unconventional: Beck was a bisexual, and both of them had relationships with other people, including at one time the same man. The couple also had two children, Isha, a girl (the word means “woman” in Hebrew), and a son, Garrick.

The Living Theater made its home in New York’s Cherry Lane Theater, and over the years presented plays by such American writers as Gertrude Stein, Paul Goodman and John Ashbery, and European playwrights like Luigi Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht and Jean Cocteau. The company often shocked -- with its nudity, with its engagement of the audiences, and its anarchistic messages -- and it sometimes simultaneously infuriated and elicited the admiration of critics. Playwright Charles Mee once wrote of it: “The Living Theater is the brat-child we love to see hit by a car -- until we realize that, for all its damnable qualities, it had life; for all its silliness and irresponsibility and selfishness and egotism, it was so often right.”

Each of the Theater’s successive homes was closed down by authorities -- the fire department, the Internal Revenue Service, the city buildings department -- and in 1965, it had to shut down after charges, later dropped, of tax evasion were leveled at it. Shortly after that, Malina and Beck left with their company for Europe, where they lived and toured over the next five years. After returning, the couple split the company into three parts, which worked in London, studied traditional theater in India, and toured Brazil. The company’s founders were in the latter group, and found themselves imprisoned there for two months after offending Brazil’s military government. (“I’ve been in jail in 12 countries,” Malina told interviewer Wechselbaum.)

After Beck’s death, another member of the company, Hanon Reznikov, became its co-leader; he also married Malina in 1988. Reznikov died in 2008, at the age of 57.

Earlier this year, the Living Theater had to give up its physical home in New York’s Lower East Side, having fallen four months behind in rent. At the same time, Malina, who turns 87 today, moved from the city to the Lillian Booth Actors Home, in New Jersey. But she is still active, and in February told a reporter from the Forward that she intended to commute into New York to continue working with her theater.

“I’m in the theater because I’m a revolutionary,” she told Jon Kalish. “I want to make the beautiful anarchist non-violent revolution and I think this is where, if anywhere, it’s going to happen. We’ll keep going. If we have no place, we’ll do street theater. We can always work on the street and pass the hat.”

June 5 / Canada's Jews get civil rights

The Emancipation Act was, in part, a response to Ezekiel Hart, a Jewish politician elected to the government - who was twice denied the right to serve.



Ezekiel Hart, a Canadian Jew who helped pave the way for Jewish civil rights in the country.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 5, 1832, the legislature of Lower Canada enacted the Emancipation Act, which extended full and equal civil rights to the province's Jews. (Lower Canada refers to the British colony that constituted the southern third of the modern province of Quebec, which in 1841 was joined with Upper Canada – parts of Ontario -- to create the Province of Canada.)

Passage of the Emancipation Act was in large part precipitated by the refusal of the legislature to allow a Jew, Ezekiel Hart, to take his seat in the house, even though he had been popularly elected to the parliament.

Hart (1767-1843), the son of Aaron Hart, the man widely remembered as the “first Jewish settler” in Canada, was a businessman who was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada in 1807, making him the first Jew elected to office in the British Empire. Because election day, April 11, was a Saturday, Hart deferred taking his oath of office until the opening of the legislature, the following January. That day, Hart, his head covered, pronounced his oath over a Hebrew Bible, replacing the last word in the phrase declaring that he was swearing “on the faith of a Christian” with “Jew.”

Although this was the manner in which Jews generally were sworn in to give testimony in court, numerous objections were heard to Hart's action, including from

the colony's attorney general, as well as in the press. Later, after Hart expressed his readiness to swear the standard oath, the legislature rejected his offer, passing a resolution stating that, "Ezekiel Hart, Esquire, professing the Jewish religion, cannot take a seat, nor sit, nor vote, in this House."

When new elections were held, in 1808, Hart was again elected by the people of his town, Trois-Rivieres. This time, he uttered the standard oath of office. But after he had sat in the legislature for only several days, his colleagues again voted to expel Hart.

Hart did not run a third time for the assembly. He continued to live and work as a businessman in Trois-Rivieres, and served as an officer in the War of 1812 against the United States.

In 1830, Quebec's Legislative Council adopted a law that granted Jews the same religious rights as members of the province's two officially recognized religions, Catholicism and Anglicanism. The bill included the right to register births, marriages and deaths, a privilege that had previously been denied to Jews. This was followed a year later by the bill guaranteeing the civil and political rights of Jews. The Act to Grant Equal Rights and Privileges to Persons of the Jewish Religion, the full name of the Emancipation Act, was supported by Louis-Joseph Papineau, leader of the reformist Patriotes party in the Assembly, and Speaker of the House. Papineau had voted for Hart's expulsion in 1809.

Only 27 years later, in 1858, did the United Kingdom pass similar legislation.

June 6 / The Socialist congressman who defeated Tammany Hall dies

After defeating the corrupt New York machine, Meyer London declared his intention, in Yiddish, to 'represent an entirely different type of Jew.'



Meyer London, one of only two members of the Socialist Party of America elected to Congress. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 6, 1926, is the day that Meyer London, the second Socialist candidate to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, died, after being hit by a car in New York. London served a total of three terms in Congress, between 1915 and 1919 and during 1923-1925.

London was born in Kalvarija, Lithuania, on December 29, 1871. His father was a onetime Orthodox scholar who had become a non-religious political revolutionary, before moving to the United States in 1888 to seek financial security. The family followed him three years later, making their home on New York's Lower East Side. There, Efraim London ran a printing business and published his own radical weekly, and the son became familiar with a number of political activists who frequented his father's shop.

Meyer was studious as well as politically involved, and in 1896, he began law school at New York University, studying at night, while working as a librarian and tutor during the day. After earning his degree, he worked as a labor lawyer. In the last decade of the 19th century and first of the 20th, London was active in various incarnations of the Socialist party, and ran several times – unsuccessfully – for New York State Assembly. He also ran three times for U.S. Congress as a Socialist, in 1908, 1910 and 1912, and lost each time. In the interim, he raised funds both for victims of anti-Jewish pogroms in revolutionary Russia, after 1905, and for the non-

Zionist Bund movement in his birthplace. He also provided legal services to a variety of trade unions in New York, most notably by guiding the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, in the massive 1910 Cloakmakers Strike, in which the union successfully fought an attempt by management to have the court issue an injunction ordering its 50,000 striking members back to work before their demands were met.

The reputation London gained helped him forge a coalition that enabled him, finally, in 1914, to defeat the Tammany Hall machine in New York, and win election to the House representing New York's 12th Congressional district, only the second time a Socialist Party candidate did so. Speaking to followers in Yiddish following his victory, he declared his intention to "represent an entirely different type of Jew from the kind Congress is accustomed to seeing" – a clear reference to the more prosperous establishment Jews of "Uptown."

It was during his second term, in April 1917, that London voted against America's entry into World War I, one of only 50 representatives to oppose participation. He explained that he believed his election as a Socialist obligated him to oppose all wars, but declared at the same time that "I believe I am as deeply in love with the United States as any man who can trace his ancestry to the Mayflower." Whichever constituents didn't resent London for that vote surely were angry when, after the U.S. declared war on Austria-Hungary, he then felt obligated to support the war effort. This caused him at one point to say, "I wonder whether I am to be punished for having had the courage to vote against the war, or for standing by my country's decision when it chose war."

Similarly, as a Socialist, London was not an early supporter of Zionism, and refused to introduce a bill in the House expressing support for the Balfour Declaration, but he also did not explicitly oppose the move to establish a political homeland for the Jews. Such ambivalence did little to win him friends, and London lost his bid for a third straight term in 1918, to Henry Goldfogle, a Democratic-Republic "fusion" candidate, and a perennial opponent of London's. Two years later, London defeated Goldfogle and returned to Congress for a final term, only to lose a bid for reelection in 1922.

Many of the progressive bills London introduced to Congress – bills that did not pass – decades later became the law of the land: bills calling for minimum wage, for unemployment insurance, for more progressive taxes. He fought for anti-lynching laws and even for paid maternity leave, a privilege still not guaranteed to women in the United States.

On June 6, 1926, London was crossing First Avenue, in Manhattan, when he got caught between traffic moving in both directions. He became disoriented, and was hit while standing in the middle of the street by one Louis Greenspan, of Newark, N.J. Later, at Bellevue Hospital, where he was brought for treatment, the dying London asked for charges not to be brought against Greenspan, reportedly saying that he was not responsible for the accident. He died later that night, at age 54.

After his body lay in state at the offices of the Forward newspaper, London was buried at Mt. Carmel Cemetery, in Queens, in a funeral attended by a reported 100,000 people. A Liberty cargo ship, the SS Meyer London, built during World War

II, was named in his memory; it was torpedoed and sunk off the coast of Libya in 1944. And a Lower East Side elementary school is named for the late congressman.

June 7 / A queen's doctor is executed for treason

Denying all to the last, the secret Jew Rodrigo Lopez was convicted, hung, drawn and quartered for conspiring to poison Elizabeth I.



Darnley Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, 1575.

On June 7, 1594, Rodrigo Lopez, the official physician to Queen Elizabeth I of England, was executed before a London crowd, on charges that included conspiring to poison the queen.

Lopez was born in Crato, Portugal, in or about 1525, and raised as a Converso – a New Christian who continued to maintain a Jewish identity secretly. In the wake of the Portuguese Inquisition (which began in 1536), Lopez moved to London, where he set up a successful practice as a doctor.

He was appointed house physician at St. Bartholomew's Hospital and tended to a number of highly placed clients, including Robert Dudley, the powerful earl of Leicester, for whom Lopez was at one point accused unsuccessfully of having prepared poisons. He also served Francis Walsingham, who became spymaster to Queen Elizabeth.

In 1586, Lopez was awarded the prestigious position of chief physician to the queen, who three years later bestowed upon him a monopoly on the import of aniseed and sumac.

Lopez seemed to have it all: a home in London's Holborn district, a son studying at Winchester College, the private boarding school established in the 14th century (and still in operation today), and responsibility for the care of the monarch. Outwardly, he led the life of a Protestant, but was part of the small community of other Portuguese Conversos in London who secretly carried on lives as Jews.

But he also had made himself an enemy, in the person of Robert Devereux, the earl of Essex, a former patient about whose medical record an indiscreet Lopez revealed details publicly. It was Essex who in 1594 accused Lopez of plotting against the queen.

Damning cryptic letters and torture

Lopez had apparently become involved in a plot against Don Antonio, the pretender to the Portuguese crown, who was now in exile in England. In early 1594, two servants to Antonio were arrested on suspicion of being double agents working for the Spanish monarchy. Orders were given to port officials at crossings to Spain to confiscate all suspicious correspondence passing through the port.

Within weeks, a Portuguese man living in England was arrested as he entered the country; on his person was found a cryptic letter addressed to an unknown person.

Though the prisoner, Gomez d'Avila, would reveal no details of his mission, he was overheard asking someone he encountered during this questioning to carry word of his arrest to Dr. Lopez.

In the meantime, a letter had been intercepted from Esteban Ferreira, one of the two men arrested earlier on charges of plotting against Antonio. In the note, he warned Lopez to do anything he could to prevent Gomez d'Avila from entering England, otherwise, "the Doctor would be undone without remedy."

Lopez's response, similarly intercepted, assured Ferreira that he "would spare no expense" to keep Gomez from coming.

When Ferreira was confronted with the two letters, he told his interrogators that Lopez had long been in the pay of Spain and was plotting to poison Don Antonio. Gomez was then tortured, and he confessed his involvement in a similar plot.

Essex oversaw the investigation of the unfolding plot, which grew increasingly complex. What became clear to him, however, was that his nemesis, Dr. Lopez, seemed to have been in the service of the Spanish crown.

Lopez was arrested, denied any wrongdoing, and Queen Elizabeth was inclined to release him. But Essex continued to dig into the case, until one of the servants of Don Antonio made the explicit claim that Lopez had agreed to undertake to poison the queen on behalf of Spain, for a price of 50,000 crowns.

Lopez was questioned again, and confessed to the charges. A jubilant Essex wrote to a friend: "I have discovered a most dangerous and desperate treason. The point of conspiracy was her Majesty's death. The executioner should have been Dr Lopez; the manner poison. This I have so followed as I will make it appear clear as noon day."

At his trial, in February 1594 Lopez claimed his confession had been induced under torture, but that did not prevent his conviction.

Although Rodrigo Lopez was sentenced to death, the queen was reluctant to see the punishment carried out, and for months, the warrant for his death remained unsigned. Only on June 7, 1594, was he taken from the Tower of London and hanged, drawn and quartered before a public audience. He is reported to have continued to maintain his innocence to the final moment, and to have declared before his death that he loved his queen as well as he loved Jesus. The crowd understood the remark as ironic and jeered at the convicted man.

A widely held literary theory suggests that Shakespeare based the character of Shylock, in "The Merchant of Venice," written between 1596 and 1598, on Dr. Lopez. One piece of evidence for this is that Shylock's enemy in the play is Antonio.

June 8 / Anti-Jewish rioting in Morocco leaves 44 dead

Massacre took place in June 1948, a month after formation of State of Israel, and triggered a mass exodus of Moroccan Jews from the North African country.



Jewish cemetery at Oujda, Morocco. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 8, 1948, was the second and final day of anti-Jewish rioting in the northeastern Moroccan towns of Oujda and Jerada, in which 44 people were killed and some 60 wounded. The massacres, whose circumstances have never been definitively determined, came weeks after Israel's declaration of statehood, and contributed to a dramatic upsurge in the departure of Jews from Morocco, most of them to Israel.

Oujda, where the violence first broke out on June 7, 1948, is a large city (today its population is about 450,000) very close to Morocco's border with Algeria, some 50 kilometers (31 miles) inland from the Mediterranean. In the year beginning from May 1947, some 2,000 Moroccan Jews fled the country for Palestine, many of them passing through Oujda before crossing into Algeria.

Within days of Israeli statehood – which was declared on May 14, 1948 – the Moroccan sultan, Mohammed V, delivered a speech in which he warned his country's Jews not to demonstrate “solidarity with the Zionist aggression,” but also reminding Morocco's Muslim majority that Jews had always been a protected people there. Because the address contained both a statement of support for the Jews and an implied threat against them, the effect of it on anti-Jewish sentiment is difficult to gauge.

What is clear is that on the morning of June 7, rioters descended on Oujda's Jewish quarter and killed four of its Jewish residents, as well as a Frenchman, and wounded another 30. Late that night, and continuing into the next morning, rioting also began

in Jerada, a much smaller mining town some 60 kilometers (37 miles) to the southwest of Oujda. There, 37 Jews were killed – including the town’s rabbi, Moshe Cohen, and four family members – out of a total Jewish population of approximately 120.

Damage to property was also extensive in both towns. As police arrived only several hours after the violence began, they could only assess the losses. And when the pasha of Oujda, Mohammed Hajoui, condemned the violence and even visited the homes of all its victims, he was attacked on June 11 in a mosque in the city.

At the time, Morocco was still a French colony – independence was granted only in March 1956 – and the French commissioner for Oujda, René Brunel, pinned responsibility for the outbreak of violence on the Jews – for their passage through Oujda on their way to Israel, and their supposed sympathies with the Zionist movement. According to a report by the French Foreign Ministry, it was “characteristic that those in this region near to the Algerian border consider all Jews who depart as combatants for Israel.”

For its part, the French League for Human Rights and Citizenship blamed the French authorities for their lax control in the area.

A number of officials from the local mining federation were put on trial on charges of instigating the massacres, with several of those convicted the following February being sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor, and others to limited sentences.

If before Oujda and Jerada there had been a stream of Jews departing Morocco, afterward it became a flood. During the next year, 18,000 of Morocco’s 250,000 or so Jews left for Israel. Between 1948 and 1956, when emigration was prohibited, the number reached about 110,000.

June 9 / Jewish community of Crete lost at sea

Some 265 Jews were being transported from the Greek island to the mainland by Germans when their ship, the Tanais, was torpedoed in 1944.

Early on the morning of June 9, 1944, the Greek freighter Tanais – which was carrying the entire Jewish community of Crete – was attacked northeast of the port of Piraeus.

Within 15 minutes, the ship – which the German occupiers of Crete were using to transport the Jews to the Greek mainland for deportation, probably to Treblinka – had disappeared beneath the surface. None of its 265 Jewish passengers survived.

Also on board were a number of Greek resistance members and Italian prisoners of war (estimates range from some 230 to 600), nearly all of whom also died when the Tanais went down.

The Jewish presence on Crete was ancient, with its first recorded mention being in the non-canonical book 2 Maccabees, written in the second century B.C.E.

By 1941, when the Germans occupied the island, it had 371 Jewish residents, all but eight of whom lived in Chania. (The decades preceding World War II had seen a net departure of Jews from the island, with the number declining from some 600 at the turn of the century.)

The Germans demanded a list of their names from the city's rabbi, Elias Osmos, but didn't get around to taking measures to deport them until May 1944.

Early on the morning of May 29, 1944, the occupiers rounded up the island's Jews – most of whom lived in the Jewish Quarter of Chania's Old City, where they were held briefly. From there, they were taken to Agia prison, outside the city, where they were imprisoned under subhuman conditions until June 8, when they were loaded on trucks and brought to Heraklion, there to be boarded onto the Tanais.

The 38-year-old cargo ship was the only vessel that had survived a June 1 Allied air raid on a German convoy, and although it too had been damaged, it was deemed seaworthy for the short voyage to Piraeus.

Shortly after 2:30 A.M. on the morning of June 9, the British submarine HMS Vivid spotted the Tanais some 33 miles northeast of Piraeus. A short time later, the submarine's commander, Lt. John Varley, ordered the firing of four torpedoes, two of which apparently hit the ship.

Within a quarter hour, the Tanais was gone. None of its prisoners, who were locked into their quarters, had a chance of surviving.

Crete was liberated by mid-October 1944, and it is estimated that 25 of the island's Jews, all of whom had evaded detection by the Germans and hence were not among those on the Tanais, survived the war.

The lone remaining synagogue on Crete, Chania's Etz Hayyim Synagogue – originally built as a church in the 15th century, and turned into a synagogue in the 17th century – was left in ruins until the mid-1990s. Then, a group of private citizens, together with the World Monuments Fund, undertook to renovate it. It reopened in 1999 as a museum and functional synagogue.

Although it was damaged after an arson attack in 2010, it was quickly repaired, and today functions as a museum of the history of Cretan Jewry.

June 10 / Maurice Sendak, creator of 'Where the Wild Things Are,' is born

Creator of some of the best-known children's books in English was convinced of becoming an artist after seeing Disney's Fantasia at age 12.



The book cover of "Where the Wild Things Are," by Maurice Sendak. Photo by AP

June 10, 1928, is the birthdate of artist Maurice Sendak, who created some of the most best-known and admired children's books in the English language, in part by defying the conventional wisdom that said children's literature must avoid themes such as aggression and fear.

Maurice Bernard Sendak was born in Brooklyn, New York, and grew up there, the youngest of the three children of Philip Sendak and the former Sadie Schindler. Both his parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland; Philip, a dressmaker and the son of a rabbi, had originally come to America, according to his son, in pursuit of "a girl who had committed herself to every living human male in the village."

As a child, Maurice was frail and sickly, spending much of his time indoors and pursued by guilt and fears. He recalled in adulthood how his father had received news of the destruction of his family and native village in the Holocaust on the day of his bar mitzvah. The son insisted that his father attend his celebration, and he did, but later Sendak told *The Believer* magazine, "I remember ... looking at him when they broke into 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow' ... And my father's face was vivid, livid, and I knew I had done something very bad."

Seeing the Disney film "Fantasia" at age 12 convinced Maurice he wanted to be an artist. While still a student at Lafayette High School in Bath Beach, Brooklyn, he began working for All American Comics, illustrating strips like "Mutt and Jeff." In

1947, he provided the illustrations for a physics textbook, "Atomics for the Millions." Soon after, while Sendak was working as a designer of window displays at F.A.O. Schwarz toy store, a colleague arranged an introduction for him to an editor of children's books at Harper & Row, which led to a number of assignments.

After making a name for himself illustrating books by other writers, including one by his own brother, Jack Sendak, Maurice was encouraged to create a work fully his own. "Kenny's Window" (1956), his first, was followed by such titles as "Chicken Soup and Rice" and "Pierre" (whose eponymous hero knows only how to say "I don't care"), in 1962, and in 1963, Sendak's most acclaimed work, "Where the Wild Things Are." Adapted twice for the screen, and once for the operatic stage, and winner of the 1964 Caldecott Medal, the book tells the story of Max, who, sent to his room for misbehaving, sees that room turn into a jungle before he sails off to an island inhabited by scary but appealing "wild things." Max tames them and becomes their king, but then realizes that home is where he wants to be. He sails back home, only to find his supper waiting for him – "and it was still hot."

Although Sendak was writer and illustrator of a dozen books, he provided illustrations alone for nearly a hundred titles, including the children's book "Zlateh the Goat and Other Stories," by Isaac Bashevis Singer. Late in his career, he also began doing set design for theater and opera. In 2003, he and playwright Tony Kushner produced an adaptation, in both book form and for the stage, of the children's opera "Brundibar," originally written by Hans Krasa and produced in the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Sendak was gay and had a relationship that lasted 50 years with the psychoanalyst and art critic Eugene Glynn, but he only went public with this aspect of his life after Glynn's death in 2007. Though all of his work was intended for children (among others), Sendak never became a father, and told interviewers that he would not have been a good one.

"I refuse to lie to children," Sendak told Emma Brockes of *The Believer*, shortly before his death. "I refuse to cater to the bullshit of innocence."

Maurice Sendak died on May 8, 2012, after a stroke, at age 83. Eight months before his death, he published "Bumble-Ardy," and "My Brother's Book," dedicated to the memory of his brother, Jack, was published posthumously in February 2013.

June 11 / The first Jewish aviator dies in a plane crash

Arthur L. Welsh ran the flight school established by the Wright brothers and set numerous flight records.



Early aviators: Al Welsh (left) with George W. Beatty. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 11, 1912, a Wright Model C airplane flown by test pilot Arthur L. Welsh crashed at the U.S. Army airfield, in College Park, Maryland, killing Welsh and a passenger. Welsh, who was described by The New York Times after his death as “one of the most daring professional aviators in America,” is believed to have been America’s first Jewish airplane pilot.

Laibel Wellcher was born on August 14, 1881, in Kiev, in the Russian Empire. He was one of six children born to Abraham and Dvora Wellcher. The family emigrated to the United States in 1890 and settled in Philadelphia. When Abraham Wellcher died and Dvora married Frank Silverman, the family relocated to the southwest section of Washington, D.C., where Frank worked in a tailor shop and Dvora ran a grocery in the basement of their home.

In 1901, Laibel, who had been a good student and a champion swimmer in high school, joined the U.S. Navy, changing his first name to Arthur – Al for short -- and anglicizing his family name to Welsh. He served for four years on both the U.S.S. Hancock and the U.S.S. Monongohela and received an honorable discharge as a seaman in 1905.

Following his discharge, Welsh worked as a bookkeeper for a Washington gas company. At a meeting of a local Zionist organization, he met Anna Harmel, from a prominent Jewish family in the District. The two were married in 1907, the first couple to wed at the new home of Adas Israel synagogue, at 6th and I streets.

In 1909, after witnessing a flight demonstration put on by the aviation company owned by Orville and Wilbur Wright, Welsh wrote the brothers asking for a job. When they didn't respond, he decided to travel to Dayton, Ohio, where they were based, to make his case. Despite Welsh's lack of flying experience, the Wrights hired him and, in 1910, sent him to join the first class of the flight school they were operating in Montgomery, Alabama.

By the summer of 1910, Welsh was running the new Wright flight school, back in Dayton, and also serving as a test pilot. (His students included Henry "Hap" Arnold, who eventually became a five-star general and the commander of the Army Air Corps during World War II.) He set numerous records for flight altitude and time, and won a \$3,000 prize in a 1911 competition for staying in the air for two hours with a passenger.

In May 1912, Welsh was dispatched to the army aviation school in Maryland to serve as a civilian test pilot for a new aircraft, the Wright Model C, being vetted by the army's Signal Corps. He stayed at his in-laws' home, on H Street SW, and took the streetcar to College Park, where he undertook the regimen of tests mandated by the War Department.

It was on June 11, during the ninth and penultimate test, that the accident occurred. Al Welsh was piloting the plane, accompanied by and he was joined by Leighton Wilson Hazelhurst, Jr., an army aviator. Shortly after they took off and elevated to a height of 200 feet, the plane pitched over and, despite Welsh's efforts to right it, crashed to the earth, killing both men instantly.

An investigation by the secretary of war concluded that pilot error was responsible for the crash, but Welsh's family believed that the aircraft was carrying too much weight, including that of the passenger.

Arthur Welsh's funeral took place on June 13, at Adas Israel. In attendance was Orville Wright, who traveled from Dayton, although he was still in mourning for his brother Wilbur, who had died two weeks earlier of typhoid fever.

June 12 / Empowering the 'have-nots'

Saul Alinsky united a wide spectrum of U.S. ethnic groups to cooperate on issues of mutual significance.



Chicago Union Stock Yards, 1947 Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 12, 1972, Saul Alinsky, the community organizer from Chicago whose influence spread across the United States and down to the present day, died at the age of 63.

When she was a student at Wellesley College, in 1969, Hillary Rodham (later Clinton) wrote her senior thesis on Alinsky's organizing tactics, and in the mid-1980s the community group that hired a 23-year-old Barack Obama to work on Chicago's South Side was operating under the influence of Alinsky. Today, political pundits still argue over the meaning of his work, although it's worth noting that both conservative and left-wing activists in America still turn to his 1971 primer "Rules for Radicals" for tips.

Saul David Alinsky was born in Chicago on January 30, 1909. His parents, Benjamin Alinsky, a tailor, and the former Sarah Tannenbaum, were both recent immigrants from the Russian Empire, who divorced when Saul was 13. It was around then, too, Alinsky told an interviewer decades later, that he began to fear his Orthodox family would pressure him to become a rabbi, and that he "kicked the habit" of Judaism.

Saul remained with his mother in Chicago after his parents' divorce (his father moved to California), and he graduated from John Marshall High School on the city's West Side. He attended college and then began graduate school at the University of Chicago, where he initially studied archaeology before moving to the more practical field of criminology.

Alinsky left before finishing his degree in order to take a job at the Institute for Juvenile Research, then headed by sociologist Clifford Shaw. Shaw was a pioneer in looking to urban society, rather than individual defects, as the major cause of delinquency. Alinsky also worked as a criminologist at Joliet State Prison in 1933-35.

In 1939, he began working in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood, so called because of its proximity to the notorious Union Stock Yards. There, he succeeded in bringing together members of a wide spectrum of ethnic groups to cooperate for the first time on issues of mutual significance. With the help of Catholic archbishop Bernard Shell, he also founded the Industrial Areas Foundation, a community-organizing body that took on projects in a number of urban communities across the U.S.

Alinsky was a pioneer in the field of political empowerment, and devoted the rest of his career to organizing the "have-nots" to challenge the economic and political elites. He was not an ideologue – he never joined a party and was never affiliated with communist or socialist movements – and he seemed more interested in the idea of enfranchising the weak than in pursuing any specific goal. In an interview with Playboy magazine shortly before his death, he explained that "My only fixed truth is a belief in people, a conviction that if people have the opportunity to act freely and the power to control their own destinies, they'll generally reach the right decisions."

By the end of the 1950s Alinsky was working largely with black communities – in Chicago's Woodlawn section (where he helped residents challenge the U of C's expansion plans), in Oakland and in Rochester, N.Y., where the community took on Eastman Kodak over its poor record of hiring blacks.

Alinsky viewed ridicule as "man's most potent weapon" in fighting those with all the power, and he was not above urging residents to undertake a "flatulent blitzkrieg" (preceded, of course, by a meal of baked beans) during a Rochester Philharmonic concert, among other bizarre tactics intended to frustrate and confound the enemy. (The mere threat of the fart-in was enough to get the desired negotiations under way.) There were those who accused him of relying on gimmicks, not to mention poor taste, but Alinsky believed that a group had to employ whatever means were available to it to induce the powers-that-be to make changes.

Saul Alinsky was hit by a massive heart attack while visiting Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA, on this day in 1972. He died on the spot.

June 13 / A writer who celebrated the American dream is born

The Russian-born Mary Antin penned a best-selling memoir of her new life in the United States called 'The Promised Land.'



Mary Antin. Photo by Wikimedia

June 13, 1881, is the birthdate of Mary Antin, the Jewish girl who began writing about the immigrant experience almost as soon as she disembarked from the boat from Russia. Her 1912 memoir “The Promised Land” explained to the citizens of her new home why the “American dream” was drawing so many to their country.

Maryashe Antin was born in Polotsk, in what is today Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire. Her father, Israel Pinchas Antin, emigrated to the United States in 1891, and was joined by his wife, the former Esther Weltman, and their children in Boston, three years later.

Israel had bad luck in running a small store, but he was successful in seeing to it that his children attained a good education. In the case of his second child, Mary, a mere four months after she started school in America, a teacher arranged for an essay of hers, “Snow,” to be published in an education journal. Though she started primary school at an advanced age, she sailed through in a mere four years. She later attended the Girls Latin School (today Boston Latin).

In 1899, Antin had her first book, “From Plotzk [sic] to Boston,” which she had written in Yiddish five years earlier, published in translation, thanks to Philip Cowen, the editor of the weekly magazine, the American Hebrew.

It was on a high school field trip that she met and fell in love with the young geologist Amadeus William Grabau (1870-1946), the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers.

The two married in 1901, and moved to New York, where he began a teaching job at Columbia University, Mary attended Columbia Teachers College and Barnard College between 1901 and 1904. She didn't graduate however, because she became pregnant, giving birth to Josephine Esther Grabau.

In 1911, the Atlantic Monthly published Antin's story "Malinke's Atonement," and a year later, began publishing "The Promised Land," in installments. In it, she held up herself as an example of the opportunities offered by America to immigrants who were willing to adopt the ethos of the young country.

"I thought it [a] miracle," Antin wrote, "that I, Mashke, the granddaughter of Raphael the Russian, born to a humble destiny, should be at home in an American metropolis, be free to fashion my own life, and should dream my dreams in English phrases."

As a book, "The Promised Land" was a best-seller, selling some 85,000 copies. Antin traveled around the country lecturing on her experience, but also became a spokeswoman for Theodor Roosevelt, when he ran for reelection to the presidency on the Progressive ticket, in 1912.

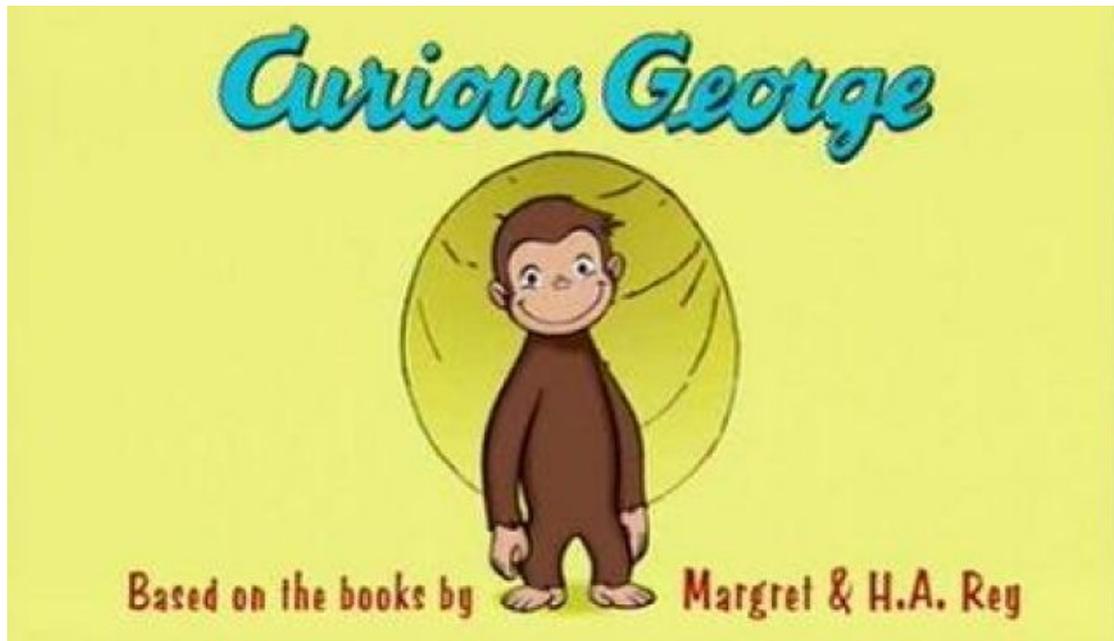
Antin and Grabau split over U.S. participation in World War I. He was a great supporter of Germany, and was forced to leave Columbia University for it; she had become an American patriot. Grabau moved to China, where he died in 1946, after being interned in a Japanese camp during World War II.

Antin wrote less in her last two decades, especially as her health began to fail her. She worked as a hospital social worker, and also became seriously involved in Rudolph Steiner's Theosophical movement.

Mary Antin died of cancer on May 15, 1949, in Suffern, New York, where she lived in her final years with her sisters. She was 67.

June 14 / The Germans take Paris, but Curious George's creators escape

When Hans and Margret Rey fled the Germans, they took with them the first pages of what would become the popular children's series about a mischievous monkey.



Curious George. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 14, 1940, the triumphant German army entered and occupied Paris. It is also the day that, not by coincidence, just a few hours earlier, Hans and Margret Rey left the city on homemade bicycles and headed south into Vichy France. It was a journey that would save the Jewish couple's lives, and also save the career of the fictional monkey Curious George, whom the two created together.

Hans Augusto Reybach (1898-1977) and Margarete Waldstein (1906-1996) were both Hamburg-born Jews who had met briefly during childhood. Later, they met again in Rio de Janeiro, where Hans, an artist and World War I veteran, had sought his fortune in the 1920s and was now using the city as his base for selling bathtubs along the Amazon River. Margarete, who had left Germany shortly after the Nazis' rise to power, was working as a photographer.

They married in 1935 and, together with their two pet marmoset monkeys, sailed to Europe for a honeymoon. The monkeys died during the journey, but the newlyweds so enjoyed Paris that they decided to relocate there from Brazil. Crucially, they both had acquired Brazilian citizenship.

In Paris, the Reys – they had simplified the family name, and she had also shortened her first name to Margret – began writing and illustrating children's books. Their first title was a 1939 book called "Raffy and the Nine Monkeys," for which Hans did the pictures and Margret wrote the story. That led to another work focusing on

just one of the characters from “Raffy,” a young simian named “Fifi,” whose boundless curiosity constantly led him into sticky situations.

The German invasion of France and the Low Countries began on May 10, 1940, and by the time the Nazis marched victoriously through Paris, the Reys, like millions of others, headed out of the city. (The story of their flight was told in 2005 in an illustrated children’s book, “The Journey that Saved Curious George,” by Louise Borden, with pictures by Allan Drummond.)

They left on bicycles that Hans had assembled from spare parts, carrying with them five manuscripts and artwork. Hans kept a succinct diary of their journey: They biked for four days through the countryside until reaching the Spanish border. There, they sold the bikes and used the proceeds to buy train tickets to Lisbon. Because they had Brazilian passports, they were able to acquire visas to leave Europe, and sailed to Rio. On arriving, Hans cabled his bank in Paris: “Have had a very narrow escape. Baggage all lost have not sufficient money in hand.”

What was still in hand was the initial manuscript for what was to become “Curious George,” the first in the series of seven books starring the mischievous monkey. (Actually, most commentators have concluded that the tailless George – renamed when the Reys’ American publisher decided that “Fifi” was no name for a male hero – is a chimpanzee.)

In October, 1940, the Reys headed to New York, and by the following year, Houghton Mifflin had published the first of the George books. In it, the little ape is found in an African jungle by the hunter known only as “The Man with the Yellow Hat.” The Man brings George to a zoo in “the big city.” After the animal escapes several time, the Man decides to take him into his own home.

Each of the seven original books tells the tale of another of George’s adventures – that is, of the trouble that George embroils himself in – whether in the circus, on a bicycle, or in the hospital.

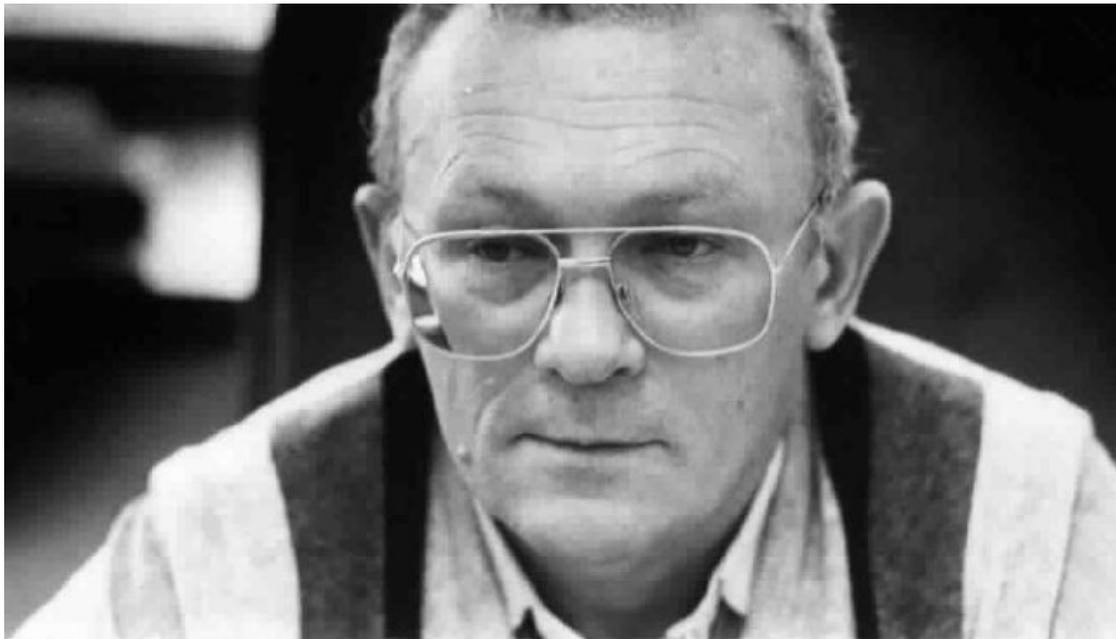
Initially, credit for the books went only to H.A. Rey, even though Margaret shared fully in the books’ creation, but eventually both their names appeared on the cover. Over the years, the books have sold some 30 million copies worldwide. They have been turned into TV series and animated films, and the characters licensed for the creation of additional titles in the book series.

Hans Rey died in 1977, and Margret in 1996. The couple, who lived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, never had children of their own.

June 15 / Refuseniks try to hijack plane in attempt to flee U.S.S.R.

Eduard Kuznetsov spent almost a decade in Soviet jail for his outrageous escape plan, along with pilot Mark Dymshits.

By Ruth Schuster



Eduard Kuznetsov Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On this day, June 15, 1970, a group of nine “refusenik” Jews unsuccessfully tried to escape from Soviet Russia by hijacking an airplane.

It may seem bizarre to today’s youngsters, who think constraints on foreign travel involve mainly budgets and visas, but Russians living under the Soviet regime were not free to leave the country at will. Would-be emigrants denied permission to leave came to be called “refuseniks.”

Among the not-small community of refuseniks were a large number of Jews, some for purely Zionistic reasons and many not least because ingrained anti-Semitism and suspicion as to their loyalties denied them opportunities in the government sector.

In fact, even applying for permission to leave the U.S.S.R. was grounds for suspicion on part of the authorities, and could bear a heavy social and economic cost, not least through loss of work.

One such refusenik was Eduard Kuznetsov, born 1939, who was first arrested in 1961 for dissident activities – including in the form of politicized poetry readings. He did seven years for that offense, which did not deter him from organizing the ill-fated hijacking attempt.

The plot, which involved no less than 16 conspirators, began with buying all the tickets on a 12-seater Antonov plane, which was to make a local flight from Leningrad – a city conveniently located in Russia’s northwest and just a hop, skip and illegal jump to Sweden – to Priozersk, under the guise of a group flight to celebrate a wedding. From Sweden, the plotters intended to fly to Israel.

The plotters thought to discard the pilot during a stop en route and have one of their members, Mark Dymshits, fly the plane to Sweden. However, all were arrested at Smolnoye Airport even before embarking on the plane and accused of high treason, a crime punishable by death.

Though indeed sentenced to capital punishment, following an international outcry Kuznetsov and his coleader, Dymshits, were given 15 years’ hard labor. The others received varying sentences, from four to 14 years.

While their means were arguable, there is no question that the desperate plot shook the Soviet establishment and spurred a wave of international indignation at Russian policies, chiefly the plight of Jews in the U.S.S.R.

Until then, the essential captivity of Russia’s Jews had been of interest chiefly to Jewish groups. From the arrest of the would-be hijackers, the issue went global, triggering protests around the world – including a mass gathering of, reportedly, some 100,000 people at the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

As the international furor seethed, Russia began to allow its Jews to leave. Following perestroika – the economic and social restructuring engineered by Mikhail Gorbachev and his successor Boris Yeltsin – starting in the early 1990s a vast wave of Jews did depart the Soviet states, with roughly a million making Israel their new home.

Among them was Kuznetsov, whose freedom Washington obtained in 1979, exchanging two incarcerated Russian spies for him and four other dissidents. Kuznetsov moved to Israel, where he went onto a career in media, becoming a voluble human-rights activist.

From 1983 to 1990, he served as head of the news desk for Radio Free Europe (also known as Radio Liberty), a U.S.-funded broadcaster that aimed to provide news to Eastern Europe and other areas where freedom of speech was constrained.

In 1999, Kuznetsov cofounded Vesti, a Russian-language newspaper published in Israel. He also wrote a number of novels and now lives in Jerusalem.

Dymshits, born 1927, had flown for the Soviet air Force for no less than 11 years. He too emigrated to Israel after his release, where he has exhibited his naïve paintings of the conditions in the Soviet prison system in Leningrad.

The last of the would-be hijackers to be released from jail was Aleksey Murzhenk, on April 11, 1988.

June 16 / Romania's first postwar chief rabbi elected

Moses Rosen walked a tightrope between the communist regime and the Jewish community - and was instrumental in its massive emigration, mainly to Israel.



Purim at the main synagogue in Bucharest, Romania, February 2013. Photo by AP

On June 16, 1948, Moses Rosen was elected chief rabbi of Romania. Over the next 45 years, he managed the delicate, and controversial, task of maintaining a beneficial relationship with a communist, and often anti-Semitic, regime while cultivating good relations with world leaders as well. It was thanks to Rosen's astute political skills that the lion's share of the country's Jewish population of 450,000 was able to emigrate under communism, most of them to Israel.

Moses Rosen was born on July 9, 1912 in the town of Moinesti, in Romanian Moldavia. He was four when the family moved to Falticeni, some 150 kilometers to the north, after his father, Avraham Arie Leib Rosen (1870-1951), became rabbi of that town.

In the early 1930s, Rosen studied law and also trained for the rabbinate, both in Bucharest and in Vienna. He moved several times, depending on political conditions, and in 1935 and 1939, respectively, he earned his law degree and rabbinical ordination, both in Bucharest.

Early in World War II, Rosen spent some time in a Romanian concentration camp. Although he was soon released, under the rule of German ally Ion Antonescu, he had to go underground in order to avoid deportation to the German death camps. Thus he avoided the fate of some 250,000 other Romanian Jews who died in the Holocaust.

After the August 1944 coup that removed Antonescu and Romania's subsequent realignment with the Allies, Rosen became head, first of the Malbim Synagogue and then of the Great Synagogue, both in Bucharest.

