

OUR JEWISH DOWNTOWN

INTRODUCTION

I have always liked making lists...any kind of lists..supper menus for the week; what clothes I need for a trip; groceries I have to buy; upcoming family birthdays, anniversaries or other events, etc, etc, etc. In 1984, when Bangor celebrated the River City Festival, I wrote an article that was actually published in the Bangor Daily news about names of our streets. There are tree streets, Presidents named streets, Maine county names, and the like. For example, here we are on York Street...actually an old British name.

Consequently, since I have been helping out with the Documenting Maine Jewry project, it seemed natural that I started making a list of all the businesses in Bangor and the surrounding area that have been owned by members of our Jewish Community. Truthfully, I am astounded by the numbers I have discovered. When I was growing up in the 1940's and 1950's, one couldn't go downtown without, most likely, stopping in more than one store where you knew the proprietor either because of a family relationship or from seeing him or her at the JCC or in shul. Shmoozing with the owners was a must! Believe it or not, Saturday afternoon was a very popular time for Jewish housewives to put on their pretty dresses, hats, and gloves and go shopping. Furthermore, they would then stop for coffee or tea and pie at one of the Main Street restaurants before walking home.

As my list grew, I began to remember different incidents about going downtown, and I will now share them with you. I do apologize ahead of time for those businesses I either never knew or have forgotten. Thanks to those of you who have been patient with me while I've asked for information.

Marcia Lieberman...June 24,2012

Growing up in Bangor, I guess I took it as matter-of-fact that so many businesses were Jewish-owned. There were no malls until the 1960's; everyone shopped downtown. Main Street had always been the locale of most of the stores. However, Central Street, State Street, Pickering Square, Exchange Street, Oak Street, Harlow Street, Columbia Street, Water Street, Washington Street, Franklin Street, Hammond Street, and others also were the homes of many businesses, both retail and wholesale.

Getting downtown was a little challenging as my parents didn't have a car until I was about eleven; nor did my mother ever drive. Consequently, when she had errands downtown, she usually walked. The occasions that I accompanied her, then, were always interesting. We would walk down Essex Street, to Somerset, taking a left on Broadway. Several old homes, even more than today, lined the wide boulevard. Grassy areas divided the to and fro one-way, traffic on each side. I preferred to walk past an abandoned home, surrounded by an intricate black iron fence. The windows were all shuttered; the dark raspberry paint was peeling. One would think that a small child would be frightened as it certainly looked like a haunted house; however, it was my favorite place to stop! The reason why was its

granite “up and down” staircase that had a nice landing on the top. I would get the go-ahead from my mother so I climbed one side, pause on the top, and pretend I was performing on stage. I would sing and dance, then obediently come down the other side so we could continue on our way to State Street.

Imagine my grownup delight a few years ago when I found a watercolor painting of that house, done in the late 1940’s by a local artist hanging on a wall in a local antique shop! I knew I was meant to own it! It now hangs proudly over our piano in our family room, along with some other Bangor pictures.

Going home, however, Mom often took the Hudson bus to return to our neighborhood. Hudson was a privately owned company; the busses were gray and blue, unlike the city-owned orange vehicles in Bangor today. I remember waiting at one of the many stops for the Garland Street bus. The fifteen or so minute ride would eventually end for us at the corner of Garland and Essex Street. We would depart and walk one block down to our house on Essex Street. It surely did beat walking up State Street hill! After all, Bangor’s downtown is REALLY down in the town! Bangor spreads from there up several hills to the other sections of the city. Walking uphill was not fun, especially when one was carrying heavy shopping bags!

One could, on the other hand, almost hurry DOWN State Street; that is, if one didn’t stop first at Janel’s photo shop to say “hi” to Dan and Esther Rosen, the proprietors. I found the smell of photo film interesting; it made the store very unique. (For that matter, I found their tall, good-looking son, Bob, also interesting when he asked me on my first “date”. However, we were only twelve! His parents drove us to the Jewish Community Center; Mrs. Rosen was craning her neck from the front seat to look at us and attempting a generic conversation about the weather simultaneously!)

In any event, we finally reached the foot of State Street Hill. The old Park Theater was on the right. I envied anyone going there to see movies as the smell of freshly-made and buttered popcorn floated right the doors! My parents thought little of both the Park and Olympia Theater off Main Street (where Nathan “Nooky” Kamen ran the projector for many years). Their reasoning was that these had reputations for being dirty. Oh, well!

So, the first time I went to the Park was with my parents to see the beautiful musical, “Showboat.” I loved the songs, the costumes, scenery, and story. My aunt, who had a piano long before I did, bought the music sheet for “Ol Man River.” I would pretend to play it even though I couldn’t yet read the notes. However, I would sing it over and over again until my father called me Lily Pons!

In any event, across the intersection of State and Harlow Streets, one could see Allen Drug and Allen’s East Side. Both were owned by Eddie Allen. His family was one of the more active groups here at Congregation Beth Israel Synagogue in its earliest years. The East Side location was a great place to stop for a sandwich or snack. My mother knew a nice waitress named Madeline who always seemed to be there when we went to have a refreshment.

