

where he stayed with his sister, Annie, who was recently married to Sol Costrell. At the time of his application for citizenship, in August 1913, Robert was living at 6 Sibley Court and was employed by his brother-in-law, Jake Cohen, who operated a clothing store on Broad Street. A short time after marrying, Robert and Fannie established their own store at 211 Broad Street on Haymarket Square. This business sold hunting rifles and knives, second-hand clothing, shoes and boots, and other items to the farmers and woodsmen who came into town. Robert and Fannie first lived at 185 York Street (where her father lived with them prior to setting up house at 67 Newbury Street); then 179 Essex; and for more than forty years at 311 French Street.

The next few years, however, were not happy ones. First, Mendel died from a heart attack late one evening in 1920 after a drunken customer entered the store and began smashing things up; then his eldest son, Morris, who was an accomplished musician and had just opened a store in Dover Foxcroft, was killed in an auto accident on the way to his wedding in 1922.

Another of Reuben and Soshe Esther's grandchildren, Sophie Kern, arrived from Chicago near the end of the war. Her husband, Nathan, first went into the junk business and then established a clothing store at 223 Broad Street. After this, a building was purchased at 85-89 Exchange Street, one block from Union Station and next door to Louis Saltzman's store. Kern and Snyder, a clothing store operated with Harry Snyder, was installed in No. 89 and the small rooming house in the upper floors of No. 87, known as the Model Hotel, continued under the management of the new owners. Like many businesses in the area, the clothier and "hotel" catered to woodsmen. After the partnership dissolved and the store closed, a tavern at No. 85 Exchange called the Eastern Eating House was operated by the Kerns until the early 1950's.

The years before the crash and Depression were productive for the Alpert and Cohens. Most family members had married, established small businesses or were working with relatives in various enterprises. Samuel M. and Dora Cohen, who continued bearing children through their forties, became the reigning patriarch and matriarch of the Alpert-Cohen clan. Their son, Nathan J. (born just three weeks after the death of his uncle Nathan in 1901) established the N.J. Cohen Company, wholesalers of fruit and produce with his brother David (b.1902) joining him in this venture. This business, based at 22 Oak Street, continued for several decades until the larger grocery chains moved into Bangor and forced the independents, who formed Cohen's customer base, out of business. Nathan and his brothers closed the business and retired.

Frances (b.1898; known as Fanny) married another transplant from the Vilna gubernia, Charles Bernstein, who was the proprietor of an insurance and loan business at 116 Exchange Street. His clientele often provided jewelry to collateralize their loans, which sent Charles on frequent trips to Boston and New York to peddle the stuff when the loans weren't repaid. Whatever his destination along the eastern seaboard, Charles usually traveled by steamship down the Penobscot. The trip he took in December of 1939 was to be the last

of these excursions, for when the boat he was sailing on docked in Philadelphia, he was missing. The fact that his luggage remained on board led the police to believe that he was robbed and thrown overboard; he was declared legally dead seven years later.

Ida (b.1899) married Pinchas Medwed, who had traveled to Bangor to work for his uncle Harry Viner in the shoe business. By 1931 the Medweds were boarding with Jake and Leah Sclair at 160 Elm Street and "Pinky" was the treasurer of Reliable Footwear, the shoe manufacturer based at 304 Hancock Street that became known as Viner Brothers Inc. Three years later Pinky went on his own, establishing the Medwed Footwear Company at 160 Center Street, manufacturing leather tops and moccasins. Factories were subsequently added in Skowhegan, Madison and Pittsfield, Maine. The Medweds, who lived in Waterville from the late 1940's, ultimately sold their factories and moved to Boston. Ida's brother, Robert, who worked with his cousin Jake at Cohen's Shoe Store on Pickering Square for several years, switched to Viner's, and then left for the Medwed operation; he finished his career working with his brothers, Nathan and David, at the N.J. Cohen Company. Allan (b.1906) apprenticed with Jake Sclair in the clothing trade and by 1931 was the president of the J. Sclair Clothing Company at 181 Exchange Street. Soon thereafter he formed a partnership with Louis Rolsky and the store was transformed to the Allan-Lewis Company. (Jake, who had been ousted from his own operation, opened another clothing store on Hammond Street between the Merrill Trust Building and Claire's Tobacco. After selling his store on Main Street, Izzy Alpert went to work at this establishment; but Jake's habit of yanking people in off the street to sell them suits didn't meet with either Izzy or Mary's approval. After a while Izzy quit.) Sadye (b.1909) married Bernard Harris and relocated to New Hampshire, where her husband operated an automobile dealership.