By the end of the war, Romania was occupied by the Red Army. The new communist government appointed a 600-member "Jewish Democratic Committee" to administer the community's affairs. It was this body that, on June 16, 1948, in a nominally secret ballot, elected Rosen chief rabbi to replace Rabbi Alexandre Safran, who had been exiled abroad six months earlier.

For the first years of Rosen's leadership, the committee's mission was to suppress all religious and cultural expressions of Judaism other than secular Yiddish culture. Even during this period, Rabbi Rosen had enough political astuteness to be able to distance himself from the major work of the committee, while retaining his position.

Following the death of Joseph Stalin, in 1953, the committee was abolished and restrictions on Jewish life were relaxed. The new regime in Bucharest wanted to improve relations with the West, and such moves as releasing Zionist activists from jail were seen as a means to this end. In the succeeding years, Rosen was permitted to establish a journal of Jewish affairs, he was elected to the Romanian parliament and he became head of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania.

Under dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who came to power in 1965 and was overthrown in 1989, Rosen played a key role in cultivating good relations with both Israel and the United States. Even after the other Warsaw Pact countries cut ties with Israel after the Six-Day War, Romania maintained them. As a consequence, Romania received most-favored-nation status from the United States – and Romanian Jews were permitted to emigrate, a privilege not afforded the Jews of other Soviet satellites.

Not surprisingly, opinions on Rosen remain mixed, two decades after his death. There's no doubt that he was autocratic and self-aggrandizing (he expected to be addressed as "Your Eminence"), and that he helped cover for some of the more oppressive practices of the Ceausescu government. On the other hand, during his leadership Romania's Jews were allowed to practice their culture, anti-Semitism was discouraged and the American Joint Distribution Committee was allowed access to the state. Most significantly, it was because of Rosen's influence that most of Romania's Jews were able to leave. As he himself commented ironically to *The New York Times* in 1990, "I was able to destroy my community, bringing without much noise or fuss about 400,000 Jews out of Romania and to Israel."

And indeed, by the time of Rabbi Rosen's death, on May 6, 1994, following a stroke, only some 14,000 Jews remained in Romania.

June 17 / Paris is burning...Talmuds

An apostate Jew started the process that led to a bonfire consuming 24 wagons piled with copies of the multi-volume work.



A depiction of a disputation between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 17, 1242, is the day that, at the orders of both the pope and the French king, all known existing copies of the Talmud were burned in Paris.

The process that led to the setting of the bonfire, in which it is said that 24 wagons piled with copies of the multi-volume work of Hebrew law and lore, took place over several years. It began with the accusations of an apostate Jew, Nicholas Donin, of La Rochelle, France. Donin was excommunicated by his Jewish community around the year 1229 for his heretical views. In 1236, he traveled to Rome and presented Pope Gregory IX with a list of complaints about the Talmud.

Among Jews, the Talmud - which is comprised of the Mishna, the 3rd-century C.E. compendium of law, as interpreted by the Rabbis; and the Gemara, the 6th-century work of commentary on the Mishna and other subjects – is also referred to as the Oral Law. And indeed, it is understood to be no less divinely inspired – or binding – than the Torah, the Five Books of Moses.

According to historian Jeremy Cohen, Nicholas Donin's principal concern was that the Talmud had begun to supersede the Bible for the Jews, and that this constituted a theological problem for Christians. For Augustine (died 430), the Jews had the responsibility of upholding the "Old Testament" so as to provide living proof of the truth of the New Testament offered by Jesus. If the Jews now gave precedence to the Oral Law, and allowed themselves to reinterpret the Bible, they were no longer fulfilling their historic role, and were no longer candidates for conversion – and hence no longer justified the protection of the Church.

In 1239, Pope Gregory sent around to other church leaders, and to the kings of Spain, England and Portugal, a list of 35 arguments against the Talmud compiled by Donin. The missive concluded with an order to confiscate the book on the first Sabbath in Lent, in this case March 3, 1240, while the Jews were at prayer. The charges made against the Talmud included the claim that it blasphemed Jesus and Mary, and attacked non-Jews, among other things. Donin himself traveled back to Paris with the pope's letter, which also ordered that "those books in which you find errors of this sort you shall cause to be burned at the stake."

The next stage in the process, at least in France, was a "trial" for the Talmud, ordered by King Louis IX, in what turned out to be the first so-called disputation between Jews and Christians, which was held in Vincennes in May and June of 1240. Again, it was Donin who argued the case against the holy book; speaking on its behalf were four distinguished rabbis, led by Rabbi Yechiel ben Joseph of Paris.

Not surprisingly, the Talmud was found to be blasphemous, and the consequence was its public burning two years later, on this date. One estimate is that the 24 wagonloads included up to 10,000 volumes of Hebrew manuscripts, a startling number when one considers that the printing press did not yet exist, so that all copies of a work had to be written out by hand.

Subsequently, Pope Innocent IV, who became pontiff in 1243, ruled that the Talmud should be corrected, rather than outright banned, making it possible to censor offensive passages while Jews were able to continue studying the work.

Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg, the Maharam, is said to have witnessed the Paris burning, which took place at the Place de Greve. In a lamentation he wrote, he described how "My tears formed a river that reached to the Sinai desert and to the graves of Moshe and Aharon. Is there another Torah to replace the Torah which you have taken from us?"

June 18 / The British army officer with a Zionist heart dies

John Henry Patterson led Jewish soldiers in battle in World War I but is perhaps best known for his adventures with two man-eating lions in Kenya.



The British army officer John Henry Patterson. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 18, 1947, John Henry Patterson, the British army officer who became a Zionist, and served as commander of the Zion Mule Corps and its successor the Jewish Legion, in World War I, died.

Patterson was born in Forgnay, Ballymahon, County Longford, Ireland, on November 19, 1867. His father was a Protestant, and his mother a Roman Catholic. At the age of 17, Patterson enlisted in the British Army, and reached the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Essex Yeomanry before finally retiring, in 1920.

Patterson became something of a legend in his time after he killed two man-eating lions that had been plaguing the crew of a railway bridge whose construction he was overseeing for the British East Africa Company in what is today Kenya. Before Patterson himself ambushed and shot the two felines, they had succeeded in killing 28 members of the team, plus a large number of other local residents of the area where the bridge was being erected over the Tsavo River.

In 1907, Patterson described his exploits in a book, “The Man-Eaters of Tsavo,” one of four memoirs he published, which was adopted several times for the screen, most recently in 1996 as “The Ghost and the Darkness.”

After service in the Boer War (1899-1902), followed by initial retirement from the army, Patterson rejoined the service with the outbreak of World War I. In 1915, he

was assigned command of the newly formed Zion Mule Corps, a 750-man unit composed of residents of the Jewish community in Palestine. He later described his impressions of the training camp of these largely inexperienced young warriors, in Egypt: "Never since the days of Judah Maccabee had such sights and sounds been seen and heard in a military camp - with the drilling of uniformed soldiers in the Hebrew language."

The ZMC served in the disastrous battle at Gallipoli, an early and unsuccessful Allied attempt to conquer Constantinople. The Corps performed admirably and suffered numerous deaths, wounded and sick: One of the wounded was the one-armed Capt. Joseph Trumpeldor, Patterson's second-in-command, who was shot in the shoulder in the battle.

The Zion Mule Corps was disbanded in early 1916, after its members refused to join the British in suppressing the Irish campaign for independence. Patterson, however, who had returned home sick a few months earlier, came back to the Middle East in 1917 to take command of the newly formed 38th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, also known as the Jewish Legion. Although part of the British Army, the legion, like its predecessor, the ZMC, was composed of Jews, from both Palestine and abroad.

The formation of the Jewish Legion was far from a foregone conclusion. The key figure in pushing for its creation was Revisionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky; he was opposed by the top figures in the World Zionist Organization, who feared negative repercussions for Jews living in the countries of the Axis if the Allies should lose the war. In the United Kingdom too, the Jewish community was largely opposed to a corps of Jewish soldiers, but once Jabotinsky and Patterson joined forces to lobby for just such a fighting unit, the growing needs of the army for more men prevailed over politics.

After the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, in November 1917, the number of recruits to the Jewish Legion grew to 5,000. Per the agreement with the authorities, they were sent to Palestine, arriving after Jerusalem fell to Gen. Allenby. The Legion saw action at several points, in Jaljulya, in the Jordan Valley and at Es Salt, in Transjordan. After the armistice, it was reassigned to Rafa, remaining under Patterson's command until his retirement, in January 1920.

Patterson left the army with the same rank he had at the start of World War I, lieutenant-colonel, after 35 years of service. He had been a vocal supporter of his men, who suffered a fair amount of abuse as Jews from fellow British soldiers and officers, and had threatened to resign several times in response to what he considered unfair treatment of the Legion.

Following his retirement, Patterson became an proponent of the Zionist movement, and was especially close to leaders of the Revisionist camp. During the Holocaust, he joined the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, established by Peter Bergson (the nom de guerre of Hillel Kook) in 1943. He also advocated formation of a Jewish army to fight against Germany, a project initiated and run by Jabotinsky before his sudden death in 1940. In fact, the Jewish Brigade did fight with the British Army during World War II, and a number of its volunteers went on to be among the early officers of the Israel Defense Forces.

Patterson and his wife, Frances Helena, moved from England to the United States in 1940, and he died in Bel Air, California on this day in 1947, at the age of 79. Frances died six weeks later. The bodies of both were cremated, and today, the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation is working to have their ashes reinterred in Israel, something that apparently was among Patterson's final wishes.

June 19 / Nobel-winning penicillin researcher is born

Ernst Boris Chain's research helped make penicillin usable by humans. For his efforts, he won the Nobel Prize in 1945.



Dr. Ernest Chain undertakes an experiment at the School of Pathology at Oxford University. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 19, 1906 is the birthdate of Ernst Boris Chain, the biochemist who won the 1945 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine for his research on penicillin. Chain shared the prize with his research partner, Howard Florey, and Alexander Fleming, who in 1928 first identified penicillin and recognized its bacteria-killing quality. Chain and Florey isolated the active ingredient in *Penicillium notatum* mold and were instrumental in determining how to mass-produce it in drug form.

Ernst Boris Chain was born in Berlin, to chemist and industrialist Michael Chain and the former Margarete Eisner, both of them Jews. Michael had immigrated from Russia, and Margarete was German-born. Michael died when Ernst was 13, and subsequently the family's fortune, from Michael's manufacturing plant, was eroded by the country's super-inflation.

Still, Ernst attended university and attained a degree in chemistry in 1930. Three years later, recognizing that the newly elected Nazi government bode ill for Jews, he emigrated to England, arriving in April 1933. Chain's mother and sister stayed behind, and both of them died in concentration camps.

After working initially on phospholipids at Cambridge University, Chain took a position in pathology in 1935 at Oxford, where he worked on a number of different topics. During his research he came across Fleming's original paper on penicillin. Fleming, who worked at St. Mary's Hospital in London, had stopped studying penicillin in 1931 after becoming convinced that its anti-bacterial qualities were not suited to action in the human body and because its production was so impractical.

Florey and Chain's success in determining *Penicillium*'s active ingredient (it was a colleague at Oxford, Dorothy Hodgkin, who mapped its precise chemical structure) made it possible to figure out how to maximize its effectiveness and from there to move on to producing it in medicinal form.

They did their first clinical trials with laboratory rats in 1940, and their success led to a rush to come up with a method to produce the antibiotic in mass quantities, an effort in which the American scientific community was enlisted. The latter was of critical importance in the early 1940s, as World War II was raging (although the United States was still a non-combatant), and infection was no less lethal a cause of battlefield death than gunfire.

At a ceremony last year at the Imperial College of London, where a biochemical research building was named for Chain and a bust of his likeness unveiled publicly, the college's president read from the diary of Oscar Nemon, the bust's sculptor. In the early 1940s, Nemon's wife had become mortally ill with pneumonia, and he was told she could not be saved.

At the same time, a friend of a friend mentioned knowing Ernst Chain, who already was recognized, Nemon noted in his journal, for his role in identifying penicillin, "the wonder of the century." Nonetheless, he went on, "I thought, what could be done? The wonder drug had been discovered but was as yet unusable."

Almost in a frenzy, Nemon took a taxi to Chain's house, and apologizing for the intrusion, told him of his desperate need to find a cure for his wife.

Nemon described Chain's response: "He said: 'Penicillin's my child, and I'm not allowed to see it or touch it. But what I'll do is this – I'll steal it!'"

"He brought the penicillin in its test tube straight from the laboratory. It had never been used on a patient before. My wife was the first case. The treatment was carried out in the greatest secrecy, and it saved her life."

The commercially produced penicillin proved its effectiveness in an improvised trial with survivors of the Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire in Boston, in November 1942. Four hundred and ninety-two people died in that disaster, but penicillin helped many more survive by preventing infection in their skin grafts. Following this success, the U.S. government became involved in the mass-production of the drug, so that it was soon available for use at the front.

Toward the end of World War II, Chain learned that his mother and sister had both been killed by the Nazis. In 1945, just months after the end of the war, he, Florey and Fleming received the Nobel Prize.

A short time later, unhappy with the support he received at Oxford in furthering penicillin research, Chain accepted an offer to lead a new laboratory of microbiological research at the Istituto Superiore di Sanita in Rome. There, in 1958, he and his colleagues isolated the penicillin molecule, which then made it possible to synthesize many new strains of the antibiotic agent. In 1961, he returned to London, now to the Imperial College, where he directed the new biochemistry department.

Chain's late career was dedicated to identifying the defensive mechanisms that cause the body to produce mutated microbes that counteract the positive effects of penicillin. His strong sense of Jewish identity, and growing religious faith, led him to develop a skeptical view of Darwin's theory of evolution, which seemed to deny the role of what is today called "intelligent design." As writer Frank Heynick wrote in his book "Jews and Medicine: An Epic Saga," there was some irony in this, considering that in the lab, Chain was focused on such Darwinian processes as mutations that could create drug-resistant microbial strains.

In any event, Chain married within the faith, to chemist Anne Beloff, and the couple had three children, whom they were intent on giving a Jewish education. Assimilation, Heynick quotes Chain as commenting, "is a loss of orderliness, and therefore a step toward an increase in entropy, i.e., chaos. It is most important to realize this and to understand that we benefit *most* the community among which we are living by *preserving* our identity, and not by losing it through an assimilation process."

Ernst Boris Chain remained active in Jewish organizations and in Israeli institutions of higher education until the end of his life. He died on August 12, 1979, at the age of 73.

June 20 / Cairo bomb blast kills 22 Jews

The explosion was part of a wave of attacks that prompted Jewish emigration from Egypt.



Jewish girls seen in an undated photo during a bat mitzvah ceremony in Alexandria, Egypt. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 20, 1948, a bomb detonated in the Karaite Quarter of Cairo killed 22 Jews and wounded another 41. As part of a series of attacks on the city's Jewish population, the event gave a significant push to an ongoing wave of emigration of Jews from Egypt.

Jews had begun to depart Egypt in 1945, after the so-called Cairo pogrom of November 2 (the anniversary of the issuing of Balfour Declaration), when violent demonstrations by Islamists – including the Muslim Brotherhood -- and nationalists against British policy in Palestine turned their anti-Zionist rage on the city's Jewish population. The Ashkenazi synagogue, in the Muski Quarter, and several other Jewish institutions were burned down, and a number of shops were looted. The next day, rioting spread to Alexandria. A total of six people were killed, with more than 100 wounded.

Egypt's Jews thought they could distance themselves from the Zionist movement. Community leaders, including the chief rabbi and the presidents of both the Cairo and Alexandria Jewish communities, publicly repudiated Zionism, and those who were active in the movement went underground.

In 1947, the government, which until then had at least nominally protested anti-Semitic actions, began to take official measures against Egypt's Jews. Foremost of these were the Company Laws, which set quotas on the percentage of non-citizens, the country's Jews included, that could be employed by incorporated businesses.

After Israel's declaration of statehood, on May 15, 1948, matters deteriorated further. Jews were rounded up for Zionist activity, which was now illegal, martial law was declared, and the assets of many Jewish firms were confiscated. These official measures were accompanied by more attacks by Islamists on Jews and their property.

When the bomb went off on June 20 in the Karaite Quarter, the authorities initially claimed that it had been set off by Rabbanite Jews, who constituted the majority of Egypt's Jewish population. They also blamed it on the accidental detonation of fireworks that had been housed in Jewish homes. But details of the crime were censored in the press, and even the local Jewish newspaper did not fully cover the event.

That terror attack was followed by five more attacks on Jewish sites in Cairo during the summer and fall of 1948: the July 19 bombing of two Jewish-owned department stores, and similar attacks on two additional stores on July 28 and August 1; the September 22 blast in the (Rabbanite) Jewish Quarter, which killed 19 people; the destruction of a large Jewish-owned publishing firm, Societe Orientale de Publicite, on November 12. One source puts the number of Jewish deaths to bombings and other murderous attacks, in July 1948 alone, at 200.

Even had it wanted to, the government was not strong enough to stand up to the Muslim Brotherhood, especially not while war was being fought between Arabs and Israelis to the east. And after Prime Minister al-Nuqrashi did finally dissolve the organization, on December 8, 20 days later, he was assassinated by a member of the Brotherhood.

In 1948, Egypt's Jewish population stood at about 75,000. According to the Jewish Agency, the number of Egyptian Jews who emigrated to Israel between 1948 and 1951 was 16,514. Another 6,000 Jews departed Egypt for other destinations during the same period. By 1957, the number of Jews remaining in the country stood about 15,000.

June 21 / KKK kills three activists during Freedom Summer

Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman were volunteering in the South for the Congress for Racial Equality in 1964 when they were murdered by local Klansmen.



FBI poster seeking information after the disappearance of Goodman, Chaney and Schwerner.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 21, 1964, three young civil-rights workers – 24-year-old Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, 21, and Andrew Goodman, 20 – were murdered in rural Mississippi by Ku Klux Klan members working in coordination with local law-enforcement officials.

The three were in the area investigating the burning of a church in Longdale, Mississippi five days earlier. They were stopped by police, who were already on the lookout for Schwerner, a veteran activist, and arrested. Later that same evening, after being arrested and then released, the three were ambushed by two carloads of Klan members and shot to death.

Their bodies were buried within an earthen dam on a nearby farm and only found 44 days later.

The killings of Schwerner and Goodman, both of them Jewish university students from New York, and Chaney, a black union worker from nearby Meridian, Mississippi, volunteering with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), took place during “Freedom Summer.” That project, run by a coalition of civil-rights organizations, was dedicated to registering African-Americans in Mississippi to vote. Like other states in the South, Mississippi had a number of procedures in place at the

time that made it extremely difficult for blacks to exercise their franchise. In fact, in 1962, only 6.2 percent of blacks in the state were registered to vote.

During Freedom Summer, some 1,000 university students from the North, 90 percent of them white and a large portion of them Jewish, were recruited, along with thousands of black volunteers from the South, to fan out across Mississippi to register voters. They also set up improvised Freedom Schools, to teach literacy skills and civics, among other things, and offered health and legal services to a population that was systematically denied some of the most basic rights of being an American.

The influx of volunteers from outside the region stirred up deep resentments among local white residents. In many cases, law-enforcement officials were themselves members of racist organizations, and they certainly abetted the locals. Eventually it was only with the involvement of federal authorities, and the passage of a slew of new laws under President Lyndon B. Johnson, that the rule of law began to be enforced in Mississippi and other states in the Deep South.

Schwerner, the oldest of the three victims, had grown up in a middle-class Jewish family in Pelham, New York. At the time of his murder, he was a graduate student in social work at Columbia University. Both he and his wife, Rita Schwerner, had been working with CORE since the previous year, and in the summer of 1964, they had been assigned by the organization to set up a community center in Meridian, MS.

Andrew Goodman had grown up on Manhattan's Upper West Side, in an intellectual and politically active Jewish family, and attended the progressive Walden School. At Queens College, he had become interested in both acting and anthropology. He was sent to Mississippi after undergoing activist training in Ohio.

On the day he was killed, Goodman sent his parents a postcard from the town from which, later that night, the sheriff would dispatch him and his colleagues to their deaths. Apparently intending to calm any fears they had about his mission, or maybe just referring to the local activists who received him, he wrote: "Dear Mom and Dad, I have arrived safely in Meridian, Miss. This is a wonderful town ... and our reception was very good. All my love, Andy."

James Earl Chaney had grown up in Meridian, and after finishing high school, he had become an apprentice in a trade union. He also had been active in civil-rights activities since at least 1962, a dangerous avocation for a black man in the South. He worked with CORE on its voter-education drives and also acted as a local coordinator with out-of-state activists.

Within hours of their disappearance that Sunday, colleagues of the three men began making phone calls to local authorities in an effort to locate them. The officials they spoke with claimed to have no knowledge of their whereabouts. By 6 A.M. the following morning, FBI investigators had become involved in trying to determine what had happened to them.

It was only after several members of the Klan turned informant that the fate of the three was known. Their bodies were dug up on August 4, 1964 – Chaney's showed that he had been beaten and tortured before he was shot. At the same time, the bodies

of another eight civil-rights workers, all of them black – and therefore never the object of extensive investigations – were also found, apparently also murder victims.

In part because the search for the men went on so long, the case was in national headlines much of the summer. On July 2, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed by Congress, and two days after the bodies were found, on August 6, the Voting Act of 1965 was approved. The two sets of laws empowered the federal government with enforcing the rights that were theoretically guaranteed all Americans under the Constitution.

Twenty-one different men were eventually arrested and tried in federal court on a variety of charges related to the harassment and intimidation of the victims, but it was not until 2005, more than 40 years after the crime, that someone was tried for murder in a state court. That year, Edgar Ray Killen, the man who planned and led the killing of Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, was tried and convicted – on the 41st anniversary of the crime -- and sentenced to three 20-year prison terms (he was then 80 years old).

June 22 / Filmmaker extraordinaire Billy Wilder is born

The director behind blockbuster hits like 'Some Like It Hot' and 'Sunset Boulevard' was born on this day in 1906 in modern-day Poland.



Oscar winning filmmaker Billy Wilder is shown in this April 30, 1979, file photo in his Beverly Hills office. Photo by AP

On this day in the year 1906, the movie director Billy Wilder was born, for which the world can be eternally grateful following blockbuster hits like "Some Like It Hot," starring the eternal Marilyn Monroe, and "Stalag 17." Less well known is that through his illustrious career, Wilder also spent time working as a journalist and artist.

Samuel "Billy" Wilder was born on June 22, 1906 in Sucha Beskidzka, a town lying in a basin between mountains in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Today it is part of Poland. His parents, Max and Eugenia, owned a cake shop in the town train station. They had thought their son would assume the business upon his adulthood, but he didn't want to and in any case the family moved to Vienna. Meanwhile, his nickname was awarded to him by his mother.

The young Wilder attended the University of Vienna, studying law, but he didn't complete the program. After some months he instead moved to Berlin to pursue a career in journalism, which was his first real brush with the world of media.

Reportedly, while building a career in reporting in Germany, Wilder also worked as a taxi dancer at a hotel. Possibly he took a casual attitude towards employment from his father, who didn't serve as an example of job security.

As for Wilder the younger, he covered crime and sports on a freelance basis for local papers in Berlin, then got a regular writing job at a newspaper.

It was at about the same time that he began writing scripts, on which he did not cavil at collaborating with other newcomers. His first effort was the screenplay for the 1931 film adaptation of the Erich Kastner book, *Emil and the Detectives*.

But Wilder was not fated to stay in Berlin: With the rise of Adolf Hitler and Nazism, he decamped for Paris, where he directed his first movie – which he co-scripted with others - *Mauvaise Graine*, in 1934. The drama, about a rich playboy (played by Pierre Mingland) who falls in with thieves, debuted in Paris after Wilder had already left for Hollywood.

After the rise of Adolf Hitler, Wilder fled to Paris, where he made his directorial debut with the 1934 film *Mauvaise Graine*. He relocated to Hollywood prior to its release. It would be eight years before he directed again.

Meanwhile, his mother, grandmother and stepfather died in the Holocaust. His mother, who had remarried, was murdered in Plaszow, her husband Bernard "Berl" Siedlisker, was killed at Belzec and his grandmother, Balbina Baldinger, died in 1943 in the Nowy Targ.

Despite the tragedy in his life, Wilder devoted himself to side-splitters, and became one of just five people to win Academy Awards as producer, director and writer for the same film: in his case - *The Apartment*. But that would come later. His first Hollywood movie was 1939's *Ninotchka*, a comedy starring the usually-tragic Greta Garbo. The film became quite the smash hit, earning him his first Academy Award nomination.

Wilder ventured far beyond comedy, however, taking up noir with his epic "*Double Indemnity*," as usual co-written – this time with renowned noir novelist Raymond Chandler. He also investigated the horrors of alcoholism in his film "*The Lost Weekend*," and co-wrote and directed the blockbuster movie "*Sunset Boulevard*" in 1950, another film noir that ripped the masks off Hollywood and garnered an astonishing 11 Academy Award nominations – winning three of them.

A great crowd-pleaser to this day is the 1959 movie "*Some Like it Hot*," starring Monroe as (hold on to your hats) a blonde bombshell, with Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon as cross-dressing hoods. Some had been concerned that bloodshed and organized crime aren't inherently thigh-slappers, yet in 1999, the American Film Institute named "*Some Like It Hot*" as the funniest American film ever made.

Wilder's star faded somewhat from the 1960s on, but he kept working. He directed his last movie, the coldly-received "*Buddy, Buddy*," in 1981. All in all, the AFI named no less than four of his movies among its top-100 of all time. Billy Wilder died at age 95 on March 27, 2002 in his adopted hometown of Beverly Hills, leaving behind his wife of 53 years, the singer Audrey Young. She passed on in 2012.

June 23 / Catholic Church 'kidnaps' 6-year-old Jewish Italian boy

After an 'emergency' Baptism, unbeknownst to his parents, Edgardo Mortara was removed from his home and raised by Pope Pious IX. The incident may have contributed to the collapse of the Papal States.



Edgardo Mortara, who lived his life in the Catholic Church, with his Jewish parents. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 23, 1858, marked the beginning of the Edgardo Mortara affair, in which the Catholic Church removed a Jewish child from his home in Bologna, in the Papal States, on the grounds he had been baptized, and proceeded to bring him up as a Christian. Aside from the pure personal drama of the episode, the Mortara affair had important repercussions both in Europe and internationally, and played not a small role in the subsequent unification of Italy and the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy.

In the mid-19th century, the Papal States, where the Church was the sovereign power, still covered a significant portion of the central Italian peninsula. On June 23, police arrived at the home of Salomone and Marianna Padovani Mortara, parents of eight children, and announced they had come for the couple's 6-year-old, Edgardo.

According to a young woman who had been a servant in the house, she had secretly arranged for Edgardo to be baptized into the church at the age of 1, when he was suffering from a serious illness. (Catholic law allows for "emergency" baptism, even by a layperson, if an individual is believed to be in mortal danger.) The Church claimed it was only doing its duty in taking Edgardo, as the law in the Papal States forbade a Catholic child to be raised by non-Christian parents.

The Mortaras told the police they knew nothing of Edgardo's supposed baptism, but the officials said they were acting on orders of the Church. In fact, Edgardo's seizure had been authorized at the highest level possible, by the pope himself, Pius IX. The child was brought to Rome, to the House of Catachumens, an institution dedicated to conversion of the Jews, and in fact, in the years to follow, Pius took a personal interest in his upbringing and education, calling Edgardo his "son."

Historian David Kertzer, who wrote a 1997 book on the affair, suggests that the servant girl's testimony was far from reliable, and that she may have exaggerated the details of Edgardo's illness – in any event, his parents denied that he had been mortally ill as a baby.

The Mortaras made every effort to have their son returned to them, and when Edgardo's story was reported internationally, both foreign governments and Jewish groups began to appeal to the pope to return him to his family.

Both Napoleon III, the French emperor, whose army provided protection for the Catholic Church in Rome, and the pope's secretary of state, Cardinal Giacomo Antonelli, also urged him to release Edgardo, but Pius, a stubborn man who believed in the rightness of his actions, would not relent.

When a delegation of Jewish leaders visited him in 1859 to appeal on behalf of the Mortaras, Pius told them that he "couldn't care less what the world thinks." He did offer, however, to return Edgardo to his parents if they agreed to have the rest of the family convert. They declined.

Although Edgardo had initially begged to be returned to his parents, who were permitted supervised visits with him, he grew to like his new life. He studied for the priesthood, and joined the Franciscan order. At age 23, he took his orders, adopting the spiritual name of "Pius."

On the larger level, the affair gave impetus to an existing move to do away with the Papal States, and to unify Italy under a single civil government. The incident also led to the founding, in 1860, of the Alliance Israelite Universelle in France, a human-rights organization that still exists today as an educational institution.

By 1861, Italy had been united as a kingdom, under the rule of Victor Emanuel II, and all of what had been the Papal States, with the exception of Rome, came under his rule. Church rule over Rome ended nine years later, after Napoleon III withdrew his support of the pope. The Church was left with control of only Vatican City.

As a priest, Edgardo Mortara took on the mission of converting Jews, and he traveled around Europe, and eventually to New York, in pursuit of this goal. He is believed not to have had much success. He also kept in touch with his family, especially after he reached adulthood, and, for example, attended his mother's funeral, in 1895.

Mortara died on March 11, 1940, at the age of 88, at the abbey of Bouhay, in Belgium.

June 24 / Polish lawyer who coined the word 'genocide' is born

Raphael Lemkin almost single-handedly persuaded the newly created United Nations to approve the Genocide Convention.



Raphael Lemkin (back row, far right) among the representatives of four states that ratified the Genocide Convention. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

June 24, 1900, is the birthdate of Raphael Lemkin, the Polish-born Jewish lawyer who coined the word “genocide” and who, in 1951, almost single-handedly persuaded the newly created United Nations to approve the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Raphael Lemkin was born in Bezwodne, Volkovysk, in the Russian Empire (today in Poland), to Joseph Lemkin and the former Bella Pomerantz. Joseph was a farmer and Bella a painter, philosopher and linguist. As a young child, Raphael was home-schooled by his mother, and although he also received a Jewish education, Lemkin was steeped in Polish and Russian culture as well.

Lemkin, a polyglot, studied linguistics, philosophy and law at John Casimir, Heidelberg and Lwow (now Lviv) universities, and received his law degree from the latter at the end of the 1920s. From an early age, he had been fascinated by tales of human cruelty throughout history, and it was the Turkish massacres of Armenians in 1915 that provided much of the impetus for him to enter law school.

From 1929 to 1934, Lemkin served as a public prosecutor, first in Berezhany (in Galicia) and then in Warsaw, and also had his own private legal practice. He also helped to codify the Polish penal codes, as all the while he studied the ability of international law to act against crimes against ethnic and cultural collectives. In this regard, Lemkin came up with two new concepts: “barbarity,” which is the term he

used for the destruction of groups, and “vandalism,” which is the word he proposed to refer to the destruction of cultural heritage.

Lemkin participated, and was wounded, in the Polish army’s defense of Warsaw against the German invasion in 1939. Then, having an ominous sense of the Nazis’ murderous intentions, he fled the country, first to Sweden and eventually to the United States, following a lengthy journey via Vladivostok and Japan. Lemkin’s parents, however, together with 47 other relations, perished in the Holocaust.

With the help of Malcolm McDermott, a law professor at Duke University in North Carolina, Lemkin took up a position there in 1941, while traveling around the United States lecturing about the crimes being committed by Germany. He had acquired copies of the laws introduced in the lands occupied by the Germans, material that served as the basis for his groundbreaking 1944 book, “Axis Rule in Occupied Europe.” It was there that Lemkin first used the term “genocide,” a neologism based on the Greek for “race” or “tribe,” and the Latin suffix for “killing.” He defined it as “the destruction of a nation or an ethnic group.”

For the rest of his life, Lemkin was obsessed with introducing into international law the prohibition of genocide, which Winston Churchill referred to in 1941 as “the crime without a name.” He assisted the American prosecution in the 1946 Nazi war crimes trials in Nuremberg, succeeding in having the crime of genocide entered into the indictments, and devoted his final years to the goal of having the UN draft an anti-genocide convention.

Lemkin, who never married, basically had no life outside his lobbying work at the United Nations, where he effectively took up residence. The convention that was adopted in 1948, and ratified three years later, did address the problem of genocide, but only in its physical sense, whereas Lemkin also pointed to the psychological and cultural aspects of the crime. Lemkin spoke out, for example, about what he saw as the Soviet pursuit of genocide against Ukrainians in the 1930s, as manifested in the destruction of what he described as that nation’s culture, beliefs and “common ideas.”

Raphael Lemkin suffered a fatal heart attack on August 28, 1959. At his death, he left behind fragments of an autobiography, which were located, edited and published as a book last year by scholar Donna-Lee Frieze.

June 25 / Annie 'Londonderry' begins her bicycle journey around the world

Annie Cohen Kopchovsky set off from Boston in a bid to win \$5,000 if she made it around the world on a bike.



Annie Cohen Kopchovsky journeyed around the world on two wheels. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 24, 1894, Annie Cohen Kopchovsky set off from Boston, Massachusetts, in an attempt to circumnavigate the world on a bicycle. The mother of three, still in her mid-20s, had been selected by “two clubmen of Boston” (as a local paper put it), who had made a wager over whether a woman was capable of accomplishing such a feat. To date, the journey had been accomplished by one man, Thomas Stevens, in 32 months. Kopchovsky’s challenge was to finish in 15 months.

Annie Cohen had been born in about 1870 in Riga, in what is today Latvia, and immigrated to the United States while still a child. She married Max Kopchovsky in 1888, and when she set off on her 42-pound Columbia bicycle, she was leaving behind – temporarily – three children under the age of 6. If she succeeded, she would be rewarded with \$5,000.

For a fee of \$100, Kopchovsky also accepted the sponsorship of the Londonderry Lithia Spring Water Company, of New Hampshire. She was required to place a placard advertising the product on her bicycle and for taking on “Londonderry” as her last name for the duration.

Although Kopchovsky’s contract with her sponsors placed a number of restrictions on her, the conditions of the wager did not specify how much of the trip had to be spent astride her bike, riding. If one examines a map of her journey, it becomes clear that much of her journey was spent at sea, accompanying, but not peddling, her bike.

Nonetheless, even as a passenger, it was highly unusual for a woman to travel unaccompanied in places such as Egypt and Yemen, Sri Lanka and Saigon, Singapore and Yokohama. For her return trip from San Francisco to Boston, from March 23, 1895, to September 24 of the same year, she apparently did ride, with many legs of the itinerary being documented in American newspapers of the time.

It turned out that Annie “Londonderry,” as she became widely known during her escapade, was extremely savvy at self-promotion, and had a strong sense of what audiences wanted to hear: In fact, the accounts of her adventures she reported to journalists often bore only coincidental resemblance to the truth. Thus, she wrote in the *New York World* after her return, she had been imprisoned by the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War, and witnessed, as she as a “Japanese soldier dragged a Chinese prisoner up to my cell and killed him before my eyes, drinking his blood while the muscles were still quivering.” She suffered a gunshot wound in China, and when a wheel was punctured outside Yuma, Arizona, she slung her bike over her shoulder and, turning down offers to board a train, began walking – only to be refused a simple glass of water after she entered Yuma on foot and knocked on the door of the first house she saw.

At least that’s what she said.

Kopchovsky’s trip overlapped not only with an explosion of interest in bicycling among Americans, but also reflected a special connection between this interest and the women’s movement of the turn-of-the century. For women, the bicycle offered freedom and independence, and also presaged a change in the fashion of their clothes. When Kopchovsky first headed west out of Boston, she was dressed in a long skirt. Several months later, after having toyed with giving up the journey altogether, she changed direction and peddled back to New York, now riding a Sterling roadster that was half the weight of the Columbia, and attired in bloomers, an article of clothing that some felt was a harbinger of civilization’s demise. She then boarded a steamer headed for Le Havre, France, and her trip was truly under way.

As the Omaha [Nebraska] *World Herald* reported, toward the end of Kopchovsky’s odyssey, “Miss Londonderry expressed the opinion that the advent of the bicycle will create a reform in female dress that will be beneficial. She believes that in the near future all women, whether of high or low degree, will bestride the wheel, except possibly the narrow-minded, long-skirted, lean and lank element.”

After her triumphant return, Annie Kopchovsky moved with her family to New York, where, over several months, she wrote up her adventures for the *New York World*, in a column called “The New Woman.” Thereafter, she departed from the public eye, and when she died, in 1947, few people had heard of her. It was only when a great-grandnephew, journalist Peter Zeutlin, decided to devote himself to excavating her story that the surprising tale of Annie Londonderry came back to life. Zeutlin tracked down a cousin who was a granddaughter of Kopchovsky and her only living descendant, and learned whatever he could about their common relation. He reported his findings in a 2007 book, “Around the World on Two Wheels: Annie Londonderry’s Extraordinary Ride.”

Earlier this year, a documentary film about Kopchovsky, “The New Woman: Annie ‘Londonderry’ Kopchovsky,” directed by Gillian K. Willman, had its premiere.

June 26 / Polish ghetto stages last-ditch revolt

Jewish fighters barricaded themselves in bunkers in Czestochowa, forcing the Germans to pursue them into the ghetto.



Shelled Warsaw Square (now Ghetto Heroes Square, circa 1944) after the Czestochowa Ghetto uprising. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 26, 1943, as the final liquidation of the ghetto in the Polish city of Czestochowa got under way, the Organization of Jewish Fighters began a last-ditch but all-out demonstration of military resistance. The revolt ended with the killing or arrest of all the rebels, but not with the razing of the ghetto, which had several factories, for which additional Jews were brought in as laborers from another Polish town.

On the eve of World War II, the population of Czestochowa, in the south-center of the country was approximately 138,000, making it Poland's eighth largest city. Some 45,000 of them were Jews, who began to populate the town in about 1700. Jews were represented in every economic stratum of Czestochowa, as industrialists, craftsmen, merchants and also the poor. It was also a center of learning, and the community was well-organized with self-help organizations.

German forces occupied Czestochowa on September 3, 1939, two days after the start of the invasion. The following day, the occupying forces carried out a massacre, killing about 1,000 people, the majority of them non-Jewish civilians. They also destroyed the city's Old Synagogue.

On April 9, 1941, a ghetto was established in Czestochowa, into which were crammed some 48,000 Jews at its peak, from there and surrounding towns. Many were forced to work as slave laborers in a military foundry within the ghetto, or in other workshops.

Deportations from the ghetto to Treblinka began on September 22, 1942, and went on for more than two weeks. At the end of this first wave of expulsions, only 5,000-6,000 Jews remained, and they were forced to move into what was called the Small Ghetto. Most of them were young, chosen so that they could work in the Hugo Schneider munitions factory. It was among this group that the Jewish Fighters Organization came into existence, led by Mordejai Zilberberg.

The first act of resistance took place on January 4, 1943, following a “selection” and killing of some 25 Jews. It was followed by other acts of insurrection, each of which elicited a German response in which some dozens or even hundreds of Jews were shot. Small-scale deportations took place through this period as well.

The final Czestochowa Uprising began on June 26 (by some accounts, June 25), after what was meant to be the final liquidation was initiated. The Jewish fighters barricaded themselves in bunkers on Nardzeczna Street, forcing the Germans to pursue them into the ghetto. The fighting and subsequent massacres led to the killing of some 1,500 Jews. Another 500 were burned to death within the Small Ghetto.

By June 30, the uprising had been quashed. Some 3,900 Jews who had escaped were rounded up by the occupiers, and sent to a variety of concentration or labor camps.

In the latter part of 1944, however, the Czestochowa Ghetto received some 10,000 new Jewish residents, brought there either from the liquidated Lodz Ghetto or from camps that had been shut down. These people were also put to work in the ghetto industries. About 3,000 of those who survived until January 1945 were deported to camps back in Germany, where they died or were murdered. Another 5,200, however, lived to be liberated from the ghetto, in addition to 3,000 earlier deportees who survived the Nazi concentration or death camps.

Of the Jews who returned to Czestochowa, which is the city depicted by Art Spiegelman in his comics work “Maus” as the home of his father, all left after a post-war pogrom in nearby Kielce, which took place July 4, 1946.

June 27 / N.Y. Jews riot over rumor of school pogrom

Vaccines and tonsil surgery for students in the N.Y. school system somehow caused a violent uprising among confused immigrant parents.



Norfolk and Hester Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side, circa 1898. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 27, 1906, thousands of immigrant parents of students in Lower East Side Manhattan schools rioted after the rumor spread that school authorities were slitting children's throats.

As outlandish as the story sounds, it was documented by contemporary newspapers and retold several years ago in a story by historian Eddy Portnoy in *Tablet* magazine. And it has a certain logic to it.

Around the turn of the 20th century, New York City schools were contending with an influx of tens of thousands of immigrant children. They came from very different cultural backgrounds, and their parents often did not understand English. At the same time, principles of public health were being adopted by society, and the public schools were seen as a vehicle for providing the youngest new Americans with minimal medical supervision and preventive services, including vaccinations.

In late June, in preparation for the summer school vacation, New York schools were providing children otherwise lacking in preventive care with mandatory inoculations. Additionally, according to the account of the riots published the following day in the *New York Tribune*, "Miss A.E. Simpson, principal of Public School 100 ... found that many of the children were suffering from adenoids," enlargements of tissue that can block the rear of the throat and can be removed by minor surgery. Simpson, reported the paper, sent a note to parents of children with adenoids, saying that if they

could not arrange for the surgery themselves, doctors from the board of health would take care of it.

Apparently, not all parents received the school announcement, or understood its content. Portnoy explains that, when their children arrived home with blood in their mouths after undergoing the procedure and were asked what had happened, they said that doctors had taken razors to their throats.

Less than two weeks earlier, a pogrom in Bialystok, in the Russian Empire, had led to the murder of more than 80 Jews. Now, parents believed they had evidence that the violence they had intended to escape by fleeing from Europe had pursued them across the ocean.

In the words of the Tribune: “Excitable, ignorant Jews, fearing Russian massacres here, knowing nothing of American sanitary ideas and the supervision exercised over school children by the Health Board, outdid all previous resistance to vaccination. They stoned the schoolhouses, smashing windows and door panes, and, except for the timely intervention of the police reserves from several precincts, would without doubt have done serious injury to the frightened women teachers.”

The New York Times also reported on the riots “among the Hebrew population on the East Side,” adding the tidbit that “cheap practitioners,” apparently from the neighborhood, “started the tale of a contemplated massacre” out of irritation that uptown physicians were being brought in to do the procedures, thus denying them the income.

The riots were quelled before the men of the community had time to join in, and without any significant injuries. Teachers sent their pupils home early, which provided the best proof that children were not being slaughtered. “The screaming, fighting mothers caught their own progeny and hurried home,” according to the Tribune, “helped along by indignant police reserves whose sleep had been spoiled. Commencement exercises in many schools were postponed. No fatalities were reported, but the East Side lost all interest in the discussion of kosher ‘wurst’ to gossip over this ‘near massacre.’”

June 28 / An archaeologist who brought Israel's history to life, dies

Yigael Yadin helped acquire the Dead Sea Scrolls, identified the historical significance of Masada, and made Israelis feel connected to their ancient history.



The Israeli delegation to the 1949 Armistice Agreements talks. Left to right: Commanders Yehoshafat Harkabi, Aryeh Simon, Yigael Yadin, and Yitzhak Rabin. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 28, 1984, Yigael Yadin – Israeli archaeologist, soldier and politician – died at age 67. Although Yadin’s career was studded with many accomplishments, he is probably best remembered for his role in acquiring and interpreting the Dead Sea Scrolls, and for his excavation of Herod’s mountain palace at Masada. Yadin had an ability to present archaeological subjects in a way that resounded with meaning and continuity for the people of the young state, who were eager to connect emotionally with Jewish history in the Land of Israel.

