

Generations:



The view of Lake Superior
from the window of the Airbnb



LATE FALL 2023

On the road: North of Gooseberry Falls

By *Robin Doroshow*

Just before Thanksgiving last fall, my family left our Golden Valley home and picked up our daughter who is a student at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and headed to the Airbnb we had rented for the long holiday weekend. We had only two requirements for

the rental: dog-friendly, and on Lake Superior.

We arrived at the house just north of Gooseberry Falls in the pitch darkness of a moonless, starless night, and navigated our way from the car to the house using a single flashlight. Imagine our surprise

On the road:



The library of the Schladnich family apartment on Bocklinstrasse in Vienna. Courtesy of Slaton Family Archives.



Ruth's boyfriend, Alex, and friends with Cule Lewis, Europe, summer of 1937. Courtesy of Slaton Family Archives.

when we found a “Shalom” doormat in Hebrew letters welcoming us.

The following morning, the Airbnb managers, Bob and Becky, stopped in to be sure we had everything we needed for our stay. They were amazing hosts. My husband commented that they would have come and tucked us into bed had we asked!

Bob and Becky gave us a brief outline of the story behind the doormat, and the history of the builders of the house. J. Merle Harris, an Indiana farm boy who would become a physics and geology professor at the University of Minnesota, built the original house on the property with his wife, Ruth Slaton Harris. Born Ruth Schladnich in Vienna in 1920, she was the only child of Oscar and Hermina (Weiner) Schladnich. Arriving in New York by ship in 1940, they changed their surname to Slaton.

Knowing of my professional interest in the story, as well as personal interest expressed by my family, Bob and Becky connected me with Merle and Ruth's three daughters, the current owners of the property.

I had the pleasure of interviewing them by Zoom earlier this year and am

delighted to share their mother's story with readers of this newsletter.

In addition to the beautiful property on the North Shore, the Harris family lived in St. Anthony Village. Judy Harris Lykins is the only Harris daughter who remains a Minnesota resident. Barbara Harris Gabioud lives in New Mexico, and Janet Harris lives in San Francisco. Merle, who died in 1997, and Ruth, who died in 2008, were blessed with five grandsons.

Ruth's Story

Ruth's early life reads a bit like *Leopoldstadt*, the Tom Stoppard play currently on Broadway that explores his Jewish roots. This is the unlikely story of how Ruth Schladnich of Vienna would come to live in Minnesota and spend many years on the North Shore of Lake Superior. In one of our conversations, Judy commented that while her mother certainly didn't anticipate spending a great deal of her life on the North Shore, she believes that she came to love it as much as her father did.

Ruth's father's family was Czechoslovakian. They owned the Schladnich General Store in Budweis, Czechoslovakia. Her mother, Hermina “Minka,” and her family were from

Vienna. Ruth lived with her parents in a large Vienna apartment. Her father played viola in a chamber orchestra and her mother was a pianist. Ruth followed in her mother's footsteps and also played piano. They were a cultured family and they hosted music salons and parties in their home. Their lives were filled with theater, music, opera and skiing.

Minka's family owned a large laundry business called Erste Wiener Dampfwascherei (First Viennese Laundry), and Oscar worked in the business. Oscar had earned a degree in chemistry from the University of Prague. This business was stolen from the family in March of 1938, when Hitler seized Austria in the Anschluss.

In July of 1937, teenaged Ruth had a boyfriend named Alex. That summer, Alex and a couple of friends hitchhiked through Europe. During their travels, they were befriended by an Englishman named Cule Lewis. The boys remained in touch with Mr. Lewis after their summer trip, and that friendship proved most fortunate as Mr. Lewis sponsored the three boys, their girlfriends, and later their families to Great Britain. Oscar's Czech citizenship was key in allowing Ruth to go to Llandudno, Wales in April of 1938. Her parents joined her there



Ruth, Oscar, and Minka Schladnich, Vienna, 1934. Courtesy of Slaton Family Archives.

and the three traveled to the U.S. in 1940. Some of Minka's family sat out the war years in Shanghai, which provided refuge to about 20,000 Jews during the Holocaust. Many members of Oscar's family perished in the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

A nephew of Oscar's, Paul Schladnich, survived through the Kindertransport, which rescued Jewish children by moving them to Great Britain between 1938-40. Eventually, Oscar and Minka adopted Paul, also changing his last name to Slaton. Dr. Paul Slaton practiced optometry in Hopkins, Minnesota until passing away in 2010.

Ruth had to leave Vienna before finishing high school, and completed her high school education in New York.



College graduation announcement and photo, Ruth Slaton, 1947. Courtesy of Slaton Family Archives.

