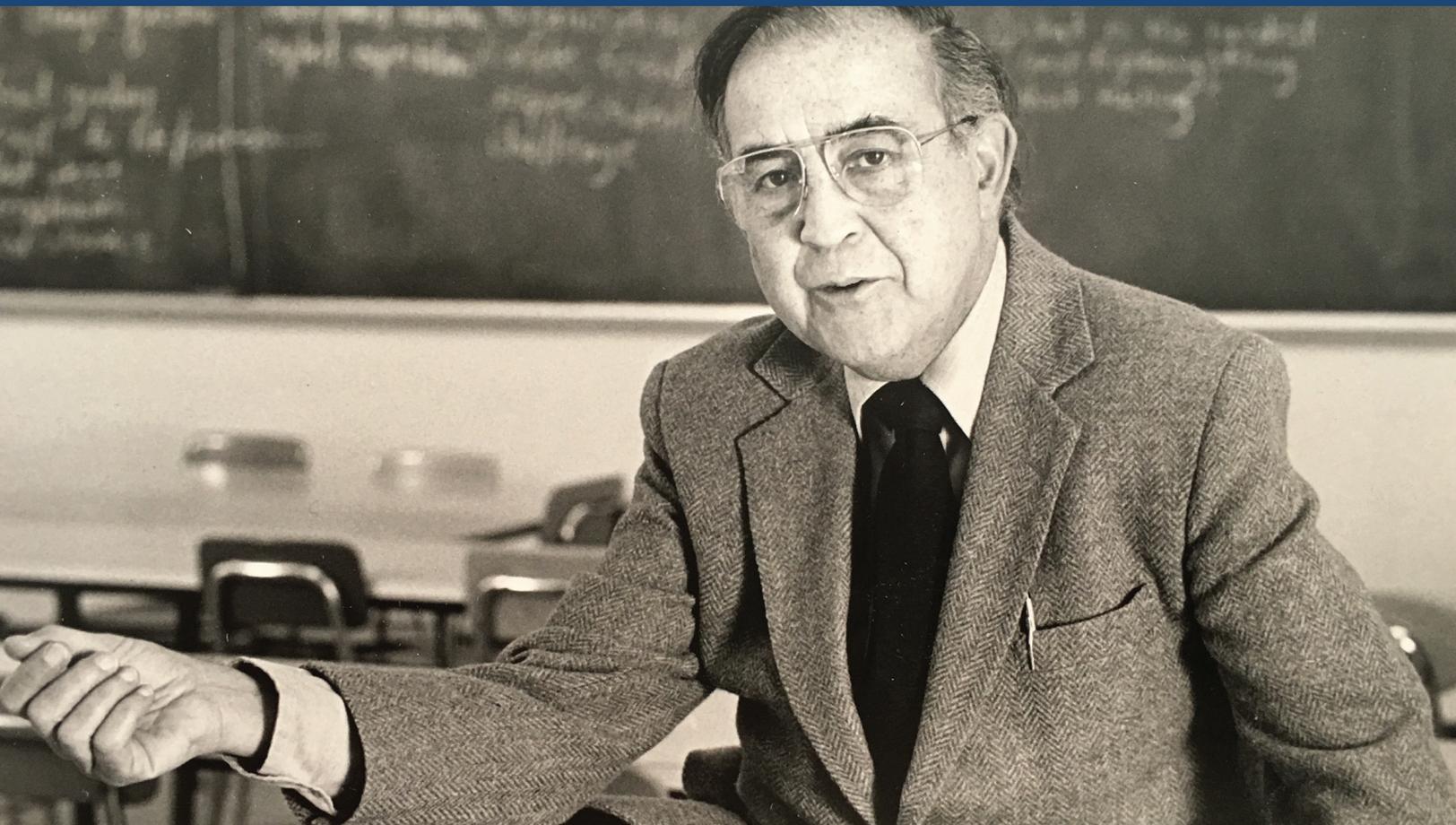


Generations:



SPRING 2021

REMEMBERING HY BERMAN (1925-2015)

Minnesota historian, New York Jew

By Jay Weiner

Hy Berman was an adopted Minnesotan, but an unmistakable New York Jew, accent and all.

