

# Der Bay

Bar Mitsve Issue

Vol.14 No.1

Founded January 1, 1991

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## *Yiddish Yiddish Yiddish*



Check your name, a group,  
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Search Der Bay Website:

Yiddish is the language of Ashkenazic Jewry. The Yiddish language, literature, poetry, theater and music have a rich heritage. Our mission is to foster the preservation of the Yiddish language (mame-loshn) and the associated Yiddish culture, music, theater, literature and poetry via the International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC).

### Specialties of Der Bay:

- 1) Der internatsyonaler kalendar has Yiddish events
- 2) Lists: Yiddish Teachers, Yiddish Clubs, Performers, Klezmer Bands
- 3) Caveats for translators and a list of Translators
- 4) Free locator services
- 5) The Yiddish Network (TYN) with contacts in 34 countries
- 6) International Assoc. of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC) and Conferences
- 7) Links to great Yiddish sites and other Jewish sites
- 8) International Pen Pal (briv fraynd) over 385 participants
- 9) Clearinghouse: Major U.S. & Canadian Yiddish Events
- 10) Information on Romanized (transliterated) Yiddish material
- 11) Yiddish for the disabled

E-mail Philip "Fishl" Kutner

<http://www.derbay.org>

## Welcome To *Der Bay's* Bar Mitsve Celebration

The cover shows the homepage of *Der Bay's* website. It is only a part of the story of the newsletter that today celebrates its bar mitsve. This issue is a brief attempt to highlight activities and news of the Yiddish community from January 1991 until today.

Within the many lists that have been compiled and continuously updated, are the elite of the Yiddish community—worldwide. It is to them, the living, and those with **Zellig Bach, Yosl Mlotek, Will Stern, Hy Kaplan, Walter Artzt Stanley Bunyan, Fred Ellin and Joseph Grinspan**, etc., whose friendship, knowledge and encouragement, are responsible for much of *Der Bay's* success. Any major omission is a serious error. Please let us know and accept our apology *foroyes*.

**Ari Davidow** was our first computer guru. At that time Ari was busy in San Francisco. It was before his move back East and establishment of a premiere klezmer website. Today, **Tomasz Pado** fills the bill. Next are **Layah Laks, Dr. Mordkhe Schaechter, Itche Goldberg, Chayale Ash-Furman, Frida de Cielak, Noyekh Miller, Mark David, Iosif Vaisman, Oscar Antell, Sylvia Schildt, Yale Strom, Henry Sapoznik, Baila Pransky, Helen Schechtman, and Sid Resnick**.

We honor Arbeter Ring—the only U.S. fraternal organization that fosters Yiddish survival. In its ranks are friends of *Der Bay*; **Stephen Dowling, Chava Lapin, Shelby Shapiro, Israel Kugler, Peysakh Fiszman, Dr. Barney Zumoff, Ruvn Millman, Marilyn Cagin, Chana Mlotek, Mike Katz, the Mandels, the Pincuses, Leon Levitt, the Rotkins, and Eric Gordon**.

In its early years *Der Bay* was influential in the founding of the International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC). All of its officers and board members have been among *Der Bay's* greatest supporters. This unique group of hard working, unselfish, lovers of Yiddish work as a team without any remuneration. They have become dear personal friends of Sally and your editor. The IAYC has grown and flourished in eight conferences throughout the United States and Canada. Now the IAYC is a vibrant organization and *Der Bay* is proud to be a major source of information.

Many feature writers have adorned the pages of *Der Bay*. They have run a series of articles on a particular theme and enriched its contents. Among them have been: **Ed Goldman** whose 15 Romanized (transliterated) comic, bible scenes are still very popular and requested for club programs.

In a scholarly vein, **Gella and Shikl Fishman** had a year of contributions. Today they contribute on archives Gella founded at Stanford University.

Currently **Kitty Katz**, photojournalist and writer has contributed stories about Jewish New York. **Israel Kugler's** series on *The American Yiddish Theater: Origins & History* is just concluding. Also in this issue is the second of five installments of **Pascal Curin's**, *History of the Jewish Community in Alsace and Lorraine*.

**Eli Katz, Louis Fridhandler and Kay Goodman** had exciting articles. Fellow ex-chicken-plucker, and dear friend, **Mendy Fliegler** has sent in original poetry. **Van Wallach** did reviews of Jewish videos.

The Major and long-time contributors were published in earlier issues. You are the stalwarts who helped to support *Der Bay*, and many wrote articles, reported on events for der internatsyonaler kalendar and are contacts for The Yiddish Network (TYN).

