



Feature: "The Bronx is But a Memory"
By Carl Migden, see pages 10-11

Etz Chaim

עץ חיים

The Quarterly Journal of the
JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER ORLANDO

ETZ CHAIM, Vol. 14, No. 4, SUMMER 2004 Orlando, FL

MORDECAI

AN EARLY AMERICAN FAMILY



EMILY BINGHAM

Book Report:
"Mordecai" page 8

ETZ CHAIM

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Editorial Office

2619 Sweetwater Country Club Dr.
Apopka, FL 32712, USA
Jay Schleichkorn, Editor Phone 407-464-9445,
FAX - 407 -464-9445 E-mail: PTJay@AOL.com

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P.O. Box 941332, Maitland, FL 32794.

JGSGO meetings are held monthly (excluding July and
August), usually on the third Monday of the month, at 7:30
p.m., in the Learning Resource Center, Congregation of
Liberal Judaism (CLJ), 928 Malone Drive, Orlando, FL.
Sunday meetings, if and when scheduled by the JGSGO
directors start at 1:30 p.m.

*JGSGO's meeting site has been made available
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Societies.*



Federation of Genealogical Societies

P. O. Box 830220

Richardson, TX 75083-0220

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CALENDAR: Future JGSGO Programs + others

Monday, June 21, 2004: Regular Meeting, 7:30 p.m., in the
Mini-Sanctuary, Congregation of Liberal Judaism, 928
Malone Drive, Orlando, Program: "Following the Stars and
Stripes: How to Get Your Ancestors Military Records," Larry
Morrell – the meeting is in conjunction with the Jewish War
Veterans in memory of the late Moe Aronson.

**NOTE: No JGSGO Meetings in July and
August, Save Monday September 20th for the
first Fall meeting**

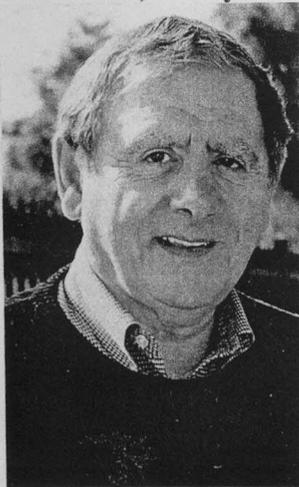
July 4-9, 2004: The 24th IAJGS International Conference on
Jewish Genealogy, Renaissance Jerusalem Hotel, Israel

September 8-11, 2004: "Legends Live Forever," Annual
Meeting of the Federation of Genealogical Societies, at the
Convention Center, Austin, Texas

November 12-13, 2004: The Florida State Genealogical
Society's 28th Annual Conference, Hilton Melbourne Rialto
Place, Melbourne, FL

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With half of the year over, JGSGO has been successful in several areas, notably:



...membership has increased, slowly but surely. We now have 70 members. Recruiting by Doris and Don Franks has shown results;

...our meeting facilities have been changed from the JCC to the Congregation of Liberal Judaism. CLJ is playing "host" to the JGSGO and their support is greatly appreciated;

...our small but growing library at the Holocaust Center will be moving to CLJ's Learning Resource Center. We owe the

Holocaust Center a debt of gratitude for housing our library and now look to CLJ to further its' purposes;

...we have established a Community Outreach Program under the chairmanship of Lori Zollman which we expect will introduce genealogy to many of the students in the local religious schools;

...we have revised the by-laws and have reverted to using terminology for the officers such as president, VP Membership, VP Program, Secretary and Treasurer: ...since January we have had five interesting programs geared to assist our genealogical projects;

...publicity in the Heritage describing JGSGO activities has been great thanks to Edith Schulman;

...Etz Chaim continues to be a vital link to all of our members and quarterly issues will be continued with Jay Schleichkorn as editor;

...two major contributions of books and materials have been received from the family of Jack Kornbluth and from former JGSGO member, Robert Marlin;

...following our successful Annual Meeting and Luncheon held in December, we have taken note of Rabbi Engel's suggestion that there be a Jewish Historical Society in Orlando We will continue to pursue the idea with further discussions;

...plans are underway for several special programs to be held in the fall. Mark your calendars for the 3rd Monday of the month starting on September 20;

...thanks to each of the Board members who give so much of their time;

...BUT – we still need volunteers to participate and take more responsibilities for the growth of the JGSGO.

Have a great summer!

Jerry Kurland, President

FLASH....

On Sunday, May 16, Rose and Hy Meltz were honored and named recipients of the Myrtle Wreath Award by the Orlando Chapter of Hadassah. The Award is the highest award Hadassah can bestow. It was given in appreciation for the 20 years plus of service by the Meltzes to the Orlando Jewish Community.

HY AND ROSE MELTZ MOVE OUT OF TOWN

Hy Meltz, a member of the JGSGO since 1991 and his wife, Rose, have moved from Oveido and the Orlando area.

They put their home up for sale and moved to the Kobernick House, an independent living facility under Jewish auspices in Sarasota.



In a March 12 e-mail, Hy wrote, "It's like living in a fancy hotel. Many advantages. A wonderful kosher dinner each evening, a nice apartment which is cleaned for us weekly, many amenities. Our address is: 1953 N. Honore Ave., Apt A301, Sarasota, FL 34235. Y'all come see us when you're down this way. Zei gezunt."

