

# Jewish Observer of Central New York

A publication of the Jewish Federation of Central New York

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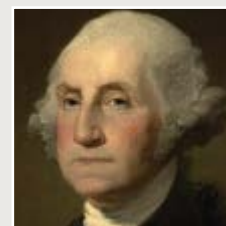
JULY 2026 | TAMMUZ-AV 5786



## Happy 250, America!



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# July 2026

## From the Editor



Barbara Davis

Maybe it's because televisions had only three channels when I was a kid, and you saw the same things over and over, but I still remember an early 1950s NBC "brotherhood" spot—aired during unsold ad time—and its song: "George Washington liked good roast beef, Haim Solomon liked fish, but when Uncle Sam served liberty, they both enjoyed the dish. I may not know a lot of things, but one thing I can state: both native born and foreign born have made our country great."

That message stays with me, more resonant than ever, as America reaches its 250th anniversary. To be Jewish and American in 2026 is to inhabit a peculiar double consciousness. On one hand, American Jews have never been more integrated, more present in government, medicine, law, arts, technology and business than at any prior moment in this country's history. On the other hand, antisemitic incidents have risen sharply in recent years, and the past several years have brought an ugly resurgence of a very old slander: that Jewish Americans are not quite fully American, that our loyalties are divided, that we belong somewhere else. We have heard this before. We know how it ends if left unanswered. The answer is not defensiveness. It is presence. It is showing up as full citizens who also happen to light Shabbat candles on Friday night. Being both Jewish and American was never a contradiction. For 250 years, it has been a source of strength, for us and for the country that took us in.

The July issue of the *Jewish Observer* looks at the history of the Jewish community in this country and, on a lighter note, at how Jewish people shaped the culinary traditions of the Fourth of July, America's birthday. We track the connections between Jews and hot dogs, ketchup, mustard, pickles, baked beans and corn on the cob. We examine Jews and the American dream and offer the review of a new book entitled *A Promised Land*.

In this issue, we include articles by outgoing Federation board chair Todd Pinsky and incoming board chair Nan Fechtner, and we have stories about members of our community who deal with serious medical issues and who need our help and support. We also thank the donors to the 2026 JO Appeal who helped us reach our financial goal. We will publish the names in the August issue.

We are also delighted to introduce a new feature: HONORABLE MENSCHEN—a column featuring community members who perform acts of lovingkindness with no expectation of reward. *Mensch* is a Yiddish word that is used as a high compliment to describe an honorable, decent, and deeply good human being—someone with integrity, compassion, and a strong moral compass who can always be counted on. We invite the community to nominate people for this recognition by sending an email to [jo@jewishfederationcny.org](mailto:jo@jewishfederationcny.org).

The issue begins with a timeline of American Jewish history, circling back to the hostile reception the first

Jews received from Peter Stuyvesant in New Amsterdam in 1655, then fast-forwarding to 1790, when George Washington wrote his landmark letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport. Stuyvesant's failure to exclude us resulted in a permanent, flourishing Jewish presence at the heart of American life and in the centuries that followed, the American Jewish community enriched this country far beyond what anyone in 1655 could have imagined. We also take a look at the possible Jewish heritage of Alexander Hamilton and at early Jewish life in America.

In July 1776, a group of men signed a document making revolutionary claims, not merely about independence from Britain, but about human nature itself: That all are created equal; that they are endowed with rights no government can remove; that when a government fails its people, it is the people who hold ultimate authority. These were not modest ideas. They are among the most ambitious words ever written. But they were written by men who did not live up to them. Washington held slaves as did Jefferson, who knew the contradiction as he wrote. And, of course, the document spoke of men, not women. The history of this country is inseparable from the gap between ideal and reality—and we have presently grown more willing to look at that gap honestly. We have reconsidered Columbus, reexamined Woodrow Wilson, and stopped pretending that our heroes were without flaws.

But what must not be lost is that the ideals themselves are not diminished by the failings of those who proclaimed them. The distance between founding promise and founding practice is precisely what has driven every great American moral movement since 1776: abolition, suffrage, civil rights, and beyond. Every generation has struggled to make America's promise real.

American Jews recognize this dynamic, because we live a version of it in our relationship to Israel. A recent survey by the Jewish Federations of North America found that a majority of American Jews no longer call themselves Zionists, yet that same majority feels a deep and genuine connection to the State of Israel, its people, and its future. This is not a contradiction. It is maturity to distinguish between a label that has grown complicated and a commitment that remains steadfast.

The same logic applies to America. We can hold a government accountable precisely because we believe in the principles it is supposed to uphold. Criticism is not rejection; it is a demand that a promise be kept. What we cannot afford, as Americans and as Jews, is to let disillusionment become detachment. These ideals belong to all of us. We cannot abandon them.

America turns 250 this month. Promises made in 1776 have survived wars, division, and disillusionment not because those entrusted with them were always worthy, but because enough people, in every generation, chose to hold them close. Let us wave our flags, wear red, white, and blue, and sing patriotic songs. And let us also put *mezuzot* on our doorposts, wear *chais* around our necks, and sing *HaTikvah* with conviction.

# Jewish Observer

of Central New York

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## MESSAGE FROM TODD PINSKY

### *Outgoing Federation Board Chair*



As my time as chair of the Board for the Jewish Federation of Central New York comes to a close, I have taken some time to reminisce about the past two years while I served in this role. The number of changes that have happened (and are still happening) can be daunting to think about. However, I recall the words that I wrote in this space shortly after my term started: “Despite the challenges that our and many other Jewish communities are facing, I am optimistic about our Jewish community’s present and future here in Central New York.”

Today, I am even more optimistic. Over the last two years, our Jewish community has rallied through numerous situations (from both internal and external stresses on our community), each time showing our community’s strength, character, and resiliency. I have had a first-hand seat to watch, participate in, and marvel at the passionate discussions, warm embraces, and detailed analytical planning that our community members and institutions engage in every day. It has been and continues to be truly awe-inspiring.

A phrase that has consistently run through my mind as chair is a quote from one of my favorite movies, *The Shawshank Redemption*: “Remember...hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies.” While at times our community has had to rely heavily on hope (as have I on occasion), I am pleased that my optimism in our community’s future is based on my own observation and facts. Primarily, I have observed that our community is blessed with numerous professional and lay leaders that have an extraordinary level of talent, foresight, and acumen to set our community on a path for success. There are simply too many to name individually, but I am pleased to say that I have not met a single person in a leadership position in Jewish Syracuse that does not advocate for their institution or cause with enthusiasm and clarity, with an eye towards collaboration, cooperation, and our collective future. Through both our established and new leaders, Federation and our community at-large are more financially stable, more collegial and friendly, and more strategically poised for a strong future than we were two years ago.

One leader that I will call out by name is Mark Segel. No matter the circumstances since Mark assumed the role of Federation’s President & CEO, Mark has diligently and conscientiously worked with me on every issue that has faced Federation’s Board and our numerous committees. Mark’s unwavering focus on identifying our community’s successes and opportunities assures me that Mark and Federation’s incoming Board Chair Nan Fechtner will bolster my optimism now and far into the future.

The only emotion that overwhelms my optimism is gratitude. I am simply so thankful to the Federation Board and the community for the opportunity that you have afforded me to help lead Federation. Most importantly, I am eternally thankful for the support of my wife Sarah and our children, Charlotte and Nate. They have uplifted me with encouraging words and humor more than anyone else could (and way more than any one man deserves). I know how lucky I am to have such an amazing family, and all my motivation comes solely from trying to make them proud. From nearly every person that I have been lucky enough to meet during my time as Federation chair, I am confident that most of us feel the same way. *L’dor v’dor* isn’t just a phrase or an ideal to which Federation subscribes, it is an intimate goal for all of us that we can rest assured knowing that each of our community members share.

## MESSAGE FROM NAN FECHTNER

### *Incoming Federation Board Chair*



As I begin my term as Board chair for our local Federation I feel a deep sense of gratitude to the community for the trust that you have placed in me, and to Todd Pinsky for leading us through the many transitions of the last couple of years. Over the last six months Todd has included me in many meetings and discussions that have given me the insight and knowledge that is necessary to make this transition to a new Board chair seamless.

As many of you know, I am a relative newcomer to the Upstate community. My husband Rob and I came to Syracuse in 2016 for Rob’s work at Upstate.

Our youngest son went through high school at J-D and we feel very fortunate that our oldest son has chosen to make Syracuse his home. Our middle son left for college almost as soon as we arrived here and has made his home in Boston.

During our marriage, Rob and I have lived in several different communities on both coasts and in the south. We were once given the advice that when you arrive in a new place, behave as though you are there for the rest of your life. For me this has always meant getting involved in the community and giving back, *tikkun olam*. Jewish life and identity have always been priorities for me and our family, so being invited to join the board of Jewish Federation was a natural fit.