Los Angeles has; **Archie Barkan, Portia Rose, Mel Rogow, Chic Wolk, Lilke Majsner, John Rauch, Hale Porter, Sid Weinstein, Hershl Hartman, the Bialises, Dr. Sarah Moskovitz, & Chassie Margolis**.

Toronto is another area of wonderful friendships. Other than IAYC Board members they are; **Henya & Nachum Reinhartz, Marv & Eda Zimler-Schiff, the Bermans, Aron Fainer, Helen Smolkin, Gerry Kane, Richard Bassett, Miriam Beckerman, Nathan Garnick, Shirley Kumove, Faye Kellerstein, the Lustgartens, (the 2 Glorias!) and Phil Givens, o'h**.

Yiddish of Greater Washington is one of the prominent Yiddish Groups. It has sponsored two IAYC conferences. Our IAYC president is from this group. The too long list includes; **Hilda Rubin, Motl Rosenbush, Marcia Gruss Levinsohn, Sid Vernier, Sonia Fuentes, Jonathan Sunshine and Rae Meltzer**.

Overseas contacts visiting our home include: **Jack Halpern** (Japan), **Jack Wiegman** (the Netherlands) **Dov Noy** (Israel), and **Norman Sims** (New Zealand).

Credit goes to Peninsula JCC's **Judy Edelson** and **0** who offered the Yiddish Club a free meeting room, and in the very early years paid for *Der Bay*. Without its aid *Der Bay* wouldn't exist.

*Der Bay* encourages all groups to support great all-Yiddish publications, and organizations like **YIVO, NYBC, Folksbiene, Yugntruf, League for Yiddish, KlezKamp, Yidishkayt LA, Charlotte & Chicago JCC Institutes, W.C. JCE, L.A. Yiddish Intensive, Circle of Yiddish Clubs**, and many overseas. *Der Bay* isn't a scholarly journal. There are wonderful ones edited by scholars. *Der Bay* is a place to learn who, what, where & when of the groups, meetings, performances, people, and publications in the Yiddish Kingdom.

It's past history—you are only as good as today's game and your value is only what you can do in the future. What does the future hold? *Der Bay* is unique in that it does what no other group continues to do—the briv fraynd program, der internatsyonaler kalendar, the resource for Romanized (transliterated) material, the compilation of lists of Yiddish teachers, translators and Yiddish clubs. Although *Der Bay* has a great Klezmer list, **Ari Davidson** is the leader.

These 13 years were a time of personal growth and rewards from many contacts. My pupils have been a rich source of stimulus and friendships. May they continue to inspire me for many years to come.

# The American Yiddish Theater: Origins & History—Part V

## by Israel Kugler

### Peretz Hirshbein (1881-1949)

He wrote of rural Lithuanian Jewish life. In *Grine Felder* a Jewish farmer hires Levi Yitzkhok to tutor his sons. The daughter Tsine tries to prevent him from taking a job with a nearby farmer and wins Levi's hand. Other plays include—*Der Schmidt's Tekhter* and the *Puste Kretshme*.

### Anski (1863-1920)

Anski's *Der Dybbuk* was one of the most popular Yiddish plays, put on also in English and Hebrew. It deals with exorcism of a spirit in the bride's betrothed who dies and afflicts the bride to a rich suitor.

### Maurice Schwartz (1890-1960)

After moving from Irving Place to the original Madison Square Garden, Schwartz amassed funds to build his own theater on Second Avenue and 12th Street. Its greatest successes included J.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb*. The actresses were Bina Abramovitch, Jennie Goldstein, Celia Adler and Berta Gersten. The actors were Jacob Ben-Ami, Lazar Freed, Maurice Schwartz, Muni Weisenfreund (Paul Muni), David Opatashu, and Joseph Buloff.

### The Vilne Troupe

This company was made famous by the avant-garde production of the *Dybbuk* in Vilne (Yerushelayim di Lite). Led by Leyb Kadison, his daughter, Luba and her husband Joseph Buloff, his company achieved worldwide recognition. It arrived in New York in the late 20's and was pulled in many directions by rival companies. After Muni Weisenfreund left Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theater, Buloff took his place acting in such classics as *Three Cities* by Sholem Asch, J.J. Singer's *Yoshe Kalb* and *The Brothers Ashkenazi*. Buloff's ability as an actor resulted in his joining the English stage where he appeared as the Greek landlord in *My Sister Eileen*, the peddler in *Oklahoma*, and in Arthur Miller's *The Price*. He also acted in a Yiddish version of Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. He held one man shows with readings from Chekhov and delightful humorous pieces by Lutsky (*A Piece of Paper Driven by the Wind*, and *A Pot of Bubbling Soup*).