Gene Starn, founder of the JGSGO and the Heritage Florida Jewish news wrote a lengthy article about Hy which was published in the issue of January 30, 2004. Here's part of it: "For five years – from March 1992 to March 1997 – Orlando's Hy Meltz delighted radio audiences with Jewish music each week. Now his records are being safeguarded and preserved in the Judaica archives at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, Florida, eventually to be heard by anyone throughout the world.

Although he had no broadcast experience, he had lots of records and a passion for Jewish music.

Although the music was dear to his heart, HY knew it would be a burden to shelve it all with him. Instead he gave his recordings to a project he had just heard about a few months earlier – the Judaica Music Rescue Project, part of the Jewish archival collections at the Wimberley Library of the university."

Hy also conducted special classes to revive and keep up with the Yiddish language. Hundreds of local Orlando Jewish folks took part in those programs.

Starn quoted a visitor to the Molly S. Fraiber, Judaica Collections, on the fifth floor of the Wimberley Library. The visitor said, "The project is taking music from the past, preserving it in the present, for the generations of the future."

Best wishes for many Happy and Healthy Days to Rose and Hy in their new environment.

JGSGO BY-LAW CHANGE APPROVED

After three readings and notification to the membership, a vote was taken on May 18, 2004, on a change in Article V of the JGSGO By-laws; Officers and Board of Directors. The change was approved and names the positions as officers rather than listing all as directors. Section B now reads: Officers will consist of a 1) President, 2) 1st Vice President, 3) 2nd Vice President, 4 Secretary, and 5) Treasurer.

4) There are 5 members in good standing elected by the membership, a president and 4 officers. Two of three directors are appointed by the Board of Directors as: 1) webmaster, 2) Etz Chaim editor, and the immediate past president shall automatically have the option to serve as the third director.

Edith Schulman proposed the motion, seconded by Doris Frank and passed.



Preparing for the JGSGO's June 21 (Monday) meeting, Edith Schulman, VP Programming and Larry Morrell discuss the special program. Larry will present "Following the Stars and Stripes: How to Get Your Ancestors Military Records." The program will also involve members of the Jewish War Veterans and a memorial to JGSGO Charter Member Moe Aronson.

The meeting will be held in the Mini-Sanctuary at the Congregation of Liberal Judaism, starting at 7:30 p.m.

THE FLORIDA STATE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY, INC.

28th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

12 - 13 November 2004

Hilton Melbourne Rialto Place
Melbourne, Florida

The Florida State Genealogical Society (FSGS) is pleased to announce their 28th Annual Genealogical Conference will be held in Melbourne, Florida in November 2004 and we take this opportunity to invite you to attend. This exciting conference will feature a main speaker and other lectures on topics in five (5) tracks: Beginning and Intermediate Genealogy, Society Helps, Florida Research and Computers & Genealogy.

Registration will be on Thursday evening and Friday mornings with the conference starting on Friday morning and continuing through Saturday afternoon. The full two-day registration includes the lectures, the Friday Banquet and the Saturday Luncheon.

Regionally and nationally acclaimed suppliers of the latest and best genealogy books, maps, CD's, periodicals, software, supplies, etc. will be available at the conference in the exhibit area for your shopping needs.

The annual banquet, held on Friday night, will honor individuals who have documented their Florida pioneers through the Florida Pioneer Descendants Certification Program. Certificates will be presented to qualifying descendants of pioneers who settled in Florida prior to statehood on 3 March 1845. In addition, awards will be given to individuals who have exemplified their dedication to genealogy.

To request conference and registration information, please contact: C. Ann Staley, State Conference Chairman
P. O. Box 441364, Jacksonville, FL 32222

Email: astaley@comcast

(Editor's Note: The JGSGO is a member of the Florida State Genealogical Society)

GENEALOGY SURFERS SURGE

The Internet is a barometer of the nation's concerns, and last month, genealogy was on America's mind. According to Internet stats firm comScore Media Metrix (<http://www.comscore.com/metrix>), genealogy Web sites received 21.4 percent more unique visits in January than in December. That's a total of 12.5 million hits, making genealogy the sixth-fastest-growing Internet category last month-possibly reflecting New Year's research resolutions and the afterglow of family get-togethers.

A total of 11.5 million unique visitors to MyFamily.com sites (including <http://www.genealogy.com>, <http://www.ancestry.com> and <http://www.rootsweb.com>) made them 45th among Web properties in the number of unique hits. Sites about taxes, politics, diet and travel dominated the most-visited lists (of course, that was before the Super Bowl halftime show).

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STUMP THE PANEL -April 19th Meeting



Left to right: The "Stump the Panel" included Carl Migden, Sheila Reback and Sim Seckbach.

It was quite an evening with three of the JGSGO members serving as the "experts" and the audience raising all kinds of questions related to genealogy. On the panel, we heard from Sheila Reback, Carl Migden and Sim Seckbach. Many topics were touched upon; from finding birth information to military discharges in Albany, NY. The panel answered queries related to immigration records, the Family Tree of the Jewish People, the American Jewish Archives, Declarations of Intent and Naturalization papers, immigration between 1880 and 1900, WWI records, the Archives at Eastport, Georgia, The German research Companion, Yearbooks, and the Roots to Routes Foundation and publications.