Those two sides of the Berman coin molded his career as a University of Minnesota professor, historian of our state's Jewish community, labor historian, and Twin Cities media personality.

I got to know Hy in the final years of his life when he and a couple of his friends began collaborating on an idea to create a monument or a gathering spot to honor "the common man." It was imagined as a sort of Vietnam Memorial Wall to sanctify opponents and victims of tyranny.

Through one of Hy's friends, I joined their brainstorming "meetings," which

Editor's note: For our cover story, we share the remarkable story of Hy Berman, in conjunction with the recent publication of *Professor Berman: The Last Lecture of Minnesota's Greatest Public Historian*, from the University of Minnesota Press. This story has many of the characteristics unique to the experience and history of Jews in the Upper Midwest.



Hy Berman (left), circa 1930, about five years old, with this grandmother, mother, and brother, Harold.

morphed into cocktail-laced dinners five or six times a year. They became occasions for Hy to tell his many stories about — among others — former Minnesota governors Rudy Perpich and Harold Stassen, as well as U.S. Senator and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.

At his 90th birthday party on February 20, 2015, Hy asked me to help him with his memoir. We spent the next seven months conducting interviews.

During this period, I learned how he grew up the Yiddish-speaking son of Polish immigrants in Depression-era Bronx — one of many “red diaper” children with actively Communist families, how he barely dodged the Communist-hunting House Un-American Activities Committee of the 1950s, and how he became the protégé of the world’s leading Jewish history scholar, Salo Baron.

All of Hy’s entertaining storytelling on television, radio, and in newspaper commentaries and his scholarship reflected his Jewishness, his understanding of the immigrant, working-class, and minority group experiences, and his ability to forge diverse and lasting friendships.

“Rudy and I had some kind of chemistry”

Hy’s first research project when he joined the University faculty in 1961 was to study Finnish immigrants’ lives on Minnesota’s Iron Range. There, he met Perpich, a young dentist with political aspirations. He also befriended Rudy’s father, Anton, who reminded Hy of his father, David Berman.

“It turned out that Rudy and I had more things in common than we even knew,” he told me. “To be sure, he came from a Croatian family and I came from a Jewish family. His father, Anton, was an iron ore miner and my father was a garment worker. His father was an anti-clerical radical, who was a Socialist, and I think on the fringe of the Communist movement. My father was a non-religious Jew deep into the Communist movement. His father was one of the participants in the organization of the Croatian Fraternal Union and the Croatian branch of the International Workers Order, which was, of course, the major organization in which my parents operated. Although we were on opposite sides of the world, New York and Minnesota, and he couldn’t understand Yiddish, nor could I understand Croatian, it seemed that Rudy and I had some kind of chemistry that worked.”

When Perpich became governor in 1976, that chemistry led to Hy becoming a member of Perpich’s “kitchen cabinet” and part-time speechwriter.

Hy’s relationship with Stassen was unusual. It grew from Hy’s scholarship that recounted and analyzed the 1938 Minnesota gubernatorial campaign, which was tainted by anti-Semitism by a right-wing fringe of the Republican Party. Stassen, eventually a perennial candidate for President, emerged as the more centrist GOP candidate for governor. Stassen never denounced the anti-Jewish tropes promoted by his colleagues against Gov. Elmer Benson, who had many Jewish staff members and key supporters. Stassen won the election.

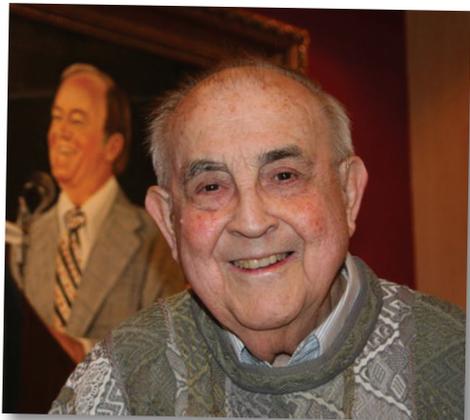
Years later, when writing his academic article about the ’38 campaign, Hy confronted Stassen for his silence in the face of that anti-Semitism. Stassen protested Hy’s accusations. But over time, the two became friends, mostly because Hy believed that Stassen was “one of the most innovative Republicans in Minnesota history. He single-handedly took the Republican Party and transformed it from a right-wing nuthouse into a modern party by accepting the role of internationalism as a critical role that the Party had to face, and by accepting FDR’s



Hy worked as a counselor at Camp Kinderland, a Massachusetts summer camp for the children of Communist-leaning parents, 1942.