### Yiddish Comedy

Yiddish comedy was an important phase of Yiddish theater, but some of it descended to *Shund*. Ludwig Satz, Aaron Lebedeff, and Peysakh Burstein were

outstanding followers after Sigmund Mogulescu in using mime—a variety of vocal expression, facial plasticity and body language to caricature a character. Last in this male line was Menashe Skulnik—the perfect player of Shlemil and Shmendrik. The diminutive Molly Picon stands out all by herself, in her ability to sing, dance, turn cartwheels, and sparkle as a gymnast. All of the comedians were capable of acting more serious roles if called upon.

### ARTEF

ARTEF was the partisan politicalization of Yiddish theater. It is the acronym for a group tied to the Jewish sector of the American Communist Party. Existing in the glow of the Moscow Art Theater of Stanislavsky and the great Yiddish actor-producer Shlomo Mikhoels (murdered by Stalin along with Soviet Yiddish writers) ARTEF drew a following under the direction of Benno Schneider. Yiddish plays had expressionistic staging and adapted some standard Yiddish plays with a party-line twist. Many Broadway actors came to ARTEF performances. David Opatashu got his start there and appeared in movies and on Broadway. Jules Dassin who was associated with the Greek actress Merlina Mercuri also was a product of ARTEF.

### Musical Theater

Molly Picon wrote, "To the musical theater were attracted a retinue of composers and lyricists whose compositions were counted by thousands. They included such giants as Joseph Rumshinsky, Sholem Secunda, Alexander Olshanetsky, Abraham Ellstein, Illya Trilling, Yasha Kreitzberg. I would include the lyricists Anshei Schorr, Isadore Lillian, Morris Rund, Nuchum Stutchkoff, Jacob Jacobs, Khayim Tauber, Israel Rosenberg and the outstanding poets, Itzik Manger, Mani Leyb, Avrom Reizen, Aaron Tzeitlin, Khayim Nachman Bialik, Nakhum Yud, Wolf Younin." (**Special Note:** During the Great Depression Sholem Secunda sold his song *Bei (Bay) Mir Bistu Sheyn* for fifteen dollars!)

### Dance

Many Yiddish theater offerings had choreographed dance developed by Binyumin Zemach, Felix Fybush and Pearl Lang. Pearl Lang, is a graduate of the Chicago Workmen's Circle Shuln. She was part of Martha Graham's ensemble. Pearl now has her own dance group with recitals often having Jewish themes.

## Yiddish Theater Today

Despite growing numbers of Yiddish vinklen, Yiddish courses at universities and at the Workmen's Circle, and well-attended outdoor Yiddish festivals, the Yiddish theater leads a tenuous existence. The Folksbiene, the oldest continuous Yiddish theater in the world, began in 1915 with amateur actresses and actors performing after a day in the shops. Once housed in the auditorium of the Forward building on East Broadway, it moved to the Central Synagogue on East 55th Street. Since the fire there, it has had three seasons with Minna Bern and Shifre Lehrer, the veteran performers as well as some newcomers. The 2002 season featured Yentl, a play based on a story of I. Bashevis Singer. The current season's offering is a comedy by Leon Kobrin, *Di Nekst-Dorike* (The Lady Next Door) of temptation and longing in the tenements.

It is hoped that the Folksbiene (theater), The Forward (Yiddish, English, Russian editions) and the Workmen's Circle/ Arbeter Ring (main headquarters) will locate in a well-planned setting for all three kindred organizations. It is worthy of note that The Folksbiene has a program for youngsters, *Kids and Yiddish* organized by Joanne Borts, star of the stage who went to shule and now teaches the kids some basic Yiddish elements. There are also staged readings by veteran Yiddish actors, David Rogow, Shifre Lehrer & Minna Bern.

I end with a dream and hope for the future—Zukunft. The Folksbiene must dare to flourish by incorporating:

- A Chorus and Chorale;
- A Dance program in association with Pearl Lang;
- A troupe appearing in urban centers across the United States, possibly even in Central and South America;
- A contest for new plays in Yiddish to showcase the continued survival of this art form;
- A dramatic training program for new Yiddish performers;
- A Klezmer program.

I am sure that lovers of the Yiddish language and Yiddish culture will help make this dream a reality. Other ethnic groups have successful theaters—Repertorio Espanol and The Irish Repertory are examples. Theater are examples. Yiddish has survived so very many obituaries. Nobel Laureate, Isaac Bashevis Singer, predicted that Yiddish would continue. As for the Yiddish theater as an expression of Yiddish culture, it is too important a part of historic Jewishness to disappear into the dark abyss of nostalgic oblivion.