Continuing down State Street towards Main Street, Mom might make other quick stops at Bangor Savings Bank or even Lyford-Woodard, a furrier store. She had a black Persian lamb coat many years ago

that, I believe, spent the summer there in storage. Picture and Gift Shop came next. Ann and Alfred Abrahams owned this small store full of greeting cards, framed pictures, and other interesting gift items. I loved looking at all the pretty things and I grew to love picking out cards for all occasions. There were cards from Hallmark, Norcross, and Rust Craft. I bet none cost more than \$1.50! I thought I was dreaming when my husband landed a job selling for the Rust Craft Company in 1972! After all, I then access to many discarded pieces of merchandise as well as new samples!

Picture and Gift also sold custom invitations and stationery products. My mother bought me my very own note paper there, light gray with cranberry ink titled "This'n'That from Marcia! That was my birthday present when I turned six. I believe that started me in loving to write letters and thank-you notes!

As for the owners, I remember Mr. A. to be short and a little stout; he wore suspenders to keep his trousers in place! He worked in the back room, framing pictures. Annie, on the other hand, was a tall, heavy-set, dramatically-dressed woman with a very commanding air. Her younger brother, Henry Miller, also worked in the store. In later years, after Mr. A. died, Annie sold the store to Henry and his friendly and attractive wife, Adele. The store was later moved to lower Main Street when Adele was the sole owner.

It was in those years, the 1970's and 1980's, that Annie bought and lived in the house next door to us. My boys drove her crazy playing whiffleball on our back lawn so that the small white hole-filled ball would frequently hit the outside wall of her house. She would sit at her open kitchen window, puffing on a cigarette at the same time, calling the police to report on our boys' activities. However, when they were old enough to drive, they became her chauffeurs every time she went either to see her friend, Lena Berger, or take her and Lena down to Millers' Restaurant for a meal. The boys would pick her up when the hostess called to say she was ready! Remembering Annie as a businesswoman and then, as a fun neighbor, will always make me smile!

At last, we were in the heart of downtown. There weren't as many cars on the road then; however, there were many more people walking on the sidewalks! Shoppers bustled from store to store on Main Street. There were stores of every type: Five-and Dime stores like Woolworth's and J.J. Newbury's to specialty shops such as Spanglers' Foods. The latter was where my mother bought delicious, but smelly bleu cheese from the wheel and white loaves of Pullman bread slice horizontally to make those fancy rolled sandwiches for her bridge club ladies. She stuffed them with various fillings: tuna and sweet gherkin pickles; egg salad with green olives, and cream cheese with maraschino cherries. Mom would wrap them in damp dish towels (no saran wrap then!) and keep them in the refrigerator overnight. She would pacify Dad and me with the less desirable end pieces, to await the hoped-for leftovers after the women went home.

More importantly, there were three large department stores: Freeses', Sears Roebuck, and W.T. Grant. These three were really the "anchor stores" of downtown. Grants, as we called it, was built in the late 1940's and boasted a mezzanine floor over the first floor. A gray metal balcony protected inquisitive

children like me who loved to stand practically on top of it to peer over and watch the hustle and bustle of the people downstairs. They had a great candy counter where my mother always bought a little bag of licorice or Boston beans. However, she also would treat me with those little valentine hearts with sayings on them and occasionally jellybeans! The two things that my mother liked in Sears were their fresh cashew nuts sold by the pound and steamed hotdogs on rolls! Of course, the meat wasn't kosher...don't ask! F.W. Woolworth was built on two levels after two former stores vacated and the dividing walls were torn down. Again, it was some kind of food that my mother shopped for there; they had a small bakery filled with delicious homemade cookies, buns, etc. Our favorites were the thin rolled and sliced date-filled cookies. Mom always asked if they used vegetable shortening instead of the forbidden lard. I liked sitting at their lunch counter, sipping on a grape drink.

So, I soon learned about all the stores where my parents shopped. Many were owned by our local Jewish families. For starters, there were the jewelry stores: Manhattan Jewelers, Crown Jewelers, Striar's Jewelers. Day's Jewelry was owned by a Portland family; they actually still exist near our Bangor Mall. GM Pollacks's came to Main Street much later and does still exist in the Bangor Mall. Once owned by the Pollack family of Portland, it was sold to company employees a few years ago. A wholesale jewelry business, Josten's, was managed by my dad's friend, Moe Fineson. Moe sold class rings to schools.

The Jewish-owned clothing stores were Allan-Lewis, Economy Clothing owned by a Cohen family, Lieberman's Clothing, Louis Saltzman Clothing, George's Men's Clothes, John Paul Clothing, Burdell's, David Braidy's Women's Clothing, Cortell-Segal Women's Clothing, Henry Segal Men's Clothing, Peter's Fashion Center owned by Peter Schwartz. Allan-Lewis was owned by Allan Cohen and Louis Rolsky. In later years, it moved to Main Street and was purchased by my in-laws, Barry and Maxene Lieberman. The Bell Shop was owned by Jewish people from the Boston area. I bought at least one item there...a dark green cinch belt for \$1!! In more recent times, David Sklar relocated from Old Town where his father, Ben, ran Ben Sklar Clothing for many years. David, however, found a store available in the Broadway Shopping Center and moved the business there as Dave Sklar Clothing.

