

# NSCI's Institutional Memory

By Ellen (Katz) Block and Merle Branner



The congregant we look to for our oldest institutional memory is Louise (Moses) Cohen. Louise is the last living child of the founding families who established this congregation and is still a

member. Her parents were Harold and Irma Moses. They were in attendance at the first meeting on April 27, 1920 at the Winnetka Women's Club to discuss the formation of a Jewish congregation on the North Shore. Louise recalls her father raising money for the congregation's first real home - the building at 840 Vernon - as he spent many Sunday mornings calling on Jewish families in the community, encouraging them to become members of the congregation and, of course, urging them to contribute to the building fund, as well. Louise's aunt was Martha Newman, the founder of the first religious school on the North Shore in 1914, which became the NSCI Religious School in 1920. Louise's mother taught 4th grade and was active in the Sisterhood (now Women of NSCI) and helped raise money for the mortgage on the 840 building through bake sales and other Sisterhood activities. As Louise says, "North Shore Congregation Israel has always been part of my life. It's just always been there."

One of the stated goals of the founders of NSCI was "an interest in furthering their thought and creating a background of Jewish thought for their children."

Religious school was held on Sundays, as was the custom of nearly every Reform congregation at that time. Louise's parents enrolled her and her sister Irene when Louise was in 4th grade but Louise recalls religious school as being more of a "social event" than anything else, with the lessons being about the history of Judaism. "Training" for teachers, she says, was not like it is today. Sunday School teachers, when Louise began, were college students who, themselves, had little or no Jewish education.

Membership in the congregation at that time was relatively small. Major events, such as Passover, were celebrated at the temple. There was no youth group and not many extracurricular programs.

Louise was confirmed in 1931, and remembers her white dress and that she gave the flower offering. Rabbi Kopold passed away the February before their confirmation and Rabbi Samuel Cohon became the Rabbi, coming to NSCI every other week from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Confirmation year, Louise feels, was the only year of her religious training that was truly worthwhile. Rabbi Cohon prepared his students well while at the same time encouraging social events such as suppers together and social hours so that the class coalesced and became more steeped in Jewish tradition and culture. Confirmation was a "big deal" with the Chicago Tribune even covering the event. Louise's sister, Irene, was also confirmed at NSCI in 1933.

Rabbi Charles Schulman, with whom Louise and her family had a good relationship married Louise and her first husband, Harry Mintz, in June, 1939, at her parents' home. Harry was in service during World War II. He was awarded a Purple Heart and a commendation from General MacArthur for his work on planning the invasion of the Philippines, where he was injured and died after he returned home. This left Louise a single mother. She was active in the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) while her son, David, was in religious school. David was also confirmed at NSCI in 1962.

Rabbi Edgar Siskin married Louise and her second husband, Joe Cohen, in his study, in 1949. This was one of the very first services Rabbi Siskin performed during his tenure at NSCI. Joe was extremely active in the congregation and in the Men's Club (Brotherhood). Joe was the president of Men's Club from 1961-1962 when he came up with the idea of a Travel Program, which was very successful in raising money for the new building on 1185 Sheridan Road. The first trip was in 1961, followed by six or seven other trips. Joe would buy the charter flight and then work to plan the land portions. London, Israel, Italy, Amsterdam, Paris, Spain Portugal, Mallorca, Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm were all visited on these various trips. Great camaraderie and greater sense of a congregational community resulted from these trips.

Louise has known and had a personal relationship with many of the rabbis at NSCI. She was especially fond of Cantor Landsman and enthusiastically co-chaired the committee to plan a dinner and honor the Cantor when he retired. She was also particularly close to Rabbi Siskin and Rabbi Kudan.

When asked about the changes in Judaism she has seen since she was a child, Louise said that "As of today, there is some branch of Judaism for everyone," although her dedication and commitment has always been and will be to North Shore Congregation Israel.

This article was written with the assistance of the Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives Oral History Project. We have been interviewing current and past members to preserve the institutional memory of the congregation. If you are interested in participating in this project, please contact Merle Branner at archives@nsci.org.

*The mission of the Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives is to preserve our past and record our present; to use the collection to educate all generations about our past and present; and to preserve history for all generations.*

## Prepping for Passover: Recipes to Share

Following our successful website and Facebook posting of Sukkot recipes with an ingredient from our garden, we will be sharing Passover recipes, one of the more challenging cooking and eating times. If you would like to lead off with a recipe for charoset, main dish, side dish, kugel, dessert, kids' food, fun food or some other special recipe, please contact Laurie Hart, hartla@comcast.net. Watch for the postings in late March and during the holiday too!



## Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)



Believe it or not, despite what you see out your window, it will soon be time to receive tasty and beautiful organic vegetables again. It's never too early

to sign up for a CSA share from Angelic Organics for next year. Remember that you sign up directly at [AngelicOrganics.com](http://AngelicOrganics.com) and choose NSCI as the pickup location. Too much food and not enough time to eat it before the next delivery comes? Contact Drew Barkley at 847/835-0724 or email him at [drewb@nsci.org](mailto:drewb@nsci.org) for more information on splitting shares with other congregants!

**Still thinking about what to do this summer? It's not too late!**

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