Various family members maintained a deep interest in politics, but the expression of this interest took on different forms. Several of Nathan and Rosa's children became actively involved in traditional party politics whereas many of their younger cousins - those who were born after Nathan's family had established itself in Bangor - held Bundist-type views that reflected their experience under the tsarist regime. KAG recalled that "the whole group of men especially, except Sroel [Israel Alpert], seem to have been permeated with vague Socialist ideas - or were carried on the momentum of the Socialist movement in Europe.

Sol Costrell was a lifelong Socialist, following Norman Thomas. Sol's brother Chonke became a Communist. Mamma was taking care of Bessie's baby Maurice one time, and Chonke was sweeping the stairs above. "Look out" she told him, "you're sweeping right in the baby's face." But he kept right on sweeping, he didn't care a thing or have the least consideration for other people, she felt. He became a Communist and a writer for the *Freiheit*, left his wife and connected up with another woman - and to her the incident represented Communism and is always cited as justification for her hostility to it - seeing it as a kind of anarchy, with on the one hand the individual supremely sweeping over the other individual and on the other hand with the individual suppressed and lost. Robert Cohen [Yankev's son] and most of the oth-

ers lost their "socialism" in the process of becoming small businessmen in America, regarding it as something vaguely idealistic - even impossible due to the general crassness of human nature. One thing you know: you must make a living. Papa retained some elements of his "socialism" for a while - he headed the Workmen's Circle, was a delegate to the national convention from Maine etc. - but lost it in the exigencies of existence. Mary, to my astonishment, told me years later that she was secretary of the Maine Branch of the Workmen's Circle.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to their younger cousins, the Nathan Cohen family departed from Russia at a time when the anti-Semitic tide had taken a major turn for the worse, but before the political consciousness of the Jewish masses had begun to awaken. Their relative youth upon arrival, the successful establishment of businesses, and the consequent penetration of the economic mainstream of Bangor were all factors that contributed to their more traditional political outlook. This was typified by Louis, who was born in Bangor in the 1880's, had served in World War One, and was a member of the draft board from its inception. Both he and his brother Sam were active in the dominant Republican Party. (Maine voters had gone to the polls fifty-one times from 1855 through 1930 to choose a governor; forty-eight of those times the voters elected Republican candidates.<sup>9</sup>) But it was their elder brother, Max, who led the Cohens' foray into politics; and by many accounts he developed the type of influence that resulted in the election of governors. His daughter, Ada Gleszer, wrote that "in later years Max Cohen became interested in politics and could have gone far in public office. However, he preferred the role of advisor to men who through his advice and judgement were elected to the offices of Governors of the State, U.S. Senators, Congressmen and many lesser offices in the city, county, and state."

While very little is discoverable about his political activities by virtue of their "behind the scenes" character, it seems that Max's involvement lay in the choice of Republican nominees and party campaign strategies. According to Ada, "among his close personal friends were Governor Bert Fernald, Governor Percival P. Baxter, Governor Owen Brewster and Governor Lewis O. Barrows. The back office of his jewelry store on Exchange Street was a meeting place where many policies for the State of Maine were formulated."<sup>10</sup> Exactly how these relationships developed can only be conjectured, for Max's public political career was limited to holding local offices, including serving as a member of the County Committee, the City Council and as Chairman of the City Committee.<sup>11</sup>

It is paradoxical that it was with Governor Ralph Owen Brewster that Max was most closely associated. Brewster was born in Dexter, Maine in 1888, graduated from Bowdoin and the Harvard Law School and had served two terms as a Representative in the Maine Legislature and one as a Senator before being nominated as the Republican candidate for governor. He was also believed to be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Brewster's predecessor, Percival P. Baxter, strongly opposed his candidacy claiming that the nomination would "kill the Republican Party in Maine for a generation." Brewster lost on the ini-

tial count by 315 votes out of 95,000 cast, but after demanding a recount he was declared the nominee by a 518 vote margin.