My mother, when looking for a new dress, would go to Rines for the most part. However, I remember shopping with her also in David Braidy's, Burdell's, and Cortell-Segals. Burdell's later became H.M. Goldsmith, when Harvey Hillson, another of David's relatives, bought it from the Rothschild family. I was married at that time and earned a family discount, so you can bet I shopped there a lot!. Before it closed for good, the store actually moved locations from upper Main Street to across the street below Freeses' where the New Atlantic Restaurant had been. Harvey had a great persona! He was always smiling and carrying a big, unlit cigar. His family in past years owned Hillson Cleaners in Orono.

By the 1960's, Cortell-Segals had also moved from lower Hammond Street to the former Star Store location. It was there that I purchased 5 maternity outfits for \$2 apiece as well as a brand-new blue denim with a plaid bow. Expecting my first baby in style was easy and fun, thanks to Jim Segal and his mother, Julia.

An interesting fact was that my mother actually purchased her suits custom-made by Mr. Ed Morris, a Jewish tailor whose shop was on the second floor of a Main Street building. I loved looking at swatches of material and buttons...loads of buttons! My mother would get measured; then, she would pick the material and style. I know she had suits with peplum jackets and pretty buttons. Dave Goldberg was another Bangor tailor. His shop was on the second floor of a lower State Street building. I discovered many years later that he was a brother to Grammy Goldsmith (Eva), my future mother-in law's mom.

Freese's provided many adventures for me through the years. Even while it was owned by the Freese family, several Jewish people were employed there. Whenever my mother and I went downtown, we had to make the "rounds" of all five floors, either to visit friends or pacify me in the toy department. We went in the men's clothing entrance to chat with Archie K. Archie waited on my mother mostly near Father's Day and my dad's birthday. She would purchase anything from boxer shorts and white handkerchiefs with colored stripe borders to the latest Arrow shirts. My dad bought his own ties and hats. Most men wore top hats in the 1940's and early 1950's! Archie was a brother to Nathan, the aforementioned "Nooky."

Once we finished in the Men's department, we would go see if Archie's sister, Bertha, might be working in cosmetics. A widow, Bertha was very friendly; she laughed a lot. She was short and stocky. Her feet looked very swollen, popping out of her always stylish spectator pumps. Bertha was an occasional employee there.

Following any necessary stops to the basement housewares departments to purchase a new pressure cooker ring or the latest gadget, we would take the Otis elevator up to the fourth floor. A small gray-haired man ran the vehicle. "Move to the back" he would shout! First, we would go see Fannie G. in Curtains. Fannie was white-haired, quiet, and very sweet. Her blue eyes, behind wire-rimmed glasses, always seemed to sparkle. It was great back then to have your personal clerk in each department! Fannie was our neighbor on Essex Street, so I knew her quite well. However, I wasn't very interested in curtain-shopping and would urge my mother to move along!

Next came Aprons and Housedresses. Ida K. was in charge there. She was a sister to Archie and Bertha. Ida was taller than Bertha, also white-haired, and quiet. She was always fussing with the aprons and housedresses under her supervision. I enjoyed looking at all the different colors and patterns of the clothing there; but, my mother was always warning not to muss everything up, making Ida's day a little harder. Actually, I think Ida was happier when we left than when we arrived!

Last of all was the third floor stop, Millinery, my second favorite place in Freese's; of course, Toys was my #1 stop! Jennie G., Fannie's sister worked there. Jennie was shorter than Fannie, dark-haired and very out-going. Both sisters were spinsters. Jennie worked there part-time and would encourage me to try on any hats I desired! How much fun was that for a 6 or 7-year-old?! I would try on the latest creations, especially the hats with the wide brims, and look at myself in the mirrors! Jennie showed me how to use a hand-held mirror so I could check out the back view! It wasn't until several years later, when as a married and pregnant woman, did I purchase my first wonderful summer hat, a black straw, wide-brimmed, with a white ribbon and artificial flower attached to the edge where hat met brim from

Jennie. I felt like I had “arrived.” I was never bored there and always enjoyed the times I spent there! Freeses’ was eventually sold to another Massachusetts family and moved to the Airport Mall before it closed forever. My husband, David, as a Revlon salesman in 1969, actually serviced those products at that location.

There was also a children’s store downtown in the early 1950’s, Jay’s Youth Center. I thought it was wonderful to go into a store that focused on kids! I didn’t have to be bored watching my mother try on dresses! Jays’ was owned by the Maurice Cohen family that also owned Manhattan Jewelers. However, it was later sold to the Schiro family from the shoe stores and became Standard Youth Center. There are snapshots of me in the snow dressed in my beautiful brown winter coat and hat that came from Jay’s. I also remember a brown and pink cotton dress that I got there. Standard Youth was where I later bought clothes for our three children. They usually wore clothes purchased from Standard’s in their posed photos!