In the "business" part of the evening, we had the second reading of the proposed change of officer's titles in the by-laws, and the second read for changing the dues structure with an increase of \$ 5.00 effective in January 2005.

Lori Zollman, chairing the Outreach Committee reported making contact with school administrators, surveying what they do with genealogy and planning on attending an August meeting of the religious school administrators.

The meeting was held at our new site, the Mini-Sanctuary, Congregation of Liberal Judaism, Orlando.

GLADYS FRIEDMAN PAULIN, CGRS, SPEAKER AT THE MAY 17TH MEETING



Gladys Friedman Paulin, CGRS (Certified Genealogical Records Specialist) was the speaker at the May 17th JGSGO meeting held in the Mini-Sanctuary, at the Congregation of Library Judaism, Orlando. Her subject was "Non UrbanJewish Immigrants: Farmers, Cowboys and Small Town Jews."

Using a highly professional Power Point slide program, Gladys traced the history of the first Jewish colonists in New Amsterdam to the major influx of Jews in the early 1900s. She spoke about Jacob Schiff and the Galveston Plan, the Industrial Removal Office, Ararat and Mordecai Manual Noah's dream in Grand Island, New York; New Jerusalem in 1823, Isaac Mayer Wise and Beersheba, Kansas, 1882, and Sicily island, Louisiana in 1882.

She described the failures of The Farm School and the Agriculture Aid Society, Cotapaxi, CO, and "how barren land, fire, drought, bad crops, poor land, crop failures and inexperience" doomed many of the poor immigrants from success in agriculture. The work of Baron de Hirsch and some success with farm colonies in New Jersey; Rockville, CT; Hirsch SD' and Clarion, UT was described

Gladys also spoke about her genealogical research in Saskatchewan and finding family records, Jewish agriculture today and where to find records of the non-urban Jews. It was a interesting and educational evening... thanks to Gladys's expertise.

HAROLD HARMATZ DIES

Some of the readers of *Etz Chaim* must be saying, "Was Harold Harmatz a JGSGO member?" The answer is NO. But to those members who grew up and lived in New York, Harmatz may have been well known. He was the owner of Ratner's the Lower East Side kosher dairy restaurant.

He died at the age of 91 on April 27, 2004, at an assisted-care home in Melville, NY.



Harold Harmatz in 1993.

Harold Harmatz began helping his father, Jacob, to run Ratner's in 1944. Harold took on all operations in the mid-1950's and continued working at the restaurant until it was closed in 2002 to make way for the expansion of Lanksy Lounge, which his sons, Robert Harmatz and his brother, Fred, opened in the rear of Ratner's in 1997.

It was an experience to eat at Ratner's.

Jacob Harmatz opened Ratner's with his brother-in-law in 1905 on Pitt Street, serving meatless kosher meals to the area's large Jewish population. To name the restaurant, the two men flipped a coin. Mr. Ratner won the toss. In 1918, he sold his share to Mr. Harmatz and moved to California. The same year, Harmatz moved the restaurant to 138 Delancy Street.

Harold Harmatz was trained as a lawyer but spent his time worrying about such things as onion rolls, blintzes and the restaurant's staff of famously no-nonsense waiters. In the mid-1950's, Ratner's was serving 1,200 people for Sunday brunch. In 1958, Mr. Harmatz expanded the restaurant to accommodate 344 diners and kept it open 24 hours a day through 1975. Many waiters and managers worked for Ratner's for 40 to 50 years. Harold Harmatz preferred an insulting waiting with a sense of humor over a polished waiter.

Harmatz expanded production by enlarging the kitchen and buying special revolving doors; soon 10,000 onion rolls were being baked on Sunday to serve, sell with takeout orders, and supply to local bakeries.

Ratner's attracted stars from local Yiddish theaters and Broadway. Four-term New York governor Nelson A. Rockefeller thought Ratner's blintzes brought good luck and insisted on serving them to guests at his election-eve dinner at the restaurant.

Harold Harmatz is survived by his wife of 60 years, two sons, four grandchildren; and a great grandson.

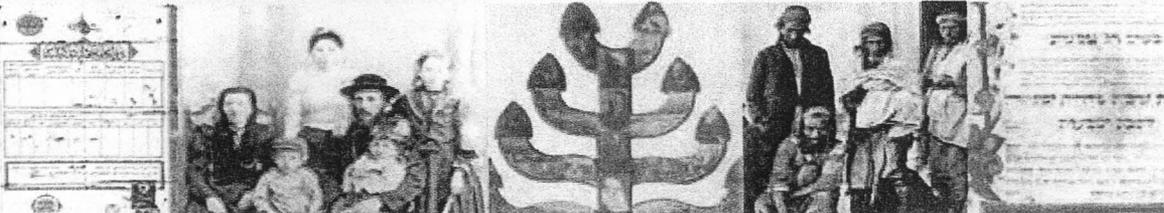
He is also survived by many good memories of Kosher food at Ratner's!

