

Generations:



Mother-daughter event, May 11, 1930. Jean Levy, seated far left, with sister-in-law Fanny Levy.

SPRING 2022

Gladiola Club

By Jon Novick

Going through old photos on a recent afternoon in one of my fits of family history research, I found a black-and-white picture in a green cardboard studio frame. My grandmother Jean Levy is pictured along with several other women, young and old, all dressed up and definitely somewhere to go. On it my mother had written, “Mom’s Gladiola Club, Mother-Daughter Luncheon, With Aunt Fanny.”

What’s the Gladiola Club, I wondered, and why was my grandmother with her aunt?

Except for this photo, my mother has no memory of her mother mentioning the group. I checked with the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest, but they hadn’t heard of the organization either. However, a quick online search of the *American Jewish World* archives revealed a surprisingly large number of Gladiola Club announcements. I started digging.

*The Jewish
Party Planners of
North Minneapolis*



Dinner party, June 30, 1926. Jean Levy, third from right.

After 70 clippings, eureka! There was a write-up in 1930 of the “Gladiolas” entertaining their mothers on May 11 at a theatre party followed by dinner at the home of one its members. Bridge was played, swag won — and apparently a very good time was had by all.

After a little more sleuthing, my mother and I could fill in the rest. “Aunt Fanny” was actually my grandmother’s older sister-in-law Fanny Levy, who stood in for my great-grandmother Anna Levy. Anna had died a few years earlier en route to Arizona where the family had been moving to seek relief for her asthma. Anna was 50 when she died; my grandmother was only 21. Looking at the photo more closely, I could see my grandmother’s smile was a little less bright than the others’; she was missing her mother on Mother’s Day.

My interest was piqued. I continued exploring. Here’s what I discovered.

Meet the Gladiolas

The Gladiola Club, formerly known as the “Happy Hour Club,” was a social and philanthropic organization for North Minneapolis’s young Jewish women. From the early 1920s to the early 1930s, they hosted back-to-back dances and parties, held fundraisers for the less fortunate,

and visited the nursing home and orphanage. Apparently their events were legendary, the likes of which the neighborhood had never seen before — or after. My grandmother was active for nearly her entire twenties.

Their first event took place in 1922. On a Sunday afternoon in late May, the women organized a day of fun for the orphans at the Jewish Sheltering Home for Children. After a two-hour tour of Minneapolis, members of their brother club *Gymal Doled* drove the children to and from Minnehaha Falls where the Gladiolas had fixed a picnic lunch.

Nine members are repeatedly listed in almost every club announcement: Irene Beck, Esther Chemrinow, Lottie Fleisher, Sophie Goldstein, Ann Hartstein, Jean Rich, Mary Suckerman, Ann Warshavsky and my grandmother Jean Levy. I found these nine names so frequently that they have become as familiar to me as my own. This small army of women was the Gladiola Club. Undoubtedly, theirs are the faces in these photos. Maybe readers will recognize relatives and help us match names to faces.

Twice a year, the Gladiola Club held elections for president, recording secretary, financial secretary and treasurer. As the

core group was small, everyone took turns serving on the board and helping plan events. It wasn’t uncommon for a woman to go from president to coat check to “general chairman of arrangements” to tickets in the same year.

Hosting fun and doing good

During the Roaring Twenties, the club held “get-acquainted” dances on Sunday evenings from fall to spring, publicized in the *Jewish World* and *Star Tribune*. The Rosh Hashanah dance was in September. A dance for Simchat Torah followed in October. The Hanukkah dance took place in December. In March, they would host a Purim dance. Finally, the end-of-the-season dance would occur in May. The Gladiolas had their favorite bands and engaged them frequently: George Harvey and His Gopher Band, Irving Schneider’s orchestra, Andy and His Harmony Aces.

Dances were held mostly at the Labor Lyceum or Royal Arcanum Hall. The Labor Lyceum was built in North Minneapolis by the local branch of the Workmen’s Circle, a Jewish socialist organization. Its hall was rented out by many groups for social events, the proceeds of which funded the majority of the association’s endeavors. The Royal Arcanum began as a fraternal society providing sick, disability and death benefits to its members. Their affiliate in Minnesota once had a building in South Minneapolis with an auditorium. And at least one dance was presented downtown at the swanky Gold Room in the Radisson Hotel (when there was just one).