There was a ladies’ store owned by my in-laws (before they became so) called The Karol Shop. The building where Rines’, a beautiful women’s shop, was located was actually owned by Abe and Ida Goldsmith .Before my time, Edith Lipsky also owned a women’s clothing shop, The Dainty Waist.

Then, there were the shoe stores. Abe Berg, a short man who walked to work with his top hat tipped to one side, owned one on Pickering Square, an area directly behind Main Street. Schiro’s was also on the “Square”; however, that family opened a larger store called “Standard Shoe Store” on Main Street. Later, more “Standards” opened at the newer Airport and Bangor Malls. There were also the Hub Shoe Store and Enterprise Shoe on Main Street, with but a few other buildings dividing them. I have to say that the most uncomfortable pair of shoes I bought were dyed peach at Enterprise, owned by Morris Shafmaster. I wore them as a bridesmaid at a wedding where they hurt so badly that I went barefoot after the ceremony. Unforgettable!

The Star Store on upper Main Street was owned by a Mr. Levenson. I remember it as a much smaller department store than Freeses’. The only time I actually can recall going in there with my mother was when she was looking for new curtains for our kitchen on Essex Street. My mother loved a certain red, black, and green print; she bought them and was so excited to bring them home to try. Well, the kitchen was yellow with blue linoleum on the floor and countertops. These curtains, in my young estimation, absolutely and positively did not blend well together. However, my opinion had no weight ; she kept them; they lasted until my parents bought their first house in 1960. I didn’t feel badly about bidding them adieu.

Miscellaneous businesses were also Jewish-owned. My future in-laws had the Carroll Cut Rate Shops on Main and lower Hammond Street; they sold health and beauty aids, leather goods, cosmetics, and the like. My only recollections of that store happened when I was graduating from Bangor High and later, when I became engaged to David, the older son of the owner. Ruth Lieberman, a tall thin woman who decorated herself with makeup, scarves, and jewelry, got very excited when my mother and I went in to buy a manicure set I could take to college. She realized that one of her sisters-in-law had a niece going to be a freshman at Boston University School of Nursing as I was about to do! Indeed, Wilma and I

not only became friends; she was also my maid of honor four years later! We are still very close with our shared aunt, who is now ninety! P.S. I still have the manicure set (well, most of it) and I wear eye shadow, lest I not feel fully dressed, according to Ruth! I looked at her, somewhat doubtfully, then bought the blue eye shadow, and I've followed that original with many others since! Eddie Allen also owned a Main Street cut-rate store.

Joe and Frank Glazier operated Claire's, also on lower Hammond Street. They sold pipes, leather goods, and moccasins. Joe also owned Automatic Music which his son, Neil took over. They supplied restaurants and bars with machines one could put a quarter into and select a favorite popular song of the day. Claire's, on the other hand, eventually was managed for several years by Alan Glazier, Frank's son.

Irving and Charlotte Broder owned the Boston Button Store, later renamed as the Boston Store, a clothing store for all ages, lasted into my children's era; Amy, Jim, and Matt were even featured in tv ads, thanks to owners Irving and Charlotte Broder! David, who travels the State of Maine as a salesman, was very surprised one night in a Madawaska hotel to suddenly see his kids on tv! The Levis brand helped make that business successful.

There were drug stores, too: Priest Drug Store, Allen Drug, and Allen's East Side. The last two had great lunch counters. My mom would occasionally treat me to a snack at either. I liked Madeline, a very nice waitress there! Post Office Pharmacy was located on Harlow Street, one block from Allen's. Mickey Allen Ed's son, moved the business sans a lunch counter to the West Side of Bangor on the corner of Hammond Street and Webster Ave. Brother Richard started Adco Medical supply company in the same vicinity. Some years later, Adco was purchased by Sam Nyer, another Bangor businessman who also owned the Nyle Corp. in Brewer.

POP was owned by the Shapero family of which my pediatrician, as well as my children's, was a brother. When they moved one block down and my children were old enough to run up and down the aisles, they somehow usually came home frequently with candy! They would get a huge laugh out of an older clerk at the cashier's spot who was always watching her soaps on a small tv while working. Personally, I think she gave them the candy!

Miller Drug was never downtown, but on State Street; it emerged from a variety store started by Abe and Freida. Freida was one of the early kosher caterers here; her mother, Mrs. Share worked with her for several years. Inside Miller Variety was a great lunch counter managed, of course, by Freida. Bill, their son, graduated from pharmacy school in Boston and started what has now grown to a chain of four stores in Bangor and Brewer and affiliated with Eastern Maine Healthcare. Bill is a stalwart member of the Bangor business community, the Bangor Band, the Bangor Symphony Orchestra, and First Gabbi at Beth Israel Synagogue. EVERYONE knows Billy! In the 1960's, the Liggett-Rexall pharmacy opened a branch at the Broadway Shopping Center. Arnold Garson bought that franchise.