Hy Berman and Betty Silbering were married in March 1950.



Hy, around 2000, in front of an image of the man he came to know, love, and share a University of Minnesota office with — Hubert Humphrey.

New Deal reforms as the social base upon which to build. In other words, Stassen was truly conservative, not reactionary.”

In 2000, when the Minnesota Revenue Building was named for Stassen, he asked Hy, the devoted DFLer, to be the keynote speaker at its dedication. Hy was truly honored.

A New York accent that wouldn't go away

Then, there was Humphrey. Their politics brought them together, as did Humphrey's stint, after his 1968 presidential defeat, as a University professor. They shared an office for a year. But decades before they met, Berman and Humphrey shared a prophetic bond when Hy sought a license to

become a New York City high school teacher.

“They told me that I wouldn't be able to pass the speech exam because I had too much of a New York accent and that I had to go take speech therapy,” Hy said. “The recordings they gave me to practice speech on was a recording of—you're not going to believe this—Hubert Humphrey's famous civil rights speech at the 1948 Democratic Party Convention. His speech was considered standard English and mine wasn't.

“Who could have imagined that Hubert Humphrey would teach me how to speak standard English?... When I told Hubert about my speech therapy, he was so proud. But as far as I can tell, I still have my New York accent.”

History is all of us

It's appropriate to write about Hy for JHSUM, because the organization's mission reflects Hy's own deeply held beliefs about the importance of history.

In 1977, Hy wrote a speech for Perpich about the importance of knowing history to inform current events.

“In meeting the challenges posed by a new generation of relentlessly honest young people, we must be prepared to look at the past through fresh eyes,” Hy wrote. “A community without a knowledge of its past is like a person with amnesia. It can exist and function from day to day, but its lack of memory leaves it without a feeling of purpose, direction, or identity. A sense of history is recognizing the influence of the past in the very web of our daily lives... It is in the touch of humility that comes with knowing that wherever we are in life, we stand upon the shoulders of those who have gone before. For, as I have said, history is all of us.”

And Hy Berman is a unique part of the Jewish history of the Upper Midwest.



**JHSUM President
Jamie Heilicher**

The buzzword these days is ZOOM. Over the past year we have learned about Zoom, and most of us have become reasonably proficient at it! Thus, we aspire to make lemonade from lemons, and find ways to connect when connecting face to face is frowned upon (pun intended).

For example, we decided to prioritize the collection of oral histories, because we can use an online video platform to do it, even in the age of COVID. Through the newly created “Their Story” platform, many of your stories have been captured without taking chances with your health.

We look forward to a future when we no longer need to practice social distancing in everyday life. We are eager to return to normal activities, where JHSUM can hold events that bring us together again in person.

Big plans are on the horizon, and your continued support will help us meet our goals. Please think of JHSUM as you plan your giving. Preserving our past and telling our story remains crucial to the long-term success of our community.

Thanks for your continued support!

Jay Weiner lives and writes in St. Paul. He's the author of three books, including Hy Berman's posthumous memoir, *Professor Berman: The Last Lecture of Minnesota's Greatest Public Historian*, available from the University of Minnesota Press, Twin Cities-area bookstores, and all major online booksellers.

Upcoming Events

Shared Experiences: Jewish Women and Small Communities

May 23, 2:00 pm

Join moderator and musical guest, Elisa Korenne, as a panel of Jewish women who grew up in small communities explores their experiences. Elisa moved from Brooklyn, New York — a metropolis with a population of 8.25 million — to New York Mills, Minnesota, a nook of a town with a population of 1,197, where she is the only Jew.

Elisa Korenne is a Yale graduate, author and award-winning songwriter.



Please note: All upcoming events will be held online via Zoom until further notice. For all events, **RSVP to history@jhsุม.org**

Past events

JHSUM has partnered on or hosted the following recent events

Being Jewish in Minnesota

In partnership with Jewish Community Action, JHSUM taught a class entitled “Being Jewish in Minnesota” about Jewish experiences past and present, through the community education program of Robbinsdale Area School district. January 2021.