The Hanukkah dances also doubled as fundraisers to benefit an assortment of good causes: the Ladies’ Hebrew Hospital Society, the Chesed Shel Emes Society (which buried the poor) or simply “destitute families.” One such dance in December 1926 raised \$75 (\$1100 in today’s dollars) — not an insignificant sum considering the participants were young, working-class women and men (my grandmother sewed undergarments at Munsingwear; my grandfather sold fruits and vegetables with his father and brothers) whose earnings went mostly to support their poor families.



For these women, the experience of being on a board and organizing events was surely a springboard for continued service to their communities.

In fact any opportunity — no matter how small — was seized upon to help the needy. In June 1927, the Gladiolas held a raffle for one prize — a silk pillow.

Purely social

And what, you may wonder, happened if the women were itching to plan a dance but the next Jewish holiday was months away? It turns out any holiday could (and often would) do: New Year's 1930, April Fool's 1931, Leap Day 1932. "Request dances" were also popular for filling holes in the calendar; attendees could request specific dances — rumba, samba, fox trot, waltz, lindy hop — and the band would oblige.

Dinner parties were occasionally held on Saturday nights — complete with supper, bridge (with prizes!) and a sleepover. Sometimes the gathering would be in honor of a friend visiting from Winnipeg or Denver, or a pal moving to Los Angeles. There were nights on the town as well, such as "a theatre and chow mein party" to celebrate a member's engagement.

Talent shows, called "vaudeville nights," took place too. There'd be song and dance numbers, violin and vocal solos, and impersonations.

Every Purim, the Gladiola Club would put on a program for the "inmates" of the Jewish Home for the Aged. Members

(and sometimes male friends they'd recruit) would play the piano or violin, sing, dance, recite poetry and, of course, serve platters of hamantaschen. They'd also throw an annual Tu B'Shevat party in February for the orphans at the Jewish Sheltering Home. The women would direct the children in a "kiddie revue" of singing and dancing, then pass out goodies.

All good things come to an end

As the 1920s ended and the Great Depression began, unemployment rose. A couple years in, the Gladiolas began holding "prosperity dances." With a reduced entry fee and hopes of Roosevelt's New Deal turning the economy around, they served as a nod to perhaps better days ahead.

The last recorded event was a Hanukkah dance in 1933. By this time one in four Americans was out of work; fun times, for the most part, were no longer to be had. Plus, the organizers were starting to marry — my grandmother married my grandfather Sam Berkovitz the following year (having met incidentally at "a dance," which I'm now certain was a Gladiola Club dance). Sleepovers and singles dances receded into the past.

For these women, the experience of being on a board and organizing events was surely a springboard for continued service to their communities. It was for my grandmother. While raising a family, she became sisterhood president of her synagogue. As a senior citizen and widow, she served as an election judge at the St. Paul Jewish Community Center anytime it was used as a polling place, and she babysat at the Veterans Hospital so mothers with children in tow could have uninterrupted visits with their husbands.

I am astonished at the industriousness of my grandmother and her friends. During a time and in a place where being young, Jewish and female didn't come with many advantages, they accomplished much. I tip my hat to the fun they had — and the joy they spread.

Jon Novick was born and raised in St. Paul. He is descended from two North Minneapolis grandmothers and two West Side grandfathers.



**JHSUM President
Jamie Heilicher**

"If we do not learn from our mistakes, we are doomed to repeat them." I have heard this phrase too many times lately. When a bully blocks your path and you choose to take another, you embolden the bully to block you again. Is there another option?

At JHSUM, our mission is to document the past so we can learn from it. Bring it to life to better understand its nuances.

With you, our members and donors, we can shine a light on what humans are capable of, good and bad. As we enter the season of Passover, with its retelling of our history and invitation to ask questions, let's inspire deeper discussion, better decision-making and actions that WILL change the world!

Passing stories from one generation to the next is a powerful act. Your JHSUM gift provides the next generation with a precious tool: history lessons. The more support we can get, the better we can accomplish our mission and make our community — and maybe the world — a better place. Thank you for joining me in continued support of our region's Jewish History!

I wish you and yours a happy and healthy Passover.

On the road:

The wine-running rabbi of South Dakota, and other stories

Did you know that Rabbi Julius Hess, the first rabbi of Congregation B'nai Isaac in Aberdeen, South Dakota, was arrested for importing large quantities of sacramental wine in 1920?

The fledgling synagogue was just a couple of years old at the time and Prohibition had been in effect for just a few months. Find out how this unexpected bit of history played out, and learn about the rich history of Congregation B'nai Isaac and the Jewish community of Aberdeen, South Dakota, with the publication of *Aberdeen: A Jewish History: 105 Years of Congregation B'nai Isaac and the community it brought together*, by our own Executive Director Robin Doroshov, which will be available for sale on our website on June 20, 2022.