## Important Sources

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**Dr. Israel Kugler** is Professor Emeritus in Social Science, The City University of New York. He graduated from Elementar shul and Mltlshul of the Workmen's Circle. He was President of the Workmen's Circle from 1980-84 and is now on its National Executive Board. At City College he was the Organizer of the Yipsels (Young Peoples Socialist League). He organized unions of college and university faculty as an officer of the United Federation of Teachers, President of the United Federation of College Teachers.

**Editor's Note:** This is the fifth and final column in this series. Dr. Israel Kugler's dedication to the Folksbiene has been a passion. We hope that Zalmen Mlotek's efforts to expand Yiddish Theater will continue to be successful.

# History of the Jewish Community in Alsace and Lorraine: Part II

by Pascal Curin

## 14th - 15th centuries continued

Jews were alternatively driven out and called back, but were definitively expelled by Duke René II in 1477 because they were falsely accused of supporting the enemy (Burgundy). The next official permission for Jews to settle in Lorraine didn't occur until the beginning of the 18th century.

Consequently, there was a recurring gap in the Jewish presence:

- \* In Metz from the 13th to the 16th centuries.
- \* In Lorraine from the 15th to the 18th centuries.
- \* In Alsace from the 14th to the 16th centuries.

This doesn't mean that there was a complete absence of Jews in these regions, but the main Jewish communities of that time lived in the larger cities. In these less densely populated regions they were more visible, and thus, in a way more vulnerable. A few isolated Jews were scattered throughout the region in these provinces, but it was obvious that very little of the European Jewish population was living in Alsace during these periods.

## 16th century

In Alsace, the urban communities of the big cities, as previously mentioned, disappeared without a trace along with their accompanying architectural heritage. Only a part of the synagogue of Bergheim, the former center of the Alsatian Rabbinate, still remains today to recall the Jewish past prior to the 17th century in this region.

In Metz the situation changed abruptly when the city became French, or under a French protectorate in 1552. Ten years later, the Jews were officially allowed to settle in Metz again. For many the French attitude may seem contradictory towards Jews in the main kingdom. But in fact, France needed the Jews to finance the numerous regiments that were garrisoned at Metz, known as the most fortified garrison town of France on foreign soil and close to the Holy Roman Empire, its main enemy. Consequently, the end justified the means.

Moreover it was in the 16th century that the word *ghetto* for Venetian *fondry* gave its name to all urban Jewish neighborhoods in Europe, which were bordered and sealed off from the Christian sections. Metz and Strasbourg adopted this ghetto system, and referred to Pope Paul IV's decree in 1555 that ordered numerous discriminatory rules against Jews. Only 24 Jewish households were allowed to live in Metz at this time.

About 160 families lived in villages in the 16th century in Alsace. Jews in Lorraine and Alsace were always in transit, or on the alert. It's contrary, Metz has remained a center and a reference point for Jewish life in Northern Lorraine, just as Nancy and Lunéville have for Southern Lorraine. Many went to Germany, then Middle and Eastern Europe. This is a typical aspect of Jewish history in Alsace, because it was a border region. There was movement between West and East, right and left side of the Rhine River. Everyone tried his luck there. Eastern European Jews came to Alsace and Metz, and Alsatian Jews went to Poland or Lithuania.

## 17th century

In 1614, the Governor of the three Lorraine Dioceses under French protectorate (Metz, Toul and Verdun) authorized 58 Jewish households in each city. In the following centuries, the ghetto borders didn't change even though the population had steadily increased. Insalubrious conditions and overcrowding didn't make life easy for the Jewish sector of the region's population. In the mid 17th century, Alsace and Lorraine had to be repopulated after the bloody Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) where everyone, regardless of their religion, might have been a victim of the gratuitous violence that took place in a disorganized and anarchic war.

At the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, France won the vicariate over the dioceses Metz, Toul and Verdun, but the Dukedom of Lorraine remained a part of the Holy Roman Empire as an autonomous region from 1542. Lorraine looked like a puzzle.

In Alsace, the Sundgau, a part of the Austrian Hapsburg Empire in the south, and the Decapole (10 autonomous Alsatian cities with their territories), became French. In 1681, Strasbourg and its dependences were annexed to the absolutist France within the framework of Louis XIV's reunion politics. Only Mulhouse remained in the Helvetica Confederation for some decades to come.