(Article based on NY Times obituary on the Times web site, www.NYTimes.com, May 3, 2004 by Corey Kilgannon)

Jerusalem 2004

The 24th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy







Israel Genealogical Society

Next year in Jerusalem

Renaissance Jerusalem Hotel, Israel,

July 4-9 2004

Check the IAJG web site: <http://www.ortra.com/Jg2004/>

US FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE ACTS AND IMMIGRATION: What the Genealogist should know

Naturalization Act of 1790:

Stipulated that "any alien, being a free white person, may be admitted to become a citizen of the United States"

Steerage Act of 1819 Congress required ship captains to keep detailed passenger records and provide more humane conditions for those on board.

1875 Supreme Court declared that regulation of immigration is the responsibility of the Federal Government.

1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited certain laborers from immigrating to the United States.

1882 Act A general Immigration Act which levied a 50 cents head tax on each immigrant and blocked the entry of idiots, lunatics, convicts, beggars, anarchists and those having contagious diseases, thereby excluding anyone likely to become a public charge.

1885 and 1887 Alien Contract Labor laws which prohibited certain laborers from immigrating to the United States.

1891 The Federal Government assumed the task of inspecting, admitting, rejecting, and processing all immigrants seeking admission to the U.S.

1892 On January 2, a new Federal immigration station opened on Ellis Island in New York Harbor.

1903 This Act restated the 1891 provisions concerning land borders and called for rules covering entry as well as inspection of aliens crossing the Mexican border.

1907 The Immigration Act of 1907 reorganized the states bordering Mexico (Arizona, New Mexico and a large part of Texas) into Mexican Border District to stem the flow of immigrants into the U.S.

1917 Act required that immigrants be able to read and write in their native language.

1917 - 1924 A series of laws were enacted to further limit the number of new immigrants. These laws established the quota system and imposed passport requirements. They expanded the categories of excludable aliens and banned all Asians except Japanese.

1924 Act reduced the number of immigration visas and allocated them on the basis of national origin.

1940 The Alien Registration Act required all aliens (non-U.S.

citizens) within the United States to register with the Government and receive an Alien Registration Receipt Card (the predecessor of the "green card").

1950 Passage of the Internal Security Act which rendered the Alien Registration Receipt Card even more valuable. Immigrants with legal status had their cards replaced with what generally became known as the "green card" (Form I-151).

1952 Act established the modern day immigration system. It created a quota system which imposes limits on a per-country basis. It also established the preference system that gave priority to family members and people with special skills.

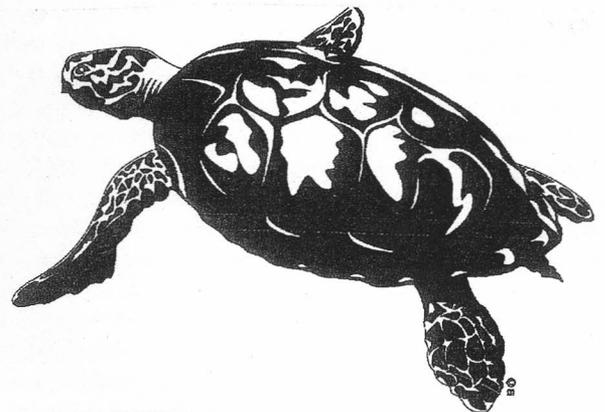
1968 Act Eliminated immigration discrimination based on race, place of birth, sex and residence. It also officially abolished restrictions on Oriental immigration.

1976 Act Eliminated preferential treatment for residents of the Western Hemisphere.

1980 Act Established a general policy governing the admission of refugees.

1986 Act focused on curtailing illegal immigration. It legalized hundred of thousands of illegal immigrants. It also introduced the employer sanctions program which fines employers for hiring illegal workers. It also passed tough laws to prevent bogus marriage fraud.

1990 Act established an annual limit for certain categories of immigrants. It was aimed at helping U.S. businesses attract skilled foreign workers; thus, it expanded the business class categories to favor persons who can make educational, professional or financial contributions. It created the Immigrant Investor Program.



**Behold the turtle...
He makes progress
only when he sticks
his neck out.**

James Bryant Conant

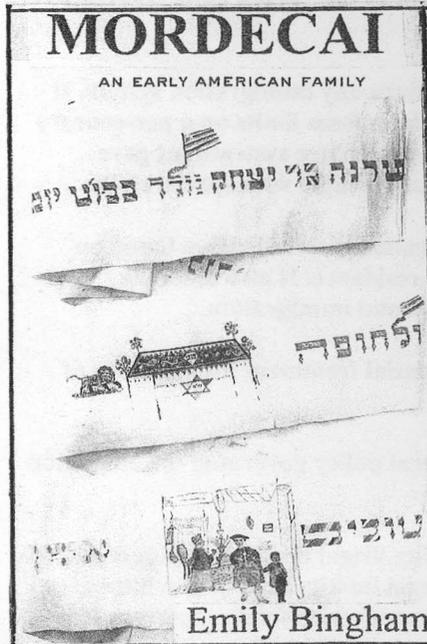
MORDECAI – An Early American Family

Author: Emily Bingham,

Publisher: Hill & Wang (Farrar, Straus & Giroux)

New York, April 2003

Description: 346 pp., illus., hard cover, ISBN 0-8090-2756-9, \$26.00



"In 1815, Alfred Mordecai, the son of a middle-class Jewish family from Warrenton, N.C. applied as a cadet to West Point, 'a bold bid for a Jew.' Despite high odds, Alfred was accepted – another step in the complex assimilation of the Mordecai family into U.S. society. Bingham (the author), an independent scholar, draws on a large cache of letters and journals written by the members of the Mordecai family and a wealth of other published material, to piece together a detailed history of this remarkable Jewish clan.