Along with publication of *Aberdeen: A Jewish History*, JHSUM is releasing the latest work of Dale Bluestein, our video documentarian. Together, the book and video capture and share the history of Jews who settled in Dakota Territory in the 1880s, and later the new state of South Dakota.

And, we're making our celebration truly come to life with a JHSUM first: You're invited to a celebratory Shabbat weekend in



Aberdeen in June — an amazing opportunity to experience for yourself this unique community and absorb its singular history and character.

Congregation B'nai Isaac, celebrating its 105th anniversary this year, is eagerly anticipating our arrival. While the region's Jewish

SAVE THE DATE

Join us for Shabbat in Aberdeen: June 17-19, 2022

Celebrate the 105th anniversary of one of the oldest congregations in our region, along with the publication of *Aberdeen: A Jewish History* and participate in this special moment in history.

Double occupancy rate of \$470/person includes:

- Bus from the Twin Cities to Aberdeen
- Two nights of accommodation and seven meals, including Shabbat dinner at the Alonzo Ward Hotel building where many Jewish celebrations have been held for decades
- Shabbat services at B'nai Isaac
- A private walking tour of historic downtown that will bring the old Jewish businesses to life
- A private tour of the Dakotah Prairie Museum
- A copy of the book and other launch gifts.

Single occupancy rates, transportation-free and local options are also available.

**RESERVE
YOUR
PLACE
TODAY!**

Learn more
and register at

www.jhsum.org/post/aberdeen

If you have any questions about joining this very special event, please contact Juliana Sellers, jsellers@jhsum.org.





community was never large, it's particularly difficult to pull together a minyan today. With no full-time rabbi since the early 1970s, it has been lovingly maintained by lay leaders for half a century.

The community may be small, but its dedication is enormous. JHSUM's Development Director Juliana Sellers is enjoying her work with them to envision and create the event, supported behind the scenes by our Communications and Marketing Manager, Julie Tarshish.

In addition to Shabbat services and private historical tours, the weekend will feature a launch event for *Aberdeen: A Jewish History*. At this event, free and open to the public, Robin will speak about her experience researching and writing the book. We will screen Dale Bluestein's video and he will discuss his process. There will be time for questions and answers, as well as a book signing.

Join us for Shabbat in Aberdeen

Celebrate the 105th anniversary of one of the oldest congregations in our region, along with the publication of *Aberdeen: A Jewish History* and participate in this special moment in history: Reserve your place today for JHSUM's Shabbat in Aberdeen, June 17-19.



New membership options – Join today!

I am often asked by our constituents: "What does it mean to be a member?"

The dictionary definition of "member" is "a person, animal, plant, group, etc., that is part of a society, party, community, taxon, or other body." Several examples followed, including: one of the persons who compose a social group (especially individuals who have joined and participate in a group organization).

Being a member of JHSUM means that you are in our tent, and the tent is always wide and open enough for new faces.

As a member, you *join* us in preserving and interpreting our community's Jewish history, so we can pass it along to the next generation.



Development Director
Juliana Sellers

FIND THE MEMBERSHIP OPTION THAT FITS YOU:

- \$18 Student/Senior
- \$36 Individual
- \$54 Household
- \$100 Annual Supporter
- **\$180 Annual Patron *NEW***
- **\$360 Annual Benefactor *NEW***

I am also excited to announce an additional Life and L'Dor membership level. As a **Benefactor Life Member**, your endowed membership will provide greater support every year for JHSUM. You can permanently honor or memorialize family members or friends in a new way by making them **Benefactor L'Dor Members**. Like with Life memberships, L'Dor members can become Benefactor L'Dor members with an additional endowed gift. JHSUM will remember and list all of our Life and L'Dor members every year and their legacy will be a light for future generations. Please contact Juliana Sellers at jsellers@jhsun.org to discuss membership options.

- \$1,800 Life & L'Dor Membership
- **\$3,600 Life & L'Dor Benefactor Membership *NEW***

Please use the enclosed membership envelope to join us today. You can also join online at www.jhsun.org, and contact me at jsellers@jhsun.org with any questions.

Making a minyan: The last Jewish institution of the old Northside

By Earl Schwartz

The Mikro Kodesh and Sharei Zedek synagogue buildings on Minneapolis's Northside are listed by the city's Heritage Preservation Commission as landmarks, while a bland apartment building on the northeast corner of Vincent and Golden Valley Road is not. It bears no commemorative plaque, but is, in its own way, also a landmark.