Yigael Sukenik was born March 21, 1917 in Jerusalem, then part of the Ottoman Empire. His mother, the former Hasya Feinsod, was an early-childhood educator and women’s rights pioneer; his father, Eliezer Sukenik, was a teacher who became a professor of archaeology. Both had been born in Bialystok, in what is today Poland.

At the age of 16, Yigael was recruited into the Haganah pre-state militia, where his code name was “Yadin,” which he later adopted as his surname. His early training in archaeology, at the Hebrew University, was intertwined with his ongoing service in the Haganah, where he became chief of operations shortly before independence was declared. After statehood, when the various militias were united into the Israel Defense Forces, he became the new army’s second chief of staff. That was in 1949, when he was only 32. Yadin also represented Israel at armistice talks with Egypt.

Yadin was instrumental in envisioning the IDF as an army largely comprised of a reserve force that could be quickly mobilized in emergency situations, an idea inspired by his observation of the Swiss army. He also was responsible for the army being involved in many different realms of life, including education and immigrant absorption. He resigned as army chief in 1952, after coming into conflict (not for the first time) with prime minister and defense minister David Ben-Gurion.

After leaving the military, Yadin devoted himself to archaeological research, beginning with translating and interpreting a first group of Dead Sea Scrolls that his father had purchased in Bethlehem in 1947. It was Yadin's translation of what Sukenik called "The War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness" that served as his 1955 doctoral dissertation from the Hebrew University.

The Scrolls, which consist of 972 documents or parchment fragments excavated at the Qumran caves along the Dead Sea, date to the period between the late fifth century B.C.E. and early fourth century C.E. Some are transcriptions of known biblical texts, others are previously unknown, and sometimes quite esoteric religious texts that offer insight into an ascetic sect – thought by many scholars to be the Essenes – that existed at the end of the Second Temple period, and also into the precursors to Christianity.

In 1954, Yadin also arranged for the purchase for Israel, through an intermediary, of four additional scrolls, completing the acquisition of the seven major complete scrolls whose collection had been initiated by his father.

Yadin subsequently led excavations in other Dead Sea caves, leading to the discovery of the Bar-Kokhba letters; at the vast Canaanite site at Hatzor, at Megiddo, and, in 1963-65, at Masada, at the southern end of the Dead Sea. Along with his scholarly publications, he wrote popular books about each of his major excavations. In each case, Yadin had a knack for establishing a connection between his finds and the traditional accounts of ancient Jewish history, thus capturing the public's imagination.

In 1963, speaking to soldiers from the Armored Corps who had their swearing-in ceremony at the Masada excavation, Yadin said: "When Napoleon stood among his troops next to the pyramids of Egypt, he declared, 'Four thousand years of history look down upon you.' But what would he not have given to be able to say to his men: 'four thousand years of *your own* history look down upon you.' The echo of your oath this night will resound throughout the encampments of our foes."

It was Yadin who concluded that the bones (and pottery shards, which served as lots for choosing the order in which people would die) found at Masada belonged to the Jewish Zealots who, according to the historian Josephus, committed suicide at the site in 73 C.E., rather than surrender to the Roman army. His presentation of the tale succeeded, at least in the early decades of the state, in presenting the Zealots in a heroic light, despite the religiously and ethically troubling nature of their end.

The final chapter in Yadin's public life was a late entry into politics, following the death of his wife, Carmella, in 1976. Having served on the Agranat Commission, which examined the intelligence failure that preceded the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, in 1973, Yadin had faced up close the disillusionment that Israelis felt about

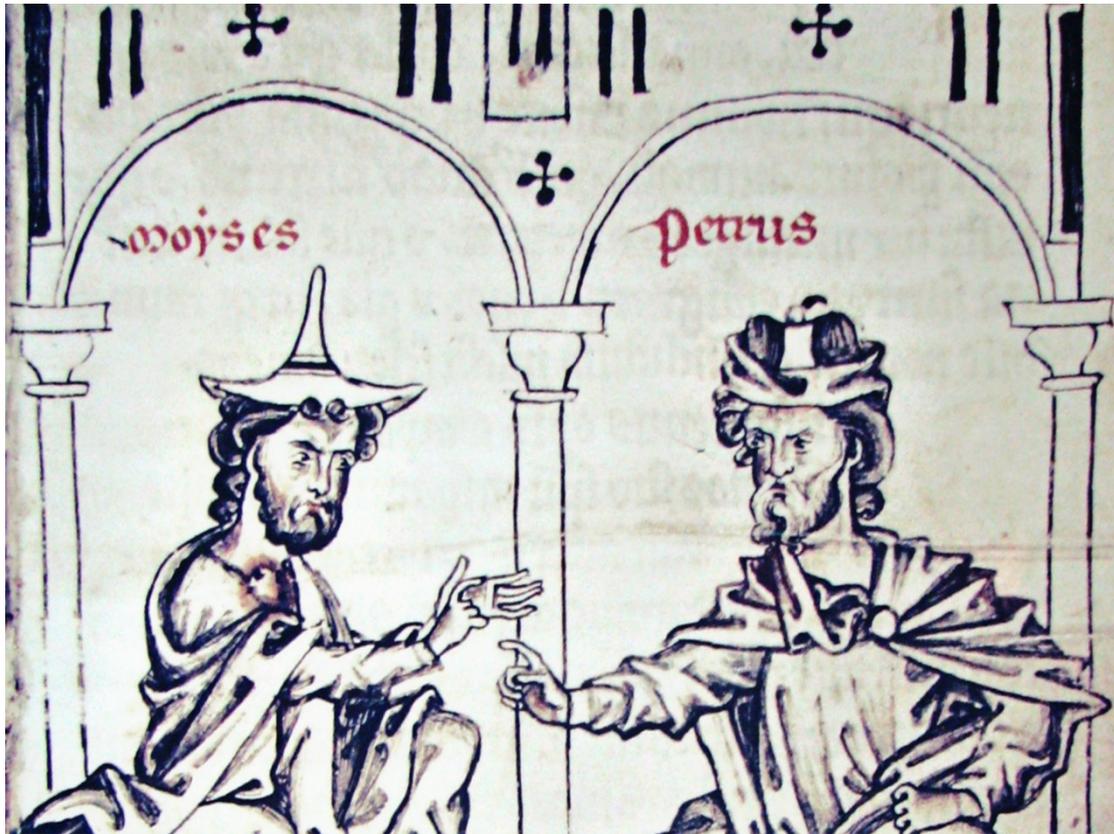
their political leaders. He decided to form a new political party, the Democratic Movement for Change, or “Dash,” as it was called by its Hebrew acronym.

Several months after Dash won 15 seats (out of 120) in the 1977 Knesset elections, Yadin took the party into the coalition government of Menachem Begin, in which he himself became deputy prime minister. He played a role in the negotiations with Egypt that led to a peace treaty with that country, but feeling that Begin denied him any real influence in the cabinet, and seeing his party splintering, a disillusioned Yadin resigned from the government, and from political life, in 1981. This last, political stage in his career is seen as his least successful.

Yadin resumed his archaeological work, publishing his analysis of the so-called Temple Scroll in 1983. He died suddenly, of a heart attack, on this day in 1984.

June 29 / An anti-Jewish Jewish-born polemicist is baptized

According to scholar John Tolan, it was Petrus Alfonsi, author of "Dialogues Against the Jews," who first proposed the idea that the Jews killed Jesus.



A 13th century Belgian Manuscript illustrating the dialogue between the jew "Moyses" and the Christian "Petrus". Photo via Wikipedia

June 29, 1106, is the day that the medieval scientist and anti-Jewish polemicist Petrus Alfonsi, who was himself born as a Jew, underwent baptism. He then proceeded to write one of the era's most influential anti-Jewish works, one that helped set the stage for forced conversions of the Jews.

Petrus Alfonsi was born as Moses Sefardi, in Muslim Spain, probably in 1062. Almost nothing is known of his life before his conversion. As he describes in the prologue to "Dialogos contra Iudaeos" (Dialogues against the Jews), his baptism took place on the feast day of Saints Peter and Paul, in Huesca, the city in northeastern Spain that had been recaptured from the Muslims in 1096. Sefardi's baptismal sponsor was none other than King Alfonso I, and it was in honor of both the Apostle Peter and of King Alfonso that the new convert changed his name to Petrus Alfonsi.

Alfonsi traveled north to England sometime between 1110 and 1116, where he taught astronomy and published a series of astronomical charts, based on the knowledge he

brought with him from Arab Spain. There is also evidence to suggest that he served as physician to England's King Henry II. Following England, Petrus spent time in France, and in general is thought to have played an important role in spreading the scientific learning of Muslim Andalusia in northern Europe.

Alfonsi wrote the "Dialogos" around 1110, mainly as a rejoinder to those Jews who looked down on him for his decision to convert. His familiarity with Jewish, Muslim and Christian thought gave his work an authoritative quality. As its title suggests, the book is organized as a series of 12 dialogues between two figures, Moses and Petrus, who apparently represent the pre-baptism Sefardi and his post-conversion self.

The conventional approach to Judaism at the time, as envisioned by Augustine, was that the Jews were mistaken in their reading of the Hebrew Bible, that they would be playing a key role in the return of the Messiah, and that eventually they too would become Christians. Petrus sees things differently. In his telling, it is the rabbis of the Jews who have deliberately led them astray. They are not misreading scripture; rather, they have abandoned it for the Talmud, which Petrus called a "fabric of lies" and "heretical."

According to scholar John Tolan, it was Petrus who first proposed the idea that the Jews killed Jesus, out of what Petrus described as "hatred and envy."

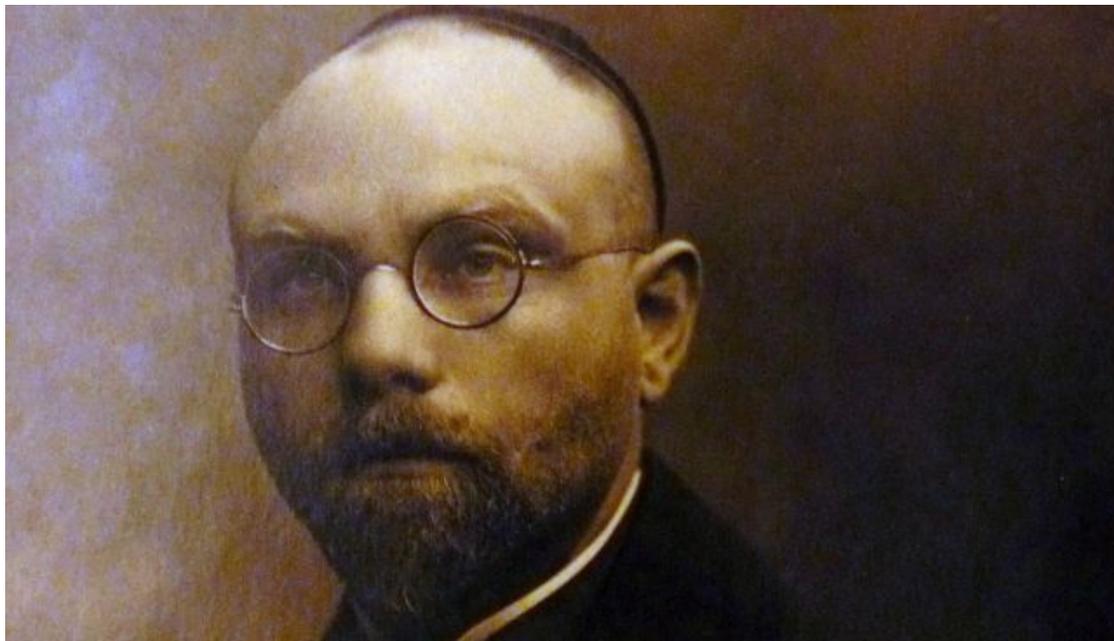
By placing the blame on the rabbis, rather than the Jewish people as a whole, Petrus was holding out the possibility that the Jews would still see the light. In practice, however, this set the stage for their violent persecution and forced conversion.

At the end of the "Dialogos," which also devoted one of its 12 chapters to an analysis of the falsity of Islam, Moses the Jew accepts the arguments of Petrus and decides that he will convert.

The work went on to be, at least through the 16th century, an important source of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim arguments. Neither the date nor place of death of Petrus are known.

June 30 / Zionism's first political assassination

When Dutch poet and journalist Jacob Israel de Haan became too vocal with his anti-Zionist writing in Mandatory Palestine, the Haganah silenced him.



Dutch journalist Jacob Israel de Haan Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On June 30, 1924, poet, legal scholar and journalist Jacob Israel de Haan was gunned down in Jerusalem, a murder apparently carried out by the Haganah, the pre-state Zionist militia, to stop de Haan's anti-Zionist activities. The story of Jacob de Haan's life – and death – is one of the more surprising, if not bizarre tales of pre-state Jewish life in Palestine.

Jacob de Haan was born on December 31, 1881, in Smilde, in the northern Netherlands. His family was traditional – his father was a ritual slaughterer and cantor – and he was said to be one of 18 children.

De Haan studied law and worked as a teacher in Amsterdam when in 1904 he published his first book, "Lines from De Pijp," a thinly disguised autobiographical novel about a supposed relationship with the scholar Arnold Aletrino, to whom he also dedicated the work. De Haan was dismissed from his teaching position and from a newspaper column he wrote for children. Meanwhile his fiancée and Aletrino (a criminal anthropologist and married man who had publicly defended homosexuality) bought up all of the book's first printing, to prevent its distribution. The author then reworked the book without the elements that alluded to Aletrino.

In 1907, de Haan married the same fiancée, Johanna van Maarseveen, a non-Jew, and a year later, published another novel, this one about a sadomasochistic relationship between a man and a young boy. In 1916, he received a doctorate in law, but was disappointed to be passed over when a job in the law faculty at the University of Amsterdam opened up

In the following years, de Haan wrote a number of books of poetry, on both Jewish and sexual themes. He visited czarist Russia to study the conditions of prisoners there on a series of trips that resulted in a book exposing those conditions, a cause in which he was also active politically, and he began to adopt both a Zionist outlook and an observant Jewish lifestyle.

In 1919, de Haan decided to emigrate from Amsterdam to Jerusalem. In a letter to British Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, he wrote, with typical self-assurance, that, "I am not leaving Holland to improve my condition. Neither materially, nor intellectually, will life in Palestine be equal to my life here. I am one of the best poets of my generation, and the only important Jewish national poet Holland has ever had. It is difficult to give up all this ..."

Initially, de Haan was involved with Zionist circles in his new home. He helped establish the Jerusalem Law Classes in 1919, where he lectured, worked as a correspondent for a Dutch newspaper, and continued writing poetry. Soon, he met and found a kindred spirit in Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the founder of the ultra-Orthodox, anti-Zionist Edah Haredit community, and became his political spokesman. He also is said to have taken an interest in the young boys of Jerusalem, both Jewish and Arab.

Within a short time, de Haan became critical of the secular nature of the Zionist movement and of its relationship with the Orthodox community. He also became convinced that it was on a collision course with the indigenous Arab population of the land.

In 1922, the same year that Jacob de Haan defended Agudath Israel, the Haredi political movement, in a legal trial over its refusal to pay a new excise tax levied by Zionist authorities on matzot before Passover, he also met with Lord Northcliffe, founder of the Daily Mail newspaper in London, when the latter visited the region. He shared his anti-Zionist views with Northcliffe and those views were reported back in the United Kingdom. Soon, de Haan was offered work as a correspondent for the tabloid Daily Express. De Haan also met with Hashemite leader Hussein bin Ali, the King of Hejaz, to discuss the establishment of a Palestinian state.

By now, de Haan had become a liability to the Zionist movement, and especially dangerous because of the platform he now had for spreading his views in London, where critical decisions about Palestine were made. In Jerusalem, he became persona non grata among Zionists, including his law students. One anecdote has him walking with a Dutch visitor, who observed that as people passed them into the street, they were spitting on the sidewalk. The visitor thought this was a sign of disrespect, to which de Haan responded, according to Dutch historian Ludy Giebels: "'Oh no, they spit on the street out of respect for you, your presence. Otherwise they would have spit in my face.'

Early on the morning of June 30, 1924, as he left the synagogue in Shaare Zedek hospital, on Jaffa Road, de Haan was shot three times. He died immediately.

The British authorities offered a reward for information that would lead to his killer, but no one was ever tried for the crime. The killing was thought to have been ordered

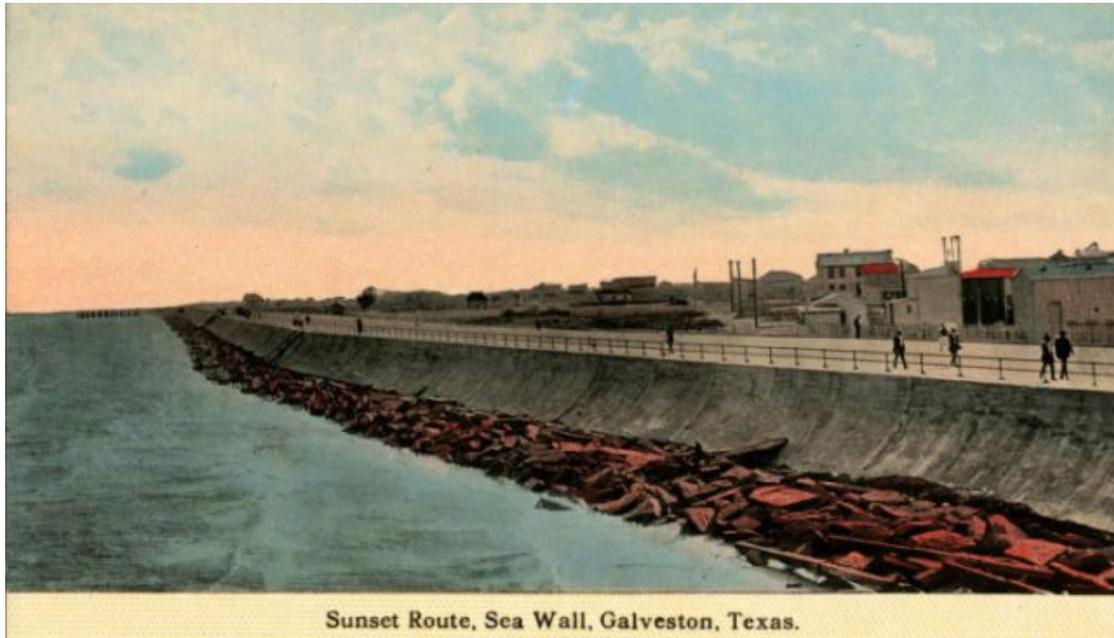
by the Haganah, but it was only in the 1980s that two Israeli journalists, Shlomo Nakdimon and Shaul Mayzlish, received an admission of guilt from Israeli businessman Avraham Tehomi, who was then living in Hong Kong.

Tehomi told the journalists that he had been acting on orders of the Haganah, specifically of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, an officer in the militia and a political activist, later the second president of the State of Israel: "I have done what the Haganah decided had to be done. And nothing was done without the order of [Yitzhak Ben-Zvi](#) ... I have no regrets because he [de Haan] wanted to destroy our whole idea of Zionism."

De Haan's murder is seen as the first political assassination in the Zionist community. Among Haredim (who generally overlook his sexual proclivities), he is still seen as a martyr. In the Netherlands, his poetry is still in print, and a line from one of his poems is engraved on the triangular Homomonument in Amsterdam.

July 1 / First group of Jewish immigrants docks in Texas

The concept behind the Galveston Plan was to ferry Eastern European Jews fleeing pogroms to someplace other than New York.



A postcard of Galveston, Texas, circa 1907. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 1, 1907, the S.S. Cassel, a German steamship, docked in Galveston, Texas, bringing the first group of Jewish immigrants to the United States as part of the so-called Galveston Plan. The concept behind the plan, which functioned until 1914, was to ferry Eastern European Jews fleeing the pogroms of czarist Russia to someplace other than New York, from which they could branch out to make new homes for themselves in towns and cities in the American West. The people responsible for the plan were prominent German Jews in New York, who said they feared a rise in anti-Semitism if Russian Jews continued pouring into the East Coast.

The idea of the “removal” of Jewish immigrants -- as the practice was called by immigration professionals at the time -- to different parts of the young country had been around for a while. However, the proposal to accomplish this by direct transport to a distant port was the brainchild of Jacob Schiff, a German-born New York financier who was the unofficial leader of American-Jewish philanthropy. Schiff offered to put up \$500,000 of his own money for the plan, which he described to Israel Zangwill, a hopeful ally, in the following manner: “to make propaganda to Russia itself for a change of this flow of emigration to the United States, from the Atlantic ports to New Orleans and other Gulf [of Mexico] ports, to arrange with steamship lines to furnish the necessary facilities and to do all the manifold work which is necessary to promoted a large immigration into the indicated channels.”

The Jewish Immigration Information Bureau, the organization established to oversee the program, considered both Charleston, South Carolina, and New Orleans,

Louisiana, as potential points of disembarkation before settling on Galveston, on the Texas coast southeast of Houston. Charleston wasn't interested and New Orleans was malaria-ridden. Galveston, however, was open to the idea. One of its draws was that it was small, and immigrants were unlikely to want to remain there. Being further west, it was also better placed to funnel new Americans to the developing frontier. And it was already serviced by the Norddeutscher Lloyd shipping line, which sailed from Bremen, Germany, a major port of departure for the Jews pouring out of Europe in those years.

A point of contention among those who initiated the Galveston scheme was whether to allow observant Jews to participate. Schiff, among others, thought it would be unrealistic for Sabbath-observant Jews to try and make a go of it in small frontier towns if they were unwilling to work on Saturday. In the end, the written guidelines distributed by the JIIB included the warning that, "It is but proper that intending immigrants should understand that economic conditions everywhere in the United States are such that strict Sabbath observance is exceedingly difficult and in some cases even impossible."

Two days before the first group of 87 Jews arrived in Galveston, the converted warehouse that was to receive the trans-Atlantic passengers burned down, just before its insurance policy took effect. Alternate facilities were quickly improvised.

The Cassel, which had departed Bremen on June 6, steamed into Galveston port on 7:30 on the morning of July 1. By prior arrangement, its Jewish immigrant passengers were permitted to disembark first. After interrogation by immigration inspectors, they were put on wagons and taken to the new reception facility, where they were given the opportunity to bathe, and fed a kosher meal. They were also greeted by the mayor of Galveston, Henry Landes, and by Rabbi Henry Cohen, of Temple B'nai Israel.

Historian Bernard Marinbach, in his book "Galveston: Ellis Island of the West," describes how a representative of the arrivals, speaking in Yiddish, responded to the salutations of the Mayor Landes: "We are overwhelmed that the ruler of the city should greet us. We have never been spoken to by the officials of our country except in terms of harshness, and although we have heard of the land of great freedom, it is very hard to realize that we are permitted to grasp the hand of the great man. We will do all we can to make good citizens."

The immigrants were then assigned, and dispatched, to 19 cities in Missouri, Minnesota, Iowa and several other states in the Midwest and West. None remained in Galveston.

By the end of 1907, some 900 Jews had come through Galveston on their way to new homes in America. The program continued until 1914, when World War I broke out, and local resistance in the U.S. made it unfeasible to continue, and during that time, it helped a total of 10,000 settle in the United States, only a tiny fraction (one source estimated 1.2 percent) of the numbers of Jews that came to the country during those years. On the other hand, those 10,000 were distributed to more than 100 different American locales, where they were given the opportunity to invent their own individual version of the American dream.

July 2 / The first Jewish cleric in the U.S. dies

Gershom Seixas never was ordained, but he faithfully led his flock - including in flight from British-occupied New York.



Gershom Mendes Seixas. Photo by Congregation Shearith Israel

On July 2, 1816, Gershom Mendes Seixas, the first Jewish cleric in the United States, died.

Seixas was not an ordained rabbi, but he served as religious leader of [Shearith Israel](#), in New York, the country's first synagogue.

Gershom Mendes Seixas (pronounced "Sey-shus") was born January 17, 1745 (some sources say 1746) in New York. His father was Isaac Mendes Seixas, the descendant of Portuguese Jewish conversos who had fled for London, and who himself came from there to New York in 1730.

There Isaac married Rachel Levy, the native-born daughter of an Ashkenazic merchant family, whose father was one of the leaders of Shearith Israel, which had been established in 1654.

At the time Gershom was growing up, there were some 2,000 Jews in the 13 British colonies that were to become the United States, but none of the half-dozen synagogues dispersed throughout them had a rabbi. In his desire to become a "minister," as Jewish religious leaders referred to themselves at the time, he attended Talmud Torah as a boy at Shearith Israel, and later studied with the congregation's hazan (cantor) and on his own. There is also evidence that he participated in Jewish learning by correspondence with the rabbis of London's Bevis-Marks Synagogue.

On July 3, 1768, the young Seixas, now certified as a cantor, shochet (ritual slaughterer) and mohel (ritual circumciser), and licensed in the colony to perform weddings and funerals, was appointed the minister of Shearith Israel, the congregation's sole religious official.

In August 1776, it was he who convinced a majority of the synagogue's board that they should vacate New York, rather than remain there under the occupation of the British army then advancing on the city from Long Island. Taking the synagogue's Torah scrolls and other ritual objects with him, Seixas moved to Stratford, Connecticut, to the home of his in-laws, before moving, four years later, to Philadelphia.

In Philadelphia Seixas was elected hazan of Congregation Mikve Israel, the number of whose congregants had swelled with other war refugees who had streamed into the city, the first capital of the United States. In 1783, he was part of a committee of Pennsylvania Jews who petitioned the state legislature, without success, to overturn a law requiring all religious officials – including Jews – to swear their belief in the divine inspiration of the New Testament. It is in the formal protest that he helped draft in the committee's name that Seixas is first publicly referred to as “Rabbi.”

Return to New York

In 1784, the British now having decamped from New York, Seixas led his congregants back to that city from Philadelphia. There they rejoined those Tories who had remained behind in Shearith Israel's Mill Street structure, and began rebuilding the congregation. That same year, he was named a member of the board of trustees of Columbia College, whose charter required representation from all of the “major” religious denominations. (The portrait of Seixas commissioned by the college at the time still hangs today at Columbia University.) He also became a regent of the State University of New York.

In 1789, Seixas was one of 14 clergymen who participated in the inauguration, in New York, of George Washington as first president of the United States. Gershom's older brother Moses was at the time the president of Touro Synagogue, in Newport, Rhode Island. It was he who, the following year, famously corresponded with Washington, both of them using the phrase “to bigotry no sanction” to characterize what was to be the attitude of the government of the United States toward minority religious groups.

Gershom Mendes Seixas served as minister of Shearith Israel until his death, in 1816. He also saw himself as a pastor to Jews living in more remote parts of the country, and as late as 1811, he undertook a tour of small Jewish communities in New England and Canada, performing weddings and circumcisions, and the like.

When in 1810, the historian and writer Hannah Adams, who was then working on her two-volume work on the history of the Jews, approached Seixas and asked him, among other things, if the Jews experienced discrimination in the United States, he responded with some indignation: “My dear Madam, there is one thing which I would wish you to notice -- that the Justice and righteousness of Providence is manifested in the dispersion of His People -- for they have never been driven from any one country

without finding an Asylum in another... and this Country – the United States of America, is perhaps the only place where Jews have not suffered persecution, but rather the reverse – for through the mercies of a Benign Judge, we are encouraged and indulged with every right of citizenship.”

July 3 / First volume of Hebrew work printed

The second-oldest extant Hebrew printed work, 'Arba'ah Turim' is one of the most important compendiums of Jewish law.



Piove di Sacco today. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 3, 1475, Meshullam Cusi Rafa ben Moses Jacob printed the first volume of the important halakhic work “Arba’ah Turim” (“Four Columns.”) It is the second-oldest dated work still in existence, printed in Hebrew a mere 21 years after Johannes Gutenberg printed his first Bible with movable type.

The only dated Hebrew work that preceded the “Arba’ah Turim” was an edition of Rashi’s commentary on the Torah, whose printing was completed in Reggio di Calabria by Abraham ben Garton ben Isaac in February 1475.

A German-born Jew who trained as a physician, Meshullam Cusi established his press in the northern Italian town of Piove di Sacco, on the outskirts of Padua, earlier in 1475. Piove was apparently the first town in the region to allow Jews to settle in it; it hosted a Jewish-owned moneylending business from as early as 1373. Later, when moneylending was prohibited within Padua, other Jewish bankers relocated to Piove di Sacco.

“Arba’ah Turim” was compiled in the 14th century by Jacob ben Asher (who died Toledo in about 1340) and is considered one of the most important compendiums of Jewish law. Its name refers to the fact that it is organized in four sections, and also is an allusion to the four rows of jewels on the breastplate of the High Priest in the days of the Temple. The book’s structure also serves as the basis for the organization of the Shulhan Arukh, Rabbi Joseph Caro’s 16th-century codex of Jewish law.

In the colophon of the work, Meshullam Cusi included a short verse, in which he seemed to indicate what he saw as the importance of the new technology whose use

he was pioneering:

“Wisdom am I, and crown of all science, / Hidden am I, a mystery to all. /
Without pen stroke, my imprint stands patent, Without scribe, lo! a volume appears. /
One instant, and ink o’er me flowing, / Without guide lines, straight stands every
word. /

Do you wonder at Deborah, the mighty. / Who ruled with the pen of the scribes? /
Had she seen me displaying my power, / She had taken me, a crown for her head” (as
quoted by David Werner Amram, in his 1909 book “Makers of Hebrew Books in
Italy.”)

Meshullam Cusi died a short time after completing the printing of the first volume of
the “Arba’ah Turim,” and work on the succeeding volumes was taken over by his two
sons and his widow. When the sons were imprisoned, their mother finished the
project, overseeing the printing of volume four.

July 4 / The most popular living playwright in U.S. is born

Working with the likes of Woody Allen and Walter Matthau, Neil Simon became the only playwright to have a Broadway theater named for him during his lifetime.



Neil Simon, who's received more Oscar and Tony nominations than any other American playwright. Photo by AP

July 4, the American Independence Day, is the birthday of the most popular living playwright in the United States, Neil Simon.

Born 86 years ago today, between 1961, when “Come Blow Your Horn” premiered on Broadway, and 2003, the last year he presented a new play on Broadway, Simon has had more than 30 original plays. He has also written the screenplays for almost as many films.

Simon not only won a Pulitzer Prize and three Tony awards (with 17 nominations): he is the only playwright to have a Broadway theater named for him during his lifetime.

Marvin Neil Simon was born in 1927 in New York, and grew up in the Bronx. His father, Irving Simon, was a clothing salesman, and his mother, Marnie Simon, raised him and his older brother, Danny (1918-2005), who himself became a successful television writer.

The marriage was an unhappy one, with Irving abandoning the family for long stretches, at a time, and with Danny and Neil sometimes being farmed out to relatives. Neil Simon later told an interviewer that he believed the instability of his home life helped him become a writer because, “I began to think early on, at the age of seven or eight, that I’d better start taking care of myself somehow, emotionally.”

Indeed, the world that Simon portrayed was that of middle-class Americans, usually New Yorkers, quite often Jewish. Though the plays were almost always comedies, often side-splitting ones, they always conveyed the pain, frustration and terrible human conflicts that are part-and-parcel of day-to-day life.

Simon has reported that he spent much of his childhood in movie theaters, and that he made his mark among friends by making them laugh -- not with jokes or one-liners, but with stories. When he was 15, he and his brother Danny took on the assignment of writing comedy sketches for employees of a department store to be performed at an annual company event.

After graduating from DeWitt Clinton High School, in 1945, Simon enrolled with the Army Air Force reserves, and began college at New York University. Later, sent to serve at a base in Colorado, he studied briefly at the University of Denver, but he didn't earn a bachelor's degree.

Mel Brooks, a most uniquely funny man

By 1948, Simon was back in New York and working in the mailroom at the Warner Brothers offices there, when he started working together with Danny writing scripts for radio and television. During the next five years, he wrote for TV's "Phil Silvers Show" and for Sid Caesar's "Your Show of Shows," experiences that he has described as essential to the development of his craft. At the latter, the writing team included Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, Woody Allen, Larry Gelbart (creator of "Mash") and Joseph Stein (who wrote the book for "Fiddler on the Roof").

In a 1992 interview with James Lipton in Paris Review, Simon described the period as "the most excruciatingly hilarious time in my life." It was also painful for him, he went on, because of his own shyness: "So I sat next to Carl Reiner and whispered my jokes to him. He was my spokesman, he'd jump up and say, He's got it! He's got it!"

Simon also recalled how the team would bicker continuously among themselves, often about who was "slacking off. Mel Brooks was the main culprit. We all came in to work at ten o'clock in the morning, but he showed up at one o'clock. We'd say, That's it. We're sick and tired of this. Either Mel comes in at ten o'clock or we go to Sid and do something about it. At about ten to one, Mel would come in with a straw hat, fling it across the room, and say, Lindy [Charles Lindbergh, who had flown across the Atlantic more than 25 years earlier] made it! -- and everyone would fall down hysterical. He didn't need the eight hours we put in. He needed four hours." Brooks, he concluded "is, maybe, the most uniquely funny man I've ever met."

Simon spent three years writing "Come Blow Your Horn." The process was lengthy because he was still working in TV at the time, but also because he has said he rewrote the play some 20 times, "And I mean from beginning to end." It opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theater in 1961, and ran for 678 performances, played in London's West End, and was adapted for the screen, starring Frank Sinatra. Norman Lear wrote the screenplay, and Simon was not happy with the way it turned out; thereafter he usually wrote the screen versions of his plays.

His first Tony

For the next three decades, Simon turned out hit after hit, and at one peak, in 1966, had four plays running on Broadway at one time. Two of them were “Barefoot in the Park” and “The Odd Couple,” which starred Walter Matthau and Art Carney, and was directed by Mike Nichols. That play, about two men, the insufferably fastidious Felix Ungar, whose wife has left him, and the slovenly and long-divorced Oscar Madison, with whom Felix moves in, was adapted for the screen and also was a long-running TV series. In its theatrical form, it won Simon his first Tony. (The other two plays running simultaneously were “Sweet Charity” and “The Star-Spangled Girl.”)

Other Simon hits have included “Promises, Promises,” “The Last of the Red-Hot Lovers,” “Plaza Suite,” “The Gingerbread Lady” and “The Prisoner of Second Avenue.” For 1991’s “Lost in Yonkers,” a comic drama about the coming-of-age of a Jewish boy in a highly dysfunctional family, he won a Pulitzer Prize and a Tony.

Among Neil Simon’s original screenplays have been “The Goodbye Girl,” “The Out-of-Towners” and “The Heartbreak Kid.”

One of Simon’s most important achievements is the trilogy he wrote in the 1980s comprised of “Brighton Beach Memoirs,” “Biloxi Blues” and “Broadway Bound.” A series of semi-autobiographical works, they depict, respectively, the late-1930s childhood, army service and first professional steps of Eugene Jerome as a comedy writer. All three were commercially successful, and the first two were adapted for the screen. And yet, four years ago, when “Brighton Beach Memoirs” was revived, at the cost of \$3 million, on Broadway, it closed after a week. Which perhaps says more about the changing sensibility of American audiences and their taste in humor than it does about the quality of the play itself.

Simon’s first marriage, to Joan Bairn, lasted 20 years and ended with her death. Since then, he’s been married four more times, and the ups and downs of his family life have been reflected in much of what he’s written. In the 1970s, after the death of Bairn, he moved to California, and has been based there since.

July 5 / A British heavyweight champion is born

Daniel Mendoza is remembered for being the father of what some called the 'Jewish School' of boxing.



Boxing gloves (illustrative). Photo by Wikimedia Commons

July 5, 1764, is the birthdate of English-Jewish pugilist Daniel Mendoza, the heavyweight champion of England in 1792-1795. Mendoza is in large part remembered for being the father of “scientific” boxing, or what some called the “Jewish School,” which introduced a number of defensive techniques that took what was then a bare-fisted sport into a realm that allowed for the use of more than just brute force. These included sidestepping, the straight left, and using a guard.

Mendoza was the son of Abraham Mendoza and Esther Lopez. His father’s family were conversos (Jews who had converted to Christianity during the Inquisition), who had moved from Spain to Amsterdam in 1701 and reverted to their native faith, before coming to London a short time later. He grew up in the Aldgate section of the capital, and prayed at the Bevis Marks synagogue there.

It was almost to be expected that Dan Mendoza became a prizefighter, as he was only taking his natural tendency to get into fights regularly and turning it into a source of income. It was while defending the good name of his employer in a tea shop, for example, at age 16, that Mendoza was spotted by Richard Humphries, the “Gentleman Boxer,” as he thrashed a porter who had challenged the man. Humphries, impressed by Mendoza’s talent, offered to become his trainer.

Under the tutelage of Humphries, Mendoza began fighting professionally in 1784, and scored his first big victory against Harry Davis the Coalheaver in a bout that went on for an hour and 50 minutes. In 1787, while training with Humphries, he and his mentor got into an argument at a tavern. Stopped by police from settling their argument on the spot, they arranged to fight in a ring on January 9, 1788, drawing a

reported 60,000 spectators to that bout. The audience was well entertained until the 28th minute, when Mendoza slipped and hurt his ankle. He conceded the match, and responded to Humphries' taunting of him as a "coward" by saying he would not fight him again until his ankle had healed.

The two met again in Stilton in May 1789, after a year in which Mendoza, who was only 5 feet 7 inches, and weighed 160 pounds, perfected his defensive style of boxing. It took 65 rounds, but he defeated Humphries soundly. This led to a decisive third match between the now-famed rivals, which took place in September 1790, and was won by the Jew, in 72 rounds (one hour and 13 minutes).

By now, Mendoza was a natural celebrity (as one newspaper writer put it, he was not "the Jew that Shakespeare drew"), and had earned himself the patronage of the Prince of Wales, later King George IV. He also was invited to Windsor Castle to meet the prince's father, George III, which is said to have made him the first Jew to speak to the British king.

In 1792, he claimed the title of heavyweight champion after the current champion retired, and he defended that title two years later, when he fought Bill Warr. But then, in 1794, Mendoza lost the championship in a fight against John "Gentleman" Jackson. Jackson was 40 pounds heavier than Mendoza, and four inches taller, and despite his nickname, he bested the champion only after grabbing and holding him by his long hair and pummeling him.

Mendoza then retired from the ring, and began to capitalize on his celebrity. Under the management of a circus producer, he began to tour Scotland and Ireland, giving demonstrations. He opened a pub (the Admiral Nelson) and a boxing academy, but it seemed that, whatever he earned, he spent. He also drank profusely.

In 1806, in debt so severe it landed him in prison, Mendoza came out of retirement for one more fight, his 33rd. He was victorious, but the bout was a punishing one. That was followed in 1820 by what was to be his last appearance in the ring, at the age of 56. Mendoza was badly defeated in that, after a mere 15 minutes.

Dan Mendoza died on September 3, 1836, at age 72. His wife Esther was left in great debt. The couple had had nine children, several of whom ended up in Australia. The family left no descendants in Britain.

July 6 / Members of proto-Zionist group Bilu land in Palestine

Fourteen members of group emigrate from Russia to escape pogroms, the start of Zionism's First Aliyah period.



Israel Belkind. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 6, 1882, the first group of 14 members of the proto-Zionist group Bilu disembarked in Jaffa. They were not the first Russian Jews to emigrate to Palestine in the wake of the wave of pogroms that had begun the preceding autumn, but they were the first to do so in an organized manner.

Bilu – the name is an acronym for the Hebrew phrase from Isaiah 2:5, “Beit Ya’akov Lekhu Venelkha”: “O House of Jacob, come ye and let us go” – had its origins in a meeting that took place on January 21, 1882, at the home of Israel Belkind, in Kharkiv (today in Ukraine). Belkind (1861-1929) was a young intellectual who invited a handful of fellow students to his home to discuss the violence to which Jews were then being subjected. They quickly came to the conclusion that the answer was to depart the Russian Empire for the Jews’ ancestral homeland.

Hayyim Hisin, an early member of Bilu, recorded in his diary the atmosphere that led him and his colleagues to contemplate such a radical move: “The recent pogroms have violently awakened the complacent Jews from their sweet slumbers. Until now, I was uninterested in my origin. I saw myself as a faithful son of Russia ... I wanted to devote my whole strength to the good of my homeland, and happily to do my duty, and suddenly they come and show us the door, and openly declare that we are free to leave for the West.”

As many as 500 young people were affiliated with Bilu, which moved its center from Kharkiv to Odessa – the port from which members intended to depart, although in the

end only a fraction actually made the journey. The organization did not have a well-articulated political manifesto, but some members definitely were thinking in terms of an independent state for the Jews. One of them, Ze'ev Dubnow, writing about that goal, declared, "If it is willed, it is no dream" – a sentiment very similar to one that would appear two decades later in Theodor Herzl's "Altneuland."

Some of the Biluim, as members of the group called themselves, believed it was prudent to wait for permission from the Ottoman sultan, who ruled Palestine at the time, and traveled to Constantinople to see about arranging that. The group led by Israel Belkind, however, decided to head directly to the Land of Israel. It is they who arrived on this day in 1882.

The day after they landed, the group headed to the Mikveh Israel agricultural school, near present-day Tel Aviv, which had been established by Charles Netter in 1870. They worked there as agricultural laborers, although not with great success. When they were dismissed from the school, some moved to Jerusalem, and others to Rishon Letzion. Finally, in December 1884, they settled on land that had been bought for them by Yechiel Pines, the leader of Hovevei Zion, south of the Arab village of Qatra. This was the beginning of the town of Gedera.

All in all, an estimated total of 53 Biluim immigrated to Palestine during this period. Some eventually returned to Russia or moved on to the United States, but others did remain, entering the annals of Zionism's First Aliyah period.

July 7 / Harold Abrahams wins Olympic gold

Abrahams and his teammates served as the basis for the 1981 British film 'Chariots of Fire.'



Harold Abrahams. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 7, 1924, British runner Harold Abrahams won the gold medal in the final of the 100-meter sprint event, at the Paris Olympic Games. The story of Abrahams and his teammates served as the basis for the 1981 British film “Chariots of Fire,” which won the Academy Award for Best Picture. (In the film, Abrahams was played by actor Ben Cross.)

Harold Maurice Abrahams was born in Bedford, England, on December 15, 1899, the son of Isaac and Ester Abrahams. Isaac, a banker, was an emigrant from Russian Poland; Ester was Welsh-born. Both of Harold’s brothers also became involved in sports, although in different ways: Sir Sidney Abrahams was an Olympic long jumper, and Sir Adolphe Abrahams was a physician who helped pioneer the field of sports medicine.

Harold was the only one of the three who did not receive a knighthood, although he was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1957.

Abrahams studied at Cambridge University from 1920-1924, where he continued his childhood involvement in track and field events, both as a sprinter and as a long jumper. He competed on the British team in the 1920 Olympics in Antwerp, in the 100- and 200-meter races, as well as in the 4 x 100-meter relay, and in the long jump. He reached the finals only in the relay, with his team coming in fourth in the event.

In preparation for the 1924 Olympics, Abrahams hired a professional trainer, Sam Mussabini, who helped him focus on, and perfect his performance in, the 100-meter event. Although this didn’t violate any rules, it was frowned upon at Cambridge,

because of the strong emphasis on the amateur aspect of the games. In the film, the Cambridge coaches' disapproval of Abrahams "playing the tradesman" is understood to be a reflection of their anti-Semitism. In real life, Abrahams was involved in a number of different extra-curricular and social activities at Cambridge, and although he is said to have suffered from some anti-Jewish discrimination, it was minor.

As the 1924 Olympics approached, Abrahams learned that he was scheduled to compete in both the 100- and 200-meter races, as well as in the long jump event. Frustrated by the news, he wrote a letter to the Daily Express, which he signed only as "A Famous International Athlete," in which he declared with indignation: "The authorities surely do not imagine that he can perform at long jumping at two o'clock and run 200-meters at 2:30 on the same afternoon." A short time later, he was removed from the lineup for the long jump competition, although in fact the distance he had jumped in the event just a month before the Olympics remained an English record for the next 32 years.

