

DMIT  
delivered at the 2nd  
Annual Meeting of  
The Jewish Family Service  
held at the Jewish Community Center,  
on Wed., Oct. 22, 1952.

A BRIEF HISTORY  
OF

UNITED HEBREW CHARITIES

of ~~Portland, Maine~~

PORTLAND, MAINE

(From

1905 to December 20, 1950)

Any history of the United Hebrew Charities must long pre-date this Organization's formal incorporation, under the Laws of the State of Maine, on June 23, 1915. Unfortunately, however, no 'Josephus' existed at the turn of the Century to put down, for posterity, a report of the beginnings of our Organization, and unfortunately, too, with very few exceptions, the founders and early workers have all passed on to their happy reward.

The only tangible evidence we have, ~~which~~ to give us a list of names of those early Members and Donors, is an Account Book, in which are recorded the contributions or payments of Dues made by them on, or <sup>about</sup> before, 1905. This book was, of course, written in Jewish, and was in the possession of relatives of one, Nathan Druker. It recently was un-covered, in Boston, Mass., and is valuable, inasmuch as it give s us the names of workers of that period.

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of the organizers of the United Hebrew Charities in the 'Ei ghteen-nineties', and that Nathan Druker probably was one of ~~the~~ early Preside nts. Benjamin

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<sup>THAT TIME HAD</sup> ~~comprised~~ of about fifty Jewish families, and he recalls th-at in the year 1905 - the year in which he married - he already had become active <sup>IN THE ORGANIZATION,</sup> ~~therein.~~

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of the organizers of the United Hebrew Charities in the 'Eighteen-nineties', the organization's and that Nathan Druker probably was one of ~~its~~ early Presidents. Benjamin Fireman informs me that when he first arrived in Portland, ~~at the turn of~~ <sup>in</sup> in 1902, he found an active Charities group in Portland, <sup>WHICH AT THAT TIME HAD</sup> comprised of about fifty Jewish families, and he recalls that in the year 1905 - the year in which he married - he already had become active <sup>IN THE ORGANIZATION,</sup> ~~therein~~. It <sup>IS</sup> ~~was~~ interesting <sup>NOTE</sup> to learn that Mr. Benjamin Fireman is the only living resident of Portland, Maine, who has been continuously active in the Charities, ~~that~~ - from before 1905 to date.

I fervently pray that the Almighty will grant him many, more years of health and happiness!

The only other early, written evidence we have of the Charities existence is the Certificate of Organization, whereby the United Hebrew Charities ~~Organization~~ was incorporated "To gratuitously aid and help the poor and the suffering with money, food, clothing and fuel, and to do anything and everything that relates to alms-giving and charity."

I am turning over, to the archives of The Jewish Family Services, the original Certificate of Incorporation, which was signed on June 15, 1915, by the following <sup>PERSONS:-</sup> Joseph S. Bernstein, President; Myer Karlin, Treasurer; Lazarus Abrahamson, Max Robinson, Samuel Rosenberg, S. Isaac Santosky and Benjamin Press.

~~As we all know, only too well,~~ The only living Charter member who



signed, that day, is Mr. Benjamin Press, who now resides in Boston.

We learn that Mr. Henry M. Taylor acted as Attorney for ~~that first~~ <sup>THE INCORPORATOR!</sup> group of workers, and he is listed as "Clerk."

Many of

The early Jewish residents of Portland had difficulty in making a livelihood, and the relief committees, as they existed from time to time, were called on to render a considerable amount of assistance. Mr. Fireman recalls that, in 1917, through the kind efforts of Miss Lillian Josselson, who was employed by the Red Cross, he had delivered to his store at 97 Middle Street, two hundred bags of flour, for distribution to needy families. Only too well, he recalls how he, together with Myer Karlin, Sprintze Bernstein, Fannie (Ginsburg) Kaplan, and several others, whose names escape him at this time, climbed three flights of stairs (because top-floor apartments were less expensive, and the poor could not afford better quarters), to deliver bags of flour, as well as other food stuffs. On many occasions these deliveries were made at late hours of the night, so that their presence would not be known by the recipients, whose pride would not permit them to make application for assistance.