Years later, Priest moved from Exchange Street to Broadway near Mary Snow School. It was then known as Sunset Drug, both owned by Sidney Alpert. As a relative to Morris and Isadore Alpert, he once had worked with them in Morin Tobacco Co., selling tobacco products and candy. It began in Old Town

but did relocate to State Street out of the downtown area. Bangor Candy was owned by the Kaprow family. Both were wholesale business. Another wholesale business was Bangor Egg Co. , partnered by William Emple and William Rosen. They actually sold beer!

Not far from Allen drug at the beginning of Harlow Street, there was an upstairs beauty shop owned and operated by Jennie Bluestein. I loved going there with my Aunt Mim. It was so much fun to see ladies getting permanents, but the smell of the solution used was AWFUL! Jennie, on the other hand, was sweet and so friendly!

Central Street was the home in the 1950's to Stevens Studios. Operated by the Ollove family, it was a popular place to have one's graduation picture taken. Albert Klyne many years before also had a photo studio. His wife, Jean and son-in-law, Nat Diamond ran the business for many years. My wedding portrait was done there.

There were even grocery stores/meat markets in the downtown area. Many years ago, Jewish men opened small groceries and butcher shops in the Hancock Street area, such as Jacob Chason. I can remember Gotlieb and Rolnick, the White Front, Wagman's and Harry Gedal's store. Sam Schneider had a kosher shop at the foot of Essex Street. I used to go there on Sunday mornings with my father. The floor was covered with sawdust, and there was a swinging gate at the counter. Later on, Sam's son, Mickey, took it over and relocated to State Street in what was previously Sklar's Delicatessen. Philip and Mollie Sklar were the owners. I loved her, but "Fishel" would make believe he grabbed my nose and scare me half to death! In any event, one could purchase the necessary foods for a delicious Sunday night supper at Sklar's: cottage cheese in brown paper tubs, sour cream in glass jars, and whole whitefish that my dad would carefully bone for eating. Mickey expanded the stock and sold meat and poultry there for many years afterward. Others who had little grocery stores in the area were Mrs. Zitaner, Jack Wald, Harry Rabin, and Harry Plesset further up Essex Street. Plessets' was right near our house; so, I went there many times, usually doing a quick errand for my mother.

Three other downtown meat and grocery stores were owned by the Gotlib brothers: Louis, Aaron, Abe, and "Lanky". Two were on the same block as my father's luncheonette on Pickering Square. The other was on Central Street. It always amazed me that the brothers were all in competition! Harold Grodinsky ran a grocery store on Ohio Street, several blocks away from the general business district, and Larry Miller was the proprietor of yet another on the corner of Garland Street and Forest Ave.

The Lavoot family owned a bakery, and the other bakery was owned by three siblings: Ruby, Dick, and Gitel Cohen. Known for years as Bangor Rye, the latter now survives still producing its famous bulkie rolls. It is known as Brick Oven Bakery and was sold by Ruby's family to two sons of a high school classmate of mine. When Dunkin Donut came to town, Maury Rich smartly bought a franchise. He did very well and subsequently sold out and retired to Florida.

Restaurants in Bangor were dominated by Greek families. However, my dad ran Berson's Luncheonette on the "Square" for seven years in the Forties until "Red" Cowan took it over. There was also the Midget Lunch probably so named because of its tiny size. My mother-in-law's Uncle Jake Braveman, a man of very small stature, and his youngest daughter, Marcia, ran it; they were also located

on the "Square." Izzy Solomon owned a lunch place on the corner of Essex and State Street. After his untimely death, John "Buddy" Gass bought it. Cy Chamoff owned a small deli restaurant on Central Street.

Miller's Restaurant was located on lower Main Street and was a most popular eating spot until it closed a few years ago. Teenagers flocked there after basketball games at the Bangor Auditorium. Their Red Lion addition contained a large banquet room that offered kosher meals. Rabbi Henry Isaacs from Beth Abraham was the mashgiach. Many wedding receptions were held there as well as other Jewish community events. It was great to have had that choice as by then, the Jewish Community Center had become quite dilapidated unfortunately.

Max Kominsky owned the Brass Rail, a very popular eatery into the 1960's. Gordon Striar purchased the Paramount Hotel and opened a Chinese eatery there. Louis Cooper was once owner of the Penobscot Hotel. Its dining area was very nice as I recall. I can remember going there with my parents and uncle. White cloth tablecloths and matching napkins adorned the tables-for-four.

Much to the contrast, my uncle, Gilbert Michelson, ran Mike's Lunch in a small red building next to the Viner Shoe Factory. Workers from the factory went there for his great hamburgers, hot dogs, and other sandwiches. He was a great cook, later becoming a kosher caterer, along with his wife, Helen. Mr. Weiss ran a small eatery downtown, also.