JHSUM Annual Meeting

JHSUM’s Annual Meeting* highlighted the publication of Vol. 8 of our journal, *Setting the Stage: Jewish Theater in the Upper*



Beautiful new tribute cards coming soon!

JHSUM is excited to share we’ve collaborated with talented artist and JHSUM board member, Susan Weinberg, to create new tribute cards featuring her artwork. Now when you make a donation in honor or memory of a loved one the honoree will receive a vibrant card informing them of your gift and support of JHSUM.

About Susan Weinberg In all her pursuits Susan solves puzzles and tells stories. She does that through artwork, writing and genealogy. Often her work explores themes of family, community and cultural history. Susan works out of her studio in Northeast Minneapolis. See more of her work at studio409art.com

Midwest from its Origin to the Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company. The event featured authors Doris Rubenstein and Natalie Madgy, along with Minnesota Jewish Theatre Company founder, Barbara Brooks, as well as actors from the company. October 2020.

Author Q&A

JHSUM hosted Dr. Henry Buchwald speaking and answering questions about his recently published memoir, *Surgical*

*Renaissance in the Heartland: A Memoir of the Wangensteen Era**. Dr. Buchwald was introduced by his longtime friend and colleague, Dr. Stanley Goldberg. October 2020.

Panel Discussion

JHSUM held a panel discussion on two powerful films: *Surviving Skokie* and *Reawakening**. Filmmakers Blair Gershkow and Alexandra Horowitz and other participants spoke about Anti-Semitism, white supremacy and the Holocaust. Co-sponsors of the event included CHAIM (Children of Holocaust Survivors Association in Minnesota), the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas, and World Without Genocide. November 2020.

*Event can be viewed on our YouTube channel at youtube.com/JHSUMchannel

Renew your membership today! Not yet a member? Join us today!

Use the enclosed envelope to renew or start your membership and include “Membership” on the check’s memo line, or go to www.jhsุม.org/donate.

From the archives:

News from the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries

Saving your family history

By Kate Dietrick

Archivist, Nathan and Theresa Berman
Upper Midwest Jewish Archives

In this time of quarantine, many people have started looking around their house and assessing their belongings. Family photographs and papers, once languishing in the corners of basements and attics, are now evoking revived interest.

Are you wanting to organize and preserve your family materials? The most common impediment for people is that they often don't know where to start. *There's too much stuff! I don't know what it is!* Here's a few tips on steps to take to begin tackling that pile.

Create your plan

Before you begin, plan out your work. First, think big picture. If you come to the project wanting everything to be perfect, chances are you'll get overwhelmed and never even begin. Know that not everything needs to be perfectly organized, labeled, identified. Just know that you can start small.

Next, consider what you believe to be the most important of all the materials. Start there, with what you value.

Finally, set a budget or timeline. Tell yourself you'll only spend money on new boxes for the textiles. Or you'll only spend three weekends sorting through old papers. By thinking things through before you even begin, you're better poised for successfully completing the project.

Basic conservation principles

Once you begin, keeping in mind a number of easy conservation steps will ensure your treasured photographs, documents, books, or scrapbooks are safe.

First — location, location, location. Extreme heat or cold, coupled with wild fluctuations of humidity, will threaten the lifespan of your items. Get your treasures out of attics, basements, and garages.

Then, make sure your materials are in appropriate storage containers. Ideally, you want to use acid-free boxes that will not off-gas chemicals onto the documents, which results in premature aging. It is also important that the items *fit* within a box — no bending or flopping or sloshing around that will warp or fray items.

Finally, organize similar items together in acid-free folders. For example, newspaper clippings are dissimilar to other papers — if they are placed together, the clippings will stain the other documents. Also be sure to remove metal fasteners. Unfold materials and lay them flat. Place them in appropriate protective plastic sleeves.

Be judicious

Here's a bit of important wisdom I want to impart: not everything needs to be kept. Yes, it's a shocking statement, especially coming from an archivist, but it's true. We cannot feasibly keep everything we ever touch. No one needs that many issues of the Star Tribune, or every single middle school yearbook. I've seen families crumble under the overwhelming weight when too much is kept. Curation is a vital element of maintaining a collection.



Top card was touching old plastic, bottom card was not. Acidic materials will age paper more quickly.