In Paris, Abrahams came in sixth in the 200 meters, and his team won the silver medal in the 4 x 100 relay, but his great achievement was in the 100-meter race. In that, he unexpectedly beat the two American favorites, Jackson Scholz and Charles Paddock, the latter of whom had won the gold four years earlier.

Under normal circumstances, Abrahams' teammate on the British team Eric Liddell, would have been the front-runner in the 100, but he had pulled out of the event during training, when he learned that one of the heats would be held on a Sunday. Liddell, known as Scotland's fastest runner, was the son of Protestant missionaries, and running on the Christian Sabbath was considered dishonorable. Instead, he focused on the 400-meter run, an event that had never been his specialty, and ended up winning the gold medal. (It was before the final heat that a masseur for the U.S. Olympic team handed him a slip of paper on which he had written the encouraging words from 1 Samuel 2:30: "Those who honor me I will honor.") He also won the bronze in the 200 meters.

Liddell himself became a missionary, serving for many years in China. He died of disease in 1943 while imprisoned in a Japanese internment camp there.

Abrahams retired from athletic competition in 1925, after breaking his leg while long-jumping, but for the rest of his life was active in British sports life. Professionally, he was both a lawyer and a sports journalist. The latter included becoming a commentator for BBC radio. He became president of the U.K.'s Jewish Athletic Association and was also chairman of the Amateur Athletic Association.

Abrahams and his (non-Jewish) wife, Sybil Evers, a singer with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company whom he married in 1936, adopted two children in England in the 1940s. They also fostered two Jewish child refugees, one from Germany, the other from Austria.

Harold Abrahams died on January 14, 1978, at the age of 78. In 1948, another Olympic athlete, Philip Noel-Baker (who in 1959 won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work on nuclear disarmament), noted that Abrahams, with his "magnificent physique, his splendid racing temperament, his flair for the big occasion," was one of those rare

people who “understood athletics and had given more brainpower and more will power to the subject than any other runner of his day.”

July 8 / A founder of Gestalt therapy is born

The method Fritz Perls co-founded with his wife and Paul Goodman emphasizes the here-and-now over reflection on past memories.



Fritz Perls in 1923. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

July 8, 1893, is the birthdate of Fritz Perls, the German-born psychotherapist who co-founded Gestalt therapy. Over the course of his life, Perls experienced some of the most significant events and movements of the 20th century, and the psychological school of therapy he developed, whose heyday was in the 1970s and '80s, very much captured the zeitgeist. That being said, his method is still being taught and practiced, and many of its ideas have been adopted by other schools of treatment.

Friedrich Salomon Perls was born in Berlin to Amelia Rund and Nathan Perls, a wine merchant. The family was for the most part secular, although Fritz, who had two older sisters, did have some religious education and celebrated his bar mitzvah. He described his parents' marriage as unloving, and his father as bullying to his wife and children.

After being expelled from one gymnasium (high school) for poor marks and bad behavior, Perls enrolled in a more progressive school, where he became very involved in theater, and also excelled academically. He was expected to follow in the footsteps of a famous uncle, Herman Staub, one of Germany's leading lawyers, but was drawn to medicine instead.

The start of Perls' medical studies coincided with World War I. Although initially rejected for military service, because of various medical deficiencies, by 1916, recruitment standards dropped, and Perls was able to enlist. He served for a year as a medical officer in the trenches, where he was gassed and wounded, and later decorated for bravery. The experience was extremely traumatic for him and turned him into a lifelong leftist.

Perls returned to his medical studies in 1918, and graduated two years later, specializing in neuropsychiatry. He set up a practice in Berlin. In 1926, he met Laura Posner, a graduate student in Gestalt psychology (Perls' Gestalt therapy is derived from the psychological school) at the University of Frankfurt. The two married in 1929, but also became intellectual and professional partners. Posner had studied existential philosophy and introduced Perls to many of the concepts that influenced Gestalt therapy, which the couple developed together with Paul Goodman.

Gestalt therapy emphasizes experience and the here-and-now over reflection on past memories. By incorporating various experiential methods, the therapy can help the individual confront directly, in a safe environment, conflicts that are troubling him.

In 1933, shortly after the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany, the couple and their two children fled, first to the Netherlands, and the following year to South Africa. There Fritz was authorized by the International Psychoanalytic Association to open a training institute for Freudian psychoanalysts. He also became an acolyte of South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, a holistic philosopher who had his own theories about the interrelationship of organism and environment.

In 1946, the family left South Africa, eventually resettling in New York. There Perls worked briefly with both Karen Horney and Wilhelm Reich, the latter of whom had been his analyst for some time in Germany. In the late 1940s, he asked the writer and social philosopher Paul Goodman, who was American-born, to help him organize his notes in book form: the result of this was part of Perls' second book, "Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality," of which Ralph Hefferline was also co-author. Shortly thereafter, Fritz and Laura opened the first Gestalt Institute in their Manhattan apartment.

In a 1969 book, "Gestalt Therapy Verbatim," Perls presented the "Gestalt Prayer," which emphasizes the importance of the individual's looking after his or her own needs, and not to try to live up to others' expectations, or what are perceived as those expectations:

"I do my thing and you do your thing.
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations,
And you are not in this world to live up to mine.
You are you, and I am I,
and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped."

During much of the 1960s, Perls lived and worked at Esalen Institute, in Big Sur, California, a humanistic, alternative-therapy retreat center. By now, he had also incorporated elements of Zen Buddhism, particularly the concept of mindfulness, into his work. Laura Perls, from whom Fritz had effectively separated some time before, stayed behind in New York. In 1969, he left Esalen and set up an institute on Vancouver Island, in British Columbia.

He had suffered for some years from heart disease, and was hospitalized in Chicago in 1970. There, after heart surgery, Perls died on March 14, 1970.

July 9 / A future AIDS warrior enters the world

Shocked by the concentration camps, scientist Mathilde Krim worked with Irgun and later devoted her skills to eradicating a global plague.



Mathilde Krim in 2010. Photo by Bloomberg

July 9, 1926, is the birthdate of Mathilde Krim, the Italian-born microbiologist who became one of earliest scientist-activists in the fight against AIDS in the United States during the 1980s.

Born Mathilde Galland in Como, Italy, to Elizabeth Rosa Krause, a Catholic from German-speaking Czechoslovakia, and Eugene Galland, a Calvinist from Geneva, Krim was brought up in a multi-cultural household whose members attended both Protestant and Catholic churches.

Eugene worked as an agronomist in Milan for the Italian government, but lost his job in 1932, when the Fascists banned foreigners from working for the state; the family moved back to Geneva, where the father took work as a municipal health official.

Mathilde Galland studied biology at the University of Geneva, earning her bachelor's degree in genetics in 1948, and her Ph.D. five years later. While a graduate student, she experimented with the newly developed electron microscope, and was among the first to use the powerful tool to observe the double helix of DNA.

Two experiences she had during her early university years, neither of them connected to science, were of pivotal importance to Galland's life. The first was the clerical job she had in the office of a lawyer named Jean Heyman. Heyman, a Jew, was involved

in making applications to Swiss immigration authorities to bring in large numbers of refugees from Nazi-occupied countries. Most of them were refused.

The experience gave Galland an initial awareness of what was happening outside of neutral Switzerland during the war years. That awareness was intensified shortly after the end of the war when she saw a newsreel depicting the liberation of concentration camps. “I was shocked out of my wits,” she told *Ms. Magazine* in a 1986 interview. “I [cried] for a week afterward.”

In addition to her science studies, Galland began to take university courses about Judaism. She also became friendly with some of the Jews from pre-state Israel who were studying medicine at the University of Geneva.

One of them was the Bulgarian-born David Danon, who was a member of the Irgun (one of the pre-state militias that later was integrated into the Israel Defense Forces).

Galland volunteered her services to the organization. One of her missions was to travel through post-war southern France in search of caches of guns left over from the resistance, and to convince their owners to donate them to the Zionist cause. She would then clean up the arms and arrange for them to be smuggled to Palestine.

In 1948, after Mathilde had converted to Judaism, she and David Danon married – and her parents disowned her. The couple remained in Geneva while they both completed their studies, and they even collaborated on several scientific articles. Then in 1953, with an 18-month daughter in tow, they moved to Israel.

Shortly after their arrival in Israel, Mathilde and David separated. In the meantime, armed with her skills with the electron microscope, she had found work as a research assistant at the Weizmann Institute in Rehovot. She lived in a small apartment on campus, where she raised their daughter, Daphna, and found herself promoted several times in her work.

One of the papers she coauthored, working in the laboratory of the molecular biologist Leo Sachs, had to do with using amniotic fluid to identify a child’s sex before birth. This research helped lead to the use of amniocentesis as a general diagnostic test for genetic defects during pregnancy.

Sometime after her divorce, Galland had given a tour of the Weizmann campus to a visiting trustee from New York, Arthur B. Krim, a lawyer and the chairman of United Artists films (and later founding chair of Orion Pictures). The two fell in love and married, and after several years of trying to sustain a relationship across two continents, she moved to the United States. There, after several months as a socialite wife, during which she was “bored to tears,” she later said, Mathilde began working as a researcher at Cornell Medical College, and then, in 1962, at the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research.

Arthur Krim later became the finance chairman of the Democratic Party and was a confidant of Lyndon B. Johnson when he was president. Mathilde was an overnight guest at the White House when the Six-Day War broke out in 1967, and remained

there for the duration of the war, giving frequent advice to the president from the Israeli point of view .

At Sloan-Kettering, Mathilde Krim, as she was now known, became involved in developing the potential of interferon, a natural protein with immunity properties, as a cancer drug. Although interferon did not live up to expectations in cancer treatment, Krim's work on immunity issues led to a critical series of conversations with two of her colleagues. Both men had recently treated a number of patients with catastrophic failures of their immune systems, who had also developed a very rare cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma. What set off alarm bells was that nearly all of these patients were gay men.

Krim brought the two colleagues, Dr. Joseph Sonnabend and Dr. Bijan Safai, together, and the connections they made helped in identifying and understanding the "new" medical challenge that was – and continues to be – AIDS.

Krim quickly became involved in the fight against AIDS as a political activist. In 1983, she founded the AIDS Medical Foundation with \$100,000 of her husband's money. The group later merged with a similar West Coast organization to become the American Foundation for AIDS Research, on whose board she still serves.

The foundation gave her an opportunity to bring together her scientific understanding with her social and political connections, to raise funds and political and public awareness of AIDS. She also was highly outspoken in her efforts to fight anti-gay prejudices and to convince the medical and political establishments to provide resources to the cause, despite those prejudices.

Krim's work made her a high-profile figure and brought her into not a few public controversies. But it also gave her the privilege to have influence in a number of different areas in advancing AIDS research, vastly improving treatment of the disorder (particularly with the use of antiviral drugs both in the U.S. and abroad), and in helping to fight the dangerous stereotypes that accompanied early reactions to the spread of AIDS.

For her efforts, Krim received the Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honor, in 2002, among many other awards and honorary degrees.

Krim, 87 (her husband died in 1994, at age 84), was present at the premiere screening of the film "The Battle of amfAR," about the history of the American Foundation for AIDS Research, this past April at the Tribeca Film Festival (it will air on HBO in December). When she was asked if the seemingly never-ending battle against AIDS ever made her lose hope, she replied, "I've never felt like throwing in the towel," adding that from "the very beginning, my feelings, my anxieties, my hopes [were] the same as they are today."

July 10 / Polish neighbors slaughter the Jews of Jedwabne

Some locals felt the Jews had been too warm to Soviet invaders and once the Nazis came, helped kill them.

July 10, 1941, is the date of the massacre carried out against the Jewish population of Jedwabne, Poland, by their Polish neighbors.

Although the fact of the killings was not a secret and was the subject of several official investigations over the years, it was only during the early years of this century that an objective and comprehensive Polish study of the pogrom was undertaken.

The belated awakening of the question of the division of responsibility – among Poles versus Nazi Germans – led to heated debate and controversy in Poland a decade ago.

Jedwabne is a small town in the country's northeast, which received its first recognition from the Polish monarchy in 1736. Jews arrived in the town around the same time, and the town's handsome wooden synagogue dates from 1770. It is estimated that at the start of World War II, Jews made up between 60 and 70 percent of an overall population of about 2,000.

In the war's initial period, eastern Poland was occupied by the Soviet Union, under the terms of the German-Soviet boundary treaty. Despite an initial welcoming of Russian forces in the town, the Soviets terrorized the population and deported large numbers of its citizens to Siberia.

Soviet occupation of Jedwabne was followed by that of the Germans, after the June 22, 1941, Nazi invasion of the USSR. A wave of anti-Jewish sentiment swept the region, due to the belief that Jews had cooperated with and benefited from the Soviet invaders.

Less than three weeks after the arrival of the Germans, on July 10, the mayor of Jedwabne, Marian Karolak, and the German gendarmerie gave the orders for the roundup of the town's Jews. These included both Jewish residents of Jedwabne and those from surrounding towns who had sought refuge there.

One group of Jews was taken to a barn that had been emptied out for the purpose, and murdered there and immediately buried. Later in the day, a second group was brought to the same barn and burned to death.

The investigation carried out in 2000-2002 by the Polish Institute of National Memory (IPN, in its Polish acronym) concluded that "at least 340" people were murdered, whereas the 1949 trial for treason of local perpetrators spoke of a figure of 1,500. (It later was revealed that the communist regime had tortured some of the defendants in that trial into confessing crimes they hadn't committed.)

'Inspiring' the massacre

The 2001 publication of “Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland,” by Jan T. Gross, stirred up renewed interest in – and controversy over –the pogrom.

Gross is a Polish-born professor of history at Princeton University, one of whose specialties has been the study of Polish anti-Semitism. His book spoke of up to 1,600 Jewish victims of the massacre, and concluded that it was local non-Jewish civilians who carried out the killings, with the approval and encouragement of the German gendarmes and a mobile SS or Gestapo unit.

Gross’ study, which was only published in Polish translation in 2008, helped to initiate the IPN investigation. That study could confirm only 340 Jewish deaths.

Although the inquiry agreed with Gross that the killings and related tortures were carried out by Poles, it ascribed a “decisive role” to the Germans for “inspiring” the massacre. Whereas Gross had asserted that “half of the population of the town murdered the other half,” the IPN concluded that a minimum of 40 Poles actively participated in the killings, while the remainder of the non-Jewish population displayed “utter passivity” in the face of the crimes.

The powerful debate that played out in Polish society over Jedwabne a decade ago is itself subject to different interpretations. Overall, though, the debate was mostly serious and revolved around factual investigations rather than outright Holocaust denial.

On the 60th anniversary of the massacre, in 2001, the Polish president, Aleksander Kwasniewski, spoke at a ceremony at Jedwabne – a ceremony that was boycotted by many residents of the town – in which he apologized for the crime “in the name of those who believe that one cannot be proud of the glory of Polish history without feeling, at the same time, pain and shame for the evil done by Poles to others.” A monument was also unveiled commemorating the Jews who were “murdered and burned alive on this spot,” although it did not specify who had carried out those murders.

July 11 / The shellfish that ushered in a movement

The 'Treifa Banquet' in Cincinnati was considered pivotal in formulating Conservative Judaism.



The banquet menu for the ordination of the first graduates of the Hebrew Union College, Reform Judaism's rabbinical seminary, included non-kosher shellfish. Photo by Nir Kafri

July 11, 1883, is a momentous date in the history of American Judaism: the occasion of the notorious “Treifa Banquet” in Cincinnati, Ohio, which many historians of Judaism hold at least indirectly responsible for the emergence of the Conservative Movement. The banquet, of course, was held to celebrate the ordination of the first graduates of the Hebrew Union College, Reform Judaism's rabbinical seminary. Adding to the weight of the occasion was the convening of the council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella body of the synagogues of the young Reform movement.

The reason why the meal to this day holds a place in the collective memory of U.S. Jews is the menu, which included littleneck clams, soft-shell crabs, shrimp salad and frogs legs – to note just a few of the delicacies served that day.

Was the choice of dishes a deliberate thumbing of the nose at the dietary standards of traditional Judaism – all of the preceding dishes are strictly non-kosher – or was it more a reflection of ignorance within the organization that presumed to be a trailblazer for the rapidly growing Jewish population of the United States?

The day's festivities began at Cincinnati's Plum Street Temple, as the commencement ceremony of the HUC's graduating class of four took place. Following that, an invited guest list of 250 made their way to the Highland House restaurant, on Mt. Adams, overlooking the Ohio River, for a lavish meal – nine courses washed down with five different alcoholic beverages.

Although Rabbi David Philipson, one of the HUC graduates, wrote in his memoir six decades later that “two rabbis rose from their seats and rushed from the room” when the first course of shrimp was placed before them, contemporary reports don’t give the impression that the dinner was a contentious affair. (And the first course was clams; the shrimps were served only after the crab.)

The real hullabaloo came several weeks later, as Jewish publications from the East Coast began to weigh in on the dietary practices of their co-religionists on the Ohio River. Writing in the *Jewish Messenger*, published in New York, a dinner guest calling herself “Shulamith” expressed her indignation at how “there was no regard paid to our dietary laws.” In a 2005 article on the banquet in the *American Jewish Archives Journal*, Lance Sussman reveals that “Shulamith” was none other than Henrietta Szold, who had accompanied her father, Rabbi Benjamin Szold, to the event.

Isaac Mayer Wise, the founder of HUC, writing in *The American Israelite*, responded to the initial criticism by blaming the chef, Gustave Lindeman, claiming “we do not know why he diversified his menu with multipeds and bivalves.” (On another occasion, however, Wise had been known to refer to oysters as “ocean vegetables.”)

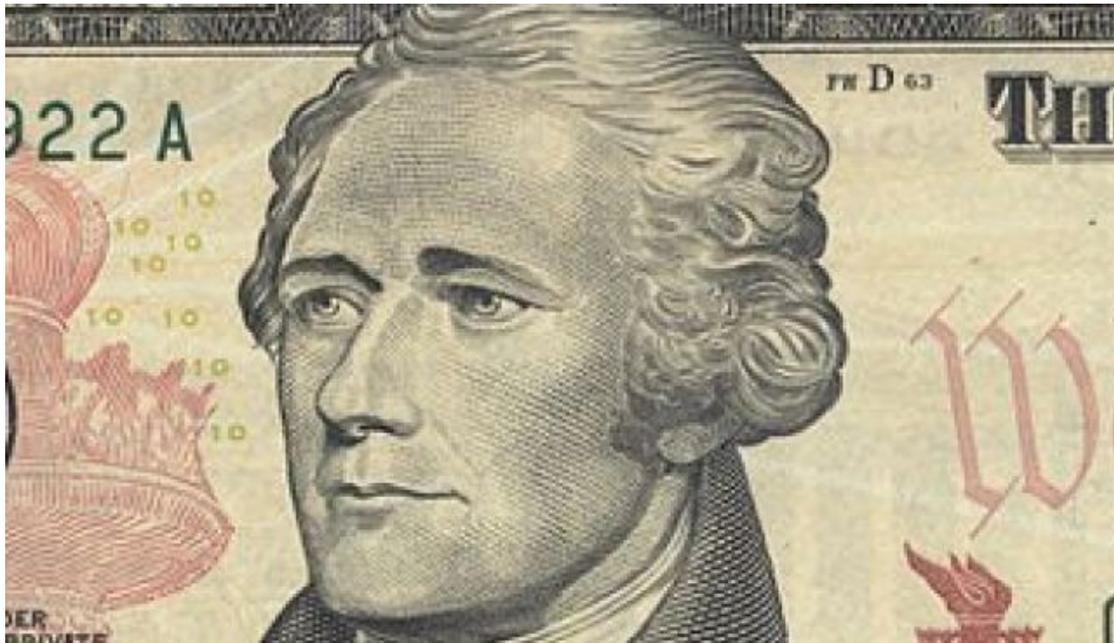
Lance Sussman, himself a Reform rabbi, notes that no less significant than the presence of shellfish on the table, and the mixing of meat and dairy, was the absence that day of pork. If the event’s organizers had wanted to make a point about Reform’s clean break with archaic dietary laws, surely they would have served ham. Suggests Sussman: “It is very possible that the sponsors of the dinner sincerely believed, from the perspective of ‘moderate Reform,’ that this one exception rendered the banquet religiously acceptable to Jewish traditionalists at the repast, particularly in a city that sported the nickname ‘Porkopolis.’”

Nonetheless, two years later, in 1885, when the Reform movement adopted its Pittsburgh Platform of principles, it rejected the laws of kashrut in toto, saying that they and other ancient practices were “altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state.”

A year after the Pittsburgh Platform was drafted, a new rabbinical school, the Jewish Theological Seminary, was established in New York. Meant to serve as a moderate bridge between Orthodoxy and Reform, it eventually led to the creation of the Conservative Movement in the U.S.

July 12/ This day in Jewish history / Hamilton dies after duel with Burr

Alexander Hamilton wasn't a Jew, though his stepfather may have been, and he was educated in a Jewish school in the Caribbean because he was illegitimate and couldn't go to a church-run school.



Alexander Hamilton on the \$10 bill. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 12, 1804, Alexander Hamilton died of wounds sustained in a duel with U.S. Vice President Aaron Burr.

Hamilton was one of the founding fathers of the United States of America – chief of staff to George Washington during the American War of Independence, primary author of the “Federalist Papers,” and first secretary of the treasury, among many other accomplishments. He was not Jewish, but his mother was married to a man who was quite possibly Jewish, and as a child on the Caribbean island of Nevis, he was educated in a Jewish school.

Hamilton was born on January 11, 1755 (or 1757), in Charlestown, the capital of Nevis, an island in the British West Indies. His mother, Rachel Faucette, was of French Huguenot and British descent (although popular legend on the island suggests that she was partly black), and her common-law partner James A. Hamilton was a Scotsman. Faucette was still married at the time, however, to Johann Michael Lavien, an older man from the nearby island of St. Croix, who is thought to have been a Danish Jew.

Faucette, at the time 16, and Johann Lavien, at least 12 years her senior, were married in Christiansted, the capital of St. Croix, in 1745. Historians have speculated that “Lavien” was a variant of the Jewish name “Levine.” Rachel was educated and attractive, and the heiress to a large fortune, and Lavien was a Danish-born gentleman farmer in search of income to pay off his debts and buy a profitable plantation. Alexander Hamilton later described his mother’s husband as “a fortune hunter ... [who] came to Nevis bedizzened with gold and paid his addresses to my mother, then a handsome young woman having a snug fortune.” The result was, in the stepson’s words, “a hated marriage”.

By 1750, Faucette had abandoned her husband. Lavien later described her as having “committed such errors which as between husband and wife were indecent, and very suspicious.” Angry and humiliated, the cuckolded husband asked to have imposed upon his rebellious wife a Danish law that mandated imprisonment on a woman twice found guilty of adultery. Rachel was thrown into the fortress at Christiansted for several months.

When released from prison, Faucette resolved to leave St. Croix altogether. She traveled to St. Kitts island (today St. Kitts and Nevis constitute the island nation of that name), where she met James Hamilton. The two of them set up house in Nevis, where Rachel owned property. There they had two sons, James, Jr., and Alexander. But because Faucette and Lavien had not divorced, both sons were illegitimate. For that reason, Alexander was rejected by the school on the island run by the Church of England. Instead, he was tutored in a private school run by Jewish woman on the island.

Alexander Hamilton’s son later described how, despite the fact that his father “rarely ... alluded to his personal history,” he nonetheless “mentioned with a smile his having been taught to repeat the Decalogue [Ten Commandments] in Hebrew, at the school of a Jewess, when so small that he was placed standing by her side on a table”.

Nevis in the mid-18th century had an established Jewish community whose roots went back to the Sephardim who had to leave the Portuguese colony of Brazil after being expelled by the Inquisition in 1654. Many of them were involved in the island’s sugar industry. Historian Michelle Terrell has quoted records from Amsterdam that mention a synagogue in Nevis as early as 1684, and the earliest gravestone found in the island’s Jewish cemetery bears the burial date of 1679. Although historical documents allude to a synagogue, Terrell’s excavations of the presumed site of its structure concluded that the building that stood on the site did not serve that purpose.

James Hamilton later abandoned Rachel Faucette, who died in 1768. Her remaining estate was seized by Lavien in probate court, and Alexander and James, his brother, were left parentless and with little in the way of material support.

Several years later, the community of Christiansted, St. Croix, gathered the funds to send him to the American mainland for an education, and he studied at King's College in New York, which later became Columbia University.

Through most of his adult life, Hamilton was not an obviously religious man; historian Ron Chernow, who wrote a biography of Hamilton in 2010, describes him as a deist, someone who sees God as standing outside of history. Late in life, however, Hamilton returned to more conventional religious beliefs, and after withdrawing from active politics in 1801, he began to organize the "Christian Constitutional Society," whose purpose was "support of the Christian religion".

He admired the Jews, however, recognizing the essential role they played in God's plan for humanity. He wrote about them that, the "progress of the Jews ... from their earliest history to the present time has been and is entirely out of the ordinary course of human affairs. Is it not then a fair conclusion that the cause is also an extraordinary one – in other words that it is the effect of some great providential plan"?

Hamilton's death, on July 12, 1804, followed his shooting by Aaron Burr a day earlier. The two men had been rivals for several years, and Hamilton, a politician who had a tendency to indulge in plot and intrigues, had gone to lengths on several occasions to work against Burr's electoral ambitions. By 1804, Burr was vice president to President Thomas Jefferson, but understood that Jefferson did not intend to support his candidacy for reelection to that position, and so ran for governor of New York. Largely because of Hamilton's efforts, Burr was defeated in that race. Additionally, word had reached him of some supposed insults expressed about him by Hamilton at a dinner party.

After an exchange of angry letters, the two men arranged to meet in a duel on July 11, on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, at the same site where Hamilton's oldest son, Philip, had died in a duel three years earlier. There are indications that both Burr and Hamilton intended to aim their fire safely away from each other, so that both would emerge from the duel unhurt, but if that was Hamilton's intention, he did not follow the accepted protocol for indicating it. It is not clear who shot first, but when Burr shot, he hit Hamilton in the abdomen. The wounded Hamilton was brought back to New York City, where he died the following afternoon.

July 13 / A Quaker convert to Judaism and early Zionist is born

Warder Cresson was the first U.S. consul to Jerusalem as well as an eccentric who used to preach about the approaching apocalypse.

July 13, 1798, is the birthdate of Warder Cresson, a Philadelphia-born Quaker who served briefly as the United States' first consul in Jerusalem, converted to Judaism, and was a strong and early proponent of the Jews' return to the Holy Land as farmers.

Warder Cresson was the second of eight children born to John Elliott Cresson and the former Mary Warder. He was raised as a Quaker, and at age 17, was sent to work on family farms situated outside Philadelphia, in Darby and Chester. By 1821, he was back at the family homestead, and married Elizabeth Townsend, also a member of the Society of Friends.

After Cresson began questioning the tenets of Quaker faith, he experimented with a number of other religions, trying out life as, among others, a Shaker, a Mormon and a Seventh Day Adventist. He developed a reputation as an eccentric, partly due to his practice of preaching in the streets about the approaching apocalypse. Hence, it is understandable that shortly after Cresson was appointed to the position of consul in Jerusalem, in May 1844, someone (a former treasury secretary) wrote to the U.S. secretary of state, informing him that Cresson's "mind, what there is of it, [is] quite out of order".

By then, however, Cresson, who had been recommended for the job by a U.S. congressman, was already on his way to Palestine. By the time he received Secretary of State John C. Calhoun's letter informing him that the United States had changed its mind about opening a delegation in Jerusalem, Cresson had already been serving in the position for a half year.

Cresson remained in Jerusalem, however, became very interested in the Jewish faith, partly through his close friendships with two successive chief Sephardi rabbis. He changed his name to Michael Boaz Israel ben Abraham and then, in March 1848, he underwent circumcision and formally converted to Judaism. A short time later, Cresson boarded a ship to return to Philadelphia, where he hoped to convince his wife and their two children to follow his path, undergoing conversion and returning with him to the Land of Israel.

By then, Elizabeth had become an Episcopalian and had no interest in becoming a Jew. She had sold off most of his assets, and now filed an "inquisition of lunacy" in a Sheriff's Court. The court judged Cresson mentally unbalanced, he appealed, and the case went on for three years. Cresson brought 73 witnesses to testify to the soundness of his mind, and when a jury of 12 deliberated, they reversed the earlier judgment.

Cresson and Elizabeth then divorced, and he returned to Jerusalem. Already before his first voyage there, Cresson had become interested in the idea of Israel as a haven for persecuted Jews, and of agriculture in particular as the solution for them. Now, he set about to organize farms, including in Jerusalem's Emek Refaim area (today's German Colony), a project that never got beyond the planning stage.

Cresson remarried one Rachel Moleano, with whom he had two children, neither of whom lived to adulthood.

In 1856, Herman Melville visited the Holy Land, a trip that disabused him of an earlier belief that a return to Zion was what was needed for the Jews. He met Cresson, and listened to his ideas, but in his journal, Melville wrote that, "The idea of making farmers of the Jews is vain. In the first place, Judea is a desert, with few exceptions. In the second place, the Jews hate farming...and besides the number of Jews in Palestine is comparatively small".

Cresson remained in Jerusalem until the end of his life, on October 27, 1860. He was buried on the Mount of Olives, but the location of his gravesite was lost. Only in 2013, during an effort to map the Jewish graves of the mount, undertaken by the Elad organization, was Cresson's headstone found and identified.

July 14 / Pope Paul IV orders Jews to live in a ghetto

Pope Paul IV was an unusually intolerant pontiff who said he would've burned his own father had he been a heretic.



Pope Paul IV. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 14, 1555, Pope Paul IV issued his bull “Cum nimis absurdum,” which subjected the Jews under his dominion to a long list of restrictions and humiliations, most notably the requirement that the Jews of Rome live within a closed area. This became the Rome Ghetto, the mandatory home of the city’s Jews until its abolishment in 1870.

Pope Paul IV (1476-1559) was an unusually rigid and intolerant pontiff. He had been the leading figure in the establishment of a Roman Inquisition in 1542 (the papal bull that created the Inquisition stated, “Even if my own father were a heretic, I would gather the wood to burn him...”), and had overseen the burning of the Talmud in Rome in 1553.

Less than two months after his ascent to the papacy on May 23, 1555, he issued “Cum nimis absurdum” – meaning literally, “Because it is completely senseless ...” After those opening words, the proclamation continues: “...and inappropriate to be in a situation where Christian piety allows the Jews (whose guilt -- all of their own doing -- has condemned them to eternal slavery) access to our society and even to live among us...” before laying a long and detailed list of restrictions on Jewish life.

The first in the list of rules was one requiring all Jews in any given town to live in a single district, which was to be enclosed with a wall, and locked at night. The Jews were not allowed to own any property in the ghetto, and were permitted to have but a

single synagogue for prayer. Any others that existed at the time of the promulgation of the bull were to be destroyed.

Jews were obligated to identify themselves with a yellow head-covering. Professionally, they were limited to the rag trade, unless they were trained physicians, in which case they were forbidden from tending to Christians. They were also prohibited from working on Sundays or on Christian feast days, among other restrictions.

The Roman Ghetto was established on the banks of the Tiber river, one of the least desirable sections of the city, if only because of its tendency to flood when the river's waters rose. The Jews, who had their own dialect, called Giudeo-romanesco, had to finance its construction, which was designed by architect Giovanni Sallustio Peruzzi. Initially, it could be entered or departed by only two gates, although by the time the walls were demolished, in the 19th century, that number had increased to eight. Since the area of the ghetto could not expand, the only way to add living space was to build up, to as high as seven stories. This helped to block the sun, making the ghetto a dark space.

On the positive side, Christian landlords could not evict their Jewish tenants, nor could they raise rents. At the same time, the Jews were required to go through an annual ritual by which they requested permission to reside in the ghetto, a privilege for which they also had to pay a tax. Before that procedure was instituted, the Jews had to participate as performers in an annual carnival of humiliation.

The abolishment of the Roman Ghetto took place over a period of nearly a century, beginning with the brief period in 1798-99 when the Papal States were overtaken by the Italian Republic. Again in the mid-1800s, there was a period when Jews were permitted to live outside the ghetto, but this too was temporary. Finally, in 1882, 12 years after the final abolition of the Papal States, the ghetto, the last remaining one in Europe, was formally abolished and its walls torn down.

July 15 / Crusaders break through defenses and conquer Jerusalem

Eyewitness reported that soldiers were 'riding in blood to their knees, and up to the reins of the horses' as locals fled for their lives.



'The Conquest of Jerusalem,' by Émile Signol. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 15, 1099, the Crusader siege of Jerusalem succeeded in breaking through the Fatimid defense of the city and conquering it. Taking possession of the site where Jesus had been crucified and, according to tradition, resurrected, was the stated purpose of the First Crusade, and it resulted in the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1291).

The First Crusade had been initiated by Pope Urban II in November 1095, at least nominally in response to the Fatimid Muslim destruction of the Holy Sepulchre in 1009 and the fall of Jerusalem in general into non-Christian hands, and to the Turkish Seljuk invasion of Asia Minor, which elicited Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos' request to the pope for assistance in defending the Eastern Orthodox Empire.

It was only in early 1099 that the various Crusader armies began to arrive in northern Palestine, and to make their way down the Mediterranean coast toward Jerusalem. On June 7, the first Crusaders reached the walled city, whose Christian residents had earlier been expelled by Jerusalem's Fatimid governor, Iftikhar ad-Daula. The invading armies, who totaled some 1,200 knights and 10 times that many foot soldiers, were led by Raymond IV of Toulouse, Godfrey of Bouillon, Robert of Flanders, Robert of Normandy and Tancred.

A month-long siege remained stymied until July 14, when the Crusaders wheeled up siege towers they had constructed to the city's walls, enabling them to breach them. Once a few were inside, they opened the gates and let their fellow fighters in.

Historians of the Crusades continue to be occupied with the question of whether the conquest of Jerusalem was accompanied by a massacre – of either the Muslims or the Jews residing there. One contemporary source and eyewitness, Raymond D'Aguilers, provides the images that have resounded through the ages: "If I tell you the truth, it will be beyond belief. Let it suffice to say that in the temple [the Dome of the Rock] and around the portico of Solomon [Al-Aqsa], they were riding in blood to their knees, and up to the reins of the horses".

Historian Jay Rubenstein, while not denying that Raymond D'Aguilers believed that he saw what he wrote, suggests that he was heavily influenced by the New Testament's Book of Revelation (14:20), which, in describing apocalyptic times, tells how an angel of the lord will gather the earth's harvest, and run it through the wine press of God's wrath: "And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about 200 miles".

On the other hand, Raymond D'Aguilers also reports how a number of Muslims who took refuge in the Tower of David had their lives spared when they surrendered and were permitted to leave the city with the Fatimid caliph.

The fate of the city's Jews at the time is also the subject of some historical controversy. There were Jews who sided with the Muslims in defending the city, and when Jerusalem fell, they supposedly retreated to their synagogue to wait to be slaughtered. Although some Muslim sources describe how the synagogue was burned down with the Jews inside, a contemporary letter found in the Cairo Geniza by historian S.D. Goitein, though it mentions the burning of the "glorious sanctuary," makes no reference to human victims of the fire.

In fact, Goitein suggests that most of the Jewish population of Jerusalem had left the city during the course of the preceding century, as Seljuk and Fatimid Muslims fought for control. In any case, as opposed to the memorial chronicles written by Jewish communities of the Rhine to record the names of brethren who were massacred during the passage of Crusader armies through their towns, no similar documents have been found noting by name Jewish victims of the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem

July 16 / A Jewish Miss America who scandalized the press is born

Beauty, brains and scandal: Bess Myerson was the kind of woman



the tabloids love to love - and hate.

Bess Myerson. Wikipedia

July 16, 1924, is the birthdate of Bess Myerson, the beauty queen with brains – the first Jewish Miss America, who went on to a successful career in entertainment and public service, but also had her share of tawdry scandal. She has been the kind of woman the tabloids love to love – and hate.

Myerson was born in the Bronx, New York, the second of three daughters of Louis and Bella Myerson, both of them Russian-Jewish immigrants who had met in the United States. She grew up in the Sholem Aleichem housing cooperative, whose 250 families were working-class Jews.

Myerson attended New York's High School of Music and Arts, where she played both flute and piano, followed by Hunter College, from which she graduated in 1945 as a music major.

Legend has it that she entered the competition that led to the Miss America pageant after a friend jokingly suggested that the \$5,000 prize awarded to the winner could pay for the Steinway piano she dreamed of owning.

In fact, Myerson used the money she earned from being the first (and to date, only) Jew and the first New Yorker to win the contest, in September 1945, to pay for graduate studies at Juilliard School of Music and Columbia University. Her victory elicited anti-Semitic backlash, including the withdrawal of three of the annual beauty pageant's five sponsors from the arrangement by which the queen would represent the company during her year-long reign.

I've got a secret

Still, Myerson's victory became a springboard to years of commercial endorsements, and also to regular appearances in the 1950s and '60s on such television game shows as "The Big Payoff" and "I've Got a Secret." She went on to become a consumer advocate, serving New York Mayor John Lindsay in 1969-73 as a successful commissioner of consumer affairs.

When Congressman Ed Koch ran for mayor in 1977, Myerson chaired his campaign and also served as his regular public companion, eliciting frequent speculation that she was providing cover for the unmarried politician, whom many suspected of being gay. (Koch, who died last year, never responded to questions about his sexual orientation, and neither he nor Myerson ever claimed to be romantically involved.) In 1983, Koch appointed her his commissioner of cultural affairs.

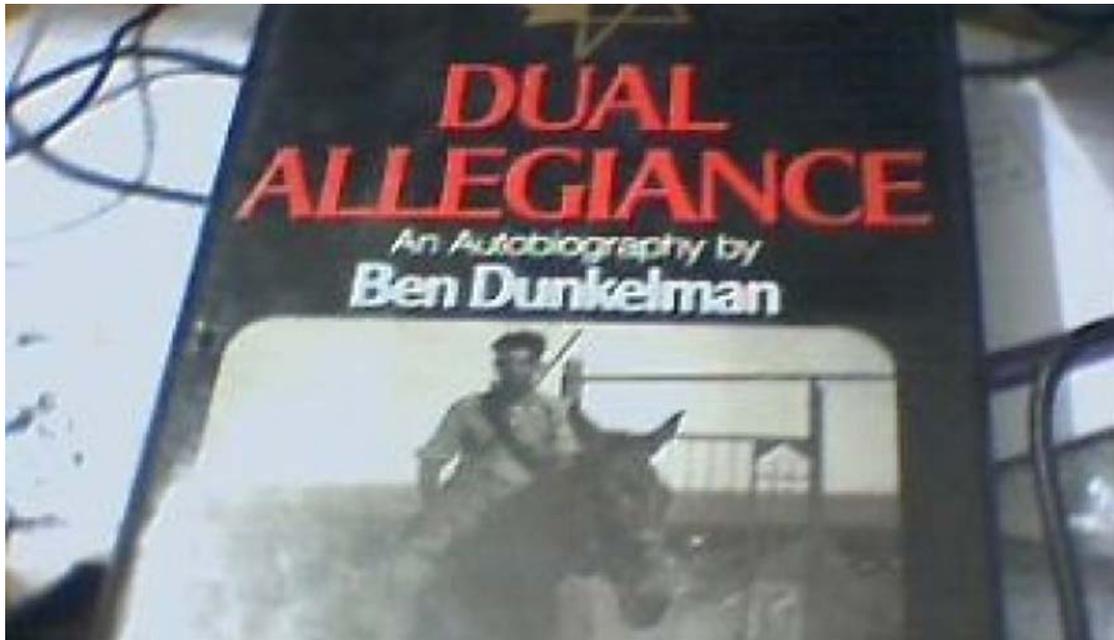
Myerson herself had run for office in 1980, competing in a four-way race for the Democratic nomination for U.S. senator. She came in a close second to Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, who went on to lose the general election to Alphonse D'Amato.

Myerson was married and divorced three times – twice to the same man, attorney Arnold Grant – and she had a daughter with her first husband, Allan Wayne. During the 1980s, she had an ongoing affair with Carl Capasso, a successful New York sewer contractor. In 1987-88, she and Capasso stood trial on charges they had schemed to bribe the New York judge, Hortense Gabel, who had overseen Capasso's divorce agreement with his wife, into lowering his monthly payments to her. The "bribe" was not monetary, but rather a job in Myerson's cultural affairs department for Judge Gabel's emotionally disturbed daughter. At the end of a spectacular trial, all the defendants were acquitted. Also in 1988, Myerson was caught shoplifting in Allentown, Pennsylvania, during a visit to Capasso, who was serving prison time there on a separate tax-fraud conviction.

Following those episodes, Myerson largely withdrew from public life, although she did do fundraising for Israel Bonds over many years. In February 2013, when Ed Koch died, the New York Daily News reported that Myerson, then 88, was living in Santa Monica, California, and suffering from dementia.

July 17 / Officer refuses to expel Nazareth Arabs

Ben Dunkelman, the IDF officer who refused an order, arrived in Israel as a volunteer from Canada.



Ben Dunkelman's autobiography 'Dual Allegiance'.

On July 17, 1948, Ben Dunkelman, the commander of Israeli forces that a day earlier had conquered the Arab city of Nazareth, refused an order from his superiors to expel the residents of the city, who had already surrendered with virtually no resistance. His superiors backed down, the majority of Nazareth's citizens stayed put, and no one was massacred or banished.

Benjamin Dunkelman was a Canadian volunteer, the first to arrive in Israel, in April 1948, shortly before independence. He was born in Toronto on June 16, 1913, one of six children of David Dunkelman and the former Rose Miller. David was a successful clothing manufacturer, and Rose was active in a number of Jewish causes and organizations in Toronto, including Hadassah.

When he reached age 18, Ben's parents bought him a ticket to sail to Palestine and back. He came, and remained a year, working on a private farm, Tel Asher. When he returned home, in 1932, he attended Upper Canada College and worked in the family business.

During World War II, Dunkelman volunteered for the Queen's Own Rifles regiment of Canada (his first choice was the Royal Canadian Navy, but such a course wasn't open to a Jew at the time), and he underwent officers' training in Britain. He saw action in France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, participating in the Allied landings in Normandy on June 6, 1944, and receiving a Distinguished Service Order for his

service in Operation Blockbuster, in Germany, in February 1945. He finished the war with the rank of major.

After the war, Dunkelman was offered the opportunity to command the Queen's Own Rifles, and was also encouraged to run for Canadian parliament. Instead, he went into business back in Toronto, and when war began to seem inevitable in Israel, he led the effort to organize Canadian volunteers with military experience to help out.

Back in Israel in the spring of 1948, Dunkelman was given command of the 7th Armored Brigade, after participating with the Harel Brigade in breaking the siege on Jerusalem, under Yitzhak Rabin. In Operation Dekel, which began on July 8, 1948, the Seventh Brigade, together with comrades from the Carmeli and Golani Brigades, was given the mission of capturing Nazareth and its environs in the Lower Galilee.

On July 16, Nazareth surrendered, with almost no resistance. The city elders did so in an agreement with the IDF, led by Dunkelman, which promised them they would be left in peace. The following day, however, Dunkelman received an order from General Haim Laskov, his direct superior (and later Israel's chief of staff), to evacuate the civilian population of Nazareth. Dunkelman later told Israeli journalist Peretz Kidron that he was "shocked and horrified. I told [Laskov] I would do nothing of the sort — in view of our promises to safeguard the city's people... I reminded him that scarcely a day earlier, he and I, as representatives of the Israeli army, had signed the surrender document in which we solemnly pledged to do nothing to harm the city or its population. When Haim saw that I refused to obey the order, he left".