When Barbara Davis and Anick Sinclair originally asked me to join the Campaign Cabinet I was a bit reticent. I wasn’t sure that I “had what it takes” to solicit donations and be successful. But I believe in the Federation mission and thought it was time to challenge myself. That first year was a bit rough, but the more I put myself out there the easier it became. I am deeply grateful for the work that I have done with Campaign and Anick over the last four years and the insights into the community and our Federation that it has given me.

Through the Federation board I have found a way to meaningfully impact our community and to give back. My work on our Allocations Committee and Strategic Planning Committee has given me a comprehensive view of the impact the Federation has locally, and what is possible for us in the future.

I am committed to working with community leaders and stakeholders to continue to strengthen our institutions. As the lay leader of the Jewish Federation of Central New York, my goal is to support and partner with our local organizations to ensure that Jewish Syracuse remains vibrant, relevant and safe. I look forward to the work that we can do together.

**Does the *Jewish Observer* still matter?**  
Well, a number of people seem to think so, and they have expressed their opinion through their generous and voluntary support of the 2026 JO Appeal.

**Read about the  
JO APPEAL 2026**

**TURN TO PAGE 9.**

# The Importance of Tisha B'av

by Rabbi Moshe Saks, Temple Adath Yeshurun

We Jews have survived for so long to a large degree because of our ability to remember. We remember the good—the Exodus, the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the conquest of the land of Israel. And we remember the bad—the destruction of two Temples, the exile from the land, persecutions throughout the ages. We have thrived despite these tragedies because of the promise that God has not forgotten us, that just as we remember, God remembers. God remembers our special status as a people, our covenant, and the divine promise to redeem us and to bring us to the land of Israel. As we say in the Pesah *Haggadah*, it is that promise that has stood by our ancestors and us. Many have sought to destroy us, but the Holy One has rescued us from their hands.



Tishah B'Av recalls the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem. We remember the suffering of past generations—God's decree against the Israelites in the wilderness, the defeat of the Bar Kochba rebellion, the expulsion from Spain,—all of which have been assigned by tradition to one date: 9 Av. Perhaps we find comfort that past generations of Jews were reassured by that promise and

were comforted by that hope: God will rescue us; God will remember the covenant. God will punish our enemies and restore our fortunes.

Jews have suffered tragedies in every era. Whether it was destruction of a holy site like the Temple in Jerusalem, exile from a city or country, or a pogrom, Jews in virtually every place and every age have seen at least some suffering. These disasters so color

our view of Jewish history that modern historians like the great Salo W. Baron have warned against a “lachrymose view of Jewish history,” where we see the Jewish past as merely a long collection of tragedies and woes. Thus, the term “dark ages” has been transplanted by the “Middle Ages,” a time during which Jewish creativity and self-autonomy were periodically disrupted by pogroms and expulsion.

If we look further back in Jewish history, much the same is true of the rabbinic period, from about the first century B.C.E. until approximately the seventh century C.E. This period saw the destruction of the Second Temple, the end to Jewish autonomy in the land of Israel, as well as numerous other national and local disasters. At the same time, Judaism also flourished through these centuries. The Mishnah and two great Talmuds were written and edited. The Midrash literature was created and compiled. Judaism expanded in its size, scope and thinking.

During this period, the Rabbis of the Talmud assigned to Tishah B'Av, the ninth day of the fifth month, five

great tragedies from Jewish history. The Rabbis found both a theological rationale and a sense of comfort that these disasters all happened on the same day: The rationale answered the question why the Second Temple was destroyed on the anniversary of the destruction of the First Temple: “Disasters happen on a disastrous day.” This theme—that certain days are “days of disaster” (what we would likely call “bad luck days”)—recurs throughout Jewish history. A host of other calamities are assigned to Tishah B'Av. The Mishnah lists five specific misfortunes (the aforementioned tragedies earlier in this writing) that befell the Jewish people on this day.

Destruction, in the liturgical scheme of things, has always been paired with redemption. That is why the Rabbis instituted seven Weeks of Consolation following the Ninth of Av.

Thus, not only did the Rabbis make Tishah B'Av into the day of national disaster. They also saw in this day the seeds of national redemption. So may it be in our day!

## PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

## REVIEW

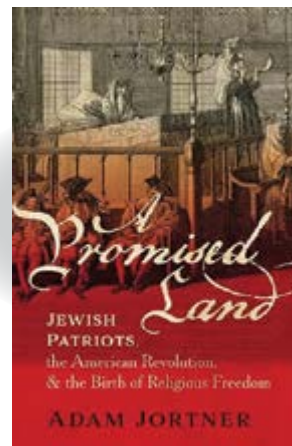
# A Promised Land

by Adam Jortner

Reviewed by Jackie Miron

*A Promised Land* by Adam Jortner, (not to be confused with the well-known book *Promised Land* by Barack Obama) was published in 2024. Jortner is a professor of religion at Auburn University. On the outside, it looks short – just 330 pages. However, 60 of those pages are footnotes and indexes and the small print leads to a very dense and tedious read. However, the book is timely as we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary this year.

If you have ever visited the Touro Synagogue, the first and oldest synagogue in the United States, in Newport, RI, you will understand how Roger Williams, the founder of the state, led Rhode Island to invoke tolerance and spiritual freedom for all settlers. Before the Revolutionary War, Jews settled in cities including Newport, Savannah, Philadelphia, New York, and Richmond. The war then displaced this group of Jews to Philadelphia primarily due to occupation by the British in most other places. This “patriot” congregation with new freedoms was a collection of Jews to determine what counted as law and Jewish practice, rather than the Yeshiva. Philadelphia was at its core, a place of independence.



Patriots highlighted in the book include Gershom Seixas, Jacob Cohen and Jonas Phillips, names unknown to most people today. The author emphasizes how the Jews petitioned against test oaths, pledges to Christian values that prevented Jews from holding office. This helped shape religious freedoms well known and practiced today. Other Jewish patriots recognized freedoms unfamiliar to new settlers, but Jews everywhere still fought to be accepted and were challenged throughout settlements.

Jortner writes of how the revolutionary generation bore the brunt of the

challenge to create a multi-religious democracy. “The Jews did benefit from the social upheaval of the period which allowed common people to have a say in public affairs for the first time. As the patriots took control, those who had been on the outside were now holding the reins of power.” Jortner explains further, however, that Jews in the early republic had to constantly fight to keep the gains they secured in the Revolution. Prejudice reared its ugly head time and time again, where the promises and progress took steps backward. Jews were criticized and accused of perfidy and treason.

One part of the book addresses the issue of patriot Jews owning slaves both before and after the Revolution, and this part was rather confusing in understanding the author's main point. Perhaps those with more historical expertise can reach a more satisfying conclusion. This is certainly not a light read. But it is a great triumph to learn about this rather small group of patriots who defy the assumption that the nation was founded on Christian principles only.



# A History Of Jews In America



**New Amsterdam** - The story begins in 1654 with 23 Sephardic Jewish refugees arriving from Recife, Brazil after the Portuguese reconquest. Peter Stuyvesant initially tried to bar them, but the Dutch West India Company (which had Jewish shareholders) overruled him. These Jews established what would become Congregation Shearith Israel, still active in New York today.

**Colonial Era** - Small Jewish communities emerged in Newport, Charleston, Savannah, and Philadelphia. Many were merchants and traders. The Touro Synagogue in Newport (1763) is the oldest surviving synagogue building in the U.S. Jews fought in the Revolutionary War, and figures like Haym Salomon helped finance the revolution.

**Early Republic** - The Constitution's religious freedom clauses were groundbreaking for Jews. Figures like Uriah P. Levy rose to prominence (first Jewish commodore in the U.S. Navy). Rebecca Gratz founded various charitable

institutions and may have inspired the character Rebecca in *Ivanhoe*.

**German Jewish Immigration (1820s-1880s)** - A major wave brought German Jews who often started as peddlers and built merchant empires. Families like the Straus family (Macy's), Lehman Brothers, and Goldman Sachs emerged from this era. Reform Judaism took root.

**Eastern European Immigration (1880s-1924)** - Pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe brought millions of Yiddish-speaking Jews, concentrated in urban areas like New York's Lower East Side. This transformed American Judaism. Labor movements, settlement houses, and the garment industry were central to this experience.

**Early 20th Century** - Eastern European Jews became a major force in American life. The labor movement saw figures like Samuel Gompers (AFL founder) and David Dubinsky (ILGWU). The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire (1911) galvanized labor reform. Jews were central to building

Hollywood - the Warner Brothers, Samuel Goldwyn, Louis B. Mayer, and the Fox brothers created the studio system. Vaudeville and Tin Pan Alley were dominated by Jewish performers and composers like Irving Berlin and George Gershwin.

