

The Second IAYC Lifetime Yiddish Achievement Award

Simon Swirsky – Yiddish Activist



Simon was born in Postawa, near Vilna in 1914. Most of the family lived as traditional Jews. He attended kheder until bar mitzvah, and then was a student in the Yiddishe Veltlekhe Folkshul. His father was a Yiddishist and it influenced Simon.

Upon graduation his teachers recommended sending him to Vilna to continue his studies, but the family could not afford it. He was obliged to work as a tailor to help support his family. He continued his education in a Polish State high school for three more years.

In 1939 Poland was divided between Germany and the USSR. The Swirsky family was in the Russian sector. When Germany attacked Russia, the family fled east. After a harrowing journey they settled in a village east of Moscow on the Volga River, and Simon joined the Red Army.

After the war Simon met his wife Myra in Kiev, and their two children were born there. In 1960 the family returned to Poland, and in 1966, the entire Swirsky family emigrated and settled in Cleveland, Ohio where he worked at Dalton's, a

clothing factory, becoming a master pattern maker for designer women's clothing.

Over the years he has made countless contributions to the Cleveland and national Jewish community:

- 1) In 1975 Simon organized the first Russian-Jewish group in America. It was named to honor Solomon Mikhoels, the renowned actor-director of the Yiddish Moscow Art Theater, who was murdered in 1948 on Stalin's orders.
- 2) He serves as the Chair of the Yiddish Cultural Committee of Cleveland for many years, establishing a successful monthly Yiddish program for the community.
- 3) He is a founding member of the annual Free Yiddish Concert in the Park committee, now in its 29th year, serving currently as treasurer.
- 4) He became a zamler for the NYBC. When he saw a storeroom of Yiddish books at what was then The Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, now Siegal College, he organized them, and the Cleveland Jewish News featured him in a story.
- 5) His knowledge of European languages, Hebrew, variations in spelling, were helpful in completing the task of translating into English. One series became a published book. Simon also translated the minutes of the first meeting in 1906 of Menorah Park when it observed its 100th anniversary.
- 6) His work on the IAYC Conference Committee has been exemplary. Simon is Mr. Yiddish of Cleveland and a star in the World-wide Yiddish Community.

Simon has been recognized by the Workmen's Circle, the NYBC and the Ohio Legislature in recognition of his work in Yiddish Culture and with Russian Jews.