Therefore, I give you permission to throw some things away (key word — *some*). To make these choices, think about the big picture. Which of your materials is unique? What tells a story? What is meaningful to you? Those are the things we want to hold on to.

If you are interested in learning more, you can view a presentation I gave with TCJewfolk on this topic. The video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=-crU_o93t0U

QUESTIONS?

To learn more about our collections, visit our website at www.lib.umn.edu/umja. Or contact archivist Kate Dietrick at diet0134@umn.edu or 612-625-0192.

Passover as innovation

By Rabbi David Locketz

Passover is the paradigm par excellence for mixing tradition with innovation. Most of us recall the way Pesach was observed as children at our grandparents' home as *the* way a seder is supposed to be, but even the venerable Maxwell House Haggadah was an innovation when it debuted.

In Biblical times, the Passover ritual was accomplished in Jerusalem as one of the *Shalosh Regalim* — literally, “the Three Feet.” This category of festival required you to use your feet to pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where you would arrange for your paschal offering at the Temple. You would have waited in line, chosen your lamb, and then waited for it to be offered on the altar by a kohen and returned to you for a picnic on a Jerusalem hillside with your family.

As we know from the Talmud, by then there already were reasons Passover might be delayed. If the rainy season was long during a particular winter and the roads to Jerusalem were still muddy, they delayed by adding an additional month of Adar, pushing *Pesach* further into Spring. In another case, if the average size of a lamb in the flock was too small, they would add a month in order to let them grow longer for a more satisfying offering and feast. In ancient days, these kinds of adaptations in order to more fully observe a ritual were not uncommon.

Almost 2000 years ago, when our Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70CE, and our people were expelled from the Land of Israel, our tradition began an incredible period of adaptation that lasted hundreds of years. The Seder as we understand and observe it today is first mentioned in the Mishnah, believed to have been codified over the course of the century following the destruction. The rabbis in exile fashioned a Judaism for people in exile with the hope that our



The Frank and Nolan family seder, circa 1960s. Photo courtesy of Terry Nolan



Gurstelle family seder, 2019. Photo courtesy of Carol Gurstelle

customs would be preserved until a return to The Holy Land when the Temple could be rebuilt.

The Passover Seder itself is an adaptation. Borrowing from Greco-Roman culture, this “symposium” was a way of observing Pesach in the absence of the Temple.

No doubt, when we look back on this pandemic and the adaptations made to tradition, the word “Zoom” will be remembered, with significance, alongside grandma’s chopped liver.

Finding their way to Minnesota — the Industrial Removal Office

By Susan Weinberg, MNJGS President

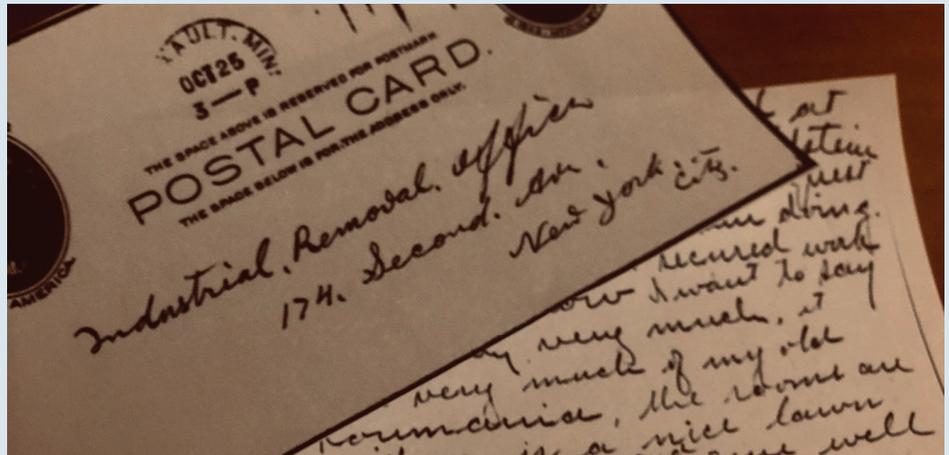
I write you per your request to let you know how I am doing... I like the city very much. It reminds me very much of my old home in Romania, the rooms are very large, there is a nice lawn in front of the house and a fine well that we draw water from... When we left you ask(ed) us to send you our countrymen and friends if we found the place to our liking. As I like the place and find it a very good place for people to make a good living, I would like to have a cousin of mine sent who is a hat maker and is out of work in New York where he has been for eight months.