**Immigration Restriction (1924)** - The Johnson-Reed Act severely limited immigration, particularly affecting Jews trying to flee rising antisemitism in Europe. This had tragic consequences in the 1930s-40s when American quotas prevented many Holocaust refugees from entering.

**The Holocaust Era** - American Jewish organizations tried to rescue European Jews, though with limited success. The U.S. turned away ships like the *St. Louis*. After the war, survivors who did arrive rebuilt lives here. The Holocaust fundamentally reshaped American Jewish identity and strengthened support for Zionism.

**Post-WWII Prosperity** - Jews moved to suburbs, entered professions and academia in unprecedented numbers. Organizations like the ADL fought discrimination. The GI Bill enabled Jewish veterans to attend universities. By the 1960s, quotas limiting

Jews in Ivy League schools were falling.

**Civil Rights Era** - Jewish Americans were disproportionately active in the civil rights movement. Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were murdered alongside James Chaney in Mississippi (1964). Rabbis marched in Selma. This era also saw complex tensions emerge between Black and Jewish communities.

**Late 20th Century** - Jews became fully integrated into American mainstream while maintaining distinct identity. Political diversity increased - Jews were prominent in both liberal causes (Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Abbie Hoffman) and neoconservatism. The women's movement and second-wave feminism had significant Jewish participation.

**Contemporary Period** - Today about 7.5 million Jews live in the U.S., representing diverse religious practices from secular to ultra-Orthodox, significant intermarriage rates, and ongoing debates about assimilation versus tradition. Issues like antisemitism (from both left and right), Israel, denominational differences, and generational change shape contemporary Jewish American life.

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# JEWS AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

The American Dream has meant many things to many people. But few communities have embraced it more fully, tested it more honestly, or embodied its promise more completely than Jewish Americans. There is a reason the American Dream resonates so deeply within the Jewish community. For a people who had spent centuries living at the mercy of rulers who could revoke their rights, seize their property, or force them from their homes with a single decree, a promise written into the founding documents of a nation was something almost beyond imagination.

When Jewish immigrants began arriving on American shores in significant numbers in the late nineteenth century, they came from a world of profound restriction. In Russia and Eastern Europe, Jews lived under the shadow of pogroms, violent, state-sanctioned attacks on Jewish communities that could erupt without warning. They were barred from certain professions, confined to specific regions, and treated as permanent outsiders in the countries of their birth. America was not merely an opportunity. It was a revelation.

The sight of the Statue of Liberty from the deck of a crowded immigrant ship was, for many Jewish families, the most emotional moment of their lives. Here was a country that did not care about your bloodline or your religion when it came to the fundamental question of whether you belonged. The Constitution made no distinction. The Dream was available to anyone willing to work for it.

Jewish immigrant families threw themselves into American life with an intensity born from knowing exactly





what the alternative looked like. Education became the primary vehicle—parents who had worked in factories and pushcarts sacrificed everything to send their children to universities.

The Jewish tradition has always placed scholarship and learning at its very center. In a culture where studying a sacred text is itself considered an act of devotion, the American university was a natural extension of something already deeply valued. The Dream and the tradition aligned perfectly, and the results were extraordinary. Within a generation, those children were doctors, lawyers, scientists, and teachers. Within two generations, they were reshaping American culture, science, business, and public life at every level.

But the American Dream for Jewish immigrants was never purely personal. The concept of tikkun olam—repairing the world—runs throughout Jewish thought and practice. Getting ahead was never enough on its own. You brought your family with you, then your community, then you turned around and helped others who were still climbing. Jewish Americans were disproportionately represented in the labor movement, in civil rights activism, in the founding of hospitals, universities, and charitable organizations that served everyone regardless of background.

The journey was not without hardship. Antisemitism was a reality in America then as it is today, although then it took the form of restricted neighborhoods, exclusive clubs, university quotas, and professional barriers that required extraordinary persistence to overcome. Yet the crucial difference was that in America, those barriers could be challenged and dismantled. The Dream provided both the aspiration and the path to its fulfillment.






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## “To Bigotry No Sanction”: George Washington’s Promise to American Jews

In August 1790, President George Washington traveled to Newport, Rhode Island. Moses Seixas, warden of Newport’s Touro Synagogue, penned a heartfelt welcome to Washington on behalf of his congregation. In his letter, Seixas expressed the hope that, in the new nation, Jews would not merely be tolerated, as they had been in some colonies, but would enjoy full citizenship rights.



Washington’s response exceeded Seixas’s hopes. The President wrote that “the Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.”

Washington expressed his belief that if “we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and happy people.” He closed by writing, “May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” He further added words of benediction: “May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, upon our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.”

## How Peter Stuyvesant Tried to Ban Jews

In 1654, Peter Stuyvesant, the iron-fisted Director-General of New Amsterdam, attempted to expel the first Jews who dared to settle in what would become New York City. In September, a small ship had brought 23 Sephardic Jews fleeing persecution in Brazil when the Portuguese reconquered it from the Dutch. Stuyvesant was not pleased. Known for his wooden leg, explosive temper, and rigid Calvinist views, he saw the refugees as a threat to his orderly Christian colony. He wrote to his employers at the Dutch West India Company in Amsterdam, requesting permission to expel the Jews.

In the letter, dated February 22, 1655, Stuyvesant described the Jewish refugees as a “deceitful race” and “hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ.” He warned that they would engage in “customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians” and argued they should “not be allowed to further infect and trouble this

new colony.” The Jews, he insisted, were “very repugnant” to the local magistrates and general population.



In April 1655, the Dutch West India Company directors responded with an order to Stuyvesant to let the refugees stay. Their reasoning was partly pragmatic; Jewish merchants had invested heavily in the Company and in Dutch colonial ventures. But their decision established else: the principle that religious minorities could live in New Netherland, provided “the poor among them shall not become a burden to the company or to the community, but be supported by their own nation.” Stuyvesant complied grudgingly. He imposed restrictions: Jews couldn’t build a synagogue, hold public worship, or own real estate. But they could stay, work, and trade.

The 23 refugees became the seed of American Jewish life. They established the first permanent Jewish community in North America, and when the British conquered New Amsterdam in 1664 and renamed it New York, the Jews remained.

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# Was Alexander Hamilton One of Us?

Long before Lin-Manuel Miranda put Alexander Hamilton center stage, rumors swirled in scholarly corners that the man on the ten-dollar bill might have had a secret: that he was a Jew. Princeton University historian Andrew Porwancher pursued that rumor across multiple continents, many archives and half a dozen languages, and wrote a book that may change how both Hamilton and the early American republic are understood. *The Jewish World of Alexander Hamilton* is a detective story, a work of revisionist biography, and a richly textured account of Jewish life in the age of the Founding Fathers.

Hamilton was born, probably around 1755, on the Caribbean island of Nevis. He was illegitimate, his father largely absent, and his early years were ones he worked



hard, in adulthood, to keep obscure. Most biographers simply assumed a Christian upbringing and moved on. Porwancher did not move on. The key figure in his argument is Hamilton's mother, Rachel Faucette, who bore the surname Levine from her first marriage. Porwancher argues that Rachel converted to Judaism before Alexander's birth in order to marry a Danish-Jewish merchant named Johann Michael Levine.

Under Jewish law, that would make Alexander Jewish as well. The young boy was not baptized, and he attended a Jewish school on Nevis, a community where other options existed.

Porwancher combed through more than 3,000 Danish colonial land records and census registers in his research. Critics who had previously dismissed the Levine-as-Jew theory, he found, were technically correct that Johann Levine was not explicitly labeled Jewish in those records but, crucially, neither were most of the other Jews in those same documents. The absence of a label, in other words, proved nothing.

Porwancher presents the origin story as a probability, not a certainty but in the second half of his book he details an extraordinary piece of scholarship. Whatever Hamilton's upbringing, his adult relationship with Jewish life was singular among the Founders. While figures like Washington and Jefferson occasionally made admiring remarks about Jews, nearly all of them also left behind records tainted by antisemitic sentiment. In contrast, Hamilton actively worked, across multiple domains, to advance Jewish inclusion in the new republic. As a lawyer, he took on cases in which Jewish rights were explicitly at stake. In one notable lawsuit in the 1790s, opposing counsel argued that the testimony of a Jewish merchant named Isaac Gomez could not be trusted because of his religion. Hamilton fought back, insisting that faith had no place in the evaluation of witness credibility. The case, Porwancher writes, became something far larger than a commercial dispute. It was a test of whether the First Amendment's promise would extend, in practice, to Jewish Americans.