A few ladies many years ago ran their own businesses. Mrs. Bell had a bar on State Street; Annie Berger, on the other hand, ran an antique store. My grandmother, Sophie Berson, had a cow in her barn! She sold milk from it; her two older sons, Jack and Morris, delivered it on foot, even to customers in Brewer. I can't imagine that was very lucrative! In the 1940's, Anne Gass Hamilton Bloom sold antiques in her Essex Street house. In more recent times, Jean Chamoff started Balloons Overhead.

Two other businesses, one close to downtown, were also conducted at home: Sam Stern's Antiques and Pels Zipper. My parents had a beautiful cranberry glass pitcher decorated with sprigs of flowers that came from Sam's place. I, no doubt, had a record number of caught or broken zippers. Lucky for me, it was only a two-block walk to the Pels house to have them repaired!

Across from the railroad station on Washington Street was Oscar's Lunch. They had great custard pie! Ben Rich, our neighbor on Essex Street, owned Oscar's. My parents often took me there.

The railroad neighborhood was home to even more Jewish businesses. Our neighbors, Lillian and Harry Goldstein, owned Richardson's Variety, a hangout for lumbermen who came in on weekends mostly. It was located on lower Exchange Street, across from Lieberman Brothers. Our favorite "sidebar" from Lieberman's Clothing, owned by my husband's grandfather and the latter's brother, was that when Abe (Grampy) took some money from the till, Uncle Lou couldn't hear him. On the other hand, when Lou took money from the till, Grampy couldn't see him! However, those physical problems didn't interfere with their savvy dealings with lumbermen who came in to buy clothing.

In the 1960's, a delightful business opened on Exchange street called Dorchester Decorators. It was owned by Lou and Eva Trembowler. They sold beautiful linens, towels, and other domestic merchandise. We were lucky to have received wedding shower and wedding gifts from there.

Also on Exchange Street, on the next block from Richardson's was Friedman Furniture. They moved to outer Main Street in the 1960's. We bought all our Ethan Allen furniture there. There were other Jewish-owned furniture stores: Home Radio and Furniture and New Central Furniture. "Furniture Sam" Rudman was the proprietor of Home. While I don't remember him, I knew we bought our first baby stroller there. New Central Furniture was owned by "Pappy Rappy" and "Smilin Dave" Rapaport and was located on State Street just up the street from Sklar's Delicatessen. They advertised heavily, featured with caricatures of their faces. Another Rapaport owned Zeke's (Used) Furniture, also near downtown. An upholstery repair shop, Bangor Upholstery, was on Hammond Street Hill. Joseph Meltzer was the owner. One cold November day, as a high school sorority initiate, I was ordered to roll a hot dog down the hill! I was so embarrassed and just hoped that neither Mr. Meltzer nor his son, Jack, would see me! A Meltzer relative, Sam Grunko, owned another such business, Brewer Upholstery across the river.

Many years before my parents even knew each other, Leo Brown owned a gas station on York Street. He later opened City Oil, and it located to Brewer. We purchased heating oil from Leo when we first got married in 1964; it cost around 89 cents a gallon!! Leo's brother, Bob, also a Bangor resident, owned Green Point Salvage ; however, that was also in Brewer. The Bluestein brothers also had a junkyard.

Other Bangor businessmen owned commercial establishments in Brewer were Harold Epstein, Louis Rolnick, and his brother Isadore. The Byer Manufacturing Co. in Orono was run by the Byer and Bayer families of Bangor. Similar to the Jewish peddlers in the early part of the 20th century, a few others still sold door-to-door clothes and household products in the rural areas. Dave Dorsky and Martin Cantor were two of those men. Still, there have been some, employed by companies out of the state, who have been traveling salesmen. My husband has sold toys, games, cosmetics, gift goods, souvenirs, and the like for many years and for various businesses to stores all around the State of Maine. My father, after selling his luncheonette and attempting an egg business, went to work in Belfast as a wholesale poultry salesman. He drove all the way to Kansas City, MO and Detroit, MI in the early 1950's!

Several Bangor men were cattle dealers, some beginning in the early years of the twentieth century when they arrived from Russia. Among them were Sam Less, Sam Seplin, Sam Smith, Shel David Striar, Baruch Striar and Harry Gopin. They were all members of Beth Abraham Synagogue.

One Bangor car dealership was Jewish-owned: Rapaport Lincoln-Mercury was headed by Jack Rapaport. The last car my dad owned was purchased there in 1985. My dad had a major stroke the end of that year; he gave the car to me. Nearby, Abe and Ben Braveman, sons of Jake, owned Braveman Tire. My dad was a lifelong friend of Benny. Phil Koritzky owned a car repair garage on Center Street.

Back on the "Square," Louis and Phil Striar ran Striar's Plumbing. They were great-uncles of my husband, younger brothers of Grammy (Minnie) Lieberman. Phil's daughter, Sheila has always been one of my best friends. When David and I got married, she became my cousin! Who says you can't choose your relatives?!