Not were the children of our needy families, put to shame by the ~~distinction~~ <sup>before graduation of the Jewish holidays</sup> destitution of their parents. On numerous occasions, Mrs. Bernstein and Mr. William Goodman sent children down to see Mr. Louis Weiner of Rines Brothers, who would outfit them from head to toe as nicely as any of the children of the more affluent parents. Mr. James Stein, of the James Finst Company, was always ready to furnish us with fruit and vegetables. Mr. Robert Cleynott always managed to have a \$10 bill available from a "private" fund. These and others always came to our assistance with question or hesitation.



Nor were the children of our needy families put to shame by the destitution of their parents. On numerous occasions, ~~at~~ such as before graduation or Jewish Holidays, Mrs. Bernstein and Mrs. William Goodman sent children down to see Mr. Louis E. Weiner, of Rines Bros., who would outfit them from 'head to toe' as nicely as any of the children of more affluent parents. Mr. James Stein, of the James Fruit Company, was always ready to furnish us with fruit and vegetables. Mr. Robert Glenott always managed to have a \$10.00 bill available from a "private" fund. These, and others, always came to our assistance without question, or hesitation.

For more than thirty-five years, both Sprantze Bernstein and Myer Karlin were the back-bone of the Organization. No heart-breaking problem was too personal to be unfolded to either. The needy of our Community had the utmost confidence in these two sterling souls, and this confidence ~~was~~ never was betrayed. Nor was any problem too difficult to be ~~under-~~ <sup>resolved, or investigated</sup> taken by Sprantze or Myer, as they fondly were called; the hour never was too late, nor was the weather ever too cold for either of them to go out on a personal visit, whenever assistance was needed. The honor and

dignity of the United Hebrew Charities was the honor and dignity which was given to the Organization by their association with the Charities.

Since I became associated with the Charities, as President, in 1940, I have had invaluable assistance rendered me by my fellow Officers - <sup>PHILIP REUBEN,</sup> Saul Sheriff, Myer Marcus, and, particularly, by Jesse Rosenberg. In fact, in 1941, it was because of the practically single-handed collection efforts of Jesse Rosenberg that \$1,600.00 was realized from the last Annual Ball, and thereby the Charities Organization was enabled to keep on with its work that year.

In passing, it should be noted that, years before the inception of our Portland Jewish Federation, a joint drive was annually conducted by the United Hebrew Charities and the Portland Hebrew School, to raise their needed funds.

These annual drives, together with the proceeds of the Annual Charities Ball <sup>and the Purim Bridge conducted annually by Mrs. Max Wersky,</sup> were the principal source of our Organization's income. However, it is regrettable to note that, although, when the Federation was organized, all local agencies were promised that their needs would <sup>be given precedence</sup> ~~be given~~, first, out of the proceeds of the Annual drive, the Federation, this year, has reduced the allocations of local, as well as other, organizations, by 19%. I hope that the functions of the Jewish Family Services will not be impaired by this



unfair action on the part of the Federation. ~~and~~

One of the most pleasant associations the Charities enjoyed, was its active co-operation with the Social Welfare Department of the Portland Chapter of the Council of Jewish Women. On several occasions, the Charities furnished funds for unusual medical and hospital services recommended by the Council and, in all instances, the Charities requested their advice and assistance as 'Big Sister' to children of families receiving assistance. A most harmonious and pleasant relationship existed between the 'Council' and the 'Charities' at all times. MCA