The Klan first reared its head in Maine in 1921, directing most of its propaganda against Catholics. (This didn't stop crosses from being painted in front of Izzy Alpert's store on Main Street - an act that prompted Irish Catholic railroad men from the yard across the street to assure Izzy that they would all stick together to fight the threat.) Despite Governor Baxter's denunciation in his 1922 inaugural address, the Klan continued to attract members: by 1923 there were some 23,000 Klansmen in the state and two years later, according to a report in the *Washington Post*, there were nearly 150,000 supporters. Bangor had a fairly large membership, but Brewer was a Klan stronghold, as demonstrated by a huge march held there in 1924. Such power could not be achieved without some mainline political support; thus the King Kleagle of the Maine Realm, F. Eugene Farnsworth of Columbia Falls, proclaimed to a 1925 gathering of Klansmen that "The cheapest thing on sale in New England today is a politician...and you can tell that to your governor." This was exasperating to the anti-Klan Baxter whose second term as governor was about to be followed by a candidate who enjoyed the support of the Klan. (In fact, it was alleged that Brewster himself had appeared in "sheets" at a Klan rally in Brewer, just across the Penobscot from Bangor.)

It was to Max Cohen that the Republican strategists turned, for without the support of the popular Baxter, they risked losing the election. Max reportedly mediated an agreement between the antagonists with the result that after Brewster publicly declared his opposition to the Klan, Baxter came out for him. Nevertheless, it is ironic that Baxter's support may not have made much difference to the outcome, for the Democratic battle cry of "a vote for Brewster is a vote for the Klan" seemed to have backfired: the chairman of the Democratic State Committee claimed after their candidate's loss that "there were more members of the Ku Klux Klan in the Democratic Party than we realized." The charges of Klan membership did little long term damage to Brewster (some maintained that this helped him) for he served two terms as governor, and though his first two attempts to secure his party's nomination for the U.S. Senate candidacy failed, he was elected three times to the United States House of Representatives between 1934-1940, and finally to the Senate in 1941 and again in 1947.

In addition to the political circumstances that contributed to the development of their relationship, it is likely that Brewster and Cohen typified the special alliances that were often cemented within fraternal orders. Max belonged to many groups including the Masons, the Eastern Star, Anah Temple, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias and the Elks. Brewster was also a Mason and a member of the Odd Fellows and Elks.<sup>12</sup> Although Ada Gleszer reported that her father was a member of the St. Andrews Lodge of the Masons, it was in Brownville's Pleasant River Lodge that Max was raised to the "Sublime Degree of the Master Mason" in June 1899. Brownville's proximity to Dexter, where Brewster made his home, may well have resulted in the two belonging to the same lodge or meeting through regional gatherings. (In a curious twist, the *Bangor Daily News* reported that Klan organizers "worked within fraternal orders, recruiting members from the roles of the Masons, Odd Fellows and

Knights of Pythias." One exception would have been found in the Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 71 in Bangor. This group would not have offered many Klan recruits, at least in 1916, when its officers were M.L. Rosen, Myer Epstein, Charles Stern, James Cahners and Max Kaminsky.)

The Cohen-Brewster relationship may have originated with ties that transcended politics, but the results of their association were evident shortly after Brewster was elected governor. By 1926, Max Cohen's son-in-law, Edward Gleszer, had been appointed one of two trial justices of the Bangor Municipal Court, making him the first Jewish judge in the state. Later the Senator and the Judge became law partners with their offices in the Eastern Trust Building at 6 State Street. Brewster was also the president of the First Church Christ Scientist of Boston (1932-33), with which Ada Gleszer later became affiliated.

Simon Cohen may have demonstrated that it was possible to achieve financial success through hard work and imagination, but it was Max, who more than anyone else, first brought a sense of confidence about the future to Bangor's Jews. Serving as a de facto patron saint to the community, he raised money and used his connections to assist the relocation of many Russians to Bangor and sponsored many cousins and cousins-in-law in their endeavors once they were here. In a time when political favors were delivered and returned no less frequently than today, though perhaps in a less subtle fashion, Max was a master in the trade, but always for a good cause.