Sidney Epstein owned the Bangor Opera House, a movie theater that once had live concerts, plays, etc. I can remember this locally well-known businessman collecting tickets and then allowing us to enter the theater section through the opened dark red velvet rope attached to the brass post. It is the only old movie theater that survived our Urban Renewal era in the 1960's. The Park, Bijou, and Olympia were all demolished. He also owned the Bangor Drive-In Theater and the first local dairy bar on the top of State Street hill. Sidney grew his properties to become Epstein Real Estate, which still is prominent in commercial real estate here.

Regarding the real estate business, Kirstein's was the most popular in Bangor for many years. The Kirstein family was one of the German-Jewish families who settled here even before the more Eastern Europeans flocked to this area. There is a small cemetery started by that family located on outer Webster Ave. Dave Rapaport sold commercial real estate as well.

There were also several insurance businesses in Bangor. Many agents were members of the Jewish community: David Miller, Max Rapaport, Ben Goodstein (who had once owned a small restaurant), Max Kominsky, Lester Cohen, Mitch Finn, Ben Gopin. Actually, my dad worked for Metropolitan Life before I was born!

My favorite fun store to go was Viner Music. It started on Pickering Square in a small, two story building by two of the six Viner Brothers, Sam and Ben. Both loved music; Sam played in the Bangor Band. They sold records and sheet music but expanded to much more when they relocated to Broad Street. They rented instruments to students sold instruments, including pianos and organs; tv sets and record players as well as records, albums and sheet music. Music lessons were even offered in the store!

My mother's sister was married to James Viner, so I felt very comfortable going there! I remember often purchasing 45rpm hits for \$1 when I was a teenager. However, when I was 10, I actually bought my own used piano for \$150! I took my own savings to pay for that so I could take lessons. Years later, I sold the piano and used the money to buy material for our living room couch slipcover; after all, we had three very active kids who loved to climb up on it. Fortunately, my husband had brought his own, newer piano to our home after we were married, that had been a gift from his maternal grandparents. During the Christmas season, my mother would sometimes work at Viner's and loved all the busy activity there.

Meanwhile, three other Viners (Jim, Bill, and Leo) were busy running their shoe factory on the outer edge of downtown. Their father, Harry Viner, began with a small shoe repair shop on Gancock Street in the early 1900's. I still own one little relic from my uncle's office: a hole puncher that he gave me one Sunday morning when he took me on a tour. It was very quiet there on Sundays as everyone had the day off. They also had a warehouse. Later, they built a larger warehouse in a more industrial part of Bangor. My aunt would take me there and let me walk up and down aisles full of new, pretty shoes. I always managed to find a few pairs that I loved! An old Viner shoebox sans cover still serves to hold my old post card collection. In 1952 however Uncle Jim left the factory to go into the investment business. The oldest Viner brother, Edward, had moved many years before to New York City where he opened Edward A. Viner and Co. on Wall Street. So, Uncle Jim went there for several months to learn that business. He

came back to Bangor and subsequently created a branch of his brother's company on State Street across from Bangor Savings Bank.

In addition, there were other local shoe factories that were Jewish-owned: Kagan- Lown and Bangor Shoe (Mac Lacritz) . Penobscot Shoe (Sam Goodman) was in Old Town. Another Bangor man, Pinchos Medwed, related to the Viners, left his relatives here and started Medwed Shoe in the Waterville-Skowhegan area.

Not so glamorous as new shoes were the wholesale meat businesses Jewish-owned: Penobscot Beef (Louis Cooper); Bangor Beef (Harry Cohen and Morris Slep); United Beef (Barney Cooper); and Star Beef. The Kobritz family which owned Star Beef also owned and operated the Oronoka Restaurant on the road to Orono. N.J. Cohen and Sons sold fruits and vegetables wholesale. There were also Jewish-owned poultry plants in Bangor. While Star Beef was a modern building on Railroad Street, Maine Poultry and Lipman Poultry were older facilities out of the downtown area. The Lipmans moved their business to Augusta. Maine Poultry owned by Morris Singer was on Broadway near the future location of the Broadway Shopping Center. Irwin, Morris's son, actually became the owner of Maine Trailer Leasing after operating a furniture store on Broadway.

Gass Office Supply was begun by Julius Gass. It grew from small store on Park Street Hill to a larger space on Harlow Street. Standard Electric was a small appliance shop across from Abraham Lincoln School and later relocated and expanded to Farm Road, an industrial area. That's where my husband worked before we were married. His uncle, Julius Stone, was the successful owner. Meanwhile, David and his brother opened a wholesale beauty supply business on Exchange Street, named for both, Dabar Beauty Supply. It is now a barbershop. There actually was another wholesale beauty company in Bangor owned by another Jewish man, Isadore "Conk" Cohen, called Eastern Beauty. After David's brother left Dabar to work for his in-laws, David went to work for Eastern as a road salesman ,the same thing he did at Dabar.