Subsequently, she earned an undergraduate degree in chemistry with honors from Northwestern University. She earned a graduate degree in bio-chemistry from the University of Minnesota.

At the University of Minnesota, Ruth served as a graduate assistant and it was there that she met her future husband who was teaching geology and physics.

My own family had the privilege of enjoying the Harris family's beautiful North Shore sanctuary, and learning the story of Ruth and her remarkable life.



JHSUM President
Jamie Heilicher

VIDEO, VIDEO, VIDEO

We have received fantastic feedback on the videos we have created that are available for viewing on our website jhsom.org. Thus, we continue to work to bring you the stories of the Jewish communities of the Upper Midwest in this format.

In today's world, if it is not on a screen, the younger generations don't seem to be very interested. So, we are focusing our efforts to bring these stories to life on the screen. Not only is this a great medium to tell stories, but they can easily live on for future generations.

Please check out our videos and let us know if you have additional ideas we have yet to cover.

We still need your help!

We need your help to continue to collect and tell these stories. We are currently seeking sponsors who will help create a sustainable organization for years to come..

Please join us in realizing our mission!

St. Paul Community Legacy Initiative

JHSUM is participating in the St. Paul Community Legacy Initiative – Life and Legacy Plus Program. As a partner, JHSUM has set a goal of 18 new Life Memberships, L'Dor Funds, or Legacy Gifts for the 2024 calendar year.

You can help us reach our goal by considering such a gift.

Contact us at history@jhsom.org or 952-381-3360 to discuss options. *Thank you for being part of JHSUM.*

FRUITS OF THE SCHLOFF RESEARCH AWARD

Recipient Shaul Kelner on the Minnesota Action Committee for Soviet Jewry

This is the first in an occasional series highlighting Schloff Research Award recipients

By *Shaul Kelner*

In the 1970s, Jews in the USSR organized underground networks to support each other in the face of state-sponsored antisemitism. The government had closed synagogues and criminalized Hebrew teaching. It created glass ceilings in universities and workplaces. When Jews tried to escape by applying for emigration visas, the government refused permission to thousands of them.

Soviet Jewish activists — known as “refuseniks” — faced a common enemy. But that did not stop them from fighting among themselves.

Because of this infighting, Herbert and Betty Kohn flew from Minneapolis to Moscow in 1975 to smooth things out.

What?! Surely the refuseniks didn't decide that they needed a dose of “Minnesota nice.” The Kohns' trip was a puzzle. As a scholar writing a book about American activism to free Soviet Jews, it piqued my curiosity. With support from the Dr. Linda Mack Schloff Research Award Fund, I used the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives to unlock the secret of this most unlikely trip.

About the Dr. Linda Mack Schloff Research Award Endowment Fund

The JHSUM Board of Directors established the Dr. Linda Mack Schloff Research Award Endowment Fund in 2008. The fund supports researchers with funds of up to \$1,400 looking to use the materials of the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives. This scholarship, provided via JHSUM, allows visiting scholars assistance in funding for research at the Elmer L. Andersen Library. The Fund is named in honor of Dr. Schloff, JHSUM's former long-time director, who was instrumental in organizing and managing the archives. Each year we invite applications from interested scholars. For more information on submissions please visit www.lib.umn.edu/collections/special/umja/fund-your-research.

in 1971 as the Minnesota Action Committee for Soviet Jewry (MACSG), later renamed to expand the geography to “Minnesota-Dakotas.” Its first chairperson was Marcia Yugend. Its second was one of our travelers, Herb Kohn.

MACSJ was part of the JCRC and Federation and was tied into their national networks. Jewish federations coordinated activism



Herb and Betty Kohn.
Courtesy of the Kohn family.

through the National Conference on Soviet Jewry (NCSJ). But, as with the refuseniks, there was infighting on the American side too. The NCSJ had a rival, the UCSJ — Union of Councils for Soviet Jews — a coalition of Soviet Jewry groups across the country. The “grassroots” Union criticized the “establishment” Conference for being too slow and cautious. The “establishment” NCSJ criticized the “grassroots” UCSJ for being reckless.

I discovered in the archive that the Minnesota Action Committee was a rare group that straddled the divide. Housed in the JCRC, it was part of the “establishment.” But its leaders' hearts were with the “grassroots.” The MACSJ joined the Union of Councils and coordinated its Adopt-a-Family program. When American Jews wanted to send money to refuseniks, Soviet Jewry councils from Long Island to San Francisco contacted Minneapolis for up-to-date information.