The Mordecais' history is deftly chartered through three generations beginning with Jacob and Judith moving to Virginia from Philadelphia in 1785, through Jacob's founding, with his own grown children, of a renowned primary school and the conversion to Christianity of some family members during the Second Great Awakening of the mid-19th century. From there, Bingham follows the family sundering that occurred in the 1860s, when most of the family supported the Confederacy, and Alfred, refusing either to side with them or to support the war in anyway, resigned from the Union army. But as thrilling as this family history is, Bingham's great feat here is to show, through the social, political and religious evolutions of one family, how class, ethnicity, region and intellectual affiliation profoundly affected assimilation in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Bingham's prose is as fluid as fiction, but she never sacrifices historical insight for narrative drive or soft-pedals such uncomfortable material as the Mordecais owning slaves.

This is an important addition not only to Jewish studies but to the literature on family and gender relations in the 19th century."

(Review from Publishers Weekly)

(Editor's Note: *From Jay Schleickorn - I read this book and thoroughly enjoyed it. Although it is written in a historical vein, I found the genealogical aspects very interesting. A Family Tree starting in 1707 introduces you to the life of Moses Mordecai, and his family - Samuel, Judith, Richea, Moses Mears, Rebecca, Jacob, Joseph, Isaac, Rachel, Solomon, Caroline, Julia, Alfred, Eliza, Laura and others. As Jews in the South, they faced success and failure in business, assimilation concerns, women's issues, social struggles within the community the Civil War, and the need for education. If you are into genealogy, you will appreciate the extensive research the author undertook to bring the Mordecai Family to us all.*

LOCATING YOUR ROOTS – DISCOVER YOUR ANCESTORS USING LAND RECORDS

Author: Patricia Law Hatcher, CG, FASG

Publisher: Betterway Books, Cincinnati, OH (2003)

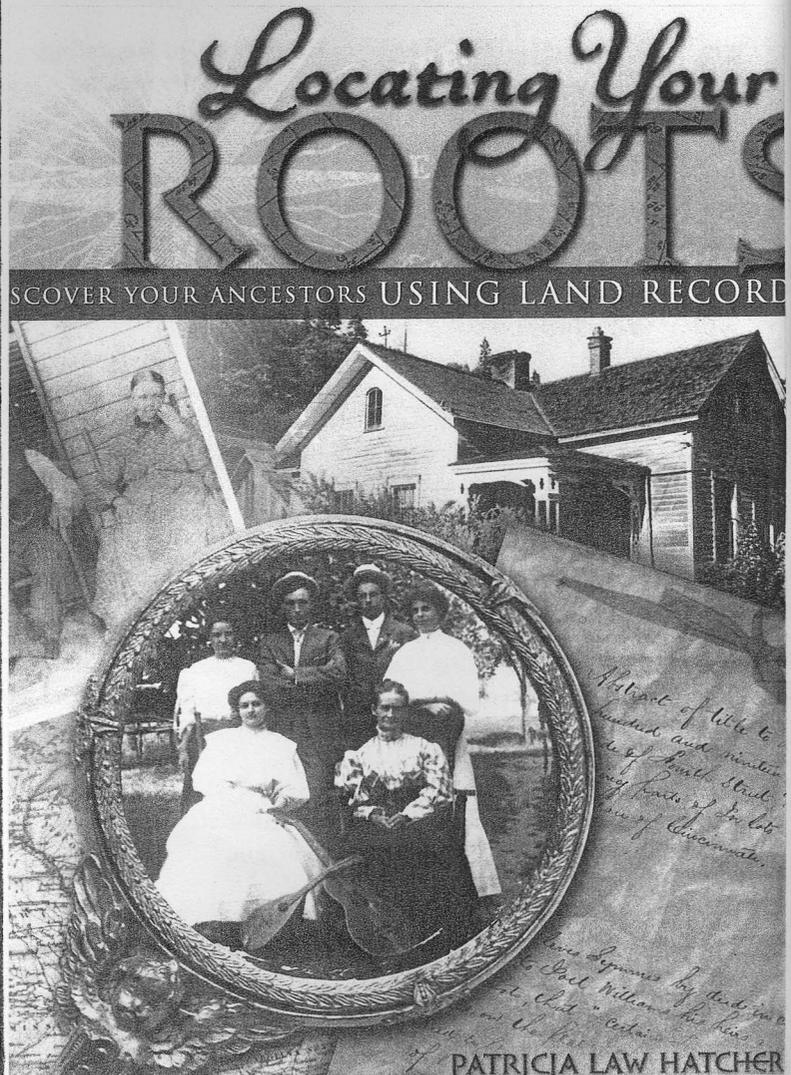
Description: 212 pp., illus., soft cover, ISBN 1-55870-614-3, \$ 21.99

According to the Press Release from the publisher this book would be "a great way to track down early ancestors as land records comprise one of the most important record sets in genealogy."