Three different Jewish families started wholesale beverage companies in the area; Sam and Dave Rudman owned Rudman Beverage, a Pepsi distributor. The former was called "Pepsi Sam" as opposed to "Furniture Sam" who owned Home Radio. It was located in the Fairmount section of Bangor, not downtown. Eventually, the Haffenreffer Co. bought that business and moved it to Brewer. Bangor brothers, Sam and Gerald Tabenken owned a Cott soda distributorship; however, it was in Veazie. Lawrence Dennis owned Dennis Beverage , first in Ellsworth, then Veazie. His son Ron, now runs Dennis Paper in Bangor. Meyer Minsky started National Confectionery which grew and moved to become Superior Paper Products. Leonard, Meyer's son, ran that for many years until he sold the business.

Howard Shapiro, who originally came from Newport, ME, owned the Harlow Street Norge and a similar place in the Westgate mall on Union Street. They were combination self-Laundromat and dry cleaning establishments. Howard also owned a drive-up ice cream business in Newport. Another Bangor man, Cy Rolsky, was the proprietor of a clothing store in Newport. Perhaps, the biggest business owned by a Bangor man and later, his family, were the Striar Woolen Mills in Orono and Corinna.

Believe it or not, my maternal grandfather, Max Michelson, was James “Gimpel” Striar’s partner selling woolens in the 1920’s here in Maine. However, my grandfather died in 1922 at the age of 39 as a result of pneumonia. There were no antibiotics then; he died on the last day of Passover leaving a young widow with five children. My grandmother ran a grocery store in Veazie; she couldn’t make a living there and so moved with her brood to New York to be near relatives.

Emple Knitting Mills, started by Joseph Emple, began on Columbia Street. Eventually, the business, as several others before and after, relocated to Brewer in a new, custom-made facility. Sam Rolsky, Joe’s brother-in-law, operated a factory store on its premises. Emple relatives, our beloved Irving “Icky” and his brother, Maurice “Mousey” owned a men’s pants wholesale business.

What about hardware stores? The Hartstone borthers, Sheldon and Fred, owned Fairmount Hardware, away from downtown on Hammond Street. Later, Fred left to open his own store, Fred’s Hardware that was on Broadway, near the Broadway Shopping Center. Their father, Arthur, had a local roofing business. Grossman Hardware, owned by Phil Grossman, was on the corner of State and Adams Street, not far from the shuls. My husband’s cousin, Bernard “Bunzie” Striar, worked alongside Phil for many years. Not to be confused with Grossman Hardware was Grossman Lumber Co. from MA . They had a huge building on outer Hammond Street for quite a while; the founders of that business were prominent in the Boston Jewish community. Jack Friedman operated a home improvement store on Park Street in the 1960’s.

Harold Baron was the proprietor of B-Gas on State and Maple Street, still very much in existence . Harold and Rose’s daughter, Carol Lipton, is the present owner. Meanwhile, Lawrence Baron, owned Yellow Cab. That company still is in operation.

In more recent times, the last Jewish-owned eating establishment was The Bagel Shop. Richard Zabot was the originator. He and his wife had relocated here from Boston. It was kosher, and again, Rabbi Isaacs was the mashgiach. It was anomaly in the kosher world as they served both meat and dairy. I would order a piece of spinach pie, and the person sitting across the table would be wolfing down knockwurst! Anyway, Richard exited Bangor suddenly, and one of his employees bought the business. Sonya moved it to Central Street and renamed it to Bagel Central. Unfortunately, while Bagel Central is still here, it is no longer kosher.

So, one by one, the amazing number of Jewish businesses in Bangor and surrounding area disappeared, mostly due to the death of original owners or the sad inability of their heirs to maintain success. Some, as I have mentioned, moved to larger locations. Others were bought by larger corporations. For example, Standard Electric is now owned by the Westinghouse Company. In the end, not even that could help them survive. In addition, the appearance of various shopping malls and stores like Walmart added to the problem. Ward Bros., owned by a Jewish family from Lewiston, was a popular women’s store for several years at the Bangor Mall. It too is gone.

Very few present-day Jewish owned businesses exist here. Dennis Paper, B-Gas, Epstein Real Estate, and Miller Drug are the stand-outs. The Serota family still own Silver’s Auto Supply on the road to

Orono. David Cutler, whose family also owned a clothing store in Old Town, brought Cutler's Embroidery to Bangor; it is located on Main Street near the old Miller's Restaurant.

Today, members of our Jewish working community are not the peddlers of the early 1900's. Stories are similar about Cyrus Schiro, Wolf Lipsky, and Abraham Berson traveling into rural area with their horse-drawn wagons full of merchandise. I've heard how they stayed overnight with Christian families and kept their "kosher kitchen" items locked in the hosts' closets!

Nor, in most cases, are our present Jewish friends the shopkeepers of the 1940's and 1950's. They are instead health care professionals, lawyers, and educators. A few work in real estate as sales agents or in the apartment rental business. Two started eateries. Yet, big box stores line the outskirts of the city. Downtown businesses come and go; they struggle for the most part. Only in my mind's eye can I still envision the wonderful Jewish folksy downtown we once were lucky to have.