The Alsatian territories were relatively spared from the subsequent armed conflicts that followed the Thirty Year's War. Louis XIV attempted a Pacific invasion of the Rhine border region. Conversely, the Dukedom Lorraine still remained occupied by the French Army for several decades following the Treaty of Westphalia, and continued to suffer the consequences of several wars against Spain. With the Pyrenean Treaty of 1659, France became more hegemonic and laid claim to several thrones and

territories around the main country. Louis XIV desired to achieve the "natural borders" of the French hexagon. In treaty after treaty, Lorraine tried to break away from Louis XIV's clutches.

Finally, at the Peace Treaty of Rijswijk in 1697, the Dukedom Lorraine once again became autonomous and could begin the repopulation of its territory to which the successive conflicts had laid waste. This explains why Jews first returned to Lorraine beginning in the 18th century. It's important not to confuse the Dukedom with the three Lorraine dioceses that unofficially became French in 1552, and then officially in 1648. As previously emphasized, the French crown needed the Jews for their own purposes, especially in the garrison town of Metz.

Contrary to the situation in Metz where the services of the Jews were needed, France granted the local Alsatian authorities, for the first time, the rights to determine the fate of the local Jewish inhabitants. However, the centralized French government urged the Alsatian authorities to understand that all Jews should be expelled from Alsace, just as all other Jews that France had driven out since the 14th century. But since the annexed Alsatian territories resisted the expulsion of Jews, France granted them their previous privileges, among them, the right to shelter Jewish families from expulsion. Thus, the Alsatian rural Jewry remained stable, or even increased in size.

From 1650 onwards, numerous Jews came to Alsace from neighboring German territories beyond the Rhine, such as Baden, Swabia, or Rhineland. This played a major role in the formation of the 2nd generation of Alsatian Jewry, and particularly in the phonetics of the local Yiddish-Daytsh dialect, which is an Alemannic-sounding language in comparison with other Yiddish dialects. It goes without saying that the immigration of German Jews to the neighboring regions of Alsace and Lorraine corresponds to war and destitution in the countries from which they came.

Louis XIV decided out of pique to put the Palatinate to fire and sword. It has already been stressed that Alsace, as a border region, experienced the conflict between France and Germany. This king tolerated Jews in the new annexed Alsace, while that same monarch laid waste to the nearby German regions and obviously set about persecuting the Jews. These machiavellian contradictions didn't make any difference to the absolutist Louis XIV and Cardinal Mazarin who would stop at nothing to get what they wanted, particularly to crush the Hapsburg Empire which had been a traditional enemy for centuries. What's more, this was already the case

with Louis XIII and especially Cardinal Richelieu who used the reasons of State as a dreadful weapon.

At the culmination of the 17th century, the Alsatian Jewish population had grown rapidly concurrent with the Christian population. In 1689, the Intendant De la Grange took a census of 525 families (2/3 in Lower Alsace and 1/3 in Upper Alsace) the majority of whom lived in the countryside. Eight years later there were 738 Jewish families, and 1,269 families of record by 1716. The Alsatian Jewish population grew tremendously over the course of the 18th century.

### **18th century in Alsace**

This century was a transitional period for the Jews on French soil. This doesn't imply that everything became better and easier, or that the coming and going of Jewish families in exile definitively stopped in the 18th Century. One of the most established, reputable, and wealthy Jewish settlements in all of Europe existed in Frankfurt, then in 1711 a large fire destroyed almost the entire neighborhood resulting in the emigration of those that lost everything. During the Succession War for the Spanish Throne (1701-1714), the Palatinate had been adversely affected by the war.

In 1750 there were 2,585 Jewish families in Alsace, which represents 103 percent more families than there had been in 1716. Then in 1784, Louis XVI ordered another census and the results were surprising: there were 210 percent more Jewish families than at the beginning of the century. This census revealed a total of 3,942 families or 19,624 souls.

On the eve of the French Revolution in 1789 there were over a 150 Jewish communities in Alsace. The oldest ones had been established earlier in the 17th Century, and the more recent ones from 1750 onwards. Initially, three rabbis were appointed for Upper Alsace, and four were appointed for Lower Alsace. The Bishop of Strasbourg, the Count of Hanau-Lichtenberg, and the reigning nobility appointed their own rabbis. Little by little, a few persons of the Jewish faith held important official positions either because of their influence, or their fortune. The local authorities considered these officials responsible for the relations between the Jewish population and themselves.

On September 27th 1791 the Constituent Assembly decreed that Jews become French nationals and receive civic rights like every other citizen. All special taxes assessed on Jews were abolished. Jews were allowed to have professions, to acquire buildings, to dwell or marry wherever and whenever they pleased.

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