These keys unlocked the puzzle. American Soviet Jewry groups were sending over support, but the two main refusenik factions were not passing the aid along to each other. To solve the problem, the refuseniks had to cooperate, and so did the “grassroots” and “establishment” in the US. Who better to mediate than the Minnesota Action Committee? It was a trusted partner in both the UCSJ and NCSJ. Moreover, as Adopt-a-Family coordinator, it housed a refusenik database and knew who was receiving what aid from whom. And that is how MACSJ leaders, Herb and Betty Kohn, ended up in Russia hammering out a deal to ensure that American Jewish aid (from both its factions) reached all refuseniks (across both their factions) smoothly and fairly.

Shaul Kelner is Associate Professor of Sociology and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University.



Do you
wish you
would
have
asked...

Now you can!



**Have you ever wondered about your grand-
parents or great grandparents growing up?**

What was their life like?

What challenges did they face?

JHSUM gathers, interprets, and tells the stories of our communities. You and future generations can learn and build on the rich history of those who came before us.

Ask, document, and discover answers to your questions with our resources of online videos, links, programs, special events, and exhibits.

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JHSUM brings our history to life. We need your help to preserve the future of our organization.

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Eloise and Elliot Kaplan Family Jewish History Center

Jay and Rose Phillips Building
Barry Family Campus
4330 S. Cedar Lake Road
Minneapolis, MN 55416

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DELicious History

Jewish Delis of the Upper Midwest: The Appetizer Exhibit

Jan. 12 - Feb. 17, 2023 | Tychman Gallery, Minneapolis JCC

Part one of this exhibit explored Jewish food, delis, and the community they brought together. Presented in partnership with JHSUM and Minnesota JCC.

Opening Reception: The Appetizer

Jan. 12, 2023 | Tychman Gallery, Minneapolis JCC

The opening reception included the premiere of our new deli mini-documentary — *DELicious History: A Forshpayz*, and author talk and book signing with Wendi Zelkin Rosenstein (granddaughter of Lincoln Del owners).

Special food event with BernBaum's Andrea Baumgardner, James Beard Award semi-finalist

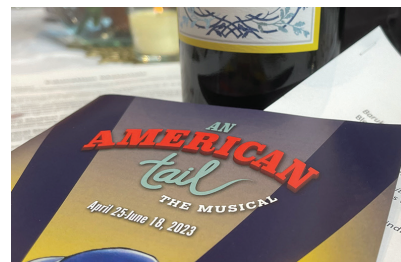
Jan. 22, 2023 | JHAP

Chef Andrea Baumgardner of BernBaum's traveled from Fargo, North Dakota and prepared delicious food from her custom menu featuring heavy deli appetizers, beer, wine, and Dr. Brown's sodas.

Screening of *The Deli Man*

Feb. 9, 2023 | Minneapolis JCC

About *Deli Man*: In Houston, Texas, third-generation deli man Ziggy Gruber has built arguably the finest delicatessen restaurant in the U.S. His story — augmented by the stories of iconic delis such as Katz's, 2nd Avenue Deli, Nate 'n Al, Carnegie, and the Stage — embodies a tradition indelibly linked to its savory, nostalgic foods.



Shabbat Dinner and Play *An American Tail the Musical*

Jun. 2, 2023

Minneapolis Children's Theatre

The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest had the pleasure of teaming up with the Children's Theater Company of Minneapolis as they launched the world premiere of *An American Tail the Musical*. Guests enjoyed a Shabbat dinner before the play.

Southside Shtetl Pop Up

Aug. 13, 2023

Judaica vendors and rent support fundraiser featuring an exhibit from JHSUM about local Jewish history.

Book talk with Rebecca Clarren *Cost of Free Land*

Oct. 19, 2023 | MNHS

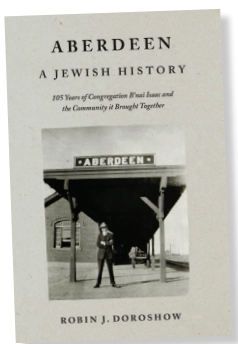
Award-winning journalist Rebecca Clarren talked about her new book, *The Cost of Free Land: Jews, Lakota, and an American Inheritance*, followed by a panel discussion with Cris Stainbrook of the Indian Land Tenure Foundation and Robin Doroshov of JHSUM.

Memory Gatherings

Oct. and Nov. 2023

Sholom East and Knollwood Place

The history of St. Paul and Minneapolis films were viewed, followed by a presentation and discussion with Robin Doroshov.



Journal Release *Aberdeen: A Jewish History*

Feb. 2023

Expanded second edition released.

Book Talk with Daniel Wolff *How to Become an American*

Apr. 27, 2023 | Mill City Museum

Daniel Wolff discussed his book, *How to Become an American*, which examines the sweeping history of immigration into the United States through the experiences of one unnamed, seemingly unremarkable Jewish family, and, in the process, makes their lives remarkable.