This is one of the letters sent to the Industrial Removal Office (IRO) in New York. What IS the “Industrial Removal Office”? What exactly are they removing?

This oddly named organization existed in the early 1900s with the objective of moving Jews out of New York. In the first ten years of the century, the peak immigration period, the IRO moved 55,000 Jews to almost 2,000 cities across the United States. By the time they closed their doors in 1922, they had moved 79,000 Jews. About 1,400 of them came to Minnesota.

But those numbers capture only part of the story. A successful placement had a ripple effect as family and friends followed them to their destination. The IRO estimated that each person drew at least five additional people who would otherwise have settled in New York and other large cities on the East Coast.

In 1900, New York had 500,000 Jews, comprising the largest Jewish population in the world. That concentration, largely in the Lower East Side, created problems in sanitation, disease and crime. It was fertile ground for radical movements that drew negative attention.



A postcard sent to the Industrial Removal Office, note transcribed at left.

The IRO was staffed by more established German American Jews who sought to quickly Americanize these new immigrants and mitigate the risk of anti-Semitism. Getting them out of New York was one of their strategies.

Where they went

The IRO assisted Jewish immigrants with arranging transportation and securing work, through their networks across the country. For each city, a committee and designated representative determined how many people they could absorb. They then assisted the new migrants in finding work that used their prior training and provided an appropriate income. Often they were reuniting families or helping a person who was unable to find satisfactory work in New York.

Local employers soon learned that these committees could serve as a source of employees. Committee representatives could liaise with prospective employers to address cultural and religious needs:

Mr. L desires us to write to you in his behalf and ask whether it will make any difference if he would refrain from working on Saturdays. He is a very pious Jew, and at his age, 54, it would be too much to ask him to make so radical a change in his religious life

as to violate the Sabbath. He is a very fine gentleman and if you could make some concession in this matter and employ him with the understanding that Sabbath labor will not be required of him, you will be doing a meritorious act (the company agreed).

Early population studies.

The IRO also did periodic surveys of the growing Jewish communities so they could tell their future residents what to expect. Their 1906 surveys covered Minneapolis, Duluth, Eveleth, Chisholm, Hibbing and Winona. In that survey, each of these urban centers reported at least one Orthodox synagogue; Duluth reported two Orthodox, one Reform and several Hebrew schools, lodges and social clubs. Minneapolis, which had a population of 5,000 to 8,000 Jews out of a total population of 265,000 in 1906, noted nine congregations, of which one was Reform, and many Hebrew schools and lodges. Several respondents commented that winters were very cold to ensure that no one would be surprised upon arrival.

Research more

Are you curious about whether your family used the IRO to get to Minnesota? Learn more at www.mnjgs.org/post/tracing-their-journey

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Executive Director
Robin Doroshov

Special thank you to Jay Weiner for his article and book on the late Professor Berman who was one of my favorite professors at the University of Minnesota.

Difficult as it is to believe, this is our third newsletter published during the pandemic. Last spring as we worked on our Passover 2020 newsletter, it was inconceivable that we would still be in the grip of COVID-19 today.

Lest 2020 be the year getting all the attention, 2021 started out with Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD) leading the House Impeachment managers in the Senate trial. Raskin is the grandson of the late Sam and Sally Bellman. Sam, a graduate of North High and the University of Minnesota Law School, served in the Minnesota Legislature in the 1930s, the first Jew to do so.

In an interview conducted by Dr. Linda Schloff in 1988, Bellman spoke about his parents' socialist history and activity at the Labor Lyceum in North Minneapolis. A line can be

drawn from Bellman to his grandson, Jamie Raskin, continuing the movement of progressive Jews from socialism to liberalism over the course of the 20th Century. The full interview can be accessed at **umedia.lib.umn.edu/item/p16022coll522:107**.

This is part of a rich history that we continue to mine today.

We hope that by the time of Passover of 2022, we will once again be able to celebrate Seders together. We may experience the story of liberation from bondage in a whole new way!

I wish each of you a joyful Passover.