Laskov appealed to the IDF General Staff for an order, and the question was referred to David Ben-Gurion, the defense minister. His response was that "the inhabitants of Nazareth should not be expelled".

Two days later, Dunkelman was replaced as military governor of Nazareth, but at the same time, the Seventh Brigade was withdrawn from the city. Dunkelman said that "I felt sure that [the order to withdraw from Nazareth] had been given because of my defiance of the evacuation order".

At the end of the war, Dunkelman turned down an offer from Ben-Gurion to remain in Israel as an army officer. He and his wife, Yael, whom he had met in the IDF, went back to Canada, where he eventually became involved in real-estate development. His projects in Toronto included the Cloverdale Mall and the Regal-Constellation Hotel, and he and Yael also owned an art gallery and several restaurants.

Ben Dunkelman died on June 11, 1997, just short of his 84th birthday.

July 18 / Civil War hero, Washington governor dies

Edward Salomon 'was the only soldier at Gettysburg who did not dodge when Lee's guns thundered; he stood up, smoked his cigar and faced the cannon balls with the sangfroid of a Saladin'...



Edward Selig Salomon, U.S. Civil War hero, governor of Washington Territory.

On July 18, 1913, Edward Selig Salomon, the German-born American Civil War hero who later became governor of Washington Territory, died. Edward Selig Salomon was born on December 25, 1836, in the duchy of Schleswig, then part of Denmark. He was one of 11 children born to Salomon M. Salomon and the former Caroline Samuels – all of whom but one (who died in youth) emigrated to the United States.

After finishing school in Europe, Edward Salomon set out for the United States, arriving in New York around 1855. The following year, he moved westward to Chicago, where he worked briefly in business and studied law. Salomon was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1859. Two years later, not yet 25, he was elected an alderman (city council member) from Chicago's sixth ward.

On May 5, 1861, after the outbreak of the Civil War, Salomon enlisted in the 24th Illinois Infantry regiment, led by Colonel Friedrich Franz Karl Hecker. (Hecker was a German-born politician who immigrated to the United States in 1848, and during the war, set up a unit of German, Hungarian, Czech and Slovak immigrants to fight for the Union.) Hecker later resigned and formed a new regiment, the 82nd Illinois, and Salomon followed him, joining him with the rank of lieutenant colonel in September 1862. He led the regiment's Company C, which was comprised nearly entirely of Jews. Historian Jonathan Sarna has written how the Jewish community of Chicago

raised \$11,000 to be divvied up as bonuses to those who would enlist in the ranks of Company C.

Salomon distinguished himself at the Battle of Gettysburg, in July 1863, where he took over for Hecker after the latter was wounded. Although he had two horses shot out from under him, Salomon kept fighting over the three days of battle. His corps commander, Maj. Gen Carl Schurz, later described his comportment as follows: “He was the only soldier at Gettysburg who did not dodge when Lee’s guns thundered; he stood up, smoked his cigar and faced the cannon balls with the sangfroid of a Saladin” ...

In 1864, Hecker resigned and Salomon took over command of the 82nd. He led the regiment during the Atlanta Campaign, and he also fought at Chattanooga, Lookout Mountain, and Chancellorsville. He finally received a promotion to brigadier general on March 13, 1865 for his “distinguished gallantry and meritorious service.” He was all of 28 at the time. (Two of his cousins, Edward Salomon and Frederick Salomon, also served as generals in the Civil War. The other Edward later became governor of Wisconsin).

Back in Chicago following the war, Salomon was appointed Cook County clerk, a position that oversees the city’s elections apparatus, among other duties. Recognized as a war hero, he remained involved in veterans’ affairs.

In 1870, Salomon’s former supreme commander, Ulysses S. Grant, now president, named him the ninth governor of the Washington Territory. (Washington became a state only 1889).

The governor, who retained a German accent his entire life, was sometimes a source of mirth. Once, visiting Seattle, Salomon walked up Yesler’s Way from the pier. Scooping up some dark sawdust mixed with horse dung, from the street, he reportedly exclaimed with enthusiasm, “Mein Gott! Vot a splendid soil for cabbages”!

Caught up in the various scandals that characterized the Grant presidency, although his personal record remained unblemished, Salomon resigned the position after two years. He and his wife, the former Sophie Greenhut, together with their six children, moved to San Francisco, where Salomon practiced law, and served as an assistant district attorney and later two terms in the California state assembly. San Francisco is also where he died, on this day in 1913 .

July 19 / The father of Betty Boop is born

Max Fleischer, inventor and maker of the first animated film with sound, also created the sing-along with the bouncing ball.



Max Fleischer Photo by Wikimedia Commons

July 19, 1883, is the birthdate of Max Fleischer, maker of the first animated film with sound and, with his brother Dave, one of the great – if today largely forgotten – pioneers of the art form. Among the most well-known cartoon characters to emerge from Fleischer Studios, in the 1930s, were Betty Boop and Popeye the Sailor.

Max Fleischer was the second-born of the six children of William Fleischer, a tailor from Krakow, Poland (or, according to some sources, from Vienna.)

The father immigrated to New York in the mid-1880s and brought over the rest of the family in 1887. Max grew up in Brooklyn, and became interested in drawing cartoons while a teenager. After high school, he studied graphic arts at Cooper Union and at the Mechanic and Tradesman’s School.

In 1915, Fleischer received a patent for his Rotoscope system, a labor-saving method for creating animated movies frame by frame by tracing projected images of live-action films. Max and Dave made their first movie using the technology in 1914, and four years later employed the method in a series of shorts they produced for Bray Studios in New York called “Out of the Inkwell”.

Amazingly, the “Out of the Inkwell” films, most of which are lost today, combined live-action with animation, with images of a live-action Max Fleischer dipping a pen into an ink bottle and then putting the pen to paper to create cartoons. Two characters

that recurred in the series were Koko the Clown (based on Dave Fleischer dressed in a clown suit) and his dog Fitz.

By 1921, the Fleischer brothers, joined by their sibling Lou, organized their own Fleischer Studios (initially called Out of the Inkwell Studios), and began producing “Song Car-Tunes,” sing-along shorts that incorporated a follow-the-bouncing-ball image, with a dog telling audience members to “follow the ball, and join in, everybody.” These were initially silent films, but by 1924, the Fleischers, employing a method developed by Lee DeForest, were using synchronized sound – the first animated talkies, two years before Walt Disney introduced Steamboat Willie to the world.

The science of evolution

Other Fleischer Studios releases included two 20-minute shorts explaining scientific concepts – one on evolution, the other on Einstein’s theory of relativity. Also innovative was their depiction of animated and live-action images of African-American jazz musicians, such as Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong, singing their own songs.

Nineteen-thirty presaged the birth of Betty Boop, perhaps Max Fleischer’s most memorable character. Betty, a young woman who initially had certain poodle-like characteristics, was a flapper type who, at least in part unwittingly, oozed sexuality – until the Hollywood censors got to her with their Production Code. Her first appearance was as a waitress in a cartoon called “Dizzy Dishes,” and she appeared regularly in Fleischer shorts until 1939. In one film, she preserves her “boop-ooop-a-doop” from a lecherous circus ringmaster; in another she is scared off by a walrus who, thanks to the Rotoscope, resembles Cab Calloway, and who sings his “Minnie the Moocher” to her.

It was in a Betty Boop picture that Fleischer’s other big star, Popeye the Sailor, made his debut. Fleischer had secured the rights to bring the comic-strip character to the screen from King Features Syndicate.

By this time, Fleischer films were being distributed by Paramount Pictures, which also invested in the company, and it was this relationship, though for some time mutually profitable, that contributed to the demise of Fleischer Studios. Paramount was resistant to investing in Technicolor technology, leaving Disney Studios to move fully into three-color movies earlier. Despite the success of Fleischer’s titles, and their artistic sophistication, they couldn’t keep up with Disney, especially after the latter brought out its full-length “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” in 1937.

In 1942, with Fleischer Studios in deep debt to Paramount, the brothers, who by now were bickering between themselves, found themselves taken over by the larger company. Max and Dave went their separate ways, and Paramount renamed their firm Famous Studios, appointing Max’s son-in-law as one of its new directors.

Max went on to make educational movies, including training films for the armed forces during World War II, and later worked for other studios, making, among other things, a full-length cartoon about Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, in 1948.

Max and Dave never reconciled. Max and his wife Essie (Ethel) moved into the Motion Picture Country House, a retirement community, in 1967, and he died in Los Angeles on September 11, 1972, at the age of 89.

July 20 / A ship carrying 152 Jews who had fled Spain sails to South America

The passengers who thought they were heading to French Guiana ended up in Tobago where they became destitute.



Pigeon Point, Tobago Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 20, 1660, a ship carrying 152 Jews, most of them from Livorno, in Italy, set sail for the New World, under the auspices of the Dutch West India Company.

Livorno, a large trading center on the northwest coast of Italy, had since the late 16th century been a major destination for Jews fleeing Iberia in the wake of the Inquisition. By the mid-17th century, Sephardi Jews living there and in the Netherlands began to serve as a source of colonization in the Atlantic colonies.

The journey of the *Monte de Cisne* on July 20 was organized by one Paulo Jacomo Pinto, who negotiated with the West India Company to bring several ship loads of colonists to the northeast coast of South America. In the case of the *Monte de Cisne*, the destination was apparently the island of Cayenne, today the capital of French Guiana, but either by accident or perhaps by design, the ship ended up at Tobago, an island to the northeast, off of Venezuela. There, they were “reduced to utmost poverty,” according to the records of the Dutch West India Company.

Among those in the group was the converso poet Miguel de Barrios (1625-1701; called Daniel Halevi in Hebrew). Barrios was Spanish-born, but was on the move throughout his life, and had come to Livorno by way of Algeria, another destination for converso Jews looking for refuge after departing Spain. As Spanish rule in Algeria became increasingly strict vis-à-vis Jews, many of them moved on to Livorno, where they could live openly as Jews.

Historian Mordechai Arbell, in his book “The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean,” describes numerous Dutch settlements along the coastline of what are today Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. These colonies served not only as sources of agricultural exports to Europe, but also as defensive outposts in the Netherlands’ ongoing conflict with Spain and Portugal. The Dutch colonies were fairly welcoming to Jews, and allowed them to practice their religion. Especially after their expulsion from Recife, Jews, who had developed significant expertise in both growing and refining sugarcane, were sought out for the Dutch settlements.

Although the passengers on board the *Monte de Cisne* believed they were destined for Cayenne, there is reason to believe that Paulo Jacomo Pinto intentionally had them directed to Tobago, where they joined colonists from Britain, France and Latvia. Most did not remain. Some, like Miguel de Barrios, returned to Amsterdam, after the death of his wife on the island. Others moved to Cayenne. Although some remained, today, there is no evidence in the Jewish cemetery of Tobago of this early wave of settlers.

Arbell, in his book, outlines a number of reasons why the Jewish colony in Tobago failed. They include a lack of economic support from the Dutch West India Company or from the Dutch Lampsins family, who ran the colony, as well as an absence of the technical skills held, for example, by expellees from Recife; a lack of strong grounding in Judaism, considering that many of them were recent returnees to the faith; and tensions between the various nations with colonies in Tobago, as well as between settlers and indigenous peoples.

As for Miguel de Barrios, he ended up in Brussels, where he became an officer in the Spanish army. He wrote works of poetry and theater, full of philosophical and religious musings, and he became a follower of the false messiah Shabtai Tzvi. He died in Amsterdam in 1701.

July 21 / Reuters' founder is born

Paul Julius Reuter established his news agency in 1849, which went on to become the U.K.'s most valuable brand.



Portrait of Paul Julius Reuter, 1869. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

July 21, 1816, is the birthdate of Paul Julius Freiherr von Reuter, the enterprising rabbi's son who became the founder of the news service that bears his name.

He was born Israel Beer Josaphat, in Kassel, Germany, the son of Rabbi Samuel Levi Josaphat and his wife, the former Betty Sanders. After initial education in Kassel, Josaphat was sent, at age 13, to Göttingen to work in an uncle's bank. It was in that city that he became acquainted with the physicist Carl Friedrich Gauss, who was experimenting with telegraphy, a technology whose potential Josaphat anticipated early on.

By October 1845, Josaphat was part owner of a German-language publisher called Reuters, and was married – apparently in a civil ceremony – to one Ida Maria Elizabeth Clementine Magnus, daughter of a Lutheran pastor from Berlin. That month, the couple sailed to London, where Josaphat, now calling himself Julius (for his month of birth), sought customers for his firm's books. It was also in London that Julius decided to convert. He did so on November 16, 1845, at St. George's German Lutheran Chapel, changing his name to Paul Julius Reuter. Seven days later, he and Clementine repeated their nuptials in a religious ceremony at the same church.

Having failed to drum up much business in England, Paul and Clementine returned to Berlin. There he became part owner of a bookstore, Reuter and Stargardt, which published a number of radical pamphlets at the time of the 1848 revolutions. Afraid of

arrest, Reuter fled to Paris; his former partners later said he absconded with company funds on departure.

Reuter had many business failures before his big success. For a while in Paris, he translated articles from French to German for sale back home. Then he worked as a translator for the Havas news agency, the predecessor of Agence France Presse. When, in 1849, Europe's first commercial telegraph line went into service, Reuter established his own wire service, using carrier pigeons to carry dispatches from Brussels to Aachen, the last 150-km stretch not traversed by the telegraph link between Belgium and Germany.

By 1851, that gap was closed and Reuter was back in London, where he set up an office at the London Royal Exchange, to transmit stock quotations to Paris and points east, via the new Dover-Calais telegraph cable. Although a large part of his business also consisted of telegrams, in 1858 Reuter succeeded in signing up several London papers to his news service. Business picked up the next year, after he convinced Napoleon III to give him an advance copy of a planned speech that heralded the Second Italian War of Independence. Reuter held off on transmitting it to subscribers until Napoleon began delivering it.

In April 1865, Reuter was the first in Europe to have the news of Abraham Lincoln's shooting – 12 days after the event itself – although there is evidence that The Associated Press scooped Reuters in actual transmission of Lincoln's death.

As telegraph cables were laid linking Asia and America to Europe, and international news no longer needed to be carried by steamer ship, the Reuters agency quickly established offices in Alexandria, Bombay, China and beyond. Eventually, though, Reuters, Havas and the German Wolff Telegraphic Bureau agreed on dividing coverage of the world (outside North America) between themselves, an arrangement that held until the 1930s.

Paul Julius Reuter retired as general director of the firm in 1878, and was succeeded by his son, Herbert. Paul died at his home, Villa Reuter, in Nice, France, on February 25, 1899. With Herbert's death, in 1915, the family's connection to Reuters ended.

By the turn of the 21st century, a still-independent Reuters was being described as the U.K.'s most valuable brand; in 2008, it became part of the Thomson Reuters media and information firm.

July 22/ The Polish pediatrician who went to the end with his children was born

Korczak is remembered for having turned down opportunities to be spared deportation, insisting on accompanying his children to the end, but his lasting contribution was as a theorist and innovator in child development.



Janusz Korczak with a group of children. Photo by Yad Vashem Archive.

July 22 1878 (or 1879) is the birthdate of Janusz Korczak, the Polish-Jewish pediatrician, educator and writer, who was deported to Treblinka together with the residents and staff of the Warsaw orphanage he directed in August 1942. Korczak is largely remembered today for having turned down several opportunities to be spared deportation and insisting on accompanying his children to the end, but his lasting contribution was as a theorist and innovator in child development. His work remains relevant and studied to this day.

Henryk Goldszmit, his given name, was born in Warsaw to Jozef Goldszmit and Cecylia Gebicka Goldszmit. (There is some disagreement about his year of birth.) Jozef was a successful lawyer who was hospitalized with mental illness in 1890 and died there six years later.

In the 1890s, the son studied in the “Flying University,” an underground school that resisted the government control that dominated conventional institutions of learning. Later he studied medicine at the University of Warsaw, before deciding on pediatrics as his speciality. At the same time, he began writing fiction, and, when submitting a story to a literary competition in 1898, he adopted the pseudonym of “Janusz

Korczak,” which he took from a book by writer Józef Ignacy Krasiński – “Janasz Korczak and the Pretty Swordsweeperlady”.

After studying briefly in Berlin, Korczak, who had already worked in a children’s school and at summer camps, was appointed director of a new orphanage, Dom Sierot (literally, “house of orphans”), for Jewish children in Warsaw. That was in 1912. As managing director, he hired Stefania Wilczyńska, also an educator and a Jew, who remained his professional partner to the end of both their lives.

Korczak served as a military doctor both in World War I and during the Polish-Soviet War that followed, in 1919.

Dom Sierot, on Krochmalna Street, offered Korczak the opportunity to put into action some of his evolving philosophy about a child’s need for autonomy. Working with children first hand, he became convinced that they were individuals deserving of respect, and didn’t just exist at the sufferance of adults. In this vein, Korczak was an early advocate of an international declaration of children’s rights.

Korczak established something of a children’s republic at Dom Sierot, suggestive of the democratic schools that are popular today. The children had their own legislature and court (to whose rulings both children and adults were subject), and they published a newspaper. By 1926, the children’s newspaper was being distributed on a weekly basis together with the Polish-Jewish daily "Nasz Przegląd" (Our Review.)

As a writer, he produced both popular children’s novels, such as “King Matt the First” (still a classic in Korczak’s native Poland) and “Kajtus the Wizard,” and professional works like “The Child’s Right to Respect” and “How to Love a Child.” He left behind a large body of writing, most of which has yet to be translated into other languages from Polish.

Korczak spent one day a week defending children who were in trouble with the law, and who stood to receive prison sentences. About the delinquent child he wrote: “He is a child who has not given up yet, but does not know who he is. A punitive sentence could adversely influence his future sense of himself and his behavior.” He appeared frequently on Polish radio, and was known affectionately by the public as the “Old Doctor”.

In 1940, when the Jews of Warsaw were forced to move into a ghetto, the Dom Sierot, too, had to relocate from Krochmalna Street, to successive new venues within the ghetto. On August 5 or 6, 1942, the Germans came for the children of the home, in order to deport them to Treblinka. Korczak, as a respected public figure, had been offered refuge on the Aryan side of Warsaw, including from Żegota, the Polish Resistance’s Council to Aid Jews. He turned down all the offers, as he felt a responsibility for remaining with the home’s nearly 200 children.

Stefania Wilczynska, too, had been given a rare opportunity after the German invasion to leave Poland for Palestine, where she had lived for several years in the 1930s, at Kibbutz Ein Harod. At the last minute, she turned the offer down. (Korczak had visited Palestine several times in the 1930s, and had considered moving there.) When the Germans showed up in early August of 1942, she and Korczak, together with a third staffer Salomea Broniatowska, each led a line of children out of the home on Sienna Street on the more than four-kilometer walk to the Umschlagplatz, the railway platform from which trains departed the ghetto for Treblinka.

Ghetto historian Emanuel Ringelblum quoted a witness to the procession that day as observing that “This was not a march to the railway cars -- this was an organized, wordless protest against the murder”.

The precise fate of Korczak, his colleagues and the children is not known, but it is assumed that they were sent to their deaths in the gas chamber upon their arrival at the death camp.

July 23 / Author of 'The Chosen' dies, aged 73

Chaim Potok, known best for the novel on which the Rod Steiger/Robby Benson movie was based, focused on tensions in 20th-century American Judaism.

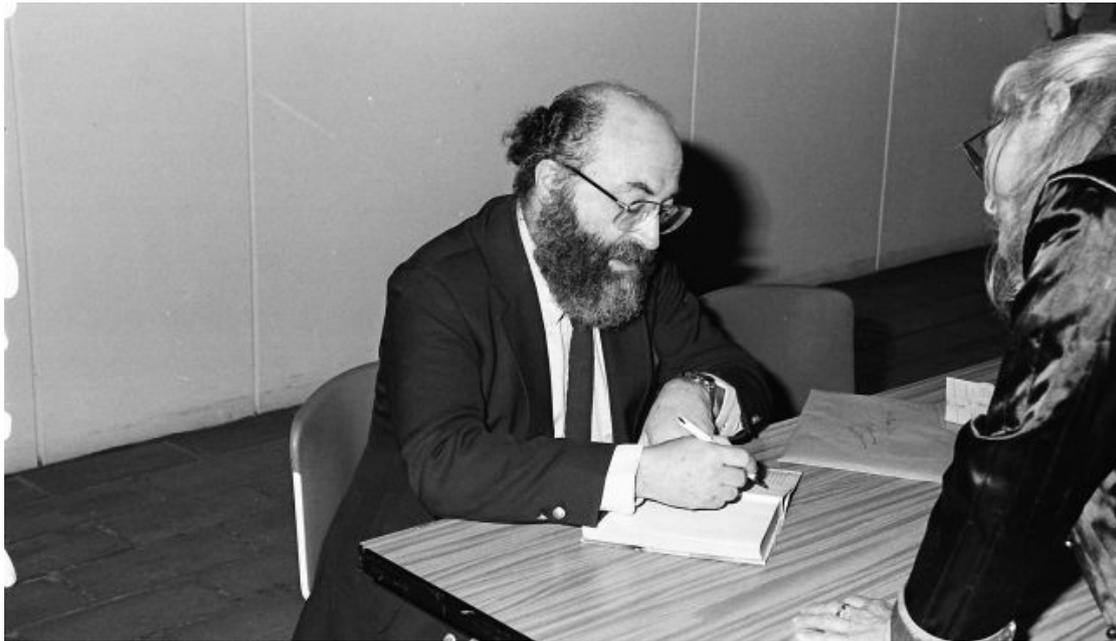


Photo by MDCarchives, licensed under Creative Commons.

On July 23, 2002, writer Chaim Potok, who in a number of popular novels, most notably “The Chosen,” explored the tension between being a believing, observant Jew and taking one’s place in the critical secular world — a tension he had experienced personally — died, aged 73. Potok was a pioneer in making accessible to millions of readers the insular world of Hasidic Jewry, doing so with knowledge and sympathy, even if ultimately he chose to live outside ultra-Orthodoxy.

Herman Harold Potok (who for most of his life was known by his Hebrew name, Chaim Tzvi) was born on February 17, 1929, in Bronx, New York, the eldest of the four children of Benjamin Max Potok, a merchant and jeweler, and the former Mollie Friedman. Both parents were Hasidic Jews who had emigrated from Poland earlier in the decade.

In a 1992 interview, quoted by The New York Times, he described his upbringing as “essentially a fundamentalist atmosphere, which by definition is both joyous and oppressive simultaneously.” He spent much of his time reading secular works in secret in the public library, and later said it was Evelyn Waugh’s “Brideshead

Revisited” that made him want to be a writer. That novel, about an aristocratic English family and its members’ respective relationships to their Catholicism, took Potok, while he was reading it, “inside a world the merest existence of which I had known nothing about,” he later said.

His parents were liberal enough that they did not discourage his secular reading, but Potok told an interviewer late in life that when he revealed his aspirations to be a writer, his mother said: “You want to write stories? That’s very nice. You be a brain surgeon, and on the side you write stories”.

Chaim attended yeshiva in the Bronx, and then high school and college at Yeshiva University. It was following college, where he studied English and edited the literary magazine, that he decided to stray from the path of a strictly Orthodox life. At the Jewish Theological Seminary, he received, in 1954, a master’s in Hebrew literature as well as ordination as a Conservative rabbi. In the world he came from, that was akin to intermarrying.

In 1955-57, Potok served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army in South Korea, where he saw action, and from which drew inspiration for two novels written decades later, “The Book of Lights” (1981) and “I Am the Clay” (1992). In 1958, he married Adena Mosevitzky, a psychiatric social worker he met at Camp Ramah in the Poconos in 1952.

Potok, who completed a Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania in 1965, worked as a teacher and an editor at a number of institutions, including nine years as editor in chief of the Jewish Publication Society. Over a period of seven years he worked on his first novel, “The Chosen,” about the friendship between two Brooklyn boys, Reuven Malter and Danny Saunders, the first the son of a Hasidic rebbe, who wants to study psychology in the secular world, the other the modern-Orthodox son of an enlightened but remote scholar. The book sold some 3.4 million copies worldwide and was made into a movie, in 1982, starring Rod Steiger and Robby Benson, for which Potok wrote the screenplay.

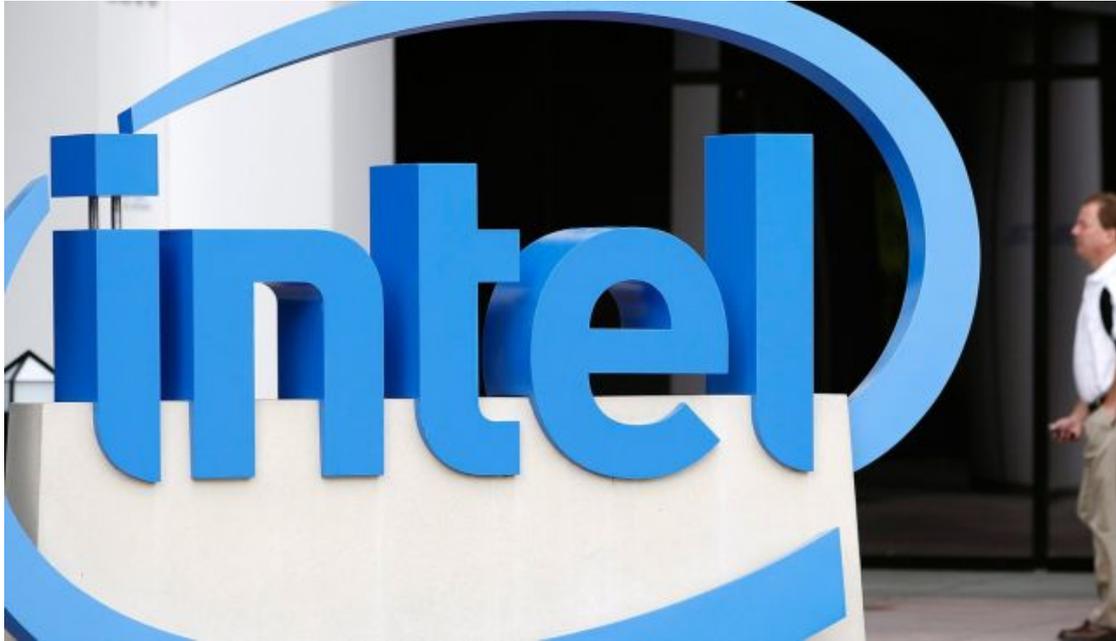
Other novels included “The Promise” (1969), “My Name Is Asher Lev” (1972) and “Davita’s Harp” (1985). His nonfiction, 1978 “Wanderings: Chaim Potok’s History of the Jews,” was also very popular.

Literary critics slighted Potok for his pedestrian style, and also for returning to the same theme in successive books, but readers responded to his storytelling ability and to the conflicts with which his protagonists struggled. Unlike many other notable Jewish-American writers of the late 20th century, he placed himself and his characters within traditional Judaism, even as he rejected fundamentalism.

Chaim Potok died of brain cancer on this date in 2002.

July 24 / Intel co-founder and self-described Luddite is born

Max Palevsky was an American tech entrepreneur who backed Democrats, saved Rolling Stone magazine and collected art.



Intel company's headquarters in Santa Clara, California Photo by Bloomberg.

July 24, 1924, is the birthdate of Max Palevsky, the American technological entrepreneur, philanthropist and art collector who was one of the founders of Intel and, surprisingly, claimed in 2001 that he never got near computers.

Palevsky was the youngest of three children, born in Chicago, Illinois, to Izchok Palevsky and Sarah Greenblatt Palevsky, Jewish immigrant parents from czarist Russia. Both were Yiddish speakers who never learned English fluently. Izchok worked as a house painter; he used public transportation to get himself and his equipment from job to job.

After high school, Max Palevsky volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Corps, and was trained as a meteorologist before being sent to New Guinea, the air corps' main electronics base in the South Pacific. He served from 1943 to 1946. The G.I. Bill enabled him to continue his schooling after the war, and he earned bachelor degrees in math and philosophy at the University of Chicago, and later began a Ph.D. program in philosophy at UCLA.

In the late 1940s, while studying and teaching at UCLA, Palevsky attended a lecture about the potential of computer technology by the mathematician John von Neumann at the California Institute of Technology. The experience was powerful enough that

Palevsky resigned from his doctoral program and took a job designing differential analyzers at Northrop Aircraft. A short time later, his division was sold to Bendix Corporation, where he continued as an engineer, working on the logic design for the company's first digital computer.

From Bendix, Palevsky moved on to Packard-Bell, becoming the director of its new computer division, which produced the first silicon computer. Seeing an opportunity in the field of small-to-medium-size process-control computers, in 1961, Palevsky raised \$1 million and started his own company, Scientific Data Systems. SDS was profitable from its first project, and became a pioneer in devices that could handle both scientific and business-data computing. SDS was sold to Xerox for nearly \$1 billion in 1969 – a time, as Palevsky later told an interviewer, “when \$1 billion meant something.” Palevsky's own take from the deal was some \$100 million.

Thereafter, Palevsky played the role of funder – in 1968, he and venture capitalist Arthur Rock provided the initial funding for Integrated Electronics Corporation, later called Intel. But he also supported liberal politicians providing donations to Democratic anti-war presidential candidates Eugene McCarthy, in 1968, and Robert Kennedy and later George McGovern, four years later. In 1973, Palevsky funded the successful mayoral campaign of Tom Bradley, the first and only black mayor of Los Angeles.

In 2000, however, having become disenchanted with the role that big money had come to play in politics, Palevsky made his biggest political donation ever -- \$1 million -- to fund California Proposition 25, which would have limited personal contributions to campaigns, and banned corporate gifts altogether. At the time, he told Newsweek, “I am making this million-dollar contribution in hopes that I will never again legally be allowed to write huge checks to California political candidates.” The ballot measure, however, was defeated.

In the 1970s, Palevsky turned his attention – and money – to the arts, becoming an important art collector – of early 20th-century Arts and Crafts movement furniture, and of modern art. He provided funding to save Rolling Stone magazine from closing in 1970, thereupon becoming its board chairman, and he started producing movies as well (“Islands in the Stream” and “Fun with Dick and Jane” are two of his more well-known, if not especially distinguished, credits). He owned and spent much time and money outfitting three homes in California; he provided major philanthropic gifts to his alma mater the University of Chicago (\$20 million for construction of a dormitory complex) and to the Israel Museum, for a design pavilion. As a collector, he was interested in showing everything he owned, and so generally when he bought a new work, he would sell something else.

Late in life, Palevsky became disenchanted with technology. In an interview with the Los Angeles Times in 2008, two years before his death, he explained his discontent

with computers, which, he said, were “originally intended to expedite work and solve serious problems,” but had become “passive entertainment devices -- substitutes for interactions with the real world. Just as the Arts and Crafts movement took issue with the alienation of people from ‘pleasure in labor’ and the resulting loss of human creativity, I, too,” he continued, “oppose the depersonalization that comes from the hypnotic quality of computer games, the substitution of a Google search for genuine inquiry, the instant messaging that has replaced social discourse”.

As early as 2001, characterizing himself as “a Luddite,” he told another interviewer that he had not “touched a computer, watched TV or used a credit card in 15 years”.

Palevsky was married six times, twice to the same woman, Jodie Evans, who is also his widow. Evans is a cofounder of the women’s anti-war organization Codepink, and, among many other causes, has been critical of Israel’s blockade of Gaza and called for an end to U.S. military aid to Israel.

Max Palevsky suffered from heart disease and once told a friend that the worst aspect of having had four heart attacks was that his physician wouldn’t allow him to take LSD anymore. He died of heart failure, in Los Angeles, on May 5, 2010, at age 85.

July 25 / Bob Dylan goes electric and the crowd goes something or other

Still, there's a difference between delivering Jesus to be crucified and adopting amplification technology, the singer pointed out.



Joan Baez and Bob Dylan in Washington, D.C. in 1963. Photo by Rowland Scherman

July 25, 1965, was the day that Bob Dylan, the 24-year-old idol of the American folk-music scene, plugged in a Fender Stratocaster guitar and flabbergasted the audience at the Newport Folk Festival with an all-electric set. The audience reaction was emotional and loud, but even today, 49 years later, witnesses cannot agree on whether listeners were booing or cheering, and if the former, whether it was because they were angry at Dylan for going electric, for the poor sound quality or because the set was so short.

That year marked Dylan's third straight appearance at the Newport, Rhode Island, music festival, an event that had been founded in 1959. In 1963, Dylan performed "Blowin' in the Wind" together with Joan Baez; Peter, Paul and Mary and others, and the following year he sang "With God On Our Side" and "Mr. Tambourine Man" — all quite acoustically. In fact, just a day earlier, on Saturday, July 24, he had participated in a ballad workshop, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar and harmonica in a three-song set.

That night, however, he decided, apparently on a whim, that the following day's gig was going to be with amplified instruments.

Secret rehearsal

Dylan quickly organized a five-man band, turning first to Al Kooper and Mike Bloomfield. Both Kooper, on organ, and blues guitarist Bloomfield had joined Dylan in June for the recording of “Like a Rolling Stone,” which had been released the week before the festival. Dylan asked Bloomfield to line up the remaining musicians, and the latter recruited two colleagues from the Paul Butterfield Blues Band, drummer Sam Lay and bassist Jerome Arnold, as well as a high-school friend, Barry Goldberg, for keyboard. Late that night, the ad hoc ensemble assembled at the home of festival founder and producer George Wein for a secret rehearsal.

The following evening, Dylan and company came on stage after traditional musician Cousin Emmy and the New Lost City Ramblers, who ended their set with “Turkey in the Straw.” Though allocated 45 minutes of playing time, they had sufficed to prepare only three songs: “Maggie’s Farm,” “Rolling Stone” and “Phantom Engineer,” an early version of “It Takes a Lot to Laugh, It Takes a Train to Cry”.

Aside from its brevity, the set had technical problems, and much of the audience seemed to respond with boos. But the audience also begged for an encore. (Sound mixer Joe Boyd, later a legendary record producer, recalled that, at an outdoor show, “a crowd shouting ‘more, more, more’ at the end of Dylan’s three songs sounded very much like booing”).

The evening’s emcee, Peter Yarrow, called a reluctant Dylan back to the stage. He delivered two more songs, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar: “Mr. Tambourine Man” and “It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue.” He then left the stage — and didn’t return to Newport until 2002.

Judas redux

But that was only the beginning of plugged-in Dylan.

A month later, he performed at New York’s Forest Hills Stadium. Two of the musicians accompanying him that evening, Robbie Robertson and Levon Helm, were members of a band called the Hawks, which in its full complement became his very electric backup band during his world tour over the next year. The Hawks, of course, later became known as The Band.

It was in that tour, during a show in Manchester, England the following May, that several fans assailed Dylan verbally, calling him “Judas.” The always gracious Dylan responded by saying, “I don’t believe you, you’re a liar,” before ordering the band to play the next number “f---ing loud”.

Later he thought to put things into perspective. In a 2012 interview with Rolling Stone, the artist formerly known as Robert Allen Zimmerman responded to charges that lyrics to some of his songs bore uncanny resemblance to the work of other authors by suggesting that those accusing him of plagiarism “are the same people that

tried to pin the name Judas on me [in 1966]. Judas, the most hated name in human history! If you think you've been called a bad name, try to work your way out from under that. Yeah, and for what? For playing an electric guitar? As if that is in some kind of way equitable to betraying our Lord and delivering him up to be crucified.”

July 26 / The world gets its first taste of Esperanto

Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof referred to the new language he described in 'Unua Libro' as 'Lingvo Internacia' - an international language.



Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 26, the physician and philologist Ludwig Zamenhof published “Unua Libro,” a Russian-language pamphlet that provided the public with its first description of the international language that came to be called Esperanto.

Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof was born in Bialystok, Russia (today, in Poland) on December 15, 1859. Both his father, Markus Zamenhof, and grandfather, Fabian Zamenhof, were German teachers, and his native city was one where four languages were spoken regularly. The cultural and religious diversity of Bialystok – home to Jews, Poles, Russians, Belarusians, Tatars and Germans – made for frequent conflicts, and Ludwig became convinced that the lack of a common, neutral language was a prime source of the misunderstandings. Hence, from as early as his high school years, he began thinking about how to create a standard and regular international tongue.

Zamenhof studied medicine in Warsaw, and trained as an ophthalmologist. He practiced his profession among the poor Jewish population of that city, and often offered his services free of charge. His free time, he devoted to linguistic research: In 1879, Zamenhof published a Yiddish grammar, and he labored for a decade on the development of Esperanto, and on initial translations into the artificial tongue.

An example from an early prototype expressed his aspirations for what such a project might accomplish:

Malamikete de las nacjes
Kado, kado, jam temp' esta !
La tot' homoze in familje
Konunigare so deba.

(English translation: “May enmity between the peoples fall. The time is due! All of humanity must unite in a family.”)

Although Zamenhof had an early flirtation with Zionism, even before the political movement came into being, he soon became convinced that the separatist nature of what he referred to as Jewish “self-exile” was a recipe for failure. Instead, he proposed a secular philosophy he called “Hillelism,” after the first century B.C.E. rabbi Hillel, who had summarized the essence of Judaism as being, “That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow.”

Zamenhof referred to the new language he described in “Unua Libro” as “Lingvo Internacia” – “international language.” He published the 44-page pamphlet, however, under the pseudonym of Doktoro Esperanto – “Doctor One-Who-Hopes” – and soon, the word “Esperanto” was applied to the language itself.

“Unua Libro” (meaning “first book” in the new language), which soon had editions in German, Yiddish, English, Polish and French, in addition to its original Russian version, was a brief work that included 16 grammatical rules and 900 roots, along with sample translations into the invented tongue of The Lord’s Prayer and some verses from the Bible, among a few other texts.

In keeping with Zamenhof’s altruism and idealism, he renounced his personal rights to the language, and declared that “Unua Libro” was in the public domain.

Esperanto was almost immediately popular, and by 1905, had become the focus of an annual international conference, an event that, like general interest in Esperanto, continues to this day. For a brief period before World War I, there was talk of making it the official language of Neutral Moresnet, a multi-ethnic territory between Belgium and Germany that at the time was not universally recognized as belonging to a particular state (today, it is part of the Belgian city of Kelmis). Later, after the war, serious consideration was given to making Esperanto the official language of the League of Nations. It was the French delegate to the League – perhaps predictably -- concerned that his country’s language was losing its international role, vetoed the proposal.

The utopian, internationalist nature of the Esperanto movement made it a target of totalitarian regimes like the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. In “Mein Kampf,” Adolf Hitler even suggested that the language, having been created by a Jew, could be used by the international Jewish conspiracy when it achieved its threat to take control of the world. The language was outlawed in Germany in 1936.

Zamenhof himself died on April 14, 1917, of heart failure, in Warsaw. His three children – Adam, an ophthalmologist and hospital director; Lidia, an Esperanto teacher and acolyte of the Bahai religion; and Sofia, a pediatrician – were murdered in the Holocaust.

July 27 / 58 dead after El Al plane shot down over Bulgaria

Lockheed Constellation plane had erroneously strayed into the Eastern European state and was gunned down by two Bulgarian air force fighter jets.



An El Al Lockheed Constellation plane, similar to the one shot down in 1955. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On July 27, 1955, an El Al plane carrying 51 passengers and seven crew was shot down by two fighter jets belonging to the Bulgarian air force, after it had gone off course and strayed across the border into western Bulgaria. Everyone on board was killed.

LY-402, the Israeli carrier's weekly flight from London to Tel Aviv, departed Heathrow Airport on the evening of Tuesday, July 26, 1955, en route to Lod (today Ben-Gurion International Airport), via Vienna and Istanbul. After a layover at the Austrian capital, the Lockheed Constellation – a four-engine propeller plane – took off for Istanbul shortly before 3 A.M. on July 27.

Soon after takeoff, the flight encountered a thunderstorm, something that was known to cause distortions in the old-fashioned NDR navigation system then in use. In the case of LY-402, which was flying along the “Amber 10” air lane, it appears that the pilot changed course after concluding incorrectly that he had passed over the Skopje (Macedonia) navigation beacon. This change of direction caused the aircraft to cross from Yugoslavia into Bulgaria, near the border village of Tran.

Detecting the violation of its airspace, the Bulgarian air force scrambled two MiG-15 jets from the Dobroslavtsi airfield to intercept the intruder, with the sequence of events that followed a subject of debate – at least initially. What's clear is that, as the

civilian plane neared the country's southern border and was about to cross into Greek airspace, the MiGs fired at it. The Constellation exploded at an altitude of 2,000 feet, with its pieces falling to earth near Petrich, Bulgaria. Everyone on board was killed.

Bulgaria quickly acknowledged that it had shot down the plane, and Israel did not dispute that its plane had crossed into Bulgaria without authorization. But the initial Bulgarian version of events had the two air force pilots claiming that they had gone through standard procedure for such cases, including firing warning shots across the front of the plane. The pilots also testified that the Israeli plane had initially moved its wing flaps, indicating its intention to follow the Bulgarian instructions, before breaking away and heading south for the border, as if intending to escape.

According to a history of Bulgarian aviation by Zahari Zahariev, the deputy commander of Bulgarian air defense, Gen. Velitchko Georgiev, told the two pilots, named Petrov and Sankiisky, "If the plane is leaving our territory, disobeying orders, and there is no time left for more warnings, then shoot it down."

Bulgaria quickly backed away from its version of events, issued an apology for the disaster, and eventually paid compensation for the loss of life. Payment to the families of the 22 Israelis on board was set, in 1963, at the maximum allowed by the Warsaw Convention – \$8,236 per passenger. Previous to that, Israel had applied to the World Court to decide on the question of compensation, but the court ruled, for technical reasons, that it did not have jurisdiction over the case.

July 28 / The mysterious murder of one of New York's wealthiest Jews

Benjamin Nathan, a scion of New York's eminent Sephardic clan, was bludgeoned to death in his Manhattan townhouse. More than a century on, the murder remains unsolved.



Nathan's son, Washington, as well as his personal servant William Kelly have been accused of murdering him.

On the night between July 28 and 29, 1870, the New York investor and prominent Jewish citizen Benjamin Nathan was murdered brutally in his Manhattan mansion, at age 57. One hundred and fifty years later, the crime remains unsolved.

Benjamin Nathan, born December 20, 1813, was a scion of one of New York's oldest Jewish clans, Sephardim who had come to the New World by way of England, and had a tendency to marry others from the same clan. Benjamin's father, Seixas Nathan, was among the founders of the New York Stock Exchange, and was active in a variety of social causes in the city.

As Josh Nathan-Kazis, himself a descendant of the Nathan family, wrote in a long article about the murder in Tablet magazine in 2010, patrician Sephardi families like the Nathans "were seen as less Jewish than their coreligionists" who had arrived more recently from Germany and Russia.

"The outcome of this bit of assimilationist jujitsu," he continued, "was that Benjamin Nathan was able to serve as president of Shearith Israel, the city's old Sephardic synagogue, and of Mt. Sinai Hospital, originally known as the Jews' Hospital, while also being a member of the Union Club and the St. Nicholas Society, an organization for New Yorkers of Dutch ancestry whose forebears arrived in the city before 1785."

In an obituary for Nathan, the local business paper *The Albion* paid him the compliment of characterizing him as a Jew who “might easily have been mistaken for a Christian.”

Benjamin Nathan became a vice-president of the NYSE, and invested in railroads and municipal transit lines. He had been chief aide to Hamilton Fish, later the U.S. secretary of state, during the latter’s brief service as governor of New York, and, as noted, was deeply involved in Jewish affairs.