As the first Secretary of the Treasury, Hamilton championed a commercial and financial vision for the new nation, centered on trade, credit, and urban enterprise, that opened more doors for Jewish citizens than the agrarian model favored by Jefferson. And as an alumnus of what is now Columbia University, he placed Gershom Mendes Seixas, the hazzan of Congregation Shearith Israel, on the institution's board of trustees, making Seixas the first Jewish trustee in Columbia's history.

The scholarly response to Porwancher's book has been very positive. Jonathan Sarna, author of *American Judaism*:

*A History* and one of the foremost authorities on American Jewish life, called it "a major contribution to our understanding both of Hamilton and of Jews in the early American republic." Harvard historian Annette Gordon-Reed described it as "provocative and intriguing," adding that it "should be read by all who are interested in one of the most important figures in America's founding generation." Stephen Whitfield, writing for the Jewish Book Council, called the research "ingenious," noting that Porwancher "impressively draws on primary sources in half a dozen languages." *The Journal of the American Revolution*, which named it Book of the Year, praised it as "an innovative study that illuminates previously obscured details of Alexander Hamilton's childhood."

There is something especially significant about this book for Jewish readers because of what the story reveals about our own community's place in American history. Jews were a tiny minority in Revolutionary-era America, numbering perhaps two thousand souls in a population of several million. They were barred from holding public office in several states. Their standing as witnesses in court was openly questioned. They were navigating, with extraordinary tenacity, the gap between the democratic promises of the new republic and the discriminatory realities of daily life. That one of the most powerful men in the country was, in Porwancher's telling, shaped by that world and chose, even after leaving it behind, to act as its advocate, is remarkable.

Porwancher is careful not to overreach. Hamilton did not identify as a Jew in America. He married into a prominent Christian family and, at least nominally, moved in Christian social circles. But the book makes a compelling case that the imprint of his earliest years never fully left him—and that his instinct to stand on the side of Jewish inclusion was not accidental. But for those who have felt that American Jewish history deserves a more prominent place in the larger American story, Porwancher has provided an unexpected argument.

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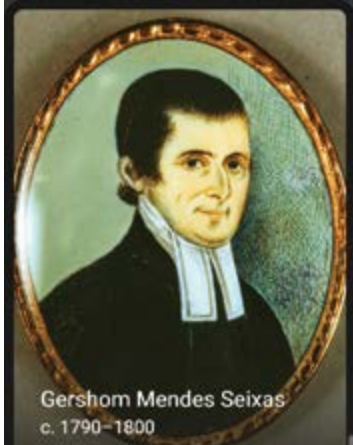
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# Jewish Life in America in 1776

In the year America declared its independence, approximately 2,000 to 2,500 Jews lived among a colonial population of nearly three million. Jews were concentrated in five main port cities: Newport, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Savannah, each home to an established congregation that served as the social, spiritual, and communal center of Jewish life.



The congregations of 1776 were almost entirely Sephardic in ritual, meaning they followed the traditions of the Jews who were expelled from Spain and Portugal in the late 15th century, even though many of their members were Ashkenazi Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. The most prominent congregations were Shearith Israel in New York, Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, Beth Elohim in Charleston, and Yeshuat Israel in Newport, Rhode Island.

Rabbinic leadership in 1776 was sparse. Rabbi Isaac Touro had led the Newport congregation with distinction, but by the time of the Revolution, the British occupation of Newport had scattered his community and he would soon depart for the Caribbean, where he died in 1783. In Philadelphia, Rabbi Gershom Mendes Seixas, American-born and deeply patriotic, was the most prominent Jewish religious leader of the Revolutionary era. Known as the "Patriot Rabbi," Seixas refused to remain in British-occupied New York and relocated his Shearith Israel congregation to Philadelphia, openly supporting the American cause.

Jews in 1776 were merchants, traders, and craftsmen, deeply woven into the commercial fabric of colonial life. Many were ardent patriots. Haym Salomon, a Polish-born Jewish financier in Philadelphia, played a very significant role in helping fund the Continental Army, working alongside Robert Morris to raise capital for the Revolution. Francis Salvador of South Carolina became the first Jew to die in the Revolutionary War, killed in battle in August 1776, just weeks after the Declaration of Independence was signed.

American Jews in 1776 enjoyed greater religious freedom than their counterparts almost anywhere else in the world. While full political equality was still years away—most states barred Jews from holding office—the promise of liberty embedded in the new nation's founding ideals felt personal and urgent.

Jonas Phillips arrived in America in the 1750s as an indentured servant and rose to become a successful merchant and a founder of Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel. He had fought for American independence and then he demanded that its promise



be kept. On September 7, 1787, ten days before the Constitution was ratified, Phillips sent a letter to George Washington and the delegates of the Constitutional Convention. His grievance was specific: Pennsylvania's constitution required officeholders to swear belief in both the Old and New Testaments, an oath no Jew could take. Phillips wrote, "to swear and believe that the new testament was given by divine inspiration is absolutely against the Religious principle of a Jew." He reminded the founders of Jewish loyalty and sacrifice: "The Jews have been true and faithful whigs; and during the late contest with England they have been foremost in aiding and assisting the states with their lives and fortunes—they have bravely fought and bleed for Liberty which they can not Enjoy." He closed with a personal plea: "I solect this favour for my Self my Children and posterity and for the benefit of all the Israelites through the 13 united states of America." His request was ultimately granted: Pennsylvania's revised constitution of 1790 removed the offending oath, a meaningful victory on the long road to full equality.

An advertisement for Joe's Buds Cannabis Company. The background is a photograph of a woman with long blonde hair lying in a hammock on a sandy beach at sunset. Her arms are raised, and she has her hands behind her head. The text "WANT TO FEEL LIKE THIS, BUT CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE BEACH? WE CAN HELP." is overlaid in purple. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo for "JOE'S BUDS CANNABIS COMPANY" featuring a cartoon character of a man with glasses and a beard.

# J E W S A N D F O O D

## J E W S A N D B A K E D B E A N S



In *The World of Jewish Cooking* and the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, food historian Rabbi Gil Marks traces the history of baked beans back to their Jewish origins. According to Marks, the sweet, tender beans were first cooked by Sephardic Jews, and the Pilgrims picked up the recipe in Holland en route to the New World. Marks' research shows that the dish began as a cholent recipe called *shkanah* in Arabic. The Sephardic Jews living in the Netherlands adapted the Middle Eastern stew to use local ingredients like fava beans, honey or molasses and goose fat. The Shabbat meal that could cook in residual heat from a hearth or oven appealed to the Pilgrims who, as Puritans, also refrained from lighting fires on the Sabbath. Once in the New World, the Pilgrims further modified the dish to include local ingredients white beans and pork and the molasses that was the basis of the rum industry.

For Jews for whom pork and beans were not a culinary option, the go-to baked bean standard was Heinz Vegetarian Beans, kosher-certified for over 60 years. Heinz Vegetarian Beans became woven into family traditions and regular meal planning across generations, valued both for their kosher status and their familiar, dependable taste. In June of 2024, Heinz abruptly discontinued the product, a move that caught many longtime customers by surprise. When customers contacted Heinz's Consumer Center seeking answers, the company offered only the vague explanation of "culinary trends." The loss was particularly keenly felt in Jewish households where the kosher vegetarian beans were a trusted staple, often central to cherished family recipes. Other brands simply couldn't recreate the distinctive taste of Heinz.

## J E W S A N D H O T D O G S

Before the hot dog, there was the frankfurter and the wiener—seasoned sausages named for Frankfurt and Vienna, the German and Austrian cities that perfected them. For centuries they were a staple of central European cooking, eaten at markets and street corners. But it took a wave of Jewish immigrants crossing the Atlantic Ocean in the 19th century to reinvent that tradition and turn it into one of America's most iconic foods.

The term "hot dog" is American. The exact origins of the name are disputed, but the leading theory is darkly comic. Sausages in 19th century America were sometimes nicknamed "dachshund sausages" because of their shape, and rumors (probably unfair but possibly not entirely unfounded) circulated that sausage makers were using dog meat as filler. The term "hot dog" appears to have started as a wisecrack about those suspicions. It showed up in print as early as 1892, and by the early 1900s it stuck. The joke became the name, and the name became an American institution.

In 1870, a German-Jewish immigrant named Charles Feltman began selling Frankfurt-style sausages from a pushcart on Coney Island. Street food being inherently messy, Feltman had the inspired idea of tucking each sausage into a soft bread roll to make it easier to eat on the go. He called his invention Coney Island Red Hots, and New Yorkers loved them. American hot dog history was made.

Two years later, on Manhattan's Lower East Side, Isaac Gellis opened a kosher butcher shop and began producing all-beef versions of German-style sausages. The all-beef frankfurter became a fixture of kosher kitchens across America, turning up in everything from franks and beans to split pea soup. The hot dog had become Jewish.