While the Jewish Northside is commonly described in terms reminiscent of many an "old neighborhood," its truly distinctive characteristics are often overlooked. Perhaps the most important of these was its mid-20th century Midwestern-Jewish emphasis on communal institutions rather than congregations, as noted by Daniel Elazar.¹ Despite very real socio-economic and halakhic divisions, the community benefitted from an underlying sense of commonality, perhaps best exemplified by the rise to pre-eminence on the Northside of a communal Talmud Torah. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, the agency would bring together faculty and students from a broad swath of the community.² Former Talmud Torah Principal L. I. Kaiser would attribute this cohesion, at least in part, "to our remoteness from the East, the source of Jewish social and cultural chaos and confusion."³ Far from the East Coast but close to one another, Northside Jews would come together around their communal agencies, along with neighborhood schools and businesses.

And yet the community began to unravel, prompted by upward and outward mobility, waning halakhic observance, and declining anti-Jewish housing discrimination. While many Jews would leave the

Northside in the strife-riven mid-1960s, Jewish home-buyers and institutions were already starting to lean toward the western suburbs in the 1950s.⁴ In the 1940s more Jews lived in North Minneapolis than any other locale in the Upper Midwest,⁵ but by the early 1970s only 2% of Jewish residents of greater Minneapolis remained on the Northside.⁶

It is commonly assumed that the last Jewish institution to leave the neighborhood was Tifereth B'nai Jacob Congregation, and that when it vacated its building in 1972, Jewish North Minneapolis was no more.⁷ But not quite.

Kenesseth Israel Congregation completed its move to St. Louis Park in 1971. However, unlike other Northside congregations, it retained an attenuated presence in the form of a minyan which in its first years met in the basement of a home on 10th and Thomas. Ten to fifteen people typically attended on Shabbat, ten to twenty on holidays, including a small number of women and girls who, in keeping with the norms of the patron congregation, could not complete the minyan or lead portions of the service, and thus not fully share in its most powerful message: You count. Nevertheless, meeting under circumstances that offered little room for pretensions or cliques, it would prove a remarkable gathering. Two modest basement rooms provided common ground for worshippers from strikingly disparate walks of life — trade and sales workers, a business owner, a university professor and a former rabbi of Kenesseth Israel; impoverished and comfortable daveners in adjoining folding

chairs; Shoah survivors, college students with roots in Yemen and Iran, halakhically observant worshippers, freethinkers, and, most likely, a gay member; mostly men, sometimes women, a few children. While such differences were becoming increasingly sectionalized in other parts of the community, the minyan maintained a poignant resemblance to an earlier Jewish Northside.

In its last years the minyan moved from 10th and Thomas to the apartment building on Vincent and Golden Valley Road, where a member lived. It was here, through the fall of 1982, in the humblest of locations — once again a basement — that this last Jewish institution of the old Northside met. Six Jewish households were within a two-minute walk of the building. Others were scattered throughout the neighborhood. Their continued presence on the Northside could be attributed, to some degree, to inertia and financial constraints, but among the Jews who remained were those who proudly insisted that they were still there, above all, because they were happy in their homes, happy with themselves, and happy with their neighbors.⁸

Afterword

Some twenty years ago, I bumped into a Chabad rabbi who as a child had regularly attended the Northside Minyan with his father, and was now accompanied by his own young son. After exchanging warm greetings, he introduced me to the boy and added, "We used to daven together!" His son looked me over, and then turned to his father, clearly thinking: This man has no head covering, no tsitsis... How could that be? But his father quickly reassured him, "No — really! We used to daven together!" Yes, we did.

1. E.g., "The National-Cultural Movement in Hebrew Education in the Mississippi Valley," <https://www.jcpa.org/dje/articles2/hebrew-mississippi.htm>

2. Indicative of this breadth, into the early 1970s Torah Academy Day School students frequently also attended the Talmud Torah.

3. "Minneapolis is Different," *Jewish Education*, Fall, 1982.

