

Religious Freedom



Beth Israel, Hartford (1876)

Jewish immigrants pressed for the right to organize synagogues and to worship together freely and publicly. In 1843, Jews from Hartford and New Haven submitted a petition to the Connecticut General Assembly, requesting a change in the Connecticut Constitution for religious freedom. The request to change the Constitution was denied, but a special enactment was approved, providing “that Jews who may desire to unite and form religious societies, shall have the same rights, powers and privileges which are given to Christians of every denomination.” Following the passage of this special act, a minyan of Hartford Jews began worshiping openly together in their homes or businesses and in a small congregation that came to be known as Beth Israel. For nineteen years, this remained the only Jewish congregation in Hartford.



How We Remember



Holocaust Monument, Elbert Weinberg

In 1981, a community memorial was established in front of the Jewish Community Center. This sculpture by Hartford native Elbert Weinberg symbolizes the triumphant rebirth of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Holocaust; the sculpture's overall form resembles the Hebrew word *chai*, for life. A pair of giant steel arms measuring 18 feet high appears to be emerging from the earth, holding aloft a gigantic shofar. Each arm bears the number of a local concentration camp inmate, one of them representing a victim and one a survivor. The first number belonged to the father of David Chase, Leon (Ari) Cielsa, who died on a death march in 1945, and the second number to survivor Regina Jacobs. More than 500 people gathered to dedicate the memorial and hear remarks from David Chase, Rep. Sam Gejdenson, and others.



Rights and Wrongs

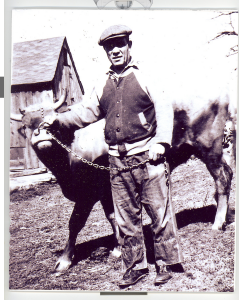


Mount Sinai Hospital

During the early twentieth century, most Jewish doctors were denied privileges in Hartford's hospitals. The unwritten "gentlemen's agreement" forced Jewish doctors to place their patients on admittance waiting lists until another physician was able to take over. This exclusion also created language barriers for Jewish patients, who feared their religious traditions would not be respected. Determined to create their own hospital open to all, a group of physicians and citizens created an association in 1918 called The Abraham Jacobi Hospital. In 1922, the association changed its name to Mount Sinai Hospital and bought the Morgan Brainard mansion on Capitol Avenue.



Jewish Farmers



Tom Cohen with Bull

Connecticut's Jewish farmers have been considered a novelty since they began to arrive from Eastern Europe in the 1890s. Jews carved out lives as farmers, bringing innovations that would come to distinguish them as outstanding in the field. Though forbidden to own land in Russia and Russian-occupied countries, Jews still came to America with some agricultural skills gained through cattle dealing, tenant farming, or raising cows, goats, or chickens. Jews pioneered the adoption of foodstuffs such as eggs, milk and broilers. Beyond specific crops, large-scale use of scientifically-designed chicken coops, Jewish farm publications, and the Jewish Farmers' cooperative all became hallmarks of Jews' success. Similarly, the farmers' credit union, formed by the Jewish Agricultural Society in 1911, was among the first in the nation, creating a model that was soon adopted across the country.



Jewish Stars: Annie Fisher



Annie Fisher

Annie Fisher was born in Russia in 1883 and came to America with her parents and eight siblings in 1888, settling in Hartford. The Fisher family was observant, and she was active in Jewish organizations from an early age. After graduating from Hartford Public High School, Annie earned a scholarship to Wesleyan University and was one of the first women to graduate in 1904. After graduating, Annie earned a Master's degree from New York University and continued at the Hartford Seminary and Columbia University, as well as studying psychology in Europe. She taught in Hartford for years, eventually becoming the first female principal and later the first female superintendent. Eventually, she advanced to become the superintendent of Hartford schools. By the time she retired in 1945, the Hartford community held her in high esteem. In 1963, Hartford named a school after her: the Annie Fisher Montessori Magnet School.



Jewish Stars: Beatrice Fox Auerbach

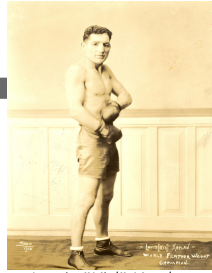


Beatrice Fox Auerbach, Pres. G. Fox & Co.

Beatrice Fox was born in Hartford on July 7, 1887 and married George S. Auerbach in 1911. Beatrice served as Vice President of G. Fox and Co. when her husband died in 1927. As both a woman and a Jew, she was not expected to excel, but under her leadership, it became the largest privately-owned department store in the U.S. She aimed to create an equitable workplace, promoting women, African Americans and veterans to upper-level management positions. She trained employees to treat all customers equally, without discrimination. Auerbach's foundation granted scholarships for higher education and subsidized the arts, music, hospitals, supported higher education for women, specifically the major in Business Administration at Connecticut College for Women. In 1945, she founded the Service Bureau for Women's Organizations, training women for leadership positions and to learn about national and international issues.



Jewish Stars: Kid Kaplan



Louis "Kid" Kaplan

Louis "Kid" Kaplan was born on October 15, 1901 in Kiev, Ukraine. His family came to the United States when he was five years old and settled in Meriden, where his father became a junk dealer. Kaplan turned professional in 1919. At first, he fought under the name "Benny Miller" because his mother didn't want to have a boxer in the family. He was a busy fighter with over 50 bouts during his first four years as a pro. On January 2, 1925, Kaplan knocked out Danny Kramer in nine rounds at Madison Square Garden to become the new featherweight champion. Kaplan was known not only for his skill in the ring, but his sportsmanship and integrity. He refused to "throw" matches, despite being offered large sums of money to do so. After retirement, he became an insurance agent, owned a liquor store, and also opened a restaurant in Hartford. He died in 1970 and was posthumously inducted into the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.



Stories From Our Past



Gloria Bein interviewing Truda Kaschmann (1982)

National and world events make written history, but oral history is different because each family is unique and had its own stories to tell. When they are shared, they become part of our own personal history. Oral history begins with the collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences. Unfortunately, too many people realize only after it's too late that they never asked the questions that would help them know their parents or grandparents as individuals who lived, loved, laughed, cried, struggled and survived in other times and circumstances. It is importantly for young people to know their past in order to find their own place in their family's ongoing story. Discovering your origins and where your family came from can provide a better understanding of who you are and deeper insight into your heritage.