The next chapter belongs to Nathan Handwerker, a Polish-Jewish immigrant who in 1916 set up a small stand on Coney Island to compete directly with his former employer, Feltman. Feltman had expanded into a large sit-down restaurant, but Handwerker kept things stripped down, fast and cheap and half the price of the competition. Nathan's Famous grew into one of the most iconic food brands in American history, built on the classic immigrant formula of hard work, ingenuity, and a willingness to out-hustle everyone around you. Handwerker's dogs were not strictly kosher. He called them "kosher-style," all beef and seasoned in the Ashkenazi tradition, carrying the cultural flavor of Jewish cooking without adhering to religious law.

Hebrew National, founded in 1905, took the kosher angle even further, building an entire brand around rigorous production standards. Their hot dogs were produced to a higher standard than what was required by law, and they leaned into that distinction with one of the most memorable advertising slogans in American food history: "We Answer to a Higher Authority." The campaign, which ran famously through the 1970s, featured a voiceover implying that God himself was watching over their production line. It was clever, funny, and effective and it worked especially well with non-Jewish consumers, who took the kosher label as a straightforward guarantee of quality and cleanliness. Hebrew National's primary market ended up being gentiles who simply believed kosher meant better.

The reality was more complicated. For much of the 20th century, Hebrew National's kosher certification was self-supervised, and more stringent Jewish communities did not accept their products as genuinely kosher. It was not until the company came under the Triangle-K kashrut supervision that the Conservative Movement came around. Orthodox Jews, by and large, remained unconvinced. As the Orthodox community grew, the market responded again — glatt kosher hot dogs arrived, made to stricter specifications, free from fillers and artificial ingredients. Today they are served in nearly thirty sports stadiums across the country. Not bad for a sausage that began on the street corners of Frankfurt and Vienna, reinvented by Jewish immigrants on Coney Island pushcarts, and eventually claimed by all of America as its own.



## J E W S A N D K E T C H U P



Ketchup traces its roots to Asia, where fermented fish sauces called ke-tsiap were used as condiments. In the 17th century, British soldiers brought them to Europe, where cooks began experimenting with mushroom, walnut, and oyster-based ketchups. Tomatoes entered the picture in America in the early 1800s, slowly overcoming widespread suspicion that they were poisonous. Soon tomato ketchup was being made at home, though it was often thin, spoiled quickly, and varied wildly in quality. Henry Heinz bottled his first ketchup in 1876, standardizing the recipe and solving the preservation problem with vinegar. Mass production and national distribution followed and by the 20th century, ketchup was the default American condiment. For the immigrant Jewish community, ketchup was the perfect cooking ingredient because it was pareve, shelf-stable, and deeply flavorful. It became a go-to condiment and cooking ingredient in countless kosher kitchens across America. An interesting historical sidenote is that, during the Great Depression, some Jewish families served pasta with ketchup, often paired with salmon croquettes, as an affordable meal known as "Jewish Spaghetti."

## J E W S A N D M U S T A R D

Mustard evolved from a biblical metaphor for the measurement of small things to a preeminent condiment of Jewish cuisine. In the Talmud, the mustard seed was used as a standard for measuring the smallest possible volume or particle. In Rabbinic writings, mustard symbolized unexpected strength, something that starts as a tiny seed but grows into a large, "invasive" presence.

The biblical commentator Rashi, who lived near Dijon, France, famously suggested that the patriarch Abraham served tongue with mustard to the three visiting angels in Genesis. Tongue with mustard sauce was a great delicacy, generally reserved for kings and priests. Abraham's choice meant that he was conferring the height of desert hospitality on his guests, even without knowing they were heavenly messengers.

Traditional Jewish-style mustard is a spicy brown that cuts through the richness of the meat. The National Mustard Museum, founded and curated by Barry Levenson, a lawyer active in the Jewish community, is located in Middleton, Wisconsin. It houses over 6,000 varieties of mustard.



## FROM THE SHTETL TO THE BBQ: HOW JEWISH PICKLES BECAME AMERICAN

In the shtetls of Poland, Russia, and Lithuania, pickling was born of necessity. Before refrigeration, Jewish families needed to preserve vegetables through harsh winters. Cucumbers, plentiful in summer, were transformed through salt brine fermentation into crisp, tangy pickles that could last for months.

When waves of Eastern European Jews arrived at Ellis Island between 1880 and 1924, the pickle trade became a natural enterprise for new immigrants with little English and less capital. The Lower East Side of Manhattan became pickle paradise. By the early 1900s, dozens of pickle vendors lined Orchard Street, Delancey Street, and Essex Street. Jewish entrepreneurs like Isidor Guss, who founded Guss's Pickles in 1920, transformed the pushcart pickle into an American business empire. Their "half-sour" pickles—fermented for less time, maintaining a bright green color and crisp snap—became a distinctly Jewish-American innovation. Meanwhile, the fully fermented "full sour" pickle satisfied those who craved the intense, garlicky taste of the old country.

As immigrants' children and grandchildren moved beyond the Lower East Side, pickles moved with them, into American mainstream culture. The corner deli pickle found its way to baseball stadiums, county fairs, and backyard barbecues. As America celebrates its 250th birthday, the pickle stands as a perfect symbol of the Jewish immigrant experience: something distinctly Jewish that became completely American.

## THE PARADOXICAL JEWISH STATUS OF CORN ON THE COB

Few foods illustrate the adaptive nature of Jewish law quite like corn on the cob, a vegetable that poses the question: How can ancient Jewish dietary regulations address a food that didn't exist in the Jewish world until the 16th century?

Corn, or maize, is native to the Americas. For thousands of years, in Jewish communities across the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, corn simply didn't exist. The Talmudic rabbis who debated the minutiae of what could and couldn't be eaten during Passover had never seen an ear of corn, never ground cornmeal, never popped a kernel. When Christopher Columbus and subsequent explorers brought corn back to the Old World, they introduced something entirely outside the framework of traditional Jewish law.

Yet corn needed to be categorized. When Jewish communities encountered this strange New World grain, rabbinic authorities did what Jewish legal scholars have done for millennia: they reasoned by analogy. Corn behaves like grain. It can be ground into flour and baked. It shares properties with foods already restricted during Passover under the Ashkenazi custom of *kitniyot*, a category that includes legumes and rice. Through this reasoning, Ashkenazi authorities classified corn as *kitniyot*. Sephardic Jews didn't classify corn as *kitniyot* because they generally didn't observe the *kitniyot* restriction at all.

The corn paradox does reveal something profound about Jewish religious law: it is not static but interpretive, not frozen in time but capable of addressing new realities through established principles. An ear of corn on the cob represents both the New World and the Old, a food that didn't exist in ancient Jewish consciousness yet now fits, albeit paradoxically, within the framework of Jewish tradition.



# JO APPEAL 2026



**Does the *Jewish Observer* still matter? Well, 412 people seem to think so, and they have expressed their opinion through their generous and voluntary support of the 2026 JO Appeal.**

In a world dominated by social media and AI-generated content, it's easy to ask: do we still need a local Jewish newspaper? The answer is yes—and now more than ever.

The *JO* is rooted in the community it serves. Its pages are filled with stories written by those who know our people, places, and organizations firsthand. The *JO* shares the voices of our rabbis, community leaders, and educators, while celebrating the achievements of our children, teens, community members and local Jewish businesses. It commemorates the lives we have lost. Social media can deliver news instantly, and AI can summarize events, but neither can capture the depth, history, and strength of Central New York's Jewish life.

*The Observer* connects us. It celebrates milestones, shares achievements and preserves the memory of our collective experiences. It filters out noise, giving readers stories grounded in local knowledge and experiences. In short, it does what no algorithm can: it keeps our community informed, educated, engaged, and united.

Even in an age of instant information, the *Jewish Observer* remains essential—a true reflection of the people, places, and traditions that make the Jewish community in Central New York special and vibrant. The imminent demise of newspapers has been greatly exaggerated, and the success of the *JO* Appeal is proof that people in our community value the tangible, sensory experience of reading a newspaper (whether in print or online), which provides a sense of tradition and the ability to disconnect from digital distractions.

**We are deeply grateful to all who answered the Appeal in 2026, whose generosity helps foster and maintain in our Jewish community a sense of shared identity and belonging. We will publish the Honor Roll in the August issue.**

# Thank you!

Barbara Davis, editor





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# Jazz Fest at 40: A Milestone Summer for CNY's Favorite Free Tradition

Forty years is a long time to keep a promise. But the Syracuse International Jazz Festival has done exactly that, delivering world-class music, free of charge, to Central New York audiences since its humble beginnings as a small nightclub showcase in 1982. The man behind that promise is Frank Malfitano, who founded the festival that year and has been its guiding force ever since.