The summer of his murder, Nathan, who had eight children with his wife Emily (nee Hendricks), had rented a 45-acre estate in Morristown, New Jersey, which was serving as their principal residence. However, that Saturday, July 30, was the anniversary of his mother’s death, and Nathan wanted to be able to observe it at his synagogue. For that reason, he remained in Manhattan after work on July 28, and planned to sleep at his residence at 12 W. 23rd Street. There, just off of Fifth Avenue, he owned a four-story mansion that was one of the grandest in the city.

After attending evening services with his sons Frederick, 26, and Washington, 22, who then accompanied him on a visit to his sister, Benjamin Nathan returned home. Because the house was undergoing renovations at the time, Nathan’s servants prepared a makeshift bed for him with four mattresses in a reception room on the second floor. Both sons came home only much later that night.

The following morning, just before 6 A.M., Washington Nathan, a handsome but dissolute young man who had spent much of the preceding evening drunk and in the company of a prostitute, checked in on his father. When Frederick heard Washington scream, he ran into the room where their father was sleeping, and found the body of Benjamin, in a pool of blood. The two shocked brothers ran out of the house, calling for help.

When the police arrived, they found that Benjamin Nathans’ skull had been bludgeoned – hit with a long iron bar a total of six times.

An initial theory of the murder saw it as a burglary gone very badly. But the theory had many holes, most obviously the fact that none of the servants in the house, nor either of the sons, had heard any kind of commotion during the night. Suspicion also fell briefly on Washington Nathan, and, more significantly, on two servants, Ann Kelly and her son William. The police questioning of William Kelly was sufficiently harsh that the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* complained that, whereas the sons of the Jewish victim were treated with “tenderness [and] courtesy,” the young Irish-Catholic William was “by interrogatories accused of bastardy, burglary, theft, bounty-jumping, perjury, vagrancy, fornication and murder.”

In his article, Josh Nathan-Kazis, depending in part on a 1924 account of the killing, “Studies in Murder” by Edmund Pearson, notes that Washington Nathan had little reason to kill his father. Benjamin was worried by his son’s irresponsible behavior and had written a will that would have given Washington minimal access to his inheritance while his mother remained alive. In life, however, Benjamin was quite generous with his son.

Nonetheless, there is evidence that the investigation into the murder, in particular to the possibility that it was committed by Washington, was impeded by Benjamin Nathan's brother-in-law, Albert Cardozo. At the time, Cardozo was a judge in the New York Supreme Court and a member of the Tammany Society, the political ring that largely ran New York in those years, while enriching itself in the process. Nathan-Kazis suggests that simple politics drove Cardozo to go to lengths to keep the family's name – specifically that of Washington Nathan – out of any scandal, and so he saw to it that the son of the murder victim was not properly investigated.

Albert Cardozo himself was implicated in a judicial corruption scandal a short time later, and had to resign his seat on the bench. Despite his own questionable character, Albert was the father of Benjamin Cardozo, who served as a U.S. Supreme Court justice in the 1930s. He was named for his uncle Benjamin Nathan.

Washington Nathan never did recover from his father's murder, and from the suspicion that had been cast upon him. He eventually inherited a large fortune, but he spent it on gambling and booze. He married and moved to Europe, but never settled down. Just weeks before his death, in 1892, he gave an interview to the Chicago Tribune in which he complained about how “No blood could ever be found on any of my clothes, yet people say that I killed him. My poor father! My poor father!”

Washington Nathan died on July 25, 1892. He had been in poor health for some time, and died while walking along the beach, in Boulogne, France. The death of his father, however, remains unexplained to this day.

July 29 / Prototypical vamp of silent film is born

Actress Theda Bara played evil seductresses and uttered a line to her defeated prey that has become legendary: 'Kiss me, my fool.'



Theda Bara. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

July 29, 1885, was the birthdate of silent-film star Theda Bara, who became one of the first superstars of the screen, but paid the price of being typecast from her first leading role as the prototypical “vamp,” and had only limited success in her efforts to land a more diverse range of roles.

Born Theodosia Burr Goodman, Theda Bara was the oldest of the three children of Polish-born tailor Bernard Goodman and French-Swiss Pauline Louise de Coppet. She grew up in the well-off Cincinnati suburb of Avondale. After graduating from Walnut Hills High School, Bara attended the University of Cincinnati for two years, before dropping out to pursue an acting career in New York, although she always remained a serious reader.

While she kept at it from 1908 to 1914, Bara’s stage career never really took off. The break that changed her life came when she attended a casting call for a movie, where she caught the eye of novice film director Frank Powell, who offered her a bit part as a nun in “The Stain.” Although she was barely seen on the screen, Powell was impressed enough with her work that he convinced William Fox, producer of his next film, “A Fool There Was,” to allow him to cast her as the star.

Released in 1915 by the Fox Film Company, “A Fool There Was” was based on a Broadway play that was in turn based on Rudyard Kipling poem, “The Vampire.” That was also the name of her character, an evil seductress who lures and then drives to ruin a young New York lawyer whose socially prominent wife has made the mistake of snubbing the Vampire. The final line of the silent film, uttered by Bara to her defeated prey, has become legendary: “Kiss me, my fool.”

Although the name “Theda Bara” was conjured up as a combination of a shortened version of Theodosia and from the middle name of her Swiss grandfather, Francois Barringer de Coppet, the publicity department at Fox decided to introduce their new star as the daughter of a French artist and an Arabian princess, born in the Sahara Desert in the shadow of the Sphinx. Although audiences knew that this was malarkey, they played along with the myth, especially when it became known that the name was also an anagram for the words “Arab death.” As movie writer Christopher DiGrazia wrote in an essay about “A Fool There Was,” “Knowing that the legend was a joke meant that audiences could gasp in horror at the vamp’s heartless seductions while loving and cheering Bara herself.”

Indeed, Theda Bara became an almost instant star with that film, achieving international fame in a matter of months. Over the next four years, Fox had her make 37 movies. In most she played the heartless vamp corrupting decent men, but in some the tables were turned, and she was the chaste innocent who was brought to ruin by a man of no scruples.

Of course, there were those who took offense at the highly suggestive roles she played, just as there were others who were aroused. When one member of the public wrote to Bara that, “It is such women as you who break up happy homes,” the star responded: “I am working for my living, dear friend, and if I were the kind of woman you seem to think I am, I wouldn’t have to.”

One of the most elaborate of her pictures was the 1917 “Cleopatra,” a two-hour feature that at the time was one of the most expensive films yet made. It was a commercial success, and Bara happily cooperated with a publicity campaign that presented her as the reincarnation of the title character, declaring at a luncheon at the Metropolitan Museum of Art: “I remember crossing the Nile on barges to Karnak and Luxor as plainly as I recall crossing the Hudson on the ferry.” She also posed in a halter top composed of two intertwined snakes.

In 1930, when the Hays Code of moral standards was adopted, the film was banned, and once the extant prints were destroyed in a fire at the Fox Studios in New York, it was lost to posterity.

By 1919, Bara was making \$4,000 a week – and the studio took in more than \$9 million that year, largely due to her appeal. But she wanted a vacation, and she wanted a raise, demands that she presented to Fox, the studio boss. Fox saw that tastes were changing in the post-World War I period, and took advantage of the opportunity to drop her contract.

No other studio was interested in picking up the vamp actress, so Bara began to seek a return to the stage. Her starring appearance in a theatrical thriller called “The Blue Flame,” in which her character is transformed into a genuine vampire, made her a lot of money, but it was a critical failure that ultimately subjected her to ridicule.

Her last film, a 1926 comedy produced by Hal Roach and directed by Stan Laurel – with Oliver Hardy as the male lead – demonstrated her ability to play funny, but her new husband, film director Charles Brabin, didn’t like the way the movie presented

her. Although it was intended to be the first in a series, Brabin wouldn't allow her to appear in any future titles, and the Roach studio dropped her, too.

Bara never took another role, and never played in a talkie film. Most of her pictures were destroyed in the 1937 Fox fire, making the fact that she is remembered today further testimony to the power of her screen image.

She had saved her money from the glory years, and was able to continue to live well, residing with her husband in Beverly Hills. The couple never had children.

In 1954, Bara discovered she had colon cancer, too late to have effective treatment. She died on April 7, 1955.

In his essay, DiGrazia quotes from a tribute to Bara that ran in the New York Times two days after her death:

“Her audiences loved her, the men because of her unmixed femininity, the women because they were sympathetically concerned with the technique. . . On the silent screen she appealed to men’s most primitive instincts. On the screen she was, indeed, a bad girl, and this was her allure. Off the screen she was a good woman, happily married for 34 years. . . Many among us who are close to her age, or even younger, will think warm and grateful thoughts of her, now that she is gone. She took other people’s minds off their troubles: is not this a tribute worth having?”

July 30 / The Jew who would sue Goebbels is born

Bernhard Weiss eventually became the highest-ranking Jew in the German police force and beat Joseph Goebbels in court 60 times.



Bernhard Weiss Photo by Bundesarchiv

July 30, 1880, was the birthdate of Bernhard Weiss, the Jewish-German lawyer who served as vice president of the Berlin police department in the period just before the Nazis came to power. He was a relentless foe of Nazi lawlessness, and successfully sued Joseph Goebbels for libel for the latter's verbal anti-Semitic attacks on him.

Bernhard Weiss was born into a well-off Jewish family in Berlin, during the reign of Kaiser Wilhelm I. After training as a lawyer, he volunteered in 1904 for military training, and was commissioned as a reserve officer in the Royal Bavarian Army. During World War I, he received the rank of captain, and commanded a medical company, service for which he received an Iron Cross First Class, a very unusual achievement for a Jew at that time. Weiss's three brothers also served in the war.

In the war's final months, Weiss was recalled to the home front, in Berlin, which was in a state of disarray, and appointed deputy head of the capital's criminal police department, the Kripo. By 1925, he was head of the Kripo, and two years later, was named deputy president of the entire Berlin police department – making him the highest-ranking Jew to that time in the field of German law enforcement.

The Weimar Republic was the short-lived (1919-1933) democratic regime that followed the imperial era and its devastating failure in World War I. Weiss, a member of the liberal German Democratic Party, was a strong defender of the republic, and took seriously his responsibility to battle extremism from both the right and the left.

On the personal level, Weiss had grown up in a family with a strong Jewish identity – his father was a leader of the Reform Fasanenstrasse Synagogue – and he too was

openly active in Berlin's Jewish community. He served on the board of the city's Reform rabbinical seminary and was a member of the Central Union of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, a rights-defense organization.

After the assassination of German foreign minister Walter Rathenau, himself a Jew, in 1922, Weiss led the successful criminal hunt for his murderers, who were ultra-right wing nationalist terrorists. He also followed the radical activities of communists and the growing National Socialist movement, the brownshirts. In 1927, he ordered the shutting down of the Nazi party branch in Berlin, and also ordered the arrest of 500 of its members.

Weiss's aggressive activism brought upon him the wrath of Joseph Goebbels, who was during the Weimar years the leader of the Nazi branch in Berlin, and later the Third Reich's minister of propaganda. Goebbels, who referred to the Weimar Republic as the "Jews' Republic," regularly mocked and attacked Weiss, dubbing him with the supposedly insulting and typically Jewish name "Isidore." He also had Weiss depicted in cartoons in his newspaper, *Der Angriff* (The Attack), as a monkey, a snake and a jackass.

Weiss sued Goebbels for defamation in court, and won. Goebbels paid his fine, and then went on with his campaign of delegitimization against Weiss. Thus was established a pattern, by which Bernhard Weiss took Goebbels to court, and defeated him, after which the Nazi went back to his libelous behavior – some 60 times.

Weiss held on to the very end of the Weimar Republic. Immediately after Adolf Hitler became chancellor, in early 1933, the police force of which Bernhard Weiss was deputy president was ordered to arrest him. A friend drove him to Czechoslovakia, and from there he fled to England with his family.

Weiss lived out the rest of his life in England, where he opened a printing and stationery shop. After the war, in 1951, West Germany returned to him the citizenship that he had been stripped of after the rise of the Nazis. He received the news while on his way to a London hospital, where he died of cancer a short time later, at the age of 71.

After Bernhard's death, his widow, Lotte, returned to Berlin, where she died the following year.

July 31 / A trailblazing Canadian athlete wins silver

Fanny 'Bobbie' Rosenfeld's sports career was launched after a friend dared her to race a Canadian champion sprinter.



**Fannie 'Bobbie' Rosenfeld (second from left) competing at the 1928 Olympics.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons**

On July 31, 1928, Canadian athlete Fanny “Bobbie” Rosenfeld won the silver medal in the 100-meter dash at the Amsterdam Olympics, a feat that she followed up several days later with the gold medal she and her team earned in the women’s 400-meter relay. These are but two of many athletic accomplishments that earned Rosenfeld recognition by her country’s sportswriters as Canada’s greatest female athlete of the first half of the 20th century.

Fanny Rosenfeld (she earned the nickname “Bobbie” for her bobbed haircut) was born in Dnipropetrovsk, in what is today Ukraine, on December 28, 1904. She, her parents, Max and Sarah, and her older brother immigrated to Canada when she was still very young, settling in Barrie, Ontario, some 90 kms north of Toronto. There, Max Rosenfeld operated a junk business. In 1922, the family, which now had three additional daughters, moved to Toronto.

Fanny excelled at sports from a young age, playing basketball, ice hockey, softball and tennis. Her prowess in track and field events prompted a friend to dare her to compete against the Canadian champion sprinter Rosa Grosse in a 100-meter race at a picnic in 1923. Rosenfeld won, and her career as a competitive track and field athlete was off to its start.

At the Ontario Ladies Track and Field Championships, in 1925, Rosenfeld came in first in the 220-yard run, discus, shot put, low hurdles and long jump – all in the same day – and second in javelin and 100-yard dash. Additionally, she played basketball on

the Toronto YWHA team that twice competed in the national championships, and was a member of city championship teams in ice hockey, softball and baseball. To these we can also add her participation in competitive tennis, lacrosse, golf and speed skating. (A short Internet biography of her at the Jewish Women's Archive site quotes one source as suggesting that, "The most efficient way to summarize Bobbie Rosenfeld's career... is to say that she was not good at swimming.")

Women were first permitted to compete in the Olympics in 1928, and that was on a trial basis. Already in the Olympic trials, Rosenfeld set national records in both the running and standing broad jump, and in the 100-meter dash and the discus. Initially, she was slated to compete in the two latter events in Amsterdam, but when it turned out they were scheduled for the same day, July 31, she took part in only the running event. There, in the final, she and the American runner Betty Robinson crossed the finish line at the same time. In the end, the judges ruled that Robinson was the winner (many spectators disagreed), and Rosenfeld took the silver medal.

Two days later, Rosenfeld was unexpectedly entered into the 800-meter run. It was not an event she had trained for, but the team's coach wanted her in the race in order to encourage her teammate Jean Thompson, who held the world record for the 800, but had injured herself shortly before the games opened. Both women qualified for the finals, and after the first of two laps, Thompson, although running with a bandage, seemed set to come in third. But after another runner bumped against her, Thompson began to fall back. That's when Rosenfeld suddenly moved up from last place, passing four runners to draw up next to her faltering teammate. Rosenfeld ran beside Thompson to the end, offering her encouragement throughout the homestretch. Then, just as they approached the finish line, Rosenfeld fell behind, letting Thompson cross before her. Thompson came in fourth place, not good enough for a medal, but still fast enough to break her previous world record. Rosenfeld finished fifth, though many believed that she could have easily finished higher, perhaps even in one of the top three places.

Finally, on August 5, Rosenfeld ran the first leg in the 4 x 100 women's relay, in which the team broke both the Olympic and world records, winning the gold. Canada's women returned home that year with the highest number of medals of any country.

It may not sound like it, but Rosenfeld also held a day job: She worked as a stenographer at the Patterson chocolate factory in Toronto. In her free time, she skated with the Toronto Patterson Pats hockey team (sponsored by her employer), where her skill as a center made her a nationally known star.

By the end of the 1920s, however, Rosenfeld had developed arthritis, and she found herself confined to bed for eight months, followed by some months on crutches. She did make a comeback that enabled her to play softball in 1931, but finally was forced to retire from sports for good in 1933. She continued working as a coach, however, leading her nation's women's track and field at the Commonwealth Games in London, in 1934, for example, before she took a job at the Toronto Globe and Mail in 1936. The next year, the paper launched her column about women's sports, called the Feminine Sports Reel. Rosenfeld wrote the column for 18 years, and continued working at the paper until 1966.

Bobbie Rosenfeld didn't marry or have children. Although most of her biographies avoid the subject altogether, she apparently had a female partner. Journalist Robert Fulford, who early in his career was a sports reporter and colleague of Rosenfeld's at the *Globe and Mail*, once wrote about her: "Bobbie was the first lesbian I knew as such, and every day her moment of greatest happiness — happiness I could see her almost physically trying to hide, for reasons it took me years to understand — coincided with her companion's arrival at her office to pick her up after work. One day this lady mentioned that she and Bobbie were looking for a new apartment and needed two bedrooms — one for Bobbie's trophies."

Rosenfeld was inducted into the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame in 1948, and after Canada's sportswriters voted her the top female athlete of the half-century in 1950, her name was attached to an award given each year to the country's finest woman athlete. In 1996, her portrait, kneeling in the starting position for a sprint race, appeared on a 45-cent Canadian postage stamp.

Fanny "Bobbie" Rosenfeld died on November 14, 1969, in Toronto.

August 1 / 'Network' dramatist whose career began with a land mine dies

Paddy Chayefsky refused surgery for cancer because he thought doctors whom he had savaged in 'The Hospital' might take revenge.



Paddy Chayefsky. 'Marty,' 'The Hospital' and 'Network.' Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 1, 1981, Sidney “Paddy” Chayefsky, one of the 20th century’s most acclaimed dramatists, died at the age of 58. Chayefsky was the only person to have won three Oscars by himself for original screenplays – for the films “Marty” (1955), “The Hospital” (1971) and “Network” (1976).

Sidney Aaron Chayefsky was born in the Bronx, New York, on January 29, 1923, to parents of Jewish-Ukrainian origin, Harry Chayefsky and the former Gussie Stuchevsky. He attended DeWitt Clinton High School, followed by the City College of New York, where he played on a semiprofessional football team, and from which he graduated in 1943.

During World War II, Chayefsky served with the U.S. 104th Infantry Division in Europe. It was during this chapter in his life that he acquired the nickname “Paddy,” apparently after he attempted to be excused from early-morning kitchen patrol by telling his commanding officer that he had to attend Mass. “Okay, Paddy,” said the officer facetiously — and the name stuck, with only Chayefsky’s mother refusing to refer to him by the Irish-sounding moniker.

Bored in the hospital

His career in entertainment was to begin with Chayefsky stepping on a mine near Aachen, Germany. While recovering in a hospital in England, he wrote a musical

comedy that went on to be produced at army bases over the next two years, and later in London's West End.

After the war he tried making a living as a writer on both the east and west coasts before settling permanently back in New York. He worked on radio dramas, stage plays, television and finally film, with significant successes – and disappointments — in each of those fields.

Probably his most acclaimed work was the TV play “Marty,” first produced in 1953 for the Philco Television Playhouse with Rod Steiger and Nancy Marchand, and transferred to the big screen two years later with Ernest Borgnine and Betsy Blair. The play, about a simple but good-hearted Bronx butcher who to his great surprise finds love in the person of a shy schoolteacher, moved audiences and cinema professionals alike, winning Academy Awards for best picture, best actor and best screenplay.

Although early in his career Chayefsky raised the possibility that then-nascent television would be “the basic theater of our century,” he despaired of the medium and its limitations, with his frustration finding its sharpest expression in “Network,” a satire on the craven hypocrisy of network TV that in 1976 already anticipated the emergence of reality TV. It was in “Network” that actor Peter Finch voiced the *cri de coeur* “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore,” as he hurled his TV set out the window.

Finch and co-star Faye Dunaway took home Oscars for their performances in the movie, along with Chayefsky and Best Supporting Actress Beatrice Straight.

The secular Jew and the dybbuk

Chayefsky was interested in Jewish themes throughout his career, writing dramas about a secular Jew who finds himself part of a synagogue minyan involved in exorcising a dybbuk from a woman's body (“The Tenth Man”), and about a cantor despairing of his faith who gets the chance to reunite a couple divided by the Holocaust after meeting the two partners on separate subway journeys (“Holiday Song”). There was also a late, never-produced screenplay called “The Habakkuk Conspiracy” about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Chayefsky had a heart attack in 1977, and in 1980 he developed cancer, for which he refused to undergo surgery. He said he “feared retribution by the doctors” for his savage portrayal of the medical profession in his 1971 film “The Hospital.” He died on this day in 1981.

August 2 / A trusted confidant of Turkish sultans dies

Joseph Nasi - businessman, court Jew and proto-Zionist - was a figure of great charm and political acumen.



Selim II. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

August 2, 1579, is the date on which Joseph Nasi – businessman, court Jew and proto-Zionist – died, at his palace at Belvedere, Turkey. Nasi was a figure of great charm and political acumen whose name turns up in a wide range of political and military episodes that transpired in the Eastern Mediterranean during the 16th century.

Joao Miques was born, probably in Portugal, in 1524, into a family of New Christians originally from Spain. When the Portuguese Inquisition began investigating the faith of converted Jews, Miques joined his aunt Dona Gracia Mendes Nasi in moving to Antwerp, in 1537. They had been preceded there by Dona Gracia's brother-in-law, and Joao's uncle, Diogo Mendes Benveniste. There, the family had established a large trading company and bank. Joao Miques studied at the University of Louvain, in Brabant.

When Diogo died, he left Dona Gracia control of the family holdings (her life is a subject unto itself). Among many other achievements, Dona Gracia established a network in Antwerp that helped Converso Jews safely flee Spain and Portugal. After some time in France, then Venice, where Dona Gracia was imprisoned for her "Judaizing" efforts, Joao Miques appealed on his and her behalf to the Ottoman sultan, Suleiman, to allow them to move their business empire to Constantinople.

In 1554, Joao Miques joined his aunt in Constantinople, where she had arrived a short time before. There he began to openly practice Judaism, had himself circumcised, and began calling himself Joseph Nasi. He married Dona Gracia's lone daughter, his first cousin, Reyna.

Joseph became an influential figure in the court of Suleiman the Magnificent. When the sultan had to decide which of his two sons, Selim or Bayezid, was to succeed him, Joseph decided to take up the cause of Selim. Later, the brothers met in battle, and Selim was victorious, later arranging for his brother and his brother's sons to be killed.

When Selim II ascended to the throne, Joseph, with extensive trading ties in Europe, became an influential confidant. He helped the Ottoman porte negotiate peace with Poland in 1562, and was given a monopoly on the trade of beeswax with that kingdom. Seven years later, he encouraged the Netherlands to revolt against Spain (what became the Eighty Years' War), and promised Turkish support. He was involved in intrigues related to the succession of princes who ruled Moldavia (with which he had a monopoly on the wine trade), and he encouraged the sultan to annex Cyprus to the empire. Selim did indeed conquer the island in 1571. The sultan also gave him permission to take possession of one-third of the merchandise found on every French ship docking in Alexandria; this was meant to compensate Joseph for family property that had earlier been stolen by the king of France.

Selim appointed Joseph as Duke of Naxos, the principal island in an archipelago in the Aegean sea. He ruled his duchy from Constantinople. The sultan also gave him control of Tiberias and seven other towns in Palestine, knowing that Joseph was interested in establishing there a colony to which Jews could emigrate from Europe.

Joseph had the walls of Tiberias rebuilt, and he worked to establish industry and agriculture there, promising work to Jews who came. A plan was launched to bring Jews from the Papal States of Italy, and several hundred did eventually come. The plan was abruptly stopped, however, after war ensued between the Ottomans and the Venetians.

After Selim II's death, in 1574, Joseph lost his main benefactor in Constantinople, and he spent the remainder of his years in semi-retirement at Belvedere. There he operated a Hebrew printing press, and had an important library of Hebrew literature. There is some evidence that he composed a book, later published in Hebrew as "Ben Porat Yosef," intended to prove the superiority of the Torah to Greek philosophy.

Don Joseph Nasi died on August 2, 1579. Having had no children, his property was seized by the successor to Selim II, Sultan Murad III.

August 3 / Author who told the story of Israel to the world is born

Leon Uris always wrote about what he knew. Most of his novels were based on history or his experiences.



Leon Uris.

On August 3, 1924, the prolific and emotive author Leon Uris, who brought the Jews' plight before the world in his book "Exodus," was born.

Leon Uris was born in Baltimore, Maryland, the second child to Jewish American parents, Wolf William and Anna Uris. Wolf had emigrated to the United States from Poland, stopping for a year in Palestine and reaching Connecticut in 1921. He changed his last name for a second time, to Uris, after switching in Palestine from Yerusalimsky to Yerushalmi. After years of menial jobs and agitating for workers' rights, Wolf became a shopkeeper. He was active in Jewish groups and rose to the executive committee of the Workers Party, remaining faithful to the communist movement despite its disdain for Jews. He married Anna, a first-generation American, in 1923.

The young Leon did not do well in school, nor did repeatedly being failed by an English teacher suggest at his future career. He dropped out of high school at age 17 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and joined the Marines, spending World War II in the Sixth Marine Regiment as a radio operator, including at Guadalcanal.

In 1945 he married Marine Sgt. Betty Katherine Beck, the first of three wives. While managing a newspaper delivery service, he began writing magazine articles. It did not go well at first: Only in 1950 did he get a bite, with Esquire paying him the princely sum of \$300 — worth \$2,900 in today's terms — for an article on the selection of the

“All American football team.” Suddenly cash-flush, he set down to write the definitive war novel.

“Battle Cry,” published in 1953, was based on Uris’ own experiences in the war. It was made into a movie in 1955.

Then came the epic “Exodus,” published in 1958. He didn’t pull the story out of his hat. Reportedly, captivated by the story of Israel, Uris spent some two years exhaustively researching for the book, including a long stay in the country during which he worked as a war correspondent, reporting on the Sinai Campaign. The result is a fictional and palpable account of Israel’s birth from the first days of Zionism in Europe, and most evocatively, the struggle of a people in desperate straits to establish a nation in the face of British opposition and Arab resistance.

The blockbuster novel became box-office gold. Released in 1960 by United Artists, the “Zionist epic” starred the biggest names in Hollywood — Paul Newman as Jewish hero Ari Ben Canaan, rescuer of Jewish refugees from Europe, and Eva Marie Saint as his love interest, the beautiful blonde American volunteer nurse Kitty Fremont. “Exodus” won a number of awards, including an Oscar and a Grammy (both for the music, by Ernest Gold).

Not everyone knows that Uris wrote the screenplay for John Sturges’ quintessential Western, “Gunfight at the O.K. Corral” (1957).

Uris went on to write many novels, including “Mila 18,” about the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, and other books. In an article in *The Paris Review*, Joseph Heller’s daughter Erica Heller wrote that her father had to change the name of his great war novel, initially called “Catch-18,” because Uris’ novel had “usurped the number.”

Uris always wrote what he knew. Most of his novels were based on history or his experiences. His blockbuster courtroom drama “QB VII” was written after a Polish physician sued him for libel, claiming that in “Mila 18” Uris depicted him as committing atrocities in Auschwitz. The doctor was awarded a halfpenny and ordered to pay the defense’s court costs.

Uris died on June 21, 2003 in New York, aged 78.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 4 / Print puts the Zohar in reach of the masses

Controversy still surrounds the foundation text of Jewish mysticism, which was first printed in 1558 and written nearly 300 - or 1,400 - years earlier.



Title page of first edition of the Zohar, Mantua, 1558. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 4, 1558, the first print edition of the Zohar appeared, though its origins lay centuries earlier, in the Jewish community of Spain. The book's publication had the effect of popularizing the study of kabbala, a Jewish form of mysticism and messianism a popularized version of which became quite the fad among the glitterati starting in the 1990s.

The Zohar is a group of books, written mainly in Aramaic, that elaborates on mystical elements in the Torah, not least of which is the nature of God and of the universe – and of evil, which some consider a necessary manifestation of the divine.

Yet the Zohar has never been wholly accepted by all Jews, as is for instance the Bible itself, in part due to questions about its origin.

Orthodox Judaism largely believes that the Zohar, like the Torah, is based on the word of God that was handed down to Moses (some say Abraham too), which then passed down the generations through oral tradition until being redacted by the second-century Jewish sage Shimon Bar Yochai.

What's certain is that the Zohar was first published — as opposed to being printed — by Rabbi Moses de Leon in 13th century Spain. He ascribed the books to Bar Yochai, who according to Jewish legend was inspired by the prophet Elijah to write them while hiding in a cave from the Romans for 13 years, studying Torah.

Aramaic was the lingua franca of the Jews during the period of the Second Temple (leading to endless arguments over which language Jesus actually spoke), and the language in the Zohar has been described as an “exalted” form of the language. But based on the form of the Aramaic used, latter-day academics believe de Leon wrote the books himself, which to some detracts from their sacredness and authority.

That hasn’t touched its standing among today’s ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, which takes its writings with deadly seriousness. It is sometimes quoted in daily life, for instance when raising money for charity. The Zohar has also been used as a source for hexes, and is often wrongly associated with being the source of the infamous “pulsá denura” (“whip of fire”) curse of death. The Zohar mentions the curse, but no more.

Lest you think the death curse is some ancient extravagance now abandoned by modern society, in 2005 extreme-right activists [tried to apply it](#) to then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who was, they explained, too well-guarded to be assassinated by regular means. It didn’t work — he didn’t die then, and neither did they, though according to the theory failed curses backfire.

Why weren’t these mystical traditions included in other Jewish texts, such as the Talmud itself? Possibly because the material was considered dangerous for ordinary folk and the young: Should they start studying before their minds are mature, they could be driven insane.

Its mystical implications aside, kabbala is also perceived as having practical applications, such as the creation of “golems” — live monsters from clay and rock. One of many such examples is the legendary Golem of Prague, a monster brought to life in order to protect the beleaguered Jews of the city in the 16th century.

While there is no law governing the start of study, according to popular tradition, the prerequisites for delving into the “deeper learning” of kabbala include being older than 40, strictly observant, and married with children. Clearly that wasn’t the rule over the ages, as some great kabbalists, such as the Safed-based 16th-century luminary Isaac Luria (known as “the Ari”), didn’t even live to age 40. He died at age 38 in Safed on July 25, 1572.

Also clearly, the warnings that kabbalistic knowledge poured into unready minds can lead to insanity hasn’t deterred the modern masses. Famous “converts” to “kabbalism” — which isn’t a religion — include Madonna, who in 2006 famously dumped poor Britney Spears for the younger singer’s decision to abandon kabbala study in favor of raising children. And no, wearing a “kabbalist” red string on your wrist hasn’t been proved to protect you from the evil eye.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 5 / Goodbye, Norma Jeane

While Marilyn Monroe's life ended tragically, its happier moments included marriage to playwright Arthur Miller and a 'sincere' conversion to Judaism.



Marilyn Monroe in 1962. Photo by AP

On August 5, 1962, actress Marilyn Monroe was found dead in her home in the Brentwood section of Los Angeles, California. She was 36 years old, and the cause of death was, according to the autopsy later done, “acute barbiturate poisoning.” Few knew at the time she had undergone a Reform Jewish conversion prior to marrying playwright Arthur Miller under the chuppah.

Monroe was born in Los Angeles as Norma Jeane Mortenson, on June 1, 1926. It has never been established conclusively who her father was, but her mother, Gladys Pearl Baker, quickly changed her newborn daughter's family name to “Baker,” since she had only been married briefly to Martin E. Mortenson, and they had separated before she became pregnant with Norma Jeane.

The uncertainty about Norma Jeane's paternity largely characterizes her childhood as a whole. Gladys Baker was mentally unstable, and often unable to care for her daughter, who lived, successively, with a foster family, a friend of her mother's, an aunt and then another aunt. There is evidence that she was sexually abused in some of these homes.

When she was 16, and the family friends who were caring for her decided to relocate to the East Coast – without Norma Jeane – it was arranged for her to marry James Dougherty, a high school classmate and neighbor. That marriage ended four years later, after Dougherty returned from World War II, during which he had served in the Merchant Marine in the Pacific.

While Dougherty was overseas, his wife had worked in a California airplane-parts plant. One day an army photographer visited the plant to shoot images for a story about the role of women in the war effort. Although none of his photos of Norma Jeane Baker ended up in the story that was published in Yank magazine, the photographer, David Conover, did encourage her to audition for a modeling agency.

It was her work for Blue Book modeling that led to a movie contract from 20th Century Fox, during which time she changed her name to “Marilyn Monroe.” But stardom did not come immediately to Monroe. She appeared in several tiny parts for Fox, but was released from her contract by 1947. She also continued to do modeling work.

A nude session she did in 1949 with photographer Tom Kelley, who posed her against a strip of red silk, resulted in Monroe appearing on pin-up calendars in 1952 and 1953, as well as having the distinction of being Playboy Magazine’s first Playmate of the Month, in December 1953. Although her studio at the time of publication – she was back at 20th Century Fox – feared negative publicity from the photos, Monroe gave an interview in which admitted to freely posing for the photographs, and to having done so because she had needed to make a living. The public seemed to respond sympathetically.

Monroe was married briefly (nine months) to retired baseball great Joe DiMaggio, in 1954. The following year, she was reintroduced to Arthur Miller, the playwright, whom she had first met in 1951 when he visited the Fox studios lot where she was shooting “As Young as You Feel.” She was invited to a party thrown for Miller a few days later, and the two ended up talking through much of the night. The playwright encouraged Monroe to work on the stage, and to come to New York to study acting.

It was only in 1954 that Monroe did move to New York, where she began studying at the Actors’ Studio with Lee and Paula Strasberg. But she had kept in touch with Arthur Miller, who had recommended books to her while she was taking college extension courses, and who generally seemed to take her seriously, an experience that was rare for Monroe. She and Miller began seeing each other, often bicycling around his neighborhood in Brooklyn. Miller was married at the time, and it was only days before he married Marilyn Monroe that he left his first wife, the former Mary Slattery.

Very shortly before Miller and Monroe married, the playwright was in touch with an old friend, Rabbi Robert E. Goldberg, the rabbi of Congregation Mishkan Israel, then in New Haven, Connecticut. Miller told Goldberg that he and the actress were planning to marry, and that Monroe wanted to convert to Judaism.

In letters written by Goldberg over the years – but only published in 2010 – to Jacob Rader Marcus, the head of the American Jewish Archives, the rabbi described the process of Monroe’s conversion and her marriage to the Jewish playwright.

In a 1962 letter, Goldberg explained that it was Marilyn Monroe’s idea to become Jewish, and that to that end he first met her at her Sutton Place apartment in New York.

“I was struck by her personal sweetness and charm.... [She] said that she had no religious training other than some memories of a Fundamentalist Protestantism which she had long rejected. She indicated that she was attracted to Judaism by being impressed with Jewish people that she knew, especially Mr. Miller. She said that she was aware of the great characters that the Jewish people had produced and that she had read selections from Albert Einstein’s ‘Out of My Later Years’.... She indicated that she was impressed by the rationalism of Judaism – its ethical and prophetic ideals and its concept of close family life.”

Goldburg met “a number of times” with Monroe, and she read and discussed with him several books that he gave her about Judaism, including “What Is A Jew?” by Morris Kurtzer, “A History of the Jews,” by Abram Leon Sachar, and “A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem,” by Milton Steinberg. According to Goldburg, “Marilyn was not an intellectual person but she was sincere in her desire to learn. It was also clear that her ability to concentrate over a long period of time was limited. However, I did feel that she understood and accepted the basic principles of Judaism.”

On June 29, 1956, Miller, at the time 40, and Monroe, 30, were married by a justice of the peace in White Plains, New York. Two days later, on July 1, a Sunday, the couple had a religious ceremony at the Katonah, New York, home of Kay Brown, Miller’s agent. The chuppah was preceded by a conversion ceremony for Monroe, during which she signed a certificate stating that she, “having sought to join the household of Israel by accepting the religion of Israel and promising to live by its principles and practices, was received into the Jewish Faith....” Miller’s cousin, Morton Miller, later characterized the ceremony as “perfunctory.”

Monroe accompanied Miller to his appearance before the House Un-American Activities Committee, in 1956, for which he was found in contempt for refusing to “name names” of colleagues who had been involved with the Communist party. Rabbi Goldburg later wrote how Monroe had agreed, at his urging, to speak at a United Jewish Appeal fundraising dinner in Miami a short time later. She was going to talk about her involvement with Judaism and about the need to support Israel. When Miller was found in contempt, the UJA withdrew his invitation to the dinner. Monroe decided not to attend.

A short time later, Miller and Monroe did appear at a fundraising dinner for the American Friends of Hebrew University, in Philadelphia. That had also been arranged by Goldburg, who testified that he also conducted a Passover seder with the couple several times. If they didn’t attend synagogue, he wrote, it was “because they believed that such attendance would turn into a public spectacle.”

Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller remained married until early 1961, but it was a tumultuous relationship that caused both of them a great deal of anguish. Miller wrote the screenplay for “The Misfits,” the last film that Monroe completed, in which she starred with Clark Gable and Montgomery Clift. According to the director, John Huston, Monroe wasn’t actually acting in the movie: “It was all the truth. It was only Marilyn.”

The film was not a commercial success, but its critical acclaim has only grown with time. But the making of it, in the northern Nevada desert in July 1960, took a toll on

everyone involved, and she and Miller had returned to New York after the filming on separate flights.

During the making of "The Misfits," Miller met Inge Morath, who was working on the set as a photographer, and who became his next wife, in February 1962.

Monroe's last two years were characterized by severe psychological problems, and film projects that never reached completion. She is alleged to have had a relationship with President John Kennedy during this time. Early in the morning of August 5, 1962, police in Los Angeles received a call from her psychiatrist, Dr. Ralph Greenson, that she had been found dead in her home.

Because of the high dosage of two different drugs found in her bloodstream, Monroe's death was ruled a "probable suicide." There have also been a variety of darker theories about her death over the years, including murder. But it may well have been that she died of an accidental overdose.

At her funeral, her former acting teacher Lee Strasberg delivered the eulogy, in which he said, in part: "In her eyes, and in mine, her career was just beginning.... She had a luminous quality. A combination of wistfulness, radiance and yearning that set her apart and made everyone wish to be part of it – to share in the childish naivete which was at once so shy and yet so vibrant."

August 6 / Harry Houdini survives 91 minutes underwater

The iconic Jewish illusionist's greatest feat was also his last.



Harry Houdini Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 6, 1926, master illusionist Harry Houdini performed his greatest feat, spending 91 minutes underwater in a sealed tank before escaping.

His illusions could have been an allegory of his life: Harry Houdini apparently delighted in hiding his personal history and exploits.

Harry Houdini grew up steeped in Jewish tradition. He was born Erik (later spelled Erich) Weisz in Budapest, on March 24, 1874, one of six or seven children – sources differ – to a religious family, though he reportedly liked to claim he'd been born in Wisconsin. His parents were Mayer Samuel and Cecília Weisz; they anglicized their surname to Weiss after moving from Hungary to the United States in 1878.

Houdini reportedly also waxed creative about his father Mayer, who apparently began his career as a soap-maker in the Hapsburg Empire and, after marrying, studied law. In Appleton, Wisconsin, Mayer served as rabbi of the Zion Reform Jewish Congregation for some years, after which the family moved to New York.

Five years after their arrival in the United States, Erich would make his stage debut – at age 9, as a trapeze artist billed as “Ehrich, the Prince of the Air.” Evidently a freewheeling spirit, at age 12 he vanished from home but returned a year later, and started working to help support the family.

Meanwhile, Erich morphed to Harry. Evidently unhampered by his lack of schoolin', he developed a keenly skeptical mind – and also, ironically, an appreciation of “magic.”

The youngster began his magic career starting with card tricks in 1891. It did not go well. He adopted an Americanized version of his idol Robert Houdin's name, though decades later he would write a scathing book that cast the Frenchman as a fraud.

Meanwhile, Houdini began to build his reputation as the greatest escape artist the world had known.

In 1894, he married singer, dancer and actress “Bess” Wilhelmina Rahner, who became his stage assistant. As a couple, they perfected an act called Metamorphosis – and the Handcuff Act that would bring him to vaudeville and propel him to international fame.

Cuffs were trivial to him, even multiple sets of them. Spoiler alert: Like all illusionists, the bottom line was keys cleverly hidden on his person. Houdini went on to burnish that name with his series of fantastical “jail breaks” – from real prisons, and with real panache.

There's a question about which prisons, however. In keeping with the fog shrouding his personal life, there's a famous story about how, when shackled to a pillar by a patronizing commander of Scotland Yard, Houdini had the cuffs off within seconds and then they all went off to a jolly lunch. There's little evidence this actually happened, though reportedly he signed the Yard's guest book on June 14, 1900.

The Vanishing Elephant trick, performed in 1918, was the illusionist at his finest. Houdini placed a cabinet that he told the audience was eight feet square and two feet high on the gargantuan stage at New York's Hippodrome Theater. Then a presumably placid pachyderm was coaxed inside and the cabinet was closed. The trick lay in the enormous size of the cabinet, further dwarfed by the dimensions of the stage and by his suggestion; the view the audience had of the cabinet's interior; curtain arrangements; and the dozen muscle-men who rotated the cabinet with the elephant inside.

One of Houdini's favorites was the Chinese Water Torture Cell escape, which involved freeing himself after being dropped headfirst, dangling from chained, manacled ankles, into a sort of barred fish tank, to which more and more locks were added in performances over the years.

But his truly greatest feat was to be his last. On this day in 1926, performing in front of journalists at the swimming pool of the Shelton Hotel in New York, Houdini spent 91 minutes underwater in a 700-pound sealed tank (no, not a coffin), starting with his hands being cuffed in front and chained to his shackled ankles. His arms were also chained around his neck, forcing his torso to be bent over. “The important thing is to believe that you are safe,” he explained.

Houdini would die three months later of a ruptured appendix after being punched in the stomach by a student as a test of his muscles, on October 31, 1926, at the age of 52.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 7 / A man who studied the being of rock is born

Auguste Michel-Lévy climbed mountains and created rock in the lab, furthering our understanding of the planet at the microscopic level.



Auguste Michel-Lévy. His particular love was volcanic outpourings, also known as igneous rock. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On this day in 1844, the French geologist Auguste Michel-Lévy, who would revolutionize the study of our planet, was born. He would also be the first person to synthesize igneous rocks in the laboratory to learn more about how they were created. To boot, he pioneered the study of stone at the microscopic level.

Auguste Michel-Lévy was born in Paris on August 7, 1844, to Michel Lévy, the president of the Académie de Médecine and a renowned military hygienist, and Adele Dupont. Nurtured in this intellectual and well-to-do household, Auguste was considered brilliant.

He graduated from the Polytechnic School of Paris at the usual age, 18, and, bedecked with scholarly awards and captivated by geology, he went on to the School of Mines. He graduated at the top of his class in 1867 and went into government service.

Three years later, Michel-Lévy joined France's geological map service. Within seven years he was its director and remained so until his death. He was also the inspector general of mining in France; all these pursuits enabled him to delve into what fascinated him most – the being of rock. His particular love was volcanic outpourings, also known as igneous rock.

Much of Michel-Lévy's scientific work was done in collaboration with a fellow Frenchman, Ferdinand Fouqué. Together they developed the science of studying rock

at the microscopic level, called microscopic petrography. This involves slicing rock as thin as possible and peering at it through a microscope to examine its mineral content and texture.

To further their understanding, the two broke ground, as it were, by synthesizing igneous rocks in the lab, including feldspar and nepheline. In doing so, they demonstrated impressive creativity given the primitive conditions they were working in. Igneous rocks form from the solidification of magma, as opposed to sedimentary rocks and metamorphic rocks — rocks that changed form after being subjected to heat.