Patricia Law Hatcher of Dallas, Texas, the author, explains where to find land records and how to use them. Through easy-to-follow instructions, Hatcher describes the process for identifying, finding and interpreting the most common types of records. She also includes in-depth advice for locating a deed in a courthouse, recording what one finds and figuring out how land was transferred.

LOCATING YOUR ROOTS would appear "to be an excellent resource for genealogists, historians, anthropologists, reference librarians and lecturers." The book is available from most local booksellers or direct from Betterway Books at 1-800-448-0913 or www.familytreemagazine.com

Patricia Law Hatcher, CG, FASG, frequently speaks at genealogy conferences and is the author of *Producing a Quality Family History* (Ancestry).



The Old Bronx



The White Castle, 1950 ca.

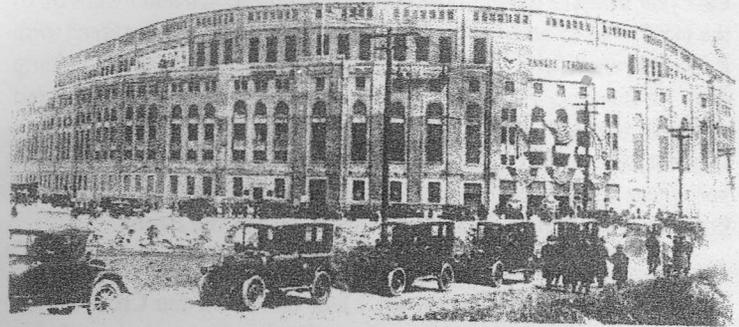


Playing Stickball on a Bronx Street, 1950 ca.



Good Humor Ice Cream Truck

Yankee Stadium Opening Day, April 19, 1923



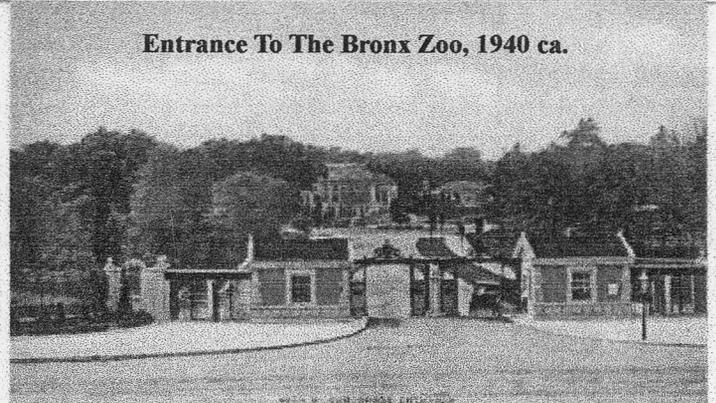
Poe Park, Grand Concourse.

Beach, Dining Pavilion and Dance Floor, Orchard Beach, Pelham Bay Park, N. Y.

Orchard Beach, 1940 ca.



Entrance To The Bronx Zoo, 1940 ca.

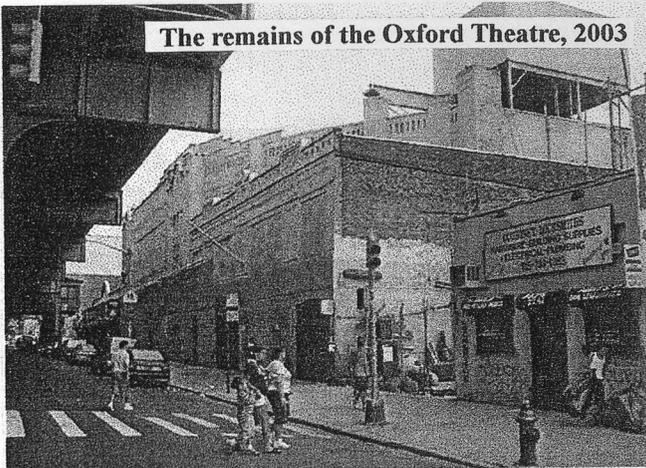


The Bronx is but a Memory

By Carl R. Migden

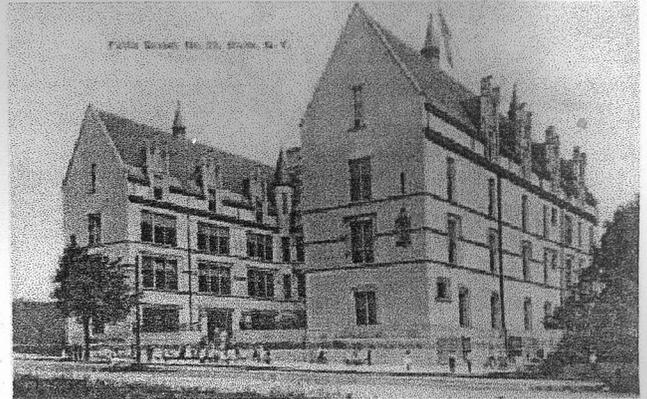
Last year due to a death in the family, my wife Karyn and I went up to the NYC area to attend a funeral. The first two days, we stayed with Karyn's brother who lives in Merrick, Long Island and the remaining days we stayed in Pomona, NY. On our way to Pomona I suggested to Karyn that since we have to pass through Queens and the Bronx why not take a short detour and visit my old neighborhood and show her where I grew up. She agreed, but was not too keen on the idea knowing the negative reputation of that area of the Bronx.