Rose Cohen's death in 1911 left Max with three teenage daughters, each of whom was married by 1916. In 1914 Maude (b.1891) married Harry Levenson, who she had met at Old Orchard Beach, Maine, a favorite "mating ground" of the time. Harry, who along with his brother George operated the Star Store in Dover, New Hampshire, moved this business to 115-125 Main Street in Bangor. The store, which was located across the street from the New York Syndicate, specialized in women's clothing and served as an employer for numerous Cohen nieces, nephews and cousins. Harry and Maude's only child, Roger (b.1914), graduated from the University of Maine, served in the Army Air Force during the Second World War and then taught in junior and senior high schools in the San Francisco area. He operated a publishing and printing business in Berkeley, California, where he also taught at the University of California.

Harry Levenson introduced his sister-in-law, Pearl Cohen (b.1892), to Liverpool-born Joseph Wigon, who apparently called on the Star Store representing an adding machine company. They were married and resided for several years in Bangor where daughters Rose and Sally were born in 1917 and 1920. Joe founded Wigon Office Supplies in Portland after his employer was bought out by a larger firm. Both Wigon daughters were educated at Westbrook College; Rose joined the Portland City Clerk's office and then worked for some time at Wigon's prior to purchasing the Welch Stencil Company. She operated this until retiring several years ago. Sally has spent her entire career with Wigon's, which she continues to run.

Ada (b.1893) reflected more of the political side of her father. She was the first woman graduate of the University of Maine Law School and was the first woman to serve on the Bangor City Council (1928). She also served for many years on the Bangor School Board and was a leader in the Maine Republican



Max Cohen's political instincts and charisma accounted for his meteoric rise to king-maker. Photo, circa 1927. (Photo by Roger Levenson; courtesy of Gleeson Library, University of San Francisco) *Right*: Isidor and Mary Alpert, 1911. (Author's collection)

Party. Her only child, Roland (b.1915), attended the University of Maine until he was appointed to West Point. He was a battalion commander in the Second World War and later became a major general in the United States Army, where his career spanned thirty-three years.

Max remarried but later separated, living the last few years of his life at the Penobscot Exchange Hotel, just a few doors from his store. In a tribute to Max just after his death in 1930, Governor Baxter said: "The passing of Max Cohen removes a figure unique in the political life of Maine. Mr. Cohen was well known and respected throughout the state. His interest in politics was unselfish and he never swerved in his loyalty to his friends. His death is a personal loss to me. He was in every way a good citizen and that is tribute enough for any man."

Baxter's old nemesis, Ralph Owen Brewster, mirrored these sentiments when he said: "In the passing of Max Cohen, Eastern Maine loses one of the most dependable, unselfish and lovable figures interested in public life and also one of the best informed. To those who knew him well, and their number was legion, there will be a deep sense of personal loss. Always intensely interested in public affairs he was loyal to the last degree to his friends, with an affection that never varied. At the same time he offered an incisiveness of comment and a rank of knowledge and of memory that encompassed every situation and laid it bare with a kindly humor that was the delight of friend and foe."<sup>13</sup>

The catastrophic effects of the Depression were not at first as deeply felt in Maine as they were elsewhere in the country; however, by 1931 most of the state's industries went into a sharp decline. As banks began to fail, the fear of economic collapse sent lenders scurrying for their money. Simon Cohen, whose real estate holdings were heavily mortgaged, was caught between tenants who suddenly could no longer pay their rent and the banks who wanted immediate payment on their loans. Most of his buildings were sold at foreclosure proceedings, but the Boston Store, the Enterprise Shoe Store and the New York Syndicate survived. The Chain Apparel Stores were also retained and gradually expanded under the management of Simon's son-in-law, Harry Broder. By 1936, Samuel, Jr. was once again recorded in the city directory as a lawyer, although still working from the New York Syndicate Store address, and his brother Robert had become an insurance agent with offices at 199 Exchange Street. Their younger brother, Nathan, died a year later.

Cohen's Shoe Store on Pickering Square continued to operate until Jake's death in 1937. Jake and Alice's children - Ada (b.1904), Pauline (b.1910), Nathan (b.1913), Mae (b.1914), Sylvia (b.1916) and Eunice (b.1921) - all graduated from the University of Maine at Orono where Ada and Pauline were Phi Beta Kappas. Mae taught at Cottage Street School in Bangor prior to marrying Hy Karas, who she met at Old Orchard Beach. She settled in Marblehead, Massachusetts where her husband ran a wholesale auto supply business. Pauline, who earned a Master's degree in math, spent her career in Bangor teaching at Fairmount, Abraham Lincoln, Fruit Street and Bangor High