ENGAGING
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JHSUM's
40th Anniversary
Spring Celebration...

2024

Special Guests
announced soon!

Preserving History

By Susan Weinberg, MNJGS President

Perhaps you've done an oral history with a long-gone family member. Odds are it is on a video (VHS) cassette. And it's likely that you no longer have equipment to listen to or view it. One of the challenges in genealogy is not only preserving information, but considering whether it is still accessible. You can safely assume that virtually any medium you select, will deteriorate, or become obsolete at some point. And keep in mind that magnetic tape degrades after 10-20 years.

My father was an early adherent of recording and left us a huge library of recordings to dispose of. I kept several on family history topics with no immediate plans to transfer them. One was a bit of a classic. My parents were going down to Florida to visit my aunts. I had enlisted my mother to interview them about what they remembered about their immigrant parents. Armed with a lengthy list of questions, my mother diligently tried to keep my aunts on topic, often with little success.

Memory Lab at Hennepin History Museum

Recently I learned of a resource that spurred me to action. The Hennepin History Museum has a Memory Lab hennepinhistory.org/archives which will allow you to digitize audio and VHS tapes. It will convert 8mm and Super 8 film to mp4 and it allows for scanning photos, negatives, and slides to jpg or pdf. The room adjoins their research library at the front of the building located within a block of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

The Lab is open on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, the same hours as the museum. The first hour is free of charge and you receive an introduction to the equipment.



Susan Weinberg digitizing a video in the Memory Lab at the Hennepin History Museum.

After that it is only \$5 per hour. I sent an email and connected with Michele Pollard, the archivist at the museum, and was soon scheduled for the following week. On the day I was scheduled, I met up with Michele for a review of the equipment and she helped me set up my tape.

I nervously waited for the image to appear, not sure how much it may have degraded in the intervening years. As it came into view, the date appeared at the bottom, 1992, now over ten years past its maximum shelf life. I had begun doing oral histories in the 1980s, but I had not begun my serious research into documents until ten years after this tape was recorded. As the image materialized, I could see that while it wasn't crisp, it was indeed my mother and my aunts filling the screen with their most welcome presence. All have since passed away. I was jolted by seeing my mother on



City directories in the research library.

video, even more so when I did the math and realized that she was younger than I am now.

The recording takes as long to transfer as it took originally to record. Be sure to save some time to view the museum and check out the research library. You will find that it contains Sanborn maps, city directories, high school year-books and a computer workstation with free access to Ancestry and newspapers.com. To reserve time in the lab or the research library email research@hennepinhistory.org.

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www.jhsum.org

CHANGE SERVICES REQUESTED



**Executive Director
Robin Doroshow**

As our newsletter is coming to you later than usual this fall, I am wishing everyone a belated Shana Tovah 5784, and an early Happy 2024.

The recent movie, *Golda*, hit theaters shortly after Israel marked 75 years of independence, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War. We may call it Israel, Palestine, the Middle East, or the Levant, but we can agree that it is far from our Upper Midwest region that is the subject of our work at JHSUM. However, I am surprised at how often I hear stories of these two regions intersecting, often in unexpected ways.

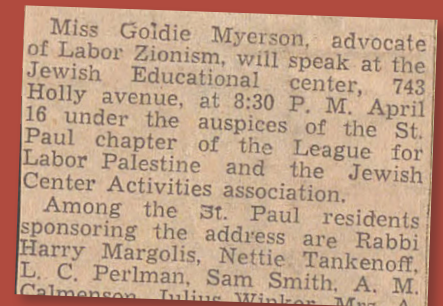
Many of us know of Saadia Gelb, the Galician immigrant to Minnesota, who made his life at Kfar Blum, a kibbutz in the Hula Valley of the Upper Galilee. Many Gelb and Mann family members remain in this region. Leonard "Skinny" Basses who was born in Minneapolis, married Faye Schusterman of Duluth. The couple moved to a very young Israel in the 1940s, where they helped to establish Beit Herut, a *moshav* located north of Netanya. Their daughter, Yael Basses Student, now in her mid-70s, is the archivist of that same *moshav*. Her cousin, David Amdur, a St. Paul-based artist, connected me with Yael. David's father, Elias, had Aberdeen, South Dakota roots. His brother, Ron, who made *aliyah* in the 60s, was tragically killed in the Yom Kippur War.

Golda, who famously raised much-needed funds for the *yishuv* (Jewish community living in Palestine prior to 1948) from American Jews, visited this region too.



**Golda with Frank Farrar,
South Dakota's 24th governor.**

Photo courtesy of Herschel and Bea Premack.



"Labor Zionism Advocate Will Give Talk Here" April 14, 1936. St. Paul Jewish Community Center records, Scrapbook 9.

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