After crossing over the Throgs Neck Bridge from Queens, we drove to the Cross Bronx Expressway. I had driven on the Cross Bronx Expressway a number of years ago and remember seeing one burnt out apartment building after another, with windows either bordered up with wooden panels, or with cinder blocks. At that time it reminded me of Europe just after WWII. This time there was a noticeable difference, a majority of the buildings along the expressway were restored and almost all the apartment buildings were habitable again. It was quite an improvement. After seeing such improvements I was gaining enthusiasm to reach my old address, 2301 Walton Ave. We continued on the expressway and got off the Jerome Ave. exit at 174th St. We took the first right turn and traveled north on Jerome Ave. On Jerome Ave. we passed the spot where the old **Oxford Movie Theatre** (between 182nd & 183rd) was located, where I saw my very motion picture at 8 years of age. Afterwards, in the early 1950's the theatre changed ownership and it was converted into an ice skating rink where I also skated as a young boy. Nothing was left except a derelict building (see photo below) and my memories of what joy I had in the late 1940's and early 50's.



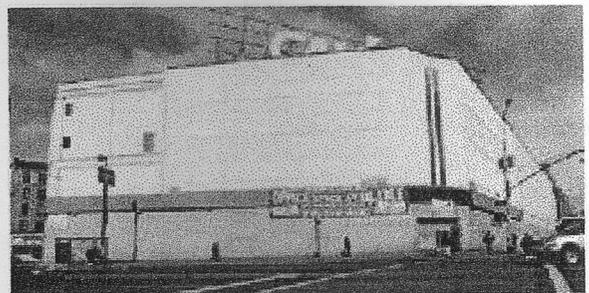
The remains of the Oxford Theatre, 2003

I decided to continue driving past 183rd St. so I could show Karyn **P.S. 33**, my first public school, located on Jerome Ave. between 184th St. & Fordham Road. I attended PS 33 from 1946 to 1952. I walked there every day, first with my mother, and as I got older with friends, even in deep snow. It was not dangerous and there was always a traffic guard at the corner of 184th & Walton. The school is still there and functioning as an elementary school. It's not as clean and as big as I remember, but at least it is still in existence. I thought to myself... "Something was still left of my past." When we reached Fordham Road and Jerome we stopped for a long red light and I looked off to my far left to see if the Grand Theatre was there. It was gone too.



Public School 33 my first public school, 2003

When the light changed we turned right onto Fordham Road and drove east toward the Grand Concourse. Looking at the sidewalks it felt like I was in a foreign country. The people and the storefronts changed, it was not the same. Time was not generous to this part of the Bronx. I had an uneasy feeling within me. This old neighborhood where I spent much of my childhood was invaded by aliens from another planet. Something is wrong. This was not progress. We continued onward and reached the intersection where the once famous **Alexander's** (see photo) department store was located. My immediate reaction was... "Oh my God", what's going on here? A once popular store located on the corner of the Grand Concourse and Fordham Road (the heart of the Bronx), Alexander's supplied Bronxites with a myriad of material and social needs. My mother shopped at Alexander's at least twice a week (where else?). After changing to Caldor's in the 1980s, the building became vacant in 1998 when the discount chain closed its doors. I've heard Houlihan-Parnes Realty bought the property and will begin renovating and re-tenanting the 300,000-square-foot space, filling it with an impressive list of retail, educational, legal and cultural facilities. All I could say to Karyn was I'm shocked of all that I've seen so far. She replied: "From what you described from your last visit, it appears in better shape." I laughed, and replied...not really. I looked to my left and tried to glance across the street at another famous landmark, Krum's. A Bronx tradition was to shop at Alexander's and spoon an ice cream sundae at Krum's. I worked at Krum's as a soda jerk in the summers from 1956 to 1960 where I have so many good memories. Working there turned me from a shy, timid teenager into an outgoing extravert. It was a wonderful experience, but never to be again, at least not in the Bronx.



What's left of Alexander's, 2003

Photos by: Charlie Kraybill www.kraybill.home.mindspring.com/

We turned right at the Grand Concourse (2413 Grand Concourse at 188th Street) and drove south after 188th St., till we reached the remains of the **Loew's Paradise Theatre** (see photo). We were able to stop and park in front of what was left of this landmark. I really could not believe my eyes. Just take a look to your right and view this catastrophe. The Paradise was the place of dreams fulfilled, the object of affection for countless Bronx natives, a wonderland on the Grand Concourse... a grandiose movie palace done in the Hollywood Baroque style so favored in the late 1920s, the Paradise was the premier venue for the Bronx. It wasn't just a theatre. Nobody went only to watch the movie. Going to the Paradise was an event, a sign that the evening's date was special. It was a place to be seen in and a transient bit of elegance that lingered in the memory long after the film itself had been forgotten. The Paradise opened on September 7, 1929. The 3,800 seat auditorium was designed by John Eberson, featured a sky ceiling which included stars laid out in the constellation of Marcus Loew's astrological birth sign. The Paradise was one of the five Loew's "Wonder Theatres" so named because each was equipped with identical Robert Morton pipe organs (the "Wonder Mortons"). The Paradise closed in 1994.

