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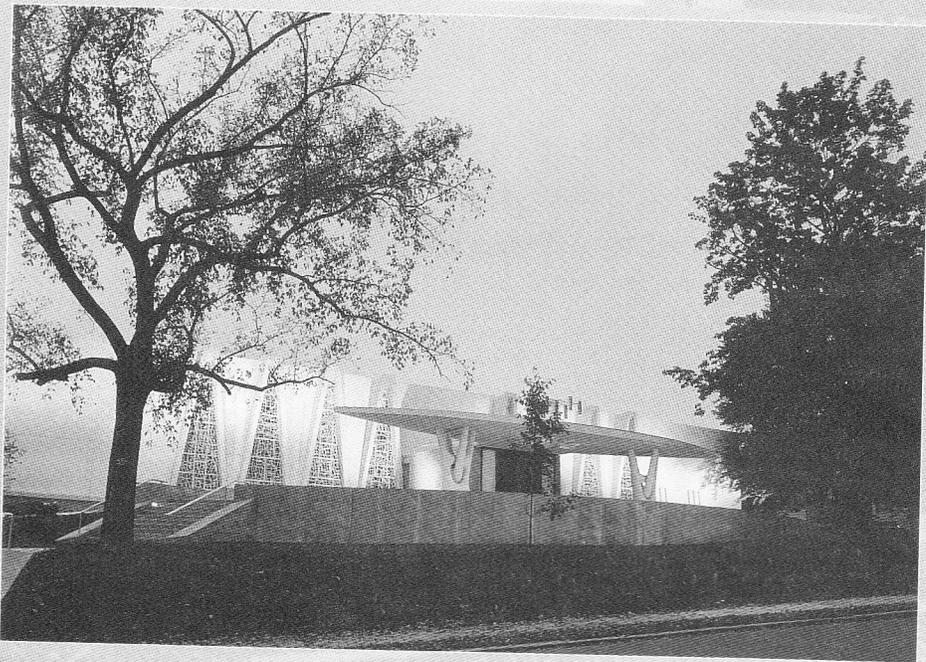
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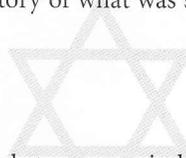


GEORGE M. GOODWIN

## Woonsocket's B'nai Israel Synagogue

Like countless small towns scattered across America, Woonsocket shelters a tiny but proud Jewish community. This community deserves to be better known for at least one significant reason: with the erection of its first and only synagogue in 1962, it created a treasure. Grandly conceived and opulently executed, B'nai Israel was a perfect embodiment of the aspirations of its lay leaders, its architect, and the artists that contributed to it. Indeed, the Woonsocket *shul* represented a glorious moment in postwar American synagogue architecture.

Fortunately, B'nai Israel has not eluded all recognition. It was mentioned, for example, in an article in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.<sup>1</sup> Neil Gilman included an illustration of it in his survey of Judaism's Conservative movement.<sup>2</sup> Various articles in the *Notes* of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association, while focusing on Woonsocket's pioneers and leaders, have also alluded to the synagogue's beauty.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, though, soon nobody may be left in Woonsocket to tell the story of what was so impressively accomplished there nearly four decades ago.



The Jews who settled in Woonsocket were an industrious and independent lot, and probably oblivious of Newport's Sephardic traditions. Solomon Treitel, the first Jewish inhabitant, opened a clothing store in Woonsocket in 1866. By 1894 there were thirty-eight Jewish names in the city directory. Borrowing a Torah from Providence's Reform congregation, Woonsocket's Jews assembled for their first services in 1889, and a religious school was begun. In 1893 the nascent community purchased land on Mendon Road for a cemetery and received a charter for a congregation known initially as Lovers of Peace. The congregation rented space in downtown lofts, first on Main Street and later on Lee's Block.

In 1900 it purchased a lot on Willow Street, but it lacked funds for building. Selling the property in 1904—by which time it had changed its name to B'nai Israel—it then purchased a Presbyterian church at the corner of Greene and Bernon Streets, on the south side of town, a few blocks from the Blackstone River. For fifty-eight years the former church served as B'nai Israel's home. Though an unremarkable Victorian structure, it was a sturdy and respectable symbol of the Jewish community. A Star of David surmounted the peaked, wooden roof, and a huge flagpole stood on the front lawn.

B'nai Israel entered a new phase of its development in 1918 and 1919, when four notable events occurred. The congregation honored thirty of its sons who had returned from service in World War I. It also demonstrated its financial stability through the ceremonial burning of its mortgage. In 1918 it hired Abel Hirsh, a graduate of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, as its first rabbi. And in 1919 it embarked on a vigorous era of lay leadership with the election of thirty-year-old Arthur Darman as its president.

*B'nai Israel Synagogue, Woonsocket. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*

*George M. Goodwin is the archivist of Temple Beth-El in Providence and a teacher in Brown University's Learning Community. He has interviewed many of the world's leading architects on behalf of the Frank Lloyd Wright Archives at Taliesin West in Arizona.*



Arthur I. Darman, circa 1962. Courtesy of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association.

Though physically a short man, for nearly his entire adult life Arthur Isaac Darman was a towering symbol of Woonsocket, both to its Jewish and to its Gentile communities, with influence far beyond any conferred by his nineteen years as synagogue president. Little in his background foretold his extraordinary success and impact.<sup>4</sup> Born in 1889 in Kurelvitz, an obscure Russian backwater, he lost his mother, Tsyvia, when he was only five. His father, Louis, soon remarried, and his first three children were joined by seven more. In 1901 the entire Darman clan emigrated to America, moving immediately to Woonsocket, where it was probably welcomed by former countrymen.