This July, the festival marks its 40th anniversary with four days of performances spread across two iconic venues: the Syracuse University campus and Beak & Skiff Apple Orchards in LaFayette. The 2026 edition runs Thursday, July 9th through Sunday, July 12th, and the lineup is incredible. Over four decades, Malfitano has assembled stages graced by legends from Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis to Aretha Franklin and B.B. King. The 2026 roster suggests he hasn't lost his touch.



The festivities open Thursday evening at the National Veterans Resource Center at the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building on the SU campus, where the USAF Airmen of Note—a 17-piece United States Air Force



big band—will take the stage at 7 pm. Formed in 1950 to carry on the legacy of Glenn Miller's legendary wartime ensemble, the Airmen of Note have performed alongside jazz giants including Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, and Doc Severinsen. It's a fitting, dignified way to begin a milestone celebration and a nod to the kind of jazz royalty Malfitano has been bringing to Syracuse for four decades.

From there, the festival moves to Beak & Skiff, where the weekend schedule reads like a dream booking sheet. Friday opens with Orange Juice, the Setnor School of Music's premier student jazz combo, at 5 pm. At 6 pm, the seven-piece British ensemble Hejira takes over with a 50th-anniversary celebration of Joni Mitchell's jazz period, drawing from landmark albums including Hejira and the live record *Shadows and Light*. Then at 7:45, Dumpstaphunk brings New Orleans funk royalty to Central New York, led by Ivan and Ian Neville, sons of Aaron Neville and Art Neville, performing a tribute to Sly & the Family Stone. The night closes at 9:30 with Tower of Power, whose nearly six-decade run of high-voltage soul and funk, anchored by one of the most

celebrated horn sections in the business, makes them a headliner in every sense.

Saturday's bill may be even more remarkable. Nathan Williams Sr. & the Zydeco Cha Chas open at 5:30 pm, celebrating their own 40th anniversary with a set rooted in Louisiana's Creole musical traditions. At 7 pm., Sweden's Gunhild Carling, who plays more than a dozen instruments while incorporating tap dancing and theatrical showmanship, delivers a tribute to Louis Armstrong with the Carling Family Band and the Syracuse Horns. Then, closing the weekend at 9 pm, Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue bring it all home with a blend of funk, soul, R&B, and rock that has made Troy Andrews one of the most electrifying performers working today.

The festival closes on Sunday, July 12th, with something altogether different and deeply rooted in community: "Return to Community: Gospel to Jazz IV," held at Hendricks Chapel on the Syracuse University Quad. Beginning at noon, the university hosts a complimentary picnic lunch on the Quad, followed at 3 pm by a gospel jazz service featuring three outstanding choirs—the Winston-Salem State University Concert Choir, the Syracuse Community Choir, and the Black Celestial Choral Ensemble. It is the

festival at its most inclusive, a reminder that jazz has always drawn from gospel's well.

Woven throughout the weekend are local Syracuse-area artists: the Drew Serafini Quartet, the Five Families Ensemble, the Tim Herron Quartet, Frank Grosso Organ Trio, Los Blancos, and others—a reminder that this festival has always been as much about community as star power.



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## A Full Day of Storytelling in Honor of Dr. Alan Goldberg

by Yolanda Febles



The Storytelling with Children Festival, organized by Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas, brought nearly 400 people together to honor Dr. Alan Goldberg on May 17.

The day began at the MOST with the sold-out live taping of *Grimm, Grimmer, Grimmest*, the podcast from bestselling Jewish children's author Adam Gidwitz. The festival attracted families from CNY, California, Virginia, Ohio, Massachusetts, and more to be part of the recording. This was only the second time Adam invited a live audience of children to participate in the podcast, usually recorded with students near his Brooklyn home.

Adam shared his retelling of "Old Rinkrank," a lesser-known Grimm fairy tale. Through call-and-response, he asked the children what they would do in the tale.

Their answers brought laughter and thoughtful moments, showing how deeply children engage when invited in.

The response reflected that energy. In post-program feedback, one attendee wrote the festival was "Incredibly entertaining and professionally produced. A fantastic event, enjoyable for kids and parents alike." Another said, "It was very interactive, immersive, fun, and worth the 10-hour drive from Indiana to be here!"

Families also heard from Bruce Coville, author of *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*; Perry Ground, who shared Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) stories; Paul Solyn, an ordained Jewish Maggid; Christine Darrow, the History Queen; Deaf storytellers Kelley Cooper and Grace Cogan,

with a voiced interpreter from Aurora of CNY; Vanessa Johnson, who shared West African stories; Nanette Perez, who shared a *The Brighthouse Guardians* in both Spanish and English and the Narratio Fellows, resettled refugee youth also shared their stories. Children also created stories of their own in "Learn to Illustrate a Book" with renowned illustrator, Susan Keeter.

The day continued with a book signing featuring Adam Gidwitz and ended with a special opportunity to reflect more personally on Alan's legacy, at a panel discussion, "The Art & Industry of Storytelling," at Parthenon Books, moderated by Sean Kirst, author of *The Soul of Central New York*. The panel featured Adam Gidwitz, Bruce Coville, Vanessa Johnson, and Nanette Perez, with a video message from Rabbi Rachel Ain, former rabbi of CBS-CS.

The panel explored how storytellers find their voice and the role stories play in culture, community, and helping children think deeply. With the Goldberg and Willsley families, CBS-CS members, and CNY guests present, the evening, along with the full day of programming, felt like a fitting tribute to Dr. Goldberg.



## The Greatest Mitzvah: How You Could Save a Father's Life

It was the week of Thanksgiving 2024. Jon Yard's wife Sarah Hammer was 38 weeks pregnant with their first child. Jon thought he had a sinus infection and went to the emergency room. There a doctor delivered words no one ever wants to hear: "You're in end-stage kidney failure." Just weeks later, his daughter came into the world and Jon began fighting to stay in it.

Many in our community know Jon through his service on the boards of the Day School and the Manlius Library. Sarah serves on the board of the Jewish Federation board. They are a family rooted in this community, committed to it—and right now, they need the community's help.

New parenthood is already one of the most overwhelming, beautiful, and exhausting chapters of a person's life. For Jon, it came layered with a medical crisis that has reshaped nearly every hour of every day. He must spend 25-30 hours each week on dialysis — time that could be spent with his daughter, providing for his family, or simply being present. Add in bloodwork, specialist appointments, and the relentless recalibration that comes with chronic illness, and the weight becomes almost unimaginable.

Jon is currently on two transplant waiting lists, but his best hope is a living donor. At 38 years old with type O-negative blood, the pool of compatible donors through the traditional waiting list is limited and the wait can be very long. Time matters.

That's where our community comes in. Through the National Kidney Registry (NKR), a donor does not need to be a direct blood-type match or even know Jon personally. Paired exchange means a single act of generosity can set off a chain reaction that saves multiple lives. The evaluation is completely free, and donors are carefully supported every step of the way.

Our tradition teaches *pikuach nefesh*—that saving a life supersedes nearly all else. Here is a concrete, immediate opportunity to live that value. ***If you've ever considered living donation, or if this is the first time the thought has crossed your mind, please take one small step: learn more at [nkr.org/ZBQ947](https://nkr.org/ZBQ947) or contact the Cleveland Clinic Transplant Program to speak with someone live at (216) 445-3150.***

Our Jewish community is built on the belief that each of us is responsible for one another. Perhaps you are the person to show what that means.



## Six Decades of Accomplishment—SHDS 1966-2026



The Syracuse Hebrew Day School graduated its first class of students in 1966. The members of that class were Jacob I. Becker, son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Becker, Roy Gilbert, son of Dr. and Mrs. Frank Gilbert, Charles N. Miller, son of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Miller, Eliezer J. Wexler, son of Rabbi and Mrs. Stanley Wexler and Randy L. Ziegler, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Ziegler. Six decades later, the Syracuse Hebrew Day School proudly awarded diplomas to the four members of the Class of 2026: Eliana Adcock, Danya Boschan, Ava Kanter and Lyra Shirilan-Howlett.

# HADASHOT TOVOT



**SHDS sixth grader Eliana Adcock** raised spirits for the community while raising funds for Camp Kesem. Camp Kesem supports children whose parents have received a cancer diagnosis by providing free, fun-filled creative programs to give children time and space to just be kids.

For her community service project (required for graduation from our school), Eliana created, produced and performed with her friend Cece Moon a dance recital entitled “Dancing is Caring” for seniors at The Oaks. In lieu of ticket sales she requested donations from the audience for Camp Kesem.

“Eliana’s goal was to spread joy, and she did just that with her incredible vision, dedication, and talent,” said Melissa Klemperer, SHDS Head of School. “She’s an incredible person, with so much love and joy to share. She and Cece gave a wonderful performance and inspired the audience to make the world a better place for kids who need support.”