Michel-Lévy' also trekked the western Alps, meticulously studying the rocks of the Pyrenees and the extinct volcanoes in central France to determine how and when they were formed. The 120-kilometer-long nature park in the Auvergne region, along the Massif Central, has no less than four chains of extinct volcanoes featuring lovely crater lakes.

In this way Michel-Lévy' and Fouqué became the first to demonstrate the optical properties of rocks, known as their birefringence, which became a method for identification. (Birefringence is behind the phenomenon of double refraction – a ray of light being split by polarization into two rays taking different paths. That's what happens when you look through a clear crystal and see more than one image of what's behind it.)

The result is the [Michel-Lévy Interference Color Chart](#). Michel-Lévy also classified igneous rocks based on their mineralogy, as well as their microscopic texture and composition. He was the first to show that different conditions of crystallization could create different igneous rocks from the same chemical building blocks.

Michel-Lévy and Fouqué would also cowrite the seminal two-volume work on microscopic petrology: “Minéralogie micrographique: Roches éruptives françaises,” published in 1879. In 1896, Michel-Lévy was elected for life to the Académie des Sciences, founded in 1666 by Louis XIV. He also served on the council of public hygiene for the department of the Seine.

In 1872 he married Henriette Saint-Paul. They had four children — Albert, Henri, Marguerite and Adele. Auguste Michel-Lévy outlived his wife by one year, dying in Paris in 1911.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 8 / Jewish tailor ordered to stop disturbing church

New York court rules that church-goers have the right to worship without the sound of sewing machines in the background.

On August 8, 1871, the American courts struck a blow for respecting religious observance, ruling that a Jewish tailor whose labors were disturbing the Sunday services at a next-door church would have to cut it out.

Thus, Judge Edward J. Shandley of the New York Court of Special Sessions found himself presiding over the case of Robert Thomas, a member of the Alanson Methodist Episcopal Church on Norfolk Street, on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

Thomas sued to stop his Jewish neighbor — Nathan Koyofsky — from disturbing their Sunday church services with the noise of his sewing machine.

The Court of Special Sessions was considered an “inferior” criminal court, handling innumerable petty crime and nuisance cases, from drunken “roughs” breaking up a bar to parents and children suing each other over Granny's necklace. This was also the era of New York's rule by “Boss” William M. Tweed, a disastrous businessman who found his true calling in political corruption.

Back to Koyofsky, who lived in an apartment next door to the church. The church members, claimed Thomas, had asked him to stop sewing on their Sabbath, Sunday, and when he refused Thomas decided to sue.

The defense argued that the state didn't have the right to dictate which days were reserved for work and which for worship, because that contravened American principles of freedom.

The court, however, found that the freedom to worship in peace without the annoyance of industry next door prevailed, on the grounds that it was against the law to “willfully disturb religious worship, of whatever nature it might be.”

Shandley troubled to point out that the Jews were afforded the same protection under law: If anyone disturbed them during their Shabbat observance, on Saturday, they had the right to recourse.

The judge showed leniency toward the errant tailor, giving Koyofsky a suspended sentence only while warning the defendant that if he repeated his offense he would be sent to prison.

It could be argued that the United States as we know it today was born of a fierce yearning to worship in peace. The United States started out as a Christian Protestant nation: the first pilgrims from Europe moved there mainly in flight from religious persecution in their home lands. Among them were the Puritans, who were reviled in their home land of England and moved to America precisely for the sake of freedom of liberty.

It is therefore ironic that the Puritans were profoundly intolerant of other forms of religion and worship, though their method of dealing with it tended towards expulsion rather than say execution, unless the alternative worshippers dared return, at which point capital punishment could apply.

By the Civil War era, religion in America had become deeply entwined with other burning issues of the day, including slavery and its abolition.

Protestants still dominated, but Catholics were gaining a foothold as well. Shandley himself was from the Irish-American community, which was largely Catholic.

The first Jews arrived in what was to become the United States of America in 1654. A group numbering 23 sailed to New Amsterdam, known now as New York. They were fleeing from persecution in Brazil, which at the time was controlled by Holland. Four years later, more Jews arrived in Rhode Island.

It is an ironic twist of fate that today, the site of the Alanson Methodist Episcopal Church on the Lower East Side houses a synagogue, Congregation Beth Hamedrash Hagodol. The building was converted from Baptist church to shul in 1885, to house an Orthodox congregation of Russian Jews. It was one of the first synagogues to gain New York City Landmark status.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 9 / Three Jews establish Pinsk community

In 1506, three Jews were the progenitors of the Jewish community of Pinsk, which would constitute 70 percent of the city's population on the eve of World War II - and be all but decimated by the end of it.



A Jewish family in Pinsk, 1903 Photo by The Alien Immigrant via Wikipedia

August 9, 1506, is the date that history marks as the official beginning of the Jewish community of Pinsk, Lithuania, in what is today the southern part of Belarus. By the eve of World War II, Pinsk's 28,000 Jews constituted some 70 percent of the city's population, making it a cultural and social microcosm of the full range of Eastern Europe Jewish life. When Soviet troops liberated the city, in 1944, they found 17 Jews there in hiding.

There had been Jews in the region prior to the 16th century, but they were expelled together with the other Jews of Lithuania in 1495. In 1506, however, the noble who owned the area, Prince Feodor Ivanovich Yaroslavitch, together with his wife, Princess Yelena, granted a charter to three Jews to return and establish a community. The record of that charter names three men, Yesko Meycovich, Pesakh Yesofovich and Abram Ryzhkevich, as the beneficiaries of the charter, giving them and their group of some 15 families the use of two parcels of land to build a synagogue and a cemetery. The charter also confirmed the rights granted earlier to the Jews of Lithuania by King Alexander Jagellon, which included freedom of religion, legal protection, and the privilege to practice a number of non-agricultural professions.

Jews were involved in trade, day labor, money-lending and lease-holding, by which they managed and collected fees on nobility-owned estates and various monopolies, including tax collection.

Legal records quoted in the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia testify to the prominent stature of the founding fathers of the community and their successors. The family of Pesakh

Yesofovich, for example, held the leases for collecting taxes and customs from the inns of Pinsk and two other towns. In 1553, they sued the Archbishop of Pinsk for non-payment of taxes on the brewing of mead and beer. Apparently, a local custom permitted the church official to brew those beverages six times a year without having to pay taxes on the product. The Yesofovich family, not willing to recognize the custom, appealed to the queen to order the payment of the tax. The queen ruled that the exemption indeed had no legal standing and ordered the payment, while at the same time, said that the tax should then be channeled back to the church, as “a mark of our kindly intention toward God’s churches.”

During the 17th century, Pinsk was subjected to the same conflicts between Russian and Polish regimes, with Cossacks joining the Russians. This included the Cossack rebellion led by Bogdan Khmelnytsky, during which Pinsk was captured in 1648, and a pogrom carried out against its Jews. But overall, the town’s Jews were better organized than the general population, and so tended to recover more quickly from such shocks. Historical records from the mid-17th century testify to the presence of Jews and to various business transactions between them and the Christian population.

In 1793, the time of the second partition of Poland, Pinsk was brought under the rule of the Russian czar. In 1844, the kahal - the Jewish commission of self-rule - was abolished, although the community still oversaw its own tax collection and conscription to the army.

Pinsk was an early stronghold of Hasidic life but it was also a bastion of modernism during the Haskalah (Jewish enlightenment) period, with a number of modern secular schools, and Jewish schools for girls as well as boys.

In the early 20th century, the city’s Jews were active in socialist and Zionist organizations, and after the failure of the 1905 revolution against the czar, many Jewish activists found themselves rounded up by the regime. The city was occupied by German forces during most of World War I, and some 9,000 Jews were deported to Poland and impressed into labor gangs. After the war, Pinsk changed hands a number of times, until finally coming under Polish rule in 1920.

The beginning of World War II saw Pinsk occupied by Soviet troops, who nationalized private businesses and, in the case of the Jews, shut down most of their community institutions. The Germans occupied Pinsk on July 4, 1941, and within a month had murdered some 11,000 Jews. Only the following year, on May 1, 1942, did they establish a ghetto, and that was liquidated the following autumn. The 200 or so Jews who survived that action were then moved into a ghetto in nearby Karlin, where they were murdered on December 23, 1942. Liberation came on July 14, 1944.

Pinsk is one of several cities in Belarus that have undergone a mini-rebirth of their Jewish communities during the past two decades. In 1991, a delegation of Karliner Hasidim from the United States arrived in Pinsk to help organize the small community that was developing there. Four years later, the government gave them authority over the town’s remaining synagogue.

August 10 / 'Son of Sam' caught; asks 'What took so long?'

After terrorizing New York for a year in the late 1970s with shooting attacks that targeted young women with long, dark hair and that he later said were commanded by a dog, Berkowitz was arrested.



Mug shot of David Berkowitz taken August 11, 1977 Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 10, 1977, David Berkowitz was finally arrested for the year-long “Son of Sam” murder spree that had terrorized New York for a year and prompted the biggest manhunt in the city’s history. After being apprehended, he reportedly asked the police, “What took you so long?”

The man who would be convicted of six nearly random murders — he targeted young woman with long, dark hair — was born Richard David Falco on June 1, 1953, to Betty Broder, who was Jewish. Broder’s Italian-American husband, Tony Falco, abandoned her while she was pregnant with Berkowitz. The couple had operated a fish market together. Broder had a married lover, Joseph Kleinman, who threatened to leave her if she kept the baby. Richard was put up for adoption, with Falco listed as the father. Within days the newborn was adopted by Pearl and Nathan Berkowitz, hardware retailers in the Bronx, who switched his first and middle names and gave him their last name, renaming him David Richard Berkowitz.

David was bright but socially awkward and reportedly also had a penchant for stealing, animal abuse and apparently for pyromania as well. Yet he stayed in school and at home, though his beloved adoptive mother Pearl was to die of cancer when he was 14. Later he would tell criminology professor Scott Bonn that he also loved his father deeply.

At age 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving in the United States and South Korea and earning an honorable discharge in 1974. He later told interviewers that while in Korea he had sex with a woman for the first and only time in his life, an experience he described as terrible.

Berkowitz later claimed that his first attacks were the stabbings of two women, both on December 24, 1975 — Christmas Eve. Meanwhile, he worked at the post office and set out to find his birth mother.

It is not clear when he found out about the circumstances of his birth and his adoption, but reportedly he was ashamed by the discovery and felt a loss of identity.

The killer who would be dubbed “Son of Sam” because of letters he wrote to the police (and to reporter Jimmy Breslin), saying “I am a monster. I am the Son of Sam,” and who claimed to be directed by a dog possessed by the devil himself, committed his first murder on July 29, 1976. He shot at two young women at close range while they were sitting in a car, a pattern he was to repeat. Donna Lauria, 18, died; Jody Valenti, 19, took a bullet in the thigh.

Valenti provided the first description of the killer, at what was to be the start of a yearlong shooting spree: white male, around 30, with curly hair. The gun used was identified as a .44-caliber Charter Arms Bulldog revolver.

Over the next year, at intervals of between one and three months, Berkowitz would attack again. He mainly targeted people in cars, but on November 27, 1976 he shot two friends sitting on a stoop — Donna DeMasi, 16, and Joanne Lomino, 18, whose spine was shattered. Both survived. And on March 8, 1977, he shot Virginia Voskerichian, 19, in the head as she passed him in the street. In what was to be his final attack, on July 31, 1977, he shot a couple in their car. Stacy Moskowitz, 20, died within hours. Bobby Violante, also 20, was rendered blind.

In all, he murdered six people and wounded seven more.

After his arrest, he confessed to all the shootings. He claimed to be a devil-worshipper and said that Satan had possessed Harvey, a neighbor’s Labrador retriever, and commanded him to kill. Berkowitz also had meticulous records of 1,400 fires he said he started.

His case won worldwide media attention, leading to some disgust at his apparent reveling in the spotlight.

At the age of 24, David Berkowitz was sentenced to six consecutive life sentences for murder. Psychologists call him a “disorganized serial killer” who had early signs of paranoia. He remains incarcerated at Sullivan Correctional Facility, in upstate New York.

(By Ruth Schuster)

August 11 / Leading union organizer and women's rights advocate dies

Rose Schneiderman, born poor in Poland, went on to lead major textile-workers' strikes in New York, run for the U.S. Senate and serve as an adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.



Rose Schneiderman. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 11, 1972, labor leader and political activist Rose Schneiderman died, at the age of 90. In an editorial appearing shortly after her death, *The New York Times* described her as a “tiny, red-haired bundle of social dynamite [who] did more to upgrade the dignity and living standards of working women than any other American.”

Rose Schneiderman was born on April 6, 1882, in Sawin, near Chelm, in Russian Poland, the oldest of what would be the four children of Samuel Schneiderman and the former Deborah Rothman. Her mother was a seamstress, her father a tailor, although both also did whatever other work was available in order to support the family. At the age of 4, at her mother's insistence, Rose began heder (Hebrew school), which was far from typical for girls at the time. Two years later, the family moved to Chelm, so that she could attend public school as well.

In 1890, the family joined Samuel, who had already immigrated to New York, taking up residence on the Lower East Side. When Samuel died of meningitis, two years later, Deborah was pregnant with their fourth child. She worked as a seamstress and took in the occasional boarder, but at different points was so desperate financially that she had to put her children into orphanages.

Rose left school at the age of 13, when she was in sixth grade. Her mother got a job for her as a cashier in a department store, which she saw as more respectable than

higher-paying factory work, but after three years the need for money led Rose to take a job as a lining stitcher in a cap factory.

Schneiderman was first exposed to socialism and trade unionism during her family's brief sojourn in Montreal, in 1902. When she returned to New York, she began organizing workers into the city's first local of the United Cloth Hat and Cap Makers Union.

She soon began her long but ambivalent relationship with the New York Women's Trade Union League. The WTUL was established and run by middle- and upper-class women, and initially was more focused on a social-reform agenda than on labor activism. Schneiderman was the league's first Yiddish-speaker, and, beginning in 1908, she worked to organize women in the garment industry. In 1909-10, it was the "Uprising of the 20,000," in the shirtmakers trade, and in 1913, she organized a strike of 35,000 women in Brooklyn and New York who worked in lingerie and underwear production, an action that received national attention.

It was widely agreed that Schneiderman was a stirring public speaker, although she herself was quite insecure about her lack of education. When she began to sense the genteel anti-Semitism of other WTUL leaders, she went over to the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, but returned to the WTUL as its New York president, in 1917, and was elected national president in 1926, a position she held until the union disbanded in 1950.

Schneiderman's political activity also included the fight for women's suffrage, and she even ran, unsuccessfully, for the U.S. Senate from New York in 1920, on a platform that included planks on public housing, education and state-funded health and unemployment insurance. (Later in life, she opposed an equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution, because it would have outlawed any special protections for women on the basis of their gender.)

She became a personal friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, who introduced her to her husband. When Franklin D. Roosevelt became president, in 1933, he appointed her to the Labor Advisory Board (its only female member), and she also served him as a close advisor, helping with the design of much of the New Deal social and economic legislation.

Following her departure from Washington, Schneiderman served as New York State's secretary of labor. She also campaigned hard, although with minimal success, to help Jews escape from occupied Europe, as well as raising money for establishment of what became Kibbutz Kfar Blum, in honor of Leon Blum.

Schneiderman, who never married, had a long-term relationship with Maud O'Farrell Swartz, another WTUL activist, who died in 1937. With no family of her own, when Schneiderman died at age 90, in New York, fewer than a dozen people attended her funeral.

August 12 / Man whose sky charts saved Columbus is born

Abraham Zacuto also predicted that Vasco da Gama would reach his destination, and wrote a groundbreaking astronomical treatise in Hebrew.



The explorer Vasco da Gama is seen kneeling before the Portuguese monarch before his departure to seek out India. Abraham Zacuto is depicted on right – with his head against a sail. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

August 12, 1452, is the birthdate of the Spanish-Jewish astronomer and historian Abraham Zacuto, who advised the court of Portuguese King John (or Juan) II, and whose state-of-the-art navigation innovations were used by both Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama.

Abraham ben Samuel Zacuto was born in Salamanca, Castile, to a family that had come to Iberia from France early in the 14th century. He acquired his Jewish learning from both his father, Samuel Zacuto, and with the great rabbinical scholar Isaac Aboab II, and studied astronomy and astrology at the University of Salamanca.

Prior to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, Zacuto worked under the patronage of the bishop of Salamanca, Gonzalo de Vivero and, after his death, for Don Juan de Zuniga, grand master of the Order of Knights of Alcántara. In these years, he wrote, successively, “Hahibbur Hagadol” (“The Great Work,” finished in 1478), an up-to-date astronomical treatise, in Hebrew, that charted the changing positions of the sun, moon and planets; and his “Brief Treatise on the Influences of the Heavens,” in 1486.

In 1492, Zacuto left Spain for Lisbon, where he became royal astronomer to King John II, who ruled from 1481-1495. He continued in that position under John’s

successor, Manuel I, but when the latter compelled the Jews of his kingdom to convert to Christianity, in 1497 Zacuto escaped for North Africa.

Prophetic astronomer

It was that same year that the explorer Da Gama set off from Portugal to seek a sea route to India. King John had consulted with Zacuto before giving his imprimatur to the journey, and Da Gama and his crew also had training with Zacuto on the use of the copper astrolabe he had developed for use in determining one's latitude while at sea, and his astronomical charts.

Zacuto predicted that Da Gama would succeed in his mission to find a sea route to India (as he did), and that Portugal would gain control of large parts of the subcontinent.

Columbus is also said to have relied on – in fact, had his life saved by – Zacuto's charts that predicted future lunar and solar eclipses. When he and his men were threatened with death by natives they encountered on one of their stops in the New World, Columbus, knowing that a lunar eclipse was about to take place, told his captors that he would make the sky go dark, and so scared them that he was released.

Zacuto and his son Samuel were taken prisoner twice in North Africa before settling in Tunis. There, he finished work on his great historical work, "Sefer Hayuhasin," a chronological record of the Jewish sages who composed the Talmud, and their successors.

It is believed that Abraham Zacuto died in Jerusalem, probably in 1515, although there is some evidence that he ended his life in Damascus, five years later.

August 13 / A maverick social activist is born

Felix Adler had a lasting influence on American society by introducing a wide range of social reforms, which he saw as the true calling of religion.



Felix Adler, son of a Reform rabbi and founder of the Society for Ethical Culture. Photo by Wikimedia

August 13, 1851, was the birthdate of Felix Adler, the German-born ethicist and political activist who was groomed to follow in the steps of his Reform rabbi and scholar father, and instead turned left and founded a secular philosophy he called Ethical Culture.

Felix Adler was born in Alzey, Germany. When he was 6, the family immigrated to the United States, after his father, Samuel Adler, a Reform rabbi, accepted an offer to take over the pulpit at Temple Emanu-El, the flagship of the Reform movement in New York. Felix attended Columbia University, and after graduation returned to Germany, to study at his father's seminary in Berlin and at Heidelberg University, in preparation for becoming a rabbi himself. At Heidelberg he came under the influence of neo-Kantism, in particular the idea that morality could be determined outside of a religious context.

In 1873, after his return to America, Felix Adler gave a sermon at his father's synagogue, on "The Judaism of the Future." It was intended to be a trial balloon for his intended succession to Samuel Adler's pulpit. Things did not turn out that way, however, and the following year, Samuel Adler was succeeded not by his son but by his deputy, Richard Gottheil. Felix's address was memorable in that he did not mention "God" in it, although it's not clear that it is what torpedoed his chances of taking over from his father. Historian Jacob Rader Marcus has suggested that it may just have been that the congregants didn't like the idea of the father foisting the son upon them. In any case, Felix Adler did not pursue rabbinical ordination, and in 1874,

with the help of wealthy members of Emanu-El, he took a teaching job in Hebrew and Oriental literature at Cornell University.

Adler's theology was not well received by the Cornell administration – though he was popular with students -- and after two years, the school refused to continue accepting the money that was paying his salary. He found himself invited to return to Emanu-El to deliver a series of Sunday lectures on his views on religion and society. By 1877, Adler had incorporated an organization to advance the philosophy he was in the process of developing. He called that organization the Society for Ethical Culture.

Central to Ethical Culture was the belief in the importance of “deed, not creed” – that good works were the basis of the good life. At a time when American society was becoming rapidly industrialized and urbanized, Adler became deeply involved in matters of social reform – reform of schools, labor laws, housing, medical care.

As Jacob Marcus wrote in his “United States Jewry, 1776-1985,” Adler, “in his desire to help... reached out in all directions, aiding Negroes, attacking corruption in government, urging arbitration in the clothing industry, seeking legal aid for the poor, and publishing a magazine on ethics. To reach his goals he erected social-welfare agencies of his own.”

Although Ethical Culture meant to take the God out of religion, it did not give up the trappings of religious life, specifically Reform. It held Sunday services with sermons, and had its own ritual music. In a sense, Ethical Culture took the rational philosophy of Reform Judaism to its next logical level, removing any pretense of belief in a supernatural first cause. But in terms of its membership and sensibility, it remained very Jewish. And it received support, both financial and moral, from the membership of Temple Emanu-El.

Over the next quarter-century, the Society for Ethical Culture helped to found one reform movement after another. It organized a nursing department for the City of New York and a kindergarten for the children of working poor. (Ironically, that kindergarten eventually evolved into the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, which is today a network of exclusive New York prep schools, with fees close to \$40,000 annually.) Adler was one of the founders of what became the American Civil Liberties Union, and was on the first executive of the National Urban League, a civil-rights organization. The Tenement House Building Corporation created by Adler actually built low-cost housing on the Lower East Side and rented it out to recent immigrants.

In 1902, Adler was appointed a professor of political and social ethics at Columbia University, a position he held until his death, 31 years later. Although his movement never became very large, it did have a lasting influence on society. This was not only through the various progressive causes it embraced that truly ushered in reform in so many different realms of American life, but also in the ethical ideal it introduced, one that justified itself not by claiming a divine origin, but by the social good it meant to accomplish.

Adler was married to the former Helen Goldmark, herself the daughter of prominent European-born Jews. Although a suffragist, Goldmark did not believe in complete female parity with men in society, and thought that a woman's most important role

was as a mother. She and Adler raised five children, and she worked to establish standards for child-rearing that would turn it into a science.

Felix Adler died on April 24, 1933, at the age of 81. Helen Goldmark Adler died in March 1948.

August 14 / A Jewish sports legend is born

Track-and-field champion Marty Glickman, who was barred from participating in the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, went on to become a prominent sports commentator.



The 1936 Olympic stadium in Berlin. Photo via Wikipedia

August 14, 1917, was the birthdate of Marty Glickman, the New York-born athlete who traveled to Berlin for the 1936 Olympics only to be pulled from competition because he was Jewish, and who later became a household name in his hometown as a broadcaster for nearly every major sport.

Martin ("Marty") Glickman was born in the Bronx, New York, to Harry and Molly Glickman, both of whom had immigrated to the United States from Iasi, Romania. At James Madison High School, in Brooklyn, he was a championship sprinter at the national level. That was followed by Syracuse University, where Glickman both ran and played football.

It was when he was a freshman at Syracuse that Glickman qualified to run in the 4x100 relay for the U.S. Olympic team. He traveled to Berlin, only to be replaced on the relay squad just before the trial heats began. The same fate was suffered by his Jewish teammate Sam Stoller, from the University of Michigan. Assigned to take their places were sprinters Jesse Owens and Ralph Metcalfe, both of whom were African American. Owens had already won three gold medals in individual events and Metcalfe a silver.

The relay team went on to win the gold medal, but no explanation was ever provided for the last-minute substitution. To Glickman, and to most observers, it seemed clear that the move was a gesture by U.S. Olympic Committee chairman Avery Brundage and track coach Dean Cromwell intended to appease their German hosts.

Embarrassing as it was for Adolf Hitler to have to watch two black sprinters win additional medals in the capital of the Third Reich, it would have been even worse if the winning team included Jewish runners, especially as the German runners performed unanimously poorly at the games.

Many years later, Glickman also had the opportunity to study the film of the qualifying heat in the 100-meter dash, during the Olympic trials. His fifth-place finish had prevented him from even being entered in that prestigious event in Berlin. What he saw suggested that he had come in third, not fifth, and that manipulation of the results had resulted in his not reaching the event while two of Dean Cromwell's runners from the University of Southern California were placed ahead of him.

For the rest of his life, Glickman carried the injury of having been robbed of the opportunity to compete in the Olympics, and was convinced that it was because of his Jewish background. Sixty-two years later, in 1998, the then-president of the U.S. Olympic Committee, William J. Hybl, honored Glickman and the memory of Sam Stoller, who had died in 1983, by presenting Glickman with a plaque "in lieu of the gold medals they didn't win" in Berlin. At the time, Hybl noted that, although there was no written proof that anti-Semitism had been at play, it was clearly the case. "I was a prosecutor," he said. "I'm used to looking at evidence. The evidence was there."

Glickman had brief professional careers in both football and basketball, but it was as a radio broadcaster that he found his real calling. As a college junior, in 1937, he had been offered the opportunity to broadcast a sporting event on a local radio station after he had scored two touchdowns in a Syracuse victory over Cornell. For that and a series of succeeding appearances, he was paid \$15 per game, making \$100 that first season.

Between 1948 and 1957, Glickman, who had served with the U.S. Marines in the Pacific during World War II, provided the narration for the sports newsreels produced by Paramount Pictures. That was followed by his serving as the on-announcer for the New York Knicks (basketball) for 21 years and the New York Giants (football), for 23 years.

In a review of Glickman's 1999 memoir, "The Fastest Kid on the Block," Nat Asch told of how Glickman, a friend of his, had been introduced in the 1950s, to Tom Gallery, the head of NBC Sports. Gallery was interested in hiring Glickman to serve as the host of the weekly broadcast of an NBA game on national TV. Gallery told Glickman that his only reservation was the announcer's name, which, he said, sounded "too Jewish."

Glickman, according to Asch, told Gallery that he would be willing to change his name. "Gallery smiled and asked Marty whether he had an alternative name that he could use. 'Yes,' said Marty. 'And what would that be,' asked Gallery. 'Lipschitz.' said Marty, 'Marty Lipschitz.' 'Gallery's face reddened,' Marty reported, 'that ended the meeting.' It also ended any intention that Marty Glickman would broadcast any NBA games on NBC."

Even without NBC, the range and the quality of Glickman's career were mind-boggling. His play-by-play coverage of sports was considered so good and so

evocative that, after TV became the standard medium for sports programming, viewers would turn off the audio on their TV and listen to Glickman from the radio, even as they watched the visual of the game on their screen.

After the Giants, Glickman covered the New York Jets; he broadcast pre- and post-game shows for the Yankees baseball team for 22 years. He even served as the announcer for the Yonkers Raceway for a dozen years. He also broadcast rodeos, roller derbies – and a marbles tournament.

Marty Glickman continued working up to the age of 74, when he retired. He died nine years later, on January 3, 2001, of complications following heart surgery.

August 15 / A brilliant but slovenly bachelor who drafted the New Deal dies

Whatever his flaws, Benjamin Cohen wrote brilliant legislation and also forged diplomatic relations between Washington and Israel.



Benjamin V. Cohen Photo by Cohen Peace Fellowship - Ball State University

On August 15, 1983, Benjamin V. Cohen, the lawyer who played a key role in the drafting of much of the New Deal's most important legislation, and who went on to be involved in the establishment of the United Nations and of diplomatic relations between the United States and Israel, died, at the age of 88.

Benjamin Victor Cohen was born on September 13, 1894, in Muncie, Indiana. His parents, Moses Cohen and the former Sarah Ringolsky, were both Polish-born Jews; Ben was the youngest of their five children. Moses Cohen owned several successive businesses in Muncie together with his father-in-law, the most successful of which was a scrap metal yard.

Ben was noted for his brilliance while still in high school, and at the University of Chicago, he needed only four years to complete both his undergraduate and his law degrees. Another year was needed for him to pick up a research doctorate in law at Harvard. It was there that Cohen met Felix Frankfurter, a law professor (and later U.S. Supreme Court justice) who helped place him and many other excellent Jewish students in different official positions.

For Cohen, it was a clerkship with U.S. Circuit Court Judge Julian Mack. Mack, an early Zionist, later took Cohen with him to represent the American Jewish Congress at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, where the terms of the League of Nations' mandate for Palestine were defined, among other things.

Come the crash

From 1921 to 1933, Cohen was a Wall Street corporate lawyer, and he lost some \$1.5 million in the “great crash” of 1929. In 1933, Frankfurter proposed him, together with Thomas Corcoran and James Landis, for the writing of the Securities Act (also called the Truth in Securities Act), which required disclosure of relevant information to potential buyers of instruments of investment.

Mainly in tandem with Corcoran, Cohen went on to write the legislation that established the Securities Exchange Commission (1934), the Public Utility Holding Company Act (1935), the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Federal Housing Administration, among many other innovations of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration intended to restore the U.S. to economic productivity, and to place obstacles in the way of corporate rapaciousness.

During his years in the Roosevelt administration, Cohen boarded together with Corcoran and five other bright young men in a house in Georgetown that came to be known as the Little Red House. Shy, awkward and somewhat sickly, Cohen never married. One biographer, Charles Mee, wrote that he was known for “his slouching posture, sloppy dress, absent-minded table manners — and for a skill at drafting legislation that was generally reckoned the best in the United States.”

Before the U.S. entered World War II, it was Cohen who drafted the Lend-Lease Act and other legislation that allowed America to provide military assistance to the Allies. Later, he served as draftsman for the president at the Potsdam Conference (1945), and at Dumbarton Oaks, where the organizing principles of the United Nations were laid down.

He went on, under President Harry S. Truman, to help in the establishment of relations between the U.S. and Israel, in 1948.

Benjamin Cohen died of pneumonia, in Washington, D.C., on this day in 1983.

August 16 / A convert to Judaism celebrates her bat mitzvah - at age 61

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, who engages constantly with questions of justice, has been involved in Jewish life since converting in 1969.



Martha Nussbaum. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

August 16, 2008, is the date on which philosopher Martha Nussbaum celebrated her bat mitzvah – at the age of 61. The ceremony took place on Shabbat Nachamu, during a service at Temple K.A.M. Isaiah Israel, in Hyde Park, near the University of Chicago, where Nussbaum holds multiple appointments, most notably in the law school.

Martha Nussbaum was not born or raised a Jew. Born May 6, 1947, in New York City, she grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, the daughter of George Craven, a Southern-born lawyer whom she has described as a “racist” who was “bigoted against African Americans and Jews,” and Betty Warren, an interior designer who could trace her ancestry back to the Mayflower, the ship that brought the Pilgrims from England to the New World in 1620.

Nussbaum has been quite forthright in describing her adult life and career as “a repudiation of my aristocratic upbringing.” After attending a private girls prep school in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, where she wrote and performed in a five-act French-language play about Robespierre and the French Revolution, Nussbaum attended college at Wellesley and New York University. She seriously considered becoming a professional actress before she turned to classics and philosophy. She earned her master’s and doctoral degrees in classics at Harvard University.

It was in 1969, when she married a fellow classicist, Alan Nussbaum – who is today a professor of linguistics at Cornell University – that Martha Craven converted to Judaism. She has written about having had "an intense desire to join the underdogs and to fight for justice in solidarity with them." She also told an interviewer from the New York Times that she had "kind of gotten to the end of my rope with Christian otherworldliness. I wanted a religion in which justice was done in this world."

The marriage to Nussbaum ended in 1987, but Martha Nussbaum, who has been romantically involved with the economist Amartya Sen and legal scholar Cass Sunstein, continued to remain involved in Jewish life – and in her determination to engage constantly with questions of justice.

Her career has taken her from Harvard to Brown University and, finally, in 1995, to the University of Chicago. A listing of her positions there gives a sense of the breadth of her interests and her engagements: In addition to her appointment in law and ethics, she is affiliated with the university's classics and political science departments, its divinity school, and she is a member of the Committee on Southern Asian Studies. A prolific writer, Nussbaum has tackled the issues of gay rights and the rights of the disabled, religious freedom and tolerance, but also looked at the origins of emotional phenomena like revulsion, shame and love. And she has sharply and famously attacked thinkers as diverse as Alan Bloom, Judith Butler and Noam Chomsky – all of them, more or less, for not taking sufficient responsibility, in her eyes, for the practical implications of their philosophical work.

Nussbaum is an amateur singer – more than a decade ago, a profile in the New York Times described how, because she "detests earphones," when she would take her 12-mile runs along Chicago's lakefront, she would replay in her mind a memorized soundtrack of "The Marriage of Figaro" – and she has said that she decided to have a bat mitzvah because she wanted to learn cantillation, the notes for singing Torah and haftarah in synagogue. That being said, she used the opportunity of her bat mitzvah to give a lengthy and intellectually meaty dvar Torah that was subsequently published online with the title "[The Mourner's Hope](#)."

In her talk, Nussbaum attempted to understand the connection between the Torah portion read that day, the Sabbath following Tisha B'Av, and the haftarah, the reading from the Prophets that follows the Torah reading and is generally thematically related to it. Whereas the Torah portion of V'etchanan (Deuteronomy 3:23 – 7:11) includes a reiteration of the 10 Commandments, and in general, as she described it, "emphasizes the binding, covenantal force of laws," with their rules of justice, the haftarah (Isaiah 40:1-26) is a consolation over the destruction of Jerusalem. The speaker wonders aloud what link the two readings are meant to have, considering that they appear to be "moving in two very different worlds: the inner world of the longing heart, of suffering that needs the consolation of an embrace; and the world of universal justice, imposing demands on all of us."

Nussbaum compared this apparent divergence with the two arguably unrelated strands that could be said to characterize her own career: "trying to map out some principles of social and global justice on the one hand, and investigating the structure of the personal emotions on the other—focusing in fact, in the latter case, on ideas of grief, consolation, and compassion, on the way one mourns the death of a beloved parent,

the way one seeks consolation when one has experienced some terrible pain. People tend to feel that I simply work on two unconnected topics.”

What Nussbaum does in her dvar Torah is to suggest that Judaism wants us to be able to feel the pain, and be able to console, not only of those we know and love, but also of those “on the other side of the world.” Reading the two texts in tandem, she says, teaches us that “we only have true consolation of the self if we have the commitment to a life of universal justice. For the narcissistic type of consolation is no good for the self. The voice of true or adequate emotion is the same as the voice of universal reason, and its message is that justice is to be pursued for all, in recognition of the human needs of all.”

The bat mitzvah concluded her talk, which is described in only an abbreviated form above, by suggesting that the message of her readings demands courage if it is to be followed – courage that she thinks can be drawn from the “arts and humanities” – because, “In a world of moral obtuseness, the message of universal justice is threatening. Joyful to the needy, it is threatening to the powerful.... It is about putting one’s whole self into the search for justice, which means not just some nice words, but a patient and persistent effort of imagination, analysis, and, ultimately, action.”

August 17 / Suriname's Jews win autonomy unmatched until Israel's founding

The privileges granted to the Jews reflected the economic contribution the community made to the colony.



Illustration of Jodensavanne in 1830 by Pierre Jacques Benoit (1782-1854).

On August 17, 1665, the English governor of Suriname extended a series of special privileges to the Jewish settlers of the colony. These privileges, which remained in place for more than 150 years, made Suriname's Jewish community the world's only one with political autonomy until Israel was founded in 1948, according to the community's website.

European exploration of what became Suriname, a tiny state on South America's northeastern coast, began in the 16th century, with the earliest settlements established in the 17th century by the English and the Dutch.

The first Jews arrived in 1639, when the English allowed a group of Spanish and Portuguese Jews to migrate from Recife, Brazil, to Torarica, on the Suriname River, a little south of the present capital of Paramaribo. They immediately set up sugar plantations, with expertise brought from Recife.

More Jews came in 1652 and 1664 and set up communities on the Cassipora Creek, some 50 kilometers south of Paramaribo. The privileges granted to the Jews on this day in 1665 reflected the economic contribution the community made to the colony, which changed hands several times between the British and the Dutch. Those privileges included not only freedom for the Jews to practice their religion and build synagogues and schools, but to have their own court and militia.

When the Dutch conquered Suriname in 1667 they reaffirmed these rights and privileges. (The same year, as part of the Treaty of Breda, Holland and England agreed to swap Suriname for New Amsterdam, which the English renamed New York.)

Two years later the Dutch permitted David Cohen Nassy, a European-born Jewish entrepreneur, to set up a new settlement near the Cassipora Creek outposts. It was called Jodensavanne (Jewish Savanna), with its residents also referring to themselves as the Portuguese Jewish Nation.

Jodensavanne lasted from 1669 to 1832, after which the site was swallowed up by the jungle. While it thrived, however, it was an economic powerhouse. By 1694 its Jewish residents numbered 570; they owned some 40 sugarcane plantations employing around 9,000 slaves. By 1760, out of around 400 plantations, more than a quarter are believed to have been Jewish-owned.

The Jews of Suriname built several synagogues. The remains of the brick Bracha v'Shalom, erected in 1685 in Jodensavanne, can be visited along with its beautiful cemetery. The Ashkenazi Neve Shalom Synagogue in Paramaribo, an elegant white wooden structure first constructed in 1719 and rebuilt a century later, is still in operation today. And the Sephardi Zedek v'Shalom Synagogue, built in Paramaribo in 1735, has an interior reconstructed in Jerusalem's Israel Museum four years ago.

During the 18th century, a number of blows to the plantation economy led to the decline of Jodensavanne and the migration of most of its Jewish residents north to Paramaribo. Until 1832 they would return to their former home to celebrate holidays, but there were frequent attacks on Jodensavanne by escaped slaves.

On April 2, 1825, the Dutch canceled the special privileges that Suriname's Jews had held since 1665. On September 10, 1832, most of the structures at Jodensavanne, including the Bracha v'Shalom Synagogue, were either destroyed or badly damaged by a fire.

Although political developments in the 1970s and '80s, including a civil war, caused most of Suriname's Jewish population to depart, the country still has some 200 Jews. With the help of donations from around the world, they maintain the Jewish sites.

August 18 / Greek Jewish community withers following fire

A fire that probably started in French army barracks in 1917 delivers death blow to Thessaloniki's prosperous Jewish community.



The 1917 fire in Greece's second-largest city portended the final decline of its prosperous Jewish community. Photo by Wikipedia

On August 18, 1917, a fire began in Thessaloniki, Greece, that destroyed some two-thirds of the city, including most of its Jewish quarter. As a consequence of the fire, which left some 70,000 people homeless, it has been estimated that close to half of the city's Jewish population left Thessaloniki.

Thessaloniki was at the time, as it is today, the second-largest city in Greece, after Athens. By Greek standards, it was a modern city, and its port was one of the most important in the eastern Mediterranean. Thessaloniki for years had a Jewish majority, the only such city in the Diaspora, a community that began when Jews, encouraged to do so by Thessaloniki's Ottoman rulers, began emigrating there from Spain following the Expulsion in 1492 (although there are signs of a Jewish presence going back to Byzantine times). So dominant was the Jewish population in the city's trade that Saturday was the official day of rest for Thessaloniki's business community and its port.

Following the First Balkan War, in 1914, the city passed from Ottoman control to Greek. During World War I, French and British troops were billeted in Thessaloniki, which became a major transit center for soldiers on their way to fighting in Bulgaria. Although the cause of the fire has not been definitely determined, one theory is that it started in the French encampment. (Another is that it was caused by an unattended kitchen fire in a civilian home in the central Mevlane district.)

The fire began in the area between the upper section of Thessaloniki and its port. By August 19, it had destroyed the city's commercial center. There were some half-hearted attempts by British and French forces to fight the fire, but the Allied armies' unwillingness to interrupt the supply of water from their camps and hospitals to the cause, combined with poorly organized fire-fighting services, allowed the fire to wreak significant destruction.

About one square kilometer of the city was destroyed - all of Thessaloniki's southwestern quadrant - including nearly all of the waterfront. Among the Jewish population, most of its 37 synagogues burned down (neither were the city's churches or mosques spared), and some 50 percent of the Jewish residents lost their homes. More than half of Thessaloniki's 7,700 shops were destroyed as well, many of them owned by Jews, and many of the city's newspapers went permanently out of business.

According to an official report, "all the banks, all the business premises, all the hotels and practically all the shops, theaters and cinemas were reduced to ashes." It is said that 9,500 buildings altogether were lost in the fire, which died out only after 32 hours.

For then-Prime Minister Eleftherios Venezelos, the wholesale destruction provided an opportunity to rebuild Thessaloniki along European standards. Although he acted quickly in calling in the French planner Ernest Hebrard, the logistical ramifications of the decision obviously slowed down the entire process. A consequence was the departure of much of the city's population, not only from Thessaloniki but from Greece in general - in the direction of Western Europe, the United States and Palestine.

Those who remained were given a choice either to live in their rebuilt neighborhoods, or to leave for Thessaloniki's outlying areas. Many of the Jews chose the latter alternative. They were convinced in fact, writes Mark Mazower in his book "Salonica: City of Ghosts," that the government's intention was to drive Jews from the city's center, a charge that was denied at the time. Nonetheless, if ethnic Greeks constituted a minority of Thessaloniki's population of 157,000 in 1913, notes Mazower, by 1928, they were 75 percent of its population of 236,000.

By the start of World War II, Jews constituted less than 40 percent of the population - their numbers had declined from 93,000 to 53,000 -- meaning that there were fewer left to murder when the Germans occupied the city in 1941.

August 19 / Israel enacts Holocaust commemoration law

Halfway through WWII, the catastrophe to Judaism was clear and the need to commemorate it was also clear to one kibbutznik in Israel.



U.S. President Barack Obama visiting Yad Vashem, March 22, 2013. Photo by Emil Salman

On August 19, 1953, the Knesset passed the Yad Vashem Law, by which it established the Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority to oversee Holocaust commemoration in Israel.

The idea for a memorial in Israel to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime was first raised officially in 1942, which was not only a half-dozen years before Israeli independence – but also a time when most of those victims were still alive.

The proposal came from Mordechai Shenhavi (1900-1983), a Russian-born founding member of Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek (although in 1942, he was living at Kibbutz Beit Alfa). He brought it up at a meeting of the board of the Jewish National Fund in September 1942.

Even at that early stage, almost two years before World War II was to end, Shenhavi saw a need to create an institution in Palestine that would, in his words, “perpetuate the memory of the century’s greatest catastrophe within the framework of our Zionist enterprise.” He also saw the institution he proposed as answering an important challenge facing the JNF, which he noted at the time, “needs a new cause that can turn into a pipeline for large sums,” as quoted by Tom Segev in his 1993 book “The Seventh Million.”

A monument and a name

The name “Yad Vashem” (“a monument and a name”) was taken from Isaiah 56:5, in which God makes a promise regarding “the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths ... and hold fast by My covenant,” saying that “unto them will I give in My house and within My walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting memorial, that shall not be cut off.”

Rather like eunuchs, who were denied the opportunity to bear children, the six million victims of the Holocaust were at risk of being “cut off” from Jewish history. In fact, since the beginning Yad Vashem has had as one of its goals trying to collect and make known the name of every Jew murdered by Hitler.

To date, it has reached some 4.3 million names, all of which are accessible via a database uploaded by Yad Vashem to the Internet.

Vast complex versus forest

According to Segev, the JNF did not respond with great enthusiasm to Shenhavi’s idea, which envisioned a vast complex, to be situated in the Upper Galilee, including a memorial forest, cemetery, research institute and museum, plus resort and sports facilities. Rather, it came up with a proposal of its own for a Jerusalem “Martyrs’ Forest,” with seedlings dedicated in the names of Holocaust victims, and “memorial huts” where survivors could contemplate those they were mourning.

Shenhavi succeeded in having the JNF limit itself to a forest, with no huts. He also came to a compromise with a proposed Shoah memorial in Paris, which agreed that the Israeli institution would be the exclusive repository of victims’ names.