This most pleasant relationship existed because of the open-heartedness and far vision of Mrs. Israel Bernstein and Mrs. Lester Willis, who cooperated with the members of our Relief Committee. This Committee was 'chair-ed', more years than I can recall, by our Myer Karlin. My association with Myer, for a period of ten years, was most pleasant, in spite of the fact that there were many periods when I visited him in his store, daily, for two or three weeks at a stretch. Myer surrounded himself with others, like himself, who worked unselfishly and indefatigably. The members of his Committee, during these past ten years, were Messrs. William Goodman, Benjamin

Fireman and Shepard Cutler, together with Mesdames Mendel Silverman, Jacob E. Rubinsky and Oscar Tabachnick, with I, myself, as President: This group never let either snow or rain deter them from a Relief Committee all at any time of the day or night. This entire Committee fully earned, ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> enjoyed, ~~the~~ <sup>and</sup> the highest confidence of our Community. I must, note, too, that, as a result of her wonderful Uncle's influence, Mrs. Melvin G. (Karlin) Finn, <sup>or</sup> 'Ruthie', as we all, lovingly, call her, organized a group of young ladies who devoted several nights a week, for a number of years, to the sewing of 'layettes' and other clothing for our needy.

The <sup>United Hebrew</sup> U. H. Committee had three other Agencies, in addition to its year-round, direct, relief services. These other Agencies are :- 1). The Gmilos Chasodim, 2). The Hachnosos Orchim Committee, and, 3). The Mo'os Chitim Committee, and I propose to deal, briefly, with each, hereunder.

The Gmilos Chasodim, or Free Loan Committee, appears to have had its inception at, or before, the 'turn of the Century.' However, there are absolutely no records prior to April 14, 1926, at which time we find an entry in the records of Mr. Jacob A. Sapiro, who has been Treasurer of the Gmilos Chasodim since 1933. His records show that, on April 14, 1926, \$500.00 was



deposited as the "Nettie Rosenberg Fund." Thereafter, smaller sums were, from time to time, contributed to the Gmil os Chasodim, the last \$500.00 donation having been received through the efforts of our Judge Louis Bernstein, from the Estate of Dr. William Needleman. This Free Loan, as distinct from direct relief, was intended to assist in re habilitating our fellow Jews. The applicant was required to sign a Promissory Note and furnish two endorsers. The average annual loans granted, since 1933, approximated \$1,200.00.

Only one aggravating session appeared, in the history of the <sup>Gmil os Chasodim</sup> ~~group~~, when the 1933 Bank Holiday caused this group to lose about 25% of its assets. However, in accordance with the practice of the Charities, these losses, as well as losses resulting from the inability of borrowers to repay their loans, were always replaced by the Charities.

William Goodman, Abraham Siegel and Jacob E. Rubinsky, each has served as Chairman of this Committee, since 1926.

~~3). Hachnosos Orchim committee Average 90 persons \$400.00  
4). Mo'os Chitim  
list the officers and close.~~

The Hachnosos Orchim Committee furnished assistance to the wayfarer . Particularly during the '30's and, to a lesser degree in current times, many



~~many~~ elderly men of learning were dismissed from their rabbinates, or teaching positions, and found themselves unfitted for any other employment. Many of these gentlemen, as well as others who could ~~ga~~ find no employment, earned a meagre livelihood by travelling from community to community, sometimes delivering a lecture or droshe in the Synagogues, and at other times accepting outright charity. It had been the custom - from time immemorial - for a committee of two men - generally Messrs. Hyman Ginsburg, Gimple Lerman, or David Davidson (Franklin Street), to visit the Congress Street merchants, and other individuals, and collect small contributions in a handkerchief, never letting the money touch their hands. This money was further increased by collections in the Synagogues and the entire contents of the handkerchief was turned over to the wayfarer.

When these collections became almost a daily matter, our merchants called a halt. A more practical arrangement had to be developed. It finally was agreed that the Charities should give a gratuity to these individuals and, in some instances, furnish them with food and lodging. No 'out-of-Town' Jew, who appeared on a Friday afternoon, was per