To support Eliana’s efforts and Camp Kesem, please visit [kesem.org](http://kesem.org).



**Maggid Jim Brulé**, Jewish storyteller, shared an Israeli tale told by Crimean Jews about two friends and neighbors, Nabek and Dagar, and a beautiful horse. Dagar dresses as a beggar to trick Nabek and take the horse. Nabek concedes to give the horse to Dagar, so long as he doesn’t share how he got the horse. Nabek explains to a confused Dagar, “If people hear how you tricked me, they may become fearful of the poor, and the sick, and the destitute. They may not trust that they can help them but instead be in fear of them.” This was one of many stories, songs and prayers shared during a World Interfaith Harmony Day program presented by InterFaith Works of CNY’s Round Table of Faith Leaders and the El-Hindi Center for Dialogue & Action. The celebration of unity and shared humanity featured faith leaders from Episcopalian, Quaker, Baptist, Buddhist, Hindu, Islamic, Mormon, and Haudenosaunee communities.



**Syracuse Community Hebrew School seventh grader Eli Gnacik** placed third in the nation in the Better2Write Writing Competition, selected from more than 600 submissions nationwide. Eli’s award-winning essay was about Steve, an 80-year-old volunteer who spent two years reading Hebrew and studying Tefillah with him, helping Eli grow in confidence and Jewish identity. He also wrote about Esther, a resident whose memory faded but whose stories, emotion, and presence remained vivid. In listening to her, Eli learned that dignity is not measured by

what someone remembers, but by how deeply they are seen. In those moments, Eli was not studying the Amidah. He was living it: supporting others through presence, patience, and kindness. He found chesed not in theory, but in shared time, conversation, and play.

The Syracuse Hebrew Day School Student Council voted to “adopt” an olive tree through the nonprofit organization My Tree in Israel. My Tree in Israel supports Israeli farmers by enabling anyone to sponsor an olive tree or other Israeli crop for a year. When the tree is harvested, the sponsor receives six bottles of olive oil. Echoing the story of Honi from the Talmud, who learned that it is important to plant trees for those who come after us, even though we may not be here to enjoy the fruits of our labor, **SHDS Student Council President**

**Danya Boschan** said, “I will have graduated from SHDS by the time the olive oil arrives here, but I know that whoever comes next will think of something special to do with it!”



**Cantor Kari Eglash** was awarded a Doctor of Divinity degree honoris causa by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music in recognition of 25 years of distinguished professional service to the Jewish people. Hebrew Union College noted, “As we celebrate our 150th anniversary, these milestone events carry even deeper meaning—honoring generations of learning, leadership, and impact.”



**Isaac Bloom** was inducted into the National Honor Society. He is a sophomore at Innovation Technology.

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# Tzofim Friendship Caravan Returns to JCC

by Ashley Schmitz

The Tzofim Friendship Caravan is heading back to Central New York this summer with a highly anticipated stop at the Jewish Community Center of Syracuse on Monday, July 20. As part of their summer tour across the United States, the Caravan will bring an upbeat celebration of Israeli culture, a tradition that has delighted the local community for more than four decades.



For over 40 years, the JCC has welcomed the Tzofim Friendship Caravan, creating a tradition that has been a highlight of the summer season. What originally started as a single visit has grown into a multi-generational connection, with former campers returning as parents to watch their own children experience the same joy and energy they felt.

The Caravan is composed of ten Israeli teens selected for their talent, leadership, fluency in English and passion for song, dance and storytelling. The performers spend a full year rehearsing before hitting the road, perfecting a high-energy show that blends Hebrew, English and even a little bit of Yiddish.



During their visit on July 20, the Caravan will spend the day immersed in camp life, joining the campers for activities, sharing stories and building friendships that cross continents. “The Israeli Caravan brings more than just a performance to Syracuse—it brings a vibrant piece of culture, connection, and joy. Through music, dance, and shared celebration, they create an experience that unites our community,” says Amy Bisnett, Associate Director of Children’s Programming. The day will crescendo with a free, community-wide performance at 6:30 pm in the JCC gymnasium. Open to all, the show invites attendees to clap, sing, and dance.



In addition to this united experience, two *shlichim* will spend the summer at Camp Romano, living with local host families and becoming part of the camp community. Their consistent presence offers the campers a deeper, day-to-day connection to Israeli life, turning fleeting moments into meaningful memories that last long after summer fades.



Organized by *Tzofim* of North America, the program continues a legacy that began in 1973, bringing messages of connection, culture and community to audiences nationwide. “The Israeli Caravan offers a special opportunity for our Syracuse community to experience the richness of Israeli culture through music, dance, and fun,” says Bisnett. “As a JCC, our role in building connection and celebrating identity is more important than ever, and experiences like this bring that mission to life.” Through partnerships and shared experiences, the Caravan continues to build bridges that resonate long

after the final bow.

Community members of all ages are encouraged to attend and be part of the celebration. **Pre-registration for the performance is required and can be accessed at [jccsy.org/caravan](https://jccsy.org/caravan). For more information on the Tzofim Friendship Caravan visit, contact the JCC of Syracuse at (315) 445-2360 or visit [jccsy.org](https://jccsy.org).**



This column features businesses owned by members of our community, as well as artists and musical programs and is generously sponsored by RAV Properties.

# Ohr Health for Teens and Young Adults

Families in the Syracuse area who are trying to find the right help for a teenager struggling with an eating disorder or a mental health crisis can find the process overwhelming and often lonely. Therapists, dietitians, physicians, schools, and coaches all hold pieces of the picture, but rarely does one provider step in to connect them all. That is exactly the role Davia Moss, FNP, has built her new practice, Ohr Health, to fill.

Ohr Health offers medical care, consultation, and care coordination for adolescents and young adults navigating eating disorders and mental health concerns. Moss partners with therapists, dietitians, schools, and community providers to build what she describes as “a complete circle of support” around each patient—ensuring that no family has to navigate the healthcare system alone. “At Ohr Health, we slow down, listen carefully, and take the time your family needs. I will coordinate care between therapists, dietitians, and schools—so you’re never left navigating the system alone,” she explains.

Moss brings formidable credentials to this work. She has over 15 years of experience in pediatric and adolescent care, including a decade spent in Adolescent Medicine at SUNY Upstate Medical University. That background gives her clinical depth and a comfort with complexity that is rare in an independent practice setting. But Moss is quick to emphasize that expertise alone is not what families are looking for when they walk through the door. “She understands how overwhelming it can feel to find the right help for your teen,” the Ohr Health website notes. “That’s why Ohr Health focuses on listening without judgment, collaborating across care teams, and supporting both patients and their families every step of the way.” Moss adds, “At Ohr Health, your teen isn’t seen as a diagnosis—they’re seen as a whole person with strength, struggles, and limitless potential.”

The scope of Ohr Health extends beyond the clinic. Moss also offers educational workshops and consultations for schools, athletic organizations, and camps, including dance studios, gymnastics gyms, and martial arts programs. This outreach reflects an understanding that eating disorders and mental health challenges



often take root in the very spaces where young people spend their time training, competing, and developing their identities.

By bringing education directly into those environments, Moss is working to shift culture, build awareness, and catch struggles before they escalate.

The choice to focus on adolescents and young adults is a deliberate one. This age group occupies a uniquely vulnerable window, old enough to be forming their own identities yet young enough that early intervention can change the entire trajectory of their lives. Eating disorders are most likely to emerge during adolescence, and the medical stakes can be severe. Having a provider like Moss, who is trained in both the physical and behavioral dimensions of these conditions, as part of a teenager’s care team is not a luxury. For many families, it is a lifeline. “We hold hope when recovery feels far away, and help your teen build confidence,

resilience, and self-trust as they heal,” Moss asserts.

Ohr Health is located at 100 East Seneca Street, Third Floor, in Manlius, easily accessible to families throughout Onondaga County and the greater Syracuse region. For parents who have spent months—or years—trying to piece together care for a struggling teenager, Ohr Health offers something rare and essential: a provider who already holds the whole picture, and who will walk alongside a family until recovery is no longer a distant hope, but a lived reality. **To learn more or schedule an appointment, visit [www.ohrhealth.org](http://www.ohrhealth.org) or call (315) 380-1943.**

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## HONORABLE MENSCHEN

A new column featuring community members who perform acts of lovingkindness with no expectation of reward. Mensch is a Yiddish word that is used as a high compliment to describe an honorable, decent, and deeply good human being—someone with integrity, compassion, and a strong moral compass who can always be counted on.