By 1950, Shenhavi also came up with the idea that the young state would grant retroactive citizenship to all the Jews murdered in the Holocaust. The Yad Vashem Law of August 19, 1953, does indeed have a clause that offers those “members of the Jewish people who perished in the days of the Disaster and the Resistance the commemorative citizenship of the State of Israel,” but this was never realized in a collective manner.

Yad Vashem opened to the public in 1957, on a section of Jerusalem’s Mt. Herzl that was dubbed the Mount of Remembrance. From early on, it included a museum and a research institute, and over the years added a children’s memorial, a monument to Righteous Gentiles, an art museum and many other departments. In 2005, a completely new museum, designed by Israeli-American architect Moshe Safdie, opened to the public.

August 20 / Padua attacks its ‘Turk-friendly’ Jews

Mistakenly thinking the Christians had routed the Muslims from Buda, Paduans celebrate by sacking the ghetto - yet all the Jews survived.



The Siege of Buda, by Frans Geffels, 1686. Photo by The Hungarian National Museum, Wikimedia Commons

On August 20, 1684, the Jewish population of Padua was spared from complete annihilation. Though angry neighbors stormed through and sacked the Jewish ghetto of this northern Italy city – no lives were lost.

In celebration of their survival and the damage being confined to property alone, the community began to commemorate the Hebrew date, the 10th day of Av, as a special Purim.

Over the centuries, many “special Purims” have been celebrated locally to mark the deliverance – presumably by Providence – of a particular Diaspora community from annihilation at the hands of Jew-haters. In the case of the Jews of Padua, who called their commemoration “Purim di-Buda” (Buda Purim), the circumstances were particularly bizarre.

“Buda,” of course, is the name of the city on the western bank of the Danube that today, together with “Pest,” on the eastern bank, makes up the Hungarian capital. In the summer of 1684, Buda, which had been in Ottoman hands since 1541, was under siege by the Holy League, an alliance of the armies of Christian Poland, the Holy Roman Empire and Venice.

The year before, 1683, the Turks had been dislodged from nearby Vienna. Now, the eyes of all of Christian Europe were focused on the campaign to liberate Buda from the Muslim yoke.

The Jews of Buda, however, sided with the Ottoman Turks, and fought with them in defense of the city.

On August 20, 1684, word reached Padua, some 800 kilometers to the west, that the Christian armies had been successful in freeing Buda. In their joy at the news – which turned out to be erroneous – the people of Padua immediately recalled how the Jews had assisted the Turks.

The day before had been the 9th of Av on the Hebrew calendar (Tisha B'Av), and the Jews had spent it in synagogue reciting lamentations, as they traditionally did on that day, which commemorates the destruction of the two great temples in Jerusalem. However, the Christians of Padua assumed that the Jews had been praying for the defeat of the Holy League. And now that the Holy League had been victorious (or so the Paduans thought), the Jewish traitors deserved to be punished.

Periodically persecuted

Padua had a large, veteran Jewish population which, even in normal times, was subject to periodic persecution, if only because of its commercial success. Its members had in fact been confined to a ghetto beginning early in the 17th century.

On August 20, masses of Paduans descended on the ghetto and began bombarding it with stones. The Jews within sent a messenger requesting assistance to the doge of Venice, who ruled Padua, but when a gate was opened to allow the messenger to depart, the angry crowd pushed its way in.

No words of explanation (about Tisha B'Av) were effective in deterring the rioters, nor were offers of food and money. The Jewish quarter was gutted. Local authorities threatened anyone who harmed a Jew with execution, but it was only when an order arrived from Venice to permit the Jews to survive that peace was restored.

Hence the celebration of a special Padua Purim, named, confusingly, “Buda Purim.” Much of existing knowledge about this episode comes from the poem “Pahad Yitzhak” (The Fear of Isaac) written by Rabbi Isaac Vita Cantarini, which was published in Amsterdam in 1684.

As it turned out, the rumor about the overthrow of the Turks had been premature. The siege of Buda continued until October 30, 1684, at which point the Christian armies withdrew. Only two years later, when they undertook a second siege, in which some 7,000 Turkish defenders were challenged by a combined Christian force more than 10 times that size, was Buda reconquered, in August 1686.

The successful invading forces were given permission to plunder the city, and proceeded to kill some 5,000 Turks and 500 Jews, half of Buda's Jewish community. The other half was sold into slavery.

August 21/ The Jew who would become France's top Catholic is baptized

Aaron Jean-Marie, upon being named archbishop of Orleans: 'It was as if the crucifix had begun to wear a yellow star.'

On August 21, 1940, 13-year-old Aaron Lustiger, a Paris-born Jew, underwent baptism into the Catholic faith in Orleans, France. Four decades later, Father Jean-Marie Lustiger, as he now called himself, would be appointed archbishop of Paris and subsequently a cardinal.

Aaron Lustiger was born on September 17, 1926, the older of what would be the two children of Charles and Gisele Lustiger. The parents were both Polish Jews who met after immigrating to France. Charles ran a clothing shop in the French capital. Although a grandfather of Aaron's back in Silesia, Poland, had been a rabbi, the immediate family was not religiously observant.

Aaron attended the Lycee Montaigne, in Paris, but after the start of World War II in October 1939, his parents sent him and his sister, Arlette, to Orleans, into the care of a Christian family. Drawn to Christianity after having begun reading the New Testament, he decided, after several visits to an Orleans church during Easter week of 1940 that he wanted to be baptized, something he later acknowledged that his parents found "unbearably painful." Five months later, he was baptized as Aaron Jean-Marie by Orleans bishop Jules Marie Courcoux.

According to Henri Tincq, who wrote a 2012 biography of Lustiger, both his parents were also baptized that autumn, in the hope that a Catholic identity might protect them from arrest by the Nazis.

In fact, Jean-Marie, his sister Arlette, also a convert, and his father Charles did survive the war by hiding in Southern France. Gisele however was arrested after returning to Paris, and was deported in September 1942 to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was murdered the following year.

The vocation of Israel

After the war, the family's surviving members returned to Paris, where Jean-Marie earned a literature degree from the Sorbonne in 1946. That was followed by clerical training, first at the Carmelite seminary in Paris and then at the city's Institut Catholique. He was ordained a priest on April 17, 1954.

Over the next two and a half decades, prior to his appointment as archbishop, Lustiger served as chaplain at the Sorbonne, headed a Catholic training center and was vicar of a 16th-arrondissement parish. In December 1979, he was named archbishop of Orleans (about which he remarked that, "it was as if the crucifix had begun to wear a yellow star"), and just over a year later received the call to return to Paris to become the effective head of French Catholics.

Lustiger was a Catholic traditionalist, and remained opposed to birth control, women's ordination and the possibility of marriage for priests. Yet he always maintained, to the consternation of some Jews, that he remained a Jew, even after becoming archbishop of Paris, when he declared: "I was born Jewish and so I remain, even if that is unacceptable for many. For me, the vocation of Israel is bringing light to the goyim. That is my hope and I believe that Christianity is the means for achieving it."

He was an outspoken opponent of expressions of anti-Semitism, and worked hard for reconciliation with Jews, helping to hammer out a resolution to the crisis caused by establishment of a Carmelite monastery in Auschwitz in the 1980s.

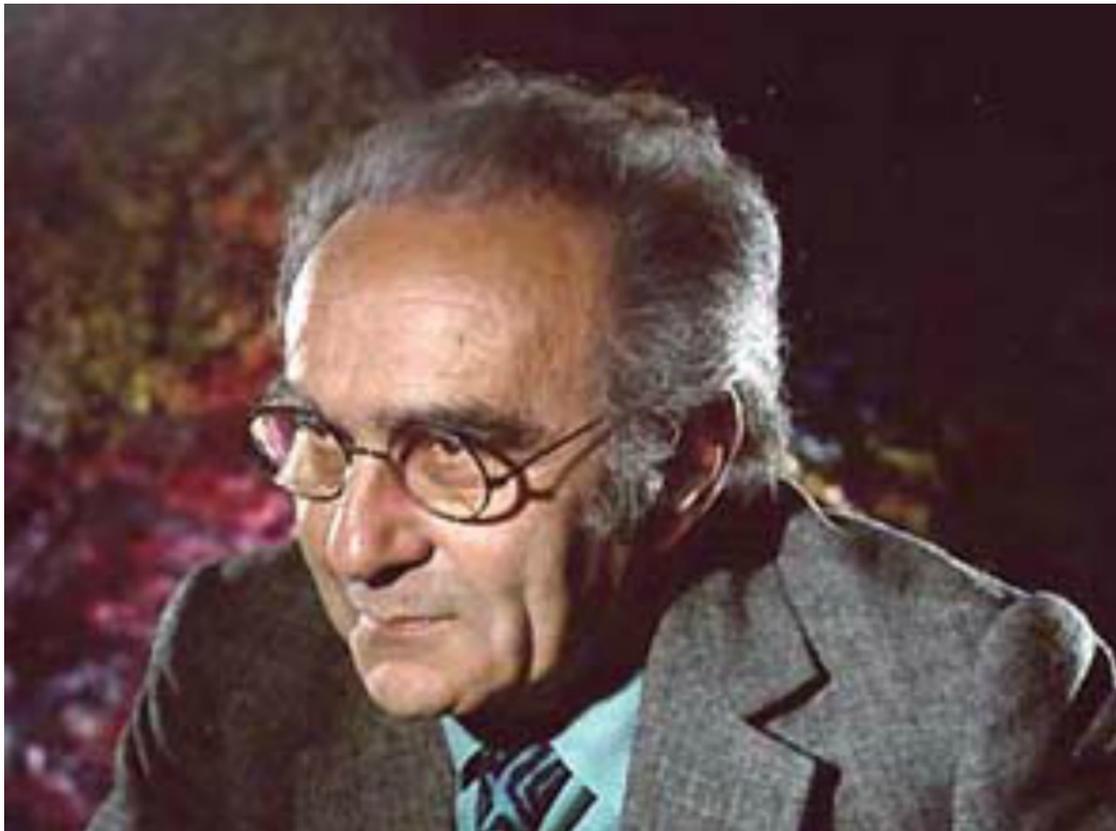
Lustiger told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 1981 that during a spiritual crisis in the previous decade he had considered moving to Israel. "I thought then that I had finished what I had to do here [in France], that I was at a crossroads," he explained, adding that he "had started to learn Hebrew, by myself, with cassettes. Does that seem absurd, making your aliyah?"

With his charisma and communications skills, Lustiger was often mentioned as a possible successor to Pope John Paul II, with whom he was very close. In fact, he submitted his resignation as archbishop in September 2001, when he turned 75, and it was accepted by John Paul in 2005.

In April 2007, Lustiger, suffering from lung and bone cancer, entered a clinic outside Paris. He died there on August 5 of that year, at age 80.

August 22 / The man who traced humanity's ascent - and descent - dies

Multi-disciplinarian Jacob Bronowski tied literature and science and did his bit for the Allies, but was sickened enough by Hiroshima to abandon war efforts for biology.



Jacob Bronowski. Wikipedia Commons

On August 22, 1974, Jacob Bronowski, the versatile mathematician, scientist and writer whose book and BBC-TV series “[The Ascent of Man](#)” chronicled the intellectual development of the human species, died, at the age of 66.

Bronowski had a multidisciplinary approach to life and work, declaring at one point that he had grown up to be “indifferent to the distinction between literature and science, which in my teens were simply two languages for experience that I learned together.” He continued to write poetry and drama to the end of his life, even as he made a career for himself as a professional scientist and acclaimed explainer of science to the masses.

Jacob Bronowski was born in Lodz, Poland, on January 18, 1908, the son of Abram and Celia Bronowski. During World War I, the family relocated to Germany, and then, in 1920, moved to London. There his father owned a haberdashery, and traded with companies in Poland.

Although he later said he knew only two words of English at the time of his arrival, Bronowski gained admission to the prestigious Central Foundation Boys School, and in 1927, he began studying mathematics at Jesus College, Cambridge, as a scholarship student.

Statistical bombing patterns

In 1930, Bronowski attained the status of “senior wrangler,” making him the highest-scoring undergraduate mathematics student in the university. No less impressive is that he also played chess competitively, was also literary editor of the university’s *Granta* magazine (precursor to today’s *Granta*), and also co-founded a new, avant-garde student literary journal.

Bronowski completed a Ph.D. in mathematics at Cambridge in 1933, a period when he was friends with such writers as Samuel Beckett, Robert Graves and Laura Riding (though he fell out with the last two). From 1934 to 1942, he taught math at the University College of Hull, publishing his first book, “The Poet’s Defense,” about the connection between poetry and mathematics, in 1939.

Although Britain’s MI5 began to keep tabs on Bronowski as a suspected radical and communist (he was neither) in 1939, this did not prevent him from working for the RAF Bomber Command during World War II, applying his expertise in statistics to devising bombing strategies.

Following the war, he was sent to Japan to examine the havoc wreaked on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by having been the targets of atomic bombs. Following that experience, he decided he would do no more military work. He soon moved into the field of biology.

Finding the human precursor

In 1950, Bronowski was asked to study the remains of the “Taung Child,” a two million-year-old skull found in South Africa, whose brain was ape-like in size, but whose teeth resembled those of a human. Using statistics, he concluded, in the face of significant opposition from other experts, that the skull was that of a precursor to humans, something of a “missing link.”

Bronowski’s popularity on the BBC Radio quiz show “The Brains Trust,” and his books on science and culture, led to his being approached by the BBC’s David Attenborough to create “The Ascent of Man.” In its 13 parts, Bronowski, speaking without a script, travels the world to trace the development of human civilization through the development of science.

In Part 11, Bronowski looks at the vast destruction of World War II, and places the blame on humans, not science. Photographed outside a crematorium at Auschwitz, where, he confesses, he lost many family members, he dips his hand into a pond, into which “were flushed the ashes of some four million people.” That, he says, “was not done by gas. It was done by arrogance, it was done by dogma, it was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave.”

Obviously moved by the setting, Bronowski warns against the dangers of “the itch for absolute knowledge and power,” by quoting Oliver Cromwell, “I beseech you in the bowels of Christ: Think it possible you may be mistaken.”

Bronowski was married to the former Rita Coblenz; they had four daughters. He died not long after the airing of “The Ascent of Man,” of a heart attack, on this day in 1974.

August 23 / The 1929 massacre of Hebron's Jews

Escalating tensions between Arabs and Jews culminated in a brutal massacre, clearing the city of its Jewish population for years to come.

On this day in 1929, the infamous massacre of the Jews of Hebron by Palestinian Arabs began. Unrest had spread to the city from Jerusalem, where a week earlier the grand mufti, Haj Amin al Husseini, helped spread rumors that Jews were killing and raping Muslims and were planning to burn down Al-Aqsa Mosque.

By Thursday, August 22, Jews were being attacked in established Jewish communities like Safed and Motza, as well as in Hebron. Over a 24-hour period, one British police officer in Hebron, Raymond Cafferata, attempted to keep Jews and Arabs separate and dispel the inflammatory rumors.

Many of Hebron's 800 Jewish residents took refuge in Beit Romano, the British police station, and a large number of Jews were protected by their Arab neighbors. But the violence was nonetheless devastating, leaving 67 Jews dead, many of them students at the Hebron Yeshiva.

Arab rioters at one point told local rabbi Yaakov Slonim, who had opened his home to frightened Jews, that they would spare the town's Sephardi Jews if he would turn over the Ashkenazim. When he refused, Slonim was killed.

When the riots died down, Mandatory officials directed the remaining Jews in Hebron to leave town. They did, and resettled in Jerusalem. Although 160 Jews returned to the town two years later, they had all left again by the time of Israeli Independence. Only after the Six-Day War in 1967 did Jews return to Hebron.

Today, there is a settlement of some 500 Jewish residents in the heart of the city of more than 160,000 Palestinians.

August 24 / Cologne Jews massacred

After Jews were blamed for causing the Black Death pandemic that wiped out most of Europe, the local population slaughtered the local community.



Jews identified by yellow badges are portrayed being burned at the stake in this medieval manuscript. Photo by Wikipedia

On August 24, 1349, the Jewish quarter of Cologne, Germany, was attacked by an angry crowd, and most of its residents killed. Their property was then plundered and divvied up between the ransackers, the city government and the Church.

Ostensibly, the justification for the massacre was the belief that Jews were responsible for the Black Death – the bubonic plague pandemic that was then raging through Europe, and which between 1348 and 1350 is estimated to have killed up to two-thirds of the continent's population. In fact, on the same day, the Jews of Mainz, who at the time constituted Europe's largest Jewish community, were slaughtered en masse in a Black Death pogrom, one of many assaults on Jews that took place during the period. The reality, however, was more complex.

Cologne had a Jewish population with a presence harking back to Roman times, in the third century C.E. By the year 321, the emperor Constantine had issued a document that gave the Jews of Cologne permission to hold certain (unpopular) municipal positions that had previously been closed to them. Ongoing excavations in the heart of modern-day Cologne in recent years have yielded impressive physical evidence of this ancient Jewish community.

In 1096, during the First Crusade, the city's Jews were attacked by the Christian armies moving eastward, with significant numbers murdered, despite efforts by the local population to hide and shelter the Jews.

By the 14th century, Cologne's renewed Jewish population played an important role in the economy of this important trading center and member of the Hanseatic League. They had exclusive permission to make interest-based loans, and their clients included not only merchants but also the city itself. (Visitors to Cologne today can still see the "Judenprivileg" carved into a wall at Cologne Cathedral, the rules set down by Archbishop Engelbert II von Falkenberg regulating the Jewish role in moneylending.)

As has been the case in so many societies throughout history, the services offered by Jews were economically critical, but also made those same Jews resented and hated – and at times even expendable. There were many cases in which the Jews found themselves caught and victimized in disputes over power and money that were in essence being waged between clerics, nobility, merchant classes and the peasantry.

Thus it was in Cologne in 1349 that the plague that was then making its way through Germany served as an excuse for those in power to stand aside while members of a panicked populace attacked the Jews, thus forestalling any possibility of the latter from collecting outstanding loans.

Although earlier in the summer, when Strasburg was hit by the Black Death, the Cologne council had implored officials in that city to spare their Jews, when the fearful populace of Cologne became concerned that Jews were poisoning their wells, there was little that the council could do to save them.

The assault on the Jewish quarter of Cologne took place on the eve of St. Bartholomew's Day, the night between August 23 and 24. According to some chronicles, many of the Jews elected to lock themselves within their synagogue and burn it down, rather than finding themselves confronted with a demand that they undergo baptism. Another version says they burned themselves inside their houses. Those Jews who didn't die at their own hands were killed by the rioters, with only a few survivors leaving town and seeking refuge nearby.

Ransacking followed the murder. Competition for the Jews' property was fierce, so that it became necessary for the Church and the city council to negotiate an agreement on how to divvy up the spoils.

Jews were officially permitted to return to Cologne in 1372, although they were prohibited from making claims on any property that had been in their hands prior to 1349.

August 25 / A WWII survivor who built Hong Kong dies

Lawrence Kadoorie rose from a Japanese prison camp to restore his family's fortunes and help forge Hong Kong's future with China.



A light display illuminates Hong Kong skyline, January 2011. Photo by Bloomberg

On August 25, 1993, Lawrence Kadoorie, leader of the second generation of a family that played a key role in the economy of pre-revolutionary China and in the development of Hong Kong, died at the age of 94.

Lawrence Kadoorie was born on June 2, 1899, the eldest of the two sons of Sir Elly Kadoorie and the former Laura Mocatta. His brother, Horace (1902-1995), eventually became his partner in running the family's businesses and philanthropies.

Elly Kadoorie came to Hong Kong in 1880 to work for another Sephardi-Jewish business firm, [David Sassoon](#) & Sons. (The Kadoories, like the Sassoons, were Baghdadi Jews who arrived in the Far East by way of Bombay, India.) In relatively short time, Elly established his own business group, based in Shanghai, that owned utilities, transportation and hotels on the Chinese mainland and in Hong Kong.

Lawrence was born in Hong Kong and received his high school education at Clifton College, outside Bristol, in England. He also studied law, at Lincoln's Inn, London, without finishing his degree. He and Horace managed the Sassoon family's Shanghai Hotel together for several years in the 1920s and '30s, before Lawrence returned to Hong Kong to head the Kadoorie business interests there. In 1938, he married Muriel Gubbay, the daughter of David Sassoon Gubbay, a scholar of Hebrew and comparative religions.

From prison camp to philanthropy

In 1942, after the Japanese occupied Hong Kong, Kadoorie and his family were imprisoned, first in camps in the colony and in Shanghai, and finally under house arrest at Marble Hall, the Shanghai mansion built by his father. (After the communist revolution, Marble Hall was turned into a “children’s palace” for art training.)

Lawrence Kadoorie really came into his own following the war and the communist revolution, mainly in the role he played in the development of Hong Kong. He and Horace rebuilt China Light and Power, a company their father had led, which provided electricity to Hong Kong and the New Territories (the parts of Hong Kong on the Chinese mainland) during the boom years. They repossessed the family’s fabled Peninsula Hotel, in Kowloon, turning it into the flagship of the international Hong Kong and Shanghai Hotels chain.

Kadoorie set up cotton and carpet mills in Hong Kong, was a majority shareholder in both the Star Ferry and the Peak Tram and was briefly involved directly in politics in the colony. But he also believed in cooperation with mainland China, an attitude that eventually paid off, for example, in 1992, when CLP went into a joint venture with China to build a nuclear power plant in Daya Bay. Long before it became a reality, he envisioned the joint development of Hong Kong and China’s Guangdong province.

His realistic approach to business did not prevent Kadoorie from being seen as a benevolent employer and a major philanthropist. The family helped European refugees from the Holocaust find refuge in Shanghai during the war years, and after the revolution they helped millions of refugees from the Chinese mainland set up independent farms in the New Territories, through the Kadoorie Agricultural Aid Association.

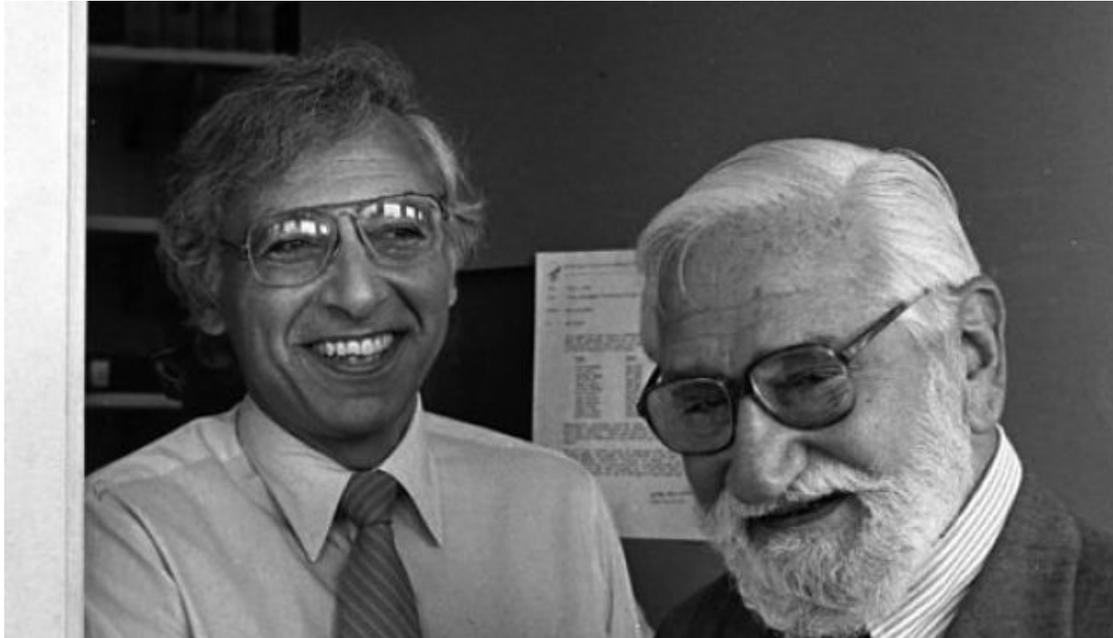
He and his family gave generously to Jewish organizations, but insisted that the facilities they funded be open to all members of the communities in which they were situated.

In 1974, Kadoorie was knighted in Britain, and seven years later he was made a life peer, shortly after his companies ordered \$600 million worth of goods and services from British firms — making him the first man born in Hong Kong to become a member of the House of Lords.

Lord Kadoorie died on August 25, 1993 and was buried in the Happy Valley Jewish Cemetery in Happy Valley, Hong Kong.

August 26 / The man who gave us a painless polio vaccine is born

Albert Sabin wasn't the first to find a way to thwart the virus. The Russian-born genius just found a way to make it not hurt.



Albert B. Sabin, right, with AIDS and cancer researcher Dr. Robert Gallo, circa 1985. Photo by Wikipedia

August 26, 1906, is the birthdate of Albert Sabin, the medical researcher whose many discoveries included identifying how the polio virus spreads, which led to his development of a safe and reliable oral vaccine for prevention of the disease.

Although Jonas Salk's polio vaccine was approved and in use earlier than Sabin's, it was the latter's that quickly became the standard internationally after its introduction in the United States in 1960.

Albert Bruce Sabin was born in Bialystok, then part of the Russian Empire, today in Poland, to Jacob Saperstein and the former Tillie Krugman. His initial education was in Hebrew and Yiddish, to which he soon added Russian, studied with a private tutor.

After the Bialystok pogrom of June 1906, much of the extended family began emigrating from Russia, although in the case of Albert's family, they did not leave until after World War I, and did not arrive at Ellis Island, in New York, until early 1921, after an 18-month journey.

Relatives who had preceded the family helped them settle in Paterson, New Jersey. There Albert, after six weeks of an English-language cram course, enrolled in high school. In 1923, he began pre-dental studies at New York University, after an uncle offered to finance his education and house him, on the understanding that Albert, at the end of his training, would join the uncle's dental practice.

Didn't want to be a dentist

After three years, however, Sabin “couldn't stand it any longer,” and, acknowledging that what he really wanted to do was medical research, quit dental school. Although he now lacked a financial backer, he was fortunate enough to have a bacteriology professor who not only gave him a lab job, but also helped arrange scholarships and even housing for Sabin.

Albert became an American citizen, and changed his name to “Sabin,” in 1930, and finished medical school the following year. Because his internship was to start only the following winter, he did research that summer in the lab of that same mentor, Dr. William H. Park, on poliomyelitis, then the cause of an epidemic.

Very quickly, Sabin proved himself to be brilliant, methodical and single-minded, and was in demand as a researcher. A year at the Lister Institute in London was followed by a fellowship at the Rockefeller Institute, back in New York, until in 1939, at age 33, he was offered the opportunity to run his own program in viral research at the University of Cincinnati.

Weizmann presidency

During World War II, as an officer in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, Sabin isolated the virus that caused sandfly fever, which affected troops in Africa. While in northern Africa, he had his first visit to Palestine. Later he would become a regular visitor to Israel, until, in 1970, he accepted an offer to become the fourth president of the Weizmann Institute of Science, in Rehovot.

During his medical career, Sabin developed vaccines against dengue fever and encephalitis, but his greatest claim to fame was the live-virus vaccine against the crippling polio, which was first tested on schoolchildren in the U.S. in 1960, after some years of trials in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. It quickly replaced the Salk injected vaccine as inoculation of choice (the two doctors had a long-running, well-publicized rivalry), although the disease has yet to be eradicated globally.

Sabin, who was married three times and had two daughters, held a variety of elder-statesman positions in his final decades, including the Weizmann presidency, which he resigned in 1972, after open-heart surgery. Despite much ill health, he continued to remain outspoken on key public-health issues.

He died in Washington, D.C., on March 3, 1993, of congestive heart failure. He left the bulk of his estate to the Weizmann Institute, having already given \$620,000 during his lifetime to fund solar energy research there.

August 27 / Pioneering philanthropist and educator dies

Rebecca Gratz helped women and children in need and filled a vacuum by opening a Hebrew Sunday school.



A painting of Rebecca Gratz by Thomas Sully. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

August 27, 1869, is the day that Rebecca Gratz – Philadelphia philanthropist, Jewish educator and humanitarian – died, at the age of 88.

Gratz was born on March 4, 1781 – half a year before the end of the Revolutionary War – in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Her father, Michael Gratz, had immigrated to America in 1752 from Langendorf, in German-speaking Silesia (today in Poland). Her mother was the former Miriam Simon, the American-born daughter of a wealthy Lancaster merchant. Rebecca was the seventh of the couple’s nine children who survived to adulthood. The family moved to Philadelphia, then the capital of the new nation, when Rebecca was still a child.

The Gratz family was accepted into Philadelphia society. They were active members of the Sephardi synagogue Mikveh Israel, founded in the 1740s. But they also moved with ease among the city’s Christian population: Among Rebecca’s brothers, only one married, and that was to a Christian woman, whereas her three sisters who married did so with Jewish men. Five of the siblings, including Rebecca, didn’t marry at all. She did, however, have male suitors, and they, too, included non-Jews.

At the age of 20, Gratz, together with her mother and a sister, founded the succinctly named Female Association for the Relief of Women and Children in Reduced Circumstances, a non-sectarian charity intended to help destitute families. The organization’s bylaws required that its treasurer be “chosen from among the UNMARRIED LADIES of its membership,” a condition that was intended to avoid a

situation in which a married woman's husband legally took control of the funds in her charge.

In 1815, Gratz helped to organize the Philadelphia Orphan Asylum, serving as its secretary for four decades. Four years after its founding, she helped to establish the Female Hebrew Benevolent Society, which had two goals. Its direct purpose was to provide material assistance and education to Jewish women outside the context of a religious congregation. At the same time, however, it was intended as a response to similar Christian-run organizations that, in a growing trend at the beginning of the 19th century, attempted to evangelize Jewish and other women in need of assistance.

On March 4, 1838, Gratz opened the Hebrew Sunday School Society. That may seem like a dubious honor to contemporary American Jews, but at the time, she was helping to fill an important vacuum. In part, this too was a reaction to the successful model of the Evangelical American Sunday School Union, which offered not only religious instruction but also such basics as literacy training, at no charge. (Before the Revolutionary War, less than 10 percent of colonists, it has been estimated, belonged to churches, and the evangelical movement meant to change that.) At the time, Jewish education was limited to boys, and was narrow in its scope. Christian proselytizing among women tended to harp on the limited opportunities that existed for women in Jewish society, while offering them a free education.

Gratz's Sunday school taught in English, and it offered explanations of Jewish texts and ritual, and not just learning by rote. Its curriculum was written by the distinguished Philadelphia rabbi Isaac Leeser, and published as the "Catechism for Jewish Children: A Religious Manual for House and School." Leeser even dedicated his text to Rebecca Gratz, writing in a brief prologue: "this little book has been undertaken to assist your efforts, which have so far been crowned with signal success, to form an institution whence the waters of life might flow alike to the rich and the poor..."

Gratz had begun by teaching her 27 nieces and nephews, and had taken responsibility for raising the six children of her sister Rachel, after Rachel's early death.

The fact that Rebecca Gratz that remained single has been the topic of much scholarly speculation. She was widely recognized as a beautiful woman, and was pursued by many men. For her part, though, she saw advantages to remaining single. In a letter written to a sister-in-law (her letters have been collected by the scholar David Philipson), for example, she explained that it left her free to pursue her benevolent goals: "That which you call the misfortune of single ladies, is in my case converted into a blessing."

Gratz was apparently in love with Samuel Ewing, a non-Jewish Philadelphia lawyer and the son of the provost of the University of Pennsylvania. She did not marry him, but when he died, in 1846, she is said to have entered the room where his body lay, and put three white roses and a miniature of herself on his heart.

An 1882 article in *The Century Magazine* speculated that the character of Rebecca in the 1829 book "Ivanhoe," by the English writer Walter Scott, was based on Rebecca Gratz. Scott had been introduced to Gratz by Washington Irving, a close friend of her

family. With “the superb arch of her eyebrows, her well-formed aquiline nose, her teeth as white as pearl and the profusion of her sable tresses,” Scott’s Rebecca, daughter of the money-lender Isaac of York, is said to be the equal of “the proudest beauties of England and is ‘keen-witted’ too.” It is she who heals the hero Ivanhoe back to health after he is wounded in a battle. And she refuses the opportunity to marry outside of the Jewish religion.

In a recent biography of Gratz, however, by Dianne Ashton, the author rejects the theory that Scott had the real-life Rebecca in mind when he wrote the book.

For her part, Gratz was familiar with Scott’s work, and even wrote to a friend, in 1829, how she felt “a little extra pleasure from Rebecca’s being a Hebrew maiden. It is worthy of Scott in a period when persecution has re-commenced in Europe to hold up a picture of the superstition and cruelty in which it originated.”

Rebecca Gratz died on this day in 1869. Her brother Hyman left money for the founding, in her memory, of a Jewish teachers’ college in Philadelphia. Gratz College still exists today, and encompasses a community high school and undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as an adult school.

August 28 / A rabbi learns of the Final Solution

Stephen Wise obeys the U.S. State Department's order to sit on the information while it was being verified. That took three months.



Rabbi Stephen Wise. Received the 'Riegner Telegram' about the Final Solution, but had to keep quiet for three months. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 28, 1942, the contents of what has been called the “Riegner Telegram,” which constituted an attempt to get news of the German decision on the Final Solution into the hands of the Allies, were received by the American rabbi Stephen Wise.

Historians have since speculated whether a significant number of Jewish lives could have been spared if Wise had gone public with the information immediately, rather than waiting three months to call a press conference, as he did.

Gerhard Riegner (1911-2001) was a Swiss Jew who in 1942 served as office manager of the World Jewish Congress office in Geneva, in neutral Switzerland. That summer, Riegner received a report that originated with a German industrialist named Eduard Schulte, regarding the mass murder of the Jews.

Schulte (1891-1966) was the head of a large German conglomerate that did extensive business with the German military. He had frequent contact with senior Nazi officers, and because he himself was opposed to Hitler, took advantage of frequent business trips to Switzerland to pass on information he had picked up to intelligence channels there.

Schulte reported on what he'd heard from high-ranking SS officers to Isidor Koppelman, an associate in Zurich, who passed the information on to Benjamin Sagalowitz, the head of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Switzerland. He in turn informed Riegner, in the hope that he would be able to get word out to the United States and Britain.

At the time, it was not possible for private individuals or organizations to send telegrams from Switzerland. The idea was for Riegner to use his contacts at a foreign legation to transmit what he had learned.

‘Prussic acid has been considered’

On August 8, Riegner visited Howard Elting, the vice-consul at the U.S. consulate in Geneva, briefed him on what he had been told, and asked Elting to send the material onward to Rabbi Wise, a well-known Reform rabbi, president of the World Jewish Congress, and a friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s. Similarly, Riegner visited a British diplomat, with a request that the same message be sent both to a British WJC official and to Wise.

Three days later, a cable went out from the U.S. legation in Bern to Washington, reporting, in telegraphic style, that “in Führer’s headquarters plan under consideration to exterminate at one blow this fall three and half to four millions Jews following deportation from countries occupied Method execution undecided but prussic acid has been considered.”

The sender, who added the caveat that “exactitude cannot be confirmed by us,” asked for the message to be transmitted to Wise.

Although the State Department did not pass the Riegner Telegram on to Rabbi Wise, the British addressee, Samuel Silverman – who was both an MP and a WJC official – sent it on to Rabbi Wise on August 28. Wise contacted Sumner Welles, the U.S. under secretary of state, who asked him not to publicize the information until the State Department had made attempts to verify the telegram’s shocking contents.

In late November, Welles called Wise and informed him that he had received four independent statements confirming Riegner’s report. According to Wise’s memoir, Welles told him he himself could not release the information to the press, but said, “There is no reason why you should not. It might even help if you did.”

According to Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer, Wise did hold a press conference, but “it received minimal newspaper coverage, and his message was basically ignored until the Bergson group, headed by Hillel Kook ... went into action.”

The Bergson Group was far more sensationalistic than the socially respectable Stephen Wise. Nonetheless, it was not until January 1944 that FDR established the War Refugee Board, which was charged with the rescue of Jews from occupied Europe.

There are good reasons to believe that the United States could have done more to save Jewish lives during the Holocaust, both militarily and through humanitarian channels. But to pin the deaths of Jews on the excessive timidity of Rabbi Wise seems like a case of misplaced blame.

August 29 / Rabbi turned archbishop and Jew hater dies

Paul of Burgos, born Solomon Halevi, came to serve the court at the highest levels and to embitter the lives of his former people.



Paul of Burgos Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 29, 1435, Paul of Burgos, a Jewish scholar turned Christian convert and cleric, who would reach the lofty position of archbishop of Burgos, died, in that city, capital of the Spanish province of Castile.

Solomon Halevi, as he was known as a Jew, was born in or around 1351, in Burgos, to which his father had moved from Aragon or Navarre a short time earlier.

Halevi was both a rabbi and scholar, as well as a royal tax collector. His Jewish erudition was well-known; his correspondence with, for example, the Talmudic scholar Isaac ben Sheshet on matters of ritual law was collected in book form. But he also was well-grounded in non-Jewish subjects, and is believed to have had a fascination with Christian theology even before his conversion.

Whether Halevi's conversion was based on conviction or on a desire to advance socially and economically – or perhaps a combination of the two – is unclear. The answer could be connected to whether he underwent baptism on July 21 of 1390 or 1391 (there is evidence to support both dates), as it was in the summer of 1391 that massacres of Jews took place in a number of communities around Spain. These were followed by vast numbers of conversions.

For his part, Halevi, who took on the name of Pablo de Santa Maria (Paul of Burgos in English), when he was baptized, wrote to a former rabbinical colleague that he had been convinced to become a Christian from his reading of St. Thomas of Aquinas.

Halevi's two brothers and his sister, as well as his five children, were also baptized at the same time. Only some time later, however, did his wife, Joanna, decide to join them.

Turning against the Jews

Paul studied Christian theology at the University of Paris, where he took rites as a priest. It was in Paris that he became acquainted with Pedro da Luna, soon to be the (anti)pope Benedict XIII. Paul accompanied Pedro to Avignon when the latter became pope, and encouraged the pontiff to expel the Jews from that city.

In 1398, Benedict appointed Paul archdeacon of Treviño, in the diocese of Burgos. That was followed by the bishopric of Cartagena, and then, in 1415, with the position of archbishop of Burgos.

He also was a confidant of King Henry II, and when that monarch died, in 1406 at the age of 27, Paul was a member of the council that ruled Castile in the name of his widow, and tutored his son, the future King John II. Later, he became John's lord chancellor.

As an apostate Jew, Paul was active in encouraging other Jews to convert, and in making their lives bitter so long as they didn't. As chancellor, he was the moving spirit behind a edict, introduced in 1412, that greatly restricted the ability of Jews to move around and to engage in commerce – unless they were willing to undergo baptism.

Paul was succeeded as archbishop of Burgos by his second son, Alfonso de Cartagena (1384-1456).

August 30 / Nearly blind female revolutionary arrested for shooting Lenin

Fanny Kaplan was arrested for the 1918 shooting, but whether or not she actually fired the gun is up for discussion.

On this day in 1918, Fanny Kaplan was arrested for shooting and wounding Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin.

Kaplan, the daughter of a Jewish schoolteacher, was born Feiga Haimovna Roytblat in Ukraine in 1890. She became a revolutionary at an early age, participating in the failed Russian Revolution of 1905, and a year later, was arrested for her part in a Kiev terror bombing. She spent the next 11 years in labor camps, until her release under a general amnesty ruling in February 1917.

By then she had given up anarchism for belief in the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which was strongly opposed to the Bolsheviks, and actually tried to overthrow them in 1918. The SRs won a majority of seats in the newly elected Constituent Assembly, but the Bolsheviks disbanded the legislature shortly after it convened, in January 1918.

No one actually saw Kaplan fire the gun that wounded Lenin. He was shot while emerging from a rally in a Moscow factory on August 30, and Kaplan herself was nearly blind from her years in prison camps. There is, however, a version that says she allowed herself to be arrested for the crime.

On September 4, 1918, she was executed in Moscow. At the same time, the Bolsheviks announced a wave of violence they called the Red Terror, which was intended, as it was described in the newspaper *Izvestiya*, to "crush the hydra of counterrevolution with massive terror!"

During the next two months, an estimated 10,000-15,000 were killed.

August 31 / Death of zigzagging Soviet-Jewish writer Ilya Ehrenburg

Opinion divided on whether Ehrenburg was a dissident or suck-up - or both - as he survived the Stalin era.



Ilya Ehrenburg's plot at the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow. The portrait of him was done by his friend Pablo Picasso. Photo by Wikimedia Commons

On August 31, 1967, Ilya Ehrenburg, the Soviet-Jewish writer who through much of his career straddled a line dividing political dissident and political toady, and in so doing, survived the reign of Stalin and beyond, died at the age of 76.

Ehrenburg produced some 100 books, including works of poetry, fiction, political commentary and history. So emotionally powerful was his journalism during World War II that Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov commented that Ehrenburg was “worth several divisions.” And following the war, he courageously participated in organizing the first compilation of documentary material on the Soviet-Jewish victims of the Holocaust, although Stalin ended up prohibiting its publication.

Ehrenburg was born January 27, 1891, in Kiev, then part of the Russian empire. Both of his parents were Jewish, but the family was not religiously observant, and Ehrenburg learned neither Hebrew nor Yiddish growing up. His father was an engineer, and when he got a job as director of a Moscow brewery, in 1895, the family moved to that city.

After the 1905 revolution, Ehrenburg, a student at the First Moscow Gymnasium, became involved with the Bolsheviks, together with his friend and classmate Nikolai Bukharin, a future political leader and theorist – and purge victim. In 1908, Ehrenburg was held for five months by czarist police for subversive activity, before being released on condition that he emigrate. His city of choice was Paris.

Ehrenburg's life was marked by ambivalence and zigzags. At heart, he was not a Bolshevik, but his willingness to serve the communist regime not only protected him, but at times put him in a position to help friends and fellow artists who had run afoul of it.

When Stalin signed a nonaggression pact with Hitler in 1939, Ehrenburg was so distressed that for eight months he could swallow no solid food. Yet when, in June 1941, Germany went to war with the U.S.S.R., Ehrenburg became a correspondent for the army's Red Star newspaper, taking on the role of maintaining morale at the front. In his 1942 poem "Kill," he wrote, "Do not count the days; do not count miles. Count only the number of Germans you have killed."

He also joined other Jewish intellectuals and artists on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which promoted the Soviet Union's good name abroad during the war, but, unlike most of its other members (such as the beloved Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels), was not murdered when Stalin disbanded the committee. He said no (three times) when he was asked to sign a petition condemning the Jewish physicians framed in the so-called Doctors' Plot, in 1952, and even wrote to Stalin warning him that punishing the Jews on a wholesale basis would cause a public-relations disaster internationally.

Fortunately for Ehrenburg, Stalin died in March 1953, and both he and most of the accused Jewish doctors were spared. The following year, it was Ehrenburg who dared to publish "The Thaw," an allegorical work about the abuses and oppression of Stalin's regime, and he again survived.

Together with writer and journalist Vasily Grossman, as early as 1943 Ehrenburg led a team in compiling "The Black Book," a record of Nazi crimes against the Jews in towns newly liberated from the Germans. But under Stalin, it was forbidden to speak of the victims as Jews, and the book was not published in the U.S.S.R. until 1980. He also treaded a thin line by expressing support for the new State of Israel, in 1948, though he reminded his fellow Jews that their home was in the Soviet Union.

If all of that isn't enough to make one unsure what to think about Ehrenburg, in his six-volume set of memoirs he actually admitted that he had been aware of many of the crimes being carried out by the regime in the 1930s, and acknowledged having been party to a "conspiracy of silence."

Ilya Ehrenburg died of cancer in Moscow on this day in 1967. He left his papers to Yad Vashem.