The Loew's Paradise Theatre, 2003

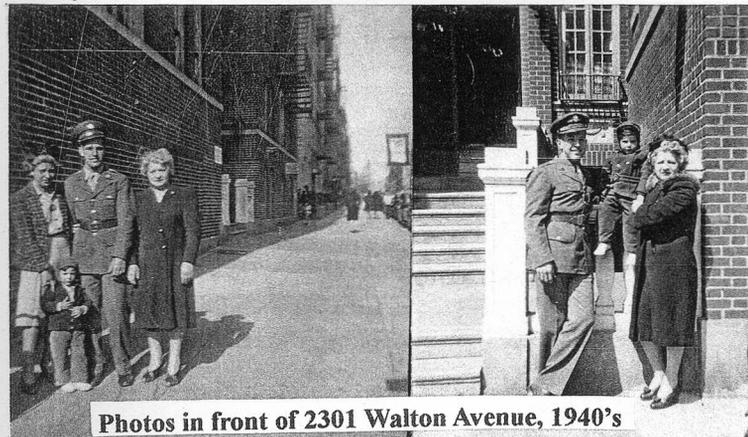


After seeing what the Paradise turned into, we continued our drive down the Concourse till we reached the corner of 183rd St. There, I sadly viewed what was left of the **Ascot Theatre**. The Ascot introduced thousands of young Bronxites to the pleasures of foreign films in the 1950s and into the 60s featuring actors like Ugo Tognazzi, Anna Magnani, Marcello Mastroianni, Anouk Aimee, Jean Paul Belmondo, Alain Delon, Jean Gabin, and Jeanne Moreau. In its later years it housed religious gatherings. It has lost its marquee. Picture taken in summer, 1999. Jay Schleickorn told me that in the 1930's it was a Yiddish Theatre where Morris Schwartz performed. Look below and you can view what it looks like today. What a shame!

The Old Site of The Ascot Theatre, 2003



Turning right on the Grand Concourse at 183rd St. I drove west, passing Creston Av., then Morris Av., looking at the storefronts my mother, my father and I once shopped at, and were no longer. We finally arrived at 183rd St. & Walton Ave only to be shocked and devastated. The apartment building where I spent most of my childhood was now a parking lot. It wasn't there anymore. It disappeared. I couldn't believe it. I spent my early years with my parents in a six-story walkup on Walton Avenue and 183rd Street (2301 Walton Avenue). It was part Jewish, as well as Irish, Italian and German. It was a blue-collar/working class neighborhood. It holds many dear memories. We lived on the second floor and had a fire escape. A fire escape was the Bronx equivalent of a balcony. I can still remember sitting on the fire escape on warm summer nights looking up to the stars. I had extended family close by, my aunt & uncle lived in the same building. We in apt. 2E, they in 1E. Since I did not have living grandparents, my aunt and uncle were surrogate grandparents. I loved them dearly. There are countless memories of the good old days. I played stickball on this street (usually taken from a mop hanging off a fire escape) with a pink spalding. This was my summer entertainment. Another pleasure was waiting for the Good Humor man or the Bungalow Bar man, because I knew that I could have an ice cream at 6:00 pm. He always came on time.



Photos in front of 2301 Walton Avenue, 1940's

It is so sad to see what the Bronx has become... no other area will match the life of the Bronx in those days. It was not a beautiful place but it had close family ties and values. I did not take any photographs of what is now on the corner of 183rd & Walton because physically there is nothing left of the building, only memories. I looked to my left where a Puerto Rican church took the place of the synagogue where I was Bar Mitzvahed. My Bronx, my old neighborhood... what happened to it?

The downfall of the West Bronx came about from the failed amusement park called Freedomland, where politicians and developers had the idea to create the largest housing cooperative in America. They decreed that here they would save the borough. Between 1968 and 1970, 35 high-rise towers and 236 townhouse units were finished. When completed, Co-op City also had eight multilevel parking garages, three shopping centers, a heating plant, a firehouse, four public schools, one high school and no soul. More than 55,000 people ultimately moved in mostly from older West Bronx neighborhoods. This exodus from other parts of the Bronx left apartment buildings empty, which would ultimately bring about the burning of the borough. That was the final nail in the coffin. Karyn looked at me sadly and said: "Can we go now?" I shuddered and drove away. What happened to everything? The Bronx, my old neighborhood... it is no more!

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REMINDER...

NEXT MEETING – June 21st

**“Follow the Stars & Stripes –
Finding Military Records”**

In the Mini-Sanctuary, 7:30 p.m.,

Congregation of Liberal Judaism,

928 Malone Drive, Orlando

(off Lee Rd at Adanson)

7:30 P.M.