In Jewish tradition, *chesed shel emet*, “true kindness” or “genuine lovingkindness,” describes acts of kindness performed for the deceased. Because the recipient can never offer thanks, can never repay the kindness, can never even know what has been done, the act is entirely selfless. There is no possibility of hidden motive, no transaction, no expectation of return. It is kindness in its most distilled form. And so it is with the quiet act of placing flags on the graves of Jewish war veterans each Memorial Day. Steven Siskind and retired Lt. Colonel Steven Nathan donate 1,000 American flags which are then placed by SHDS students, Steven Nathan and Robin Siskind into the earth beside the headstones of veterans they do not know. In doing so, they are performing *chesed shel emet* in its truest sense. The gesture demands nothing of the recipient and everything of the giver, and that, in Judaism, is what makes it among the most sacred things a person can do.

### MICHAEL A. WOLFSON, M.D. May 11, 2026



Michael A. Wolfson, M.D., of Syracuse, passed away surrounded by his family on May 11, 2026, after a brief illness. Michael devoted his life to medicine, public health, environmental justice, and his family. As a physician specializing in family practice and occupational and environmental medicine, he spent decades advocating against environmental hazards and injustices long before many recognized their impact on communities and public health. He was deeply committed to helping others and was known among family, friends, and patients for his willingness to offer guidance, solve difficult medical problems, and care for those in need.

Michael completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Rochester, where he met his wife Carolyn. He attended medical school at SUNY Upstate Medical University, completed a family medicine residency and addictions fellowship at Brown University, and earned an MPH in public health at Harvard University. He loved reading, photography, music, traveling, trying new hot sauces, and discovering new interests throughout his life. A lover of the blues and jazz, he took up guitar lessons later in life. Michael was also an avid sports fan who faithfully participated in a football pool with his daughter Kate for more than 20 years and looked forward to March Madness each spring.

Above all, Michael was a devoted husband and father. He cherished time with family, quiet evenings doing crossword puzzles and listening to jazz with his wife, Carolyn, and encouraging his daughters, Becca and Kate, to pursue excellence in everything they did. Thoughtful, protective, and endlessly curious, he found joy in small moments, meaningful conversation, and time spent with the people he loved most.

Michael is survived by his loving wife, Carolyn, and daughters, Becca and Kate. A memorial service celebrating Michael’s life will be held at Siskind Funeral Chapel on October 10, 2026, with additional details to be announced at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Michael’s memory may be made to Doctors Without Borders or another charitable organization of one’s choice.

[www.siskindfuneralservices.com](http://www.siskindfuneralservices.com)

### ROBERTA BRAEN May 24, 2026



Roberta Braen, 96 of Syracuse, NY passed away peacefully on Sunday, May 24, 2026, at Iroquois Nursing Home, Jamesville, NY.

Roberta was born and raised in Boston, Massachusetts and was an artist and an art teacher at several public schools in the Syracuse City School District for 30 years and taught art at her home during her free time. She inspired many students to take up careers in art and they remained in close contact with her after graduating. She created many art pieces, primarily paintings, which were exhibited at art shows and galleries. She was recognized for her work as an art teacher by organizations who identify contributors to aspiring artists and the work they created.

She is survived by her two sons, Eric and Philip, her three grandchildren, Mollie, Alexander and Ashley, one great grandson Owen, and her sister Marilyn Goodman-Galbraith.

She loved her family, her lifelong friends, and friends she met through her love of art. A phrase that summed up her passion for art was: “Art is Life and Life is Art.” Her son, Eric, would spell her name

“RobARTa” and since she had no middle name, he chose the name “Wonderful” as she used that word so often when talking with family and friends.

Cards, photos and memories of Roberta can be sent to honor and remember her can be sent to Siskind Funeral Service LLC, 3175 E. Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY, 13224.

[www.siskindfuneralservice.com](http://www.siskindfuneralservice.com)

### PEGGY BERTRAM June 1, 2026



Peggy Bertram, 70, passed away on June 1, 2026, after a courageous battle with a rare and aggressive meningioma brain tumor.

Born on February 18, 1956, to Joy and Mike Moss, Peggy spent most of her life in the Syracuse area, while also spending meaningful years in San Diego, where she met the love of her life, Harold. She and Harold raised their daughters, Rachel and Amy, in Fayetteville.

Peggy was a graduate of Nottingham High School and Ithaca College. She spent cherished summers at Camp Woodmere, where she formed lasting friendships and memories she treasured always. She spent nearly 40 years as a physical therapist, with most of her time at St. Joseph’s Hospital, where she blended her love of movement and science with her deep desire to help others. Outside of work, she enjoyed making memories with her family, exploring nature, cheering on her favorite sports teams, and volunteering at Helping Hounds Dog Rescue.

Her family includes her husband, Harold Bertram, daughters Rachel (Brandon) Wooten and Amy (Brittany Ellenberg) Bertram, grandchildren Ryder, Brinley, and Rowen Smith, and Mac, Stone, and Quinn Wooten; sister Jacqueline (Scott) Ayres and nephews Richard (Mekea Larson) and Christopher

Ayres. She also cherished a nearly 60-year friendship with her best friend, Anne Kemper. In addition to her parents, she was predeceased by her sister, Anita.

One of Peggy’s final acts of generosity was participating in Memorial Sloan Kettering’s Last Wish Program, through which she donated her organs and tissue to help advance cancer research after her passing. Her gift will help researchers better understand how cancers like hers grow and spread, with the hope of supporting the search for better treatments for families facing similar diagnoses.

In lieu of a formal memorial service, we invite those who knew and loved Peggy to share photos, memories, and stories. If you have a favorite memory, photo, story, or anything that captures who Peggy was, please email [honoringpeggy@gmail.com](mailto:honoringpeggy@gmail.com). These memories will mean so much to our family and will help us hold on to all the ways she was loved.

We are also raising funds for a picnic table dedication in Peggy’s honor. Peggy was active, vibrant, caring, and had a zest for life. She loved swimming, biking, hiking, and being near lakes, waterfalls, and nature. The picnic table will be placed near a waterfront walking path, creating a peaceful place where our family can gather in the years ahead to remember her. If you would like to contribute, please email [honoringpeggy@gmail.com](mailto:honoringpeggy@gmail.com) for donation information. Any contribution, in any amount, is deeply appreciated.

[www.siskindfuneralservice.com](http://www.siskindfuneralservice.com)

**MURRAY LEIPZIG**  
June 5, 2026



Murray Leipzig aka Moshe David ben Shrage Fival v. Etkka Zipa aka MDL, passed away on Friday, June 5, 2026, before Shabbat. Murray lived eighty-one tremendous years full of accomplishment both professionally and personally.

Murray grew up in Syracuse. He lived and worked in hospital and medical administration in Philadelphia, Chicago, Framingham, and for the last 22 years, in Boca Raton. He was a pillar for his extended family and the Jewish community and continued working almost until his death. He loved sports, music, travel, Judaism, and above all, his family. His motto was "show up" and he did it consistently for all he loved and cared about.

Murray is survived by his wife - the love of his life - Floris (Schoenfeld) Leipzig. Murray and Floris would have been married for 60 years this July. They found each other and began dating seven years earlier when Murray and Floris were just fourteen years young. He is survived by his brother, Bruce (Kay) Leipzig, and sister, Rosanne (Ora Chaikin) Leipzig. Murray is also survived by his three children, Tamar (Chris) Hennessy, Hava (Adam) Holzhauer, and Gordon (Shimrit) Leipzig. Murray has one great-grandchild and ten grandchildren who will proudly carry his memory and legacy forward. In age (not height) order: Jonah (Julia Thomas) Hennessy, Ariel (Shirley) Holzhauer, Sarah Hennessy, Elie Leipzig Holzhauer, Caleb Holzhauer, Ava Leipzig, Solomon Holzhauer, Aidan Hennessy, Raaya Leipzig, Kahrell Leipzig, and Callahan Murray Thomas Hennessy. Murray is also survived by

countless friends, colleagues, family members, and people who just met him once, who loved him and were better for having known him.

Funeral services will be conducted at 1 pm on Wednesday, June 10, 2026, at the Birnbaum Funeral Chapel, in their new location at 3690 Erie Blvd East in DeWitt, NY. Friends may visit with the family from noon to 1 pm immediately prior to the service at the chapel. Burial will be in Adath Yeshurun Cemetery. Additionally, there will be a Memorial Service in Boca Raton, FL on Friday June 12 at 10 am, at Congregation B'nai Torah followed by Shiva through Tuesday, June 16.

Donations in Murray's memory can be made to the following organizations: Jewish Federation; Temple of the High Country in Boone, NC; Congregation Shaarei Kodesh in Boca Raton, FL; B'nai Torah Congregation in Boca Raton, FL; Stand With Us; Liumi West Retreat in Delray Beach, FL.

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