4. E.g., Beth El purchased land in St. Louis Park in 1959, the same year the Talmud Torah opened its St. Louis Park branch. B'nai Abraham, a Southside congregation, moved to St. Louis Park in 1956. On the earliest stage of the move westward, see A.I. Gordon, *Jews in Transition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), p. 7

5. <https://www.mnopedia.org/exclusion-integration-story-jews-minnesota>

6. J. Adams, *Minneapolis-St. Paul: People, Place and Public Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.75.

7. The building was actually on the Golden Valley side of Xerxes Avenue.

8. Cf. Dorothy Jacobs' comments in *Cornerstones: a History of North Minneapolis*. <https://www.pbs.org/video/tpt-documentaries-cornerstones-history-north-minneapolis/>

JewishGen: An important site for Jewish genealogy

By Susan Weinberg, MNJGS President

For anyone with Jewish heritage and an interest in genealogy, one of your first stops should be **JewishGen.org** — a site offering a wide range of resources tailored specifically to those pursuing Jewish genealogy. Using the site is free, but you will need to register to gain basic access, and a donation of \$100 allows you to search on more variables.

Do you know the name of the town your family came from?

Under Databases you will find the **Town Finder**. Enter the name to find variants in multiple languages such as Yiddish or Russian. It also will tell you the name of the larger surrounding region and indicate what country controlled the city through time — pre-World War I, between the wars, and post-World War II.

You will also find a link to the **JewishGen Family Finder**, an option which connects you to others researching the same town — JewishGen makes it possible to reach out to them through the site to compare notes.

Are you interested in finding family lost in the Holocaust?

Click on **Holocaust Databases** for well-known resources such as the Shoah Foundation which lists people related to the interviewee. You also will find lesser-known databases for niche searches on topics and regions of interest to you.

Find burial registries

When I was last in my ancestral town in Ukraine, I spent several hours photographing 200 tombstones in an overgrown Jewish cemetery, hidden in a forest behind the cemetery in use today. I brought those back to the **Jewish Online Worldwide Burial Registry** (JOWBR), who translated them and posted them to



Overgrown Ukrainian cemetery

share with others. In addition to providing remote access to cemeteries, JOWBR also preserves information in the face of deterioration and erosion.

Unified Search under Databases consolidates the various country search engines into one — a handy tool when researching areas in which boundaries frequently changed. If you are fortunate you may locate an index to a record for a family member, and sometimes you can even discover a link to the original record, where more detailed information can be found.

Many of those more complete records are in Cyrillic Russian...which brings us to **Viewmate**, which allows you to post a record for volunteers to translate at no charge. Find this option from the JewishGen menu under **Research**.

Also under “Research” you will find **Yizkor Books**, many in the process of translation from Yiddish. These were created by survivors after the war to commemorate their community and those who perished. These are a source of information not only for the period of the Holocaust, but for the history of the early years of the Jewish population within that city.

Additional resources

In contemporary towns where the Jewish community is much diminished or gone, you may find **Kehilalinks**. These



Radom Yizkor book cover

are websites, created and maintained by volunteers, which include a variety of information on the history of the Jewish community and the families that once lived within it. I've created one for the ancestral town of my grandfather, Radom, Poland (<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/radom>). When the war broke out, Radom had a population of around 100,000, 30 percent of which was Jewish.

And don't forget to check out the **Research Divisions** that are associated with countries. Most have their database within the Unified Search, but their site offers additional information on areas with Jewish communities

JewishGen can help you to find and translate a wide range of ancestral records. Equally important, they can connect you to a community of fellow researchers. This important site is central to research for any genealogist pursuing Jewish roots.

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**Executive Director
Robin Doroshow**

May we continue to engage in acts of mutual aid, in times of crisis and other times. May we all have a meaningful Passover.

One of my very earliest memories of Passover was when I was 6 or 7 years old. My parents had recently opened a business in a small town in the Upper Midwest. There were Jews...but not many. Here's my flicker of a memory: Before the holiday, the community had arranged for a supply of Passover food to be left anonymously on the porches of Jewish families in need. I remember being part of the group gathering the donations and delivering them after dark. The whole operation seemed very clandestine — very exciting to my younger self.

I was reminded of that event from more than fifty years ago when I read an article in the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* entitled: "Grassroots efforts spring up to help Twin Cities families," and felt moved to write about the history of mutual aid in the Jewish community.

The result, "Mutual Aid Organizations — Then and Now", was published in the *Ramsey County History* magazine last fall, a testament to how grassroots efforts today can link back to mutual aid in other times. Read the article here: https://publishing.rchs.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/RCHS_Fall-2021_Online-Supplement_Mutual-Aid_web.pdf



Dining room crew during 1943 Seder at Army Air Base, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

Photo courtesy of University of Minnesota Libraries, Nathan and Theresa Berman Upper Midwest Jewish Archives.