As the eldest child, Arthur received only a year or two of public schooling to augment his meager religious training before he went to work in his father's waste-fiber business to help support his siblings. Like an urchin from pulp fiction, at age fourteen he ran away from home and joined a circus—George Adams's Humpty Dumpty Show. Initially a peanut vendor, he soon became an actor; and though the circus went belly-up in Texas, Darman would never lose his love of glamour and fantasy.

Having discovered fine dining, Darman eventually became the manager of a restaurant in St. Louis. Then, in 1914, the prodigal son returned to Woonsocket, where he resumed working for his father and married Frances Cohan of Worcester. In 1917, having launched his own wool and waste-fiber business, he purchased land at the corner of Railroad and Arnold Streets and erected the Darman Building, a four-story, 40,000-square-foot edifice. Soon Darman became a highly successful businessman and the town's "leading Jewish citizen."<sup>5</sup>

In 1940 Darman expanded his business with the purchase of the Rathbun Knitting Mill at 565 North Main Street. Further growth followed World War II, when he formed the Top Company, which produced wools, mohair, and "specialty" fibers. Headquartered in nearby South Barre, Massachusetts, Top had six hundred employees. Darman's older child, Morton, a Brown alumnus, managed operations in Charlotte, North Carolina, and, later, in Boston. Before its demise in 1974, the company imported wool from Australia and New Zealand.

Darman also had a successful second career as a real estate developer. In 1926, at a cost of \$750,000, he erected the Stadium Building, a four-story office building on Main Street at Monument Square. To celebrate this accomplishment and to attract tenants, he published a glossy illustrated brochure highlighting the building's luxurious details: Tennessee marble, Italian travertine, Dutch floor tiles, and a ceiling mural showing Woonsocket's growth. Next door Darman built an equally impressive structure, the 1,500-seat Stadium Theater. A silent movie palace, the theater also presented concerts, vaudeville, and stage plays. Emphasizing wholesome family entertainment, Darman promoted the Stadium as Rhode Island's grandest showcase.<sup>6</sup>

With a third career as an impresario, Darman also developed the Woonsocket Opera House, on Main Street, built in 1888. After purchasing it in 1942, he invested more than \$150,000 in it and renamed it the Park. Darman's kindness to vaudeville performers was so extraordinary that in 1945 he was the subject of a feature article—with seven color photographs—in the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, the Park burned to the ground in 1975.

Elegantly dressed, groomed, and manicured, Darman never tired of playing the role of consummate host. He and his wife welcomed countless dignitaries to their imposing seventeen-room Victorian home at 309 Prospect Street. In addition to rabbis and cantors, they invited Catholic and Protestant clergy, elected officials (mostly Republicans), and fellow industrialists, including the French owners of local textile mills. As major-domo, Darman oversaw the preparation of elaborate meals in his kosher kitchen. He was routinely asked to plan weddings and receptions, and he often persuaded friends and associates, sometimes against their better judgment, to throw lavish affairs.

One can only imagine the efforts brought to bear on the 1940 wedding of the Darmans' only daughter, Syvia, a Wellesley alumna, to Edward Medoff, a graduate of Brown and Harvard Medical School, who had established a general practice in the Stadium Building. The ceremony and party held at New York City's Biltmore Hotel represented a union between Woonsocket's two leading Jewish families.

Acquaintances from Ukraine, the Medoffs had emigrated directly to Woonsocket in 1901 and rented an apartment on Mason Street once occupied by the Darmans. Abraham Medoff's oldest children, Israel and Eve, were born in the old country, their four younger siblings in America. Like his counterpart Arthur Darman, Israel received hardly any schooling. By age fifteen he began work as a peddler. After military service in France during World War I, he returned home and established a textile business, the I. Medoff Company, that soon prospered, allowing him to help many of his less affluent relatives. He was eventually joined in the business by his brother, Samuel, who had studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and had earned a law degree at Northeastern University, and who was one of the very few Jews employed by a Providence bank before World War II. A lifelong bachelor, Sam Medoff lived with his widowed mother.<sup>8</sup>

Although active in the synagogue, Israel Medoff—unlike his brother—never served as its president. A hard-driving, cigar-chomping executive, he was wedded to his business, particularly after his wife's death in 1933. For decades Israel worked much of each week in Manhattan, where he kept an apartment at the Waldorf Astoria.

There were at least three reasons why the leaders of the B'nai Israel congregation were eager to plan a new synagogue. The existing structure, remodeled in 1923, required extensive repairs. Moreover, its location was no longer convenient; most of Woonsocket's Jews had moved to the North End, a prosperous neighborhood of freestanding homes, where the Darmans had long ago relocated. Perhaps most important, however, members of B'nai Israel wanted a structure that would reflect their self-perceptions and aspirations.

Unlike most American congregations that built in the post-World War II era, B'nai Israel had experienced neither significant growth nor inner-city flight. Further, it was not competing with other Jewish denominations. Indeed, the Woonsocket Jewish community was ordered both by the clear religious and social boundaries around it and by the hierarchical authorities within.

Darman and Israel Medoff found a vehicle that made fund-raising both timely and somewhat democratic. They determined that 121 Jewish men and women—15 percent of the community—were serving or had served in the armed forces during the war. Five of these young men had made the supreme sacrifice for their country. The congregation therefore voted on 22 June 1944 to build in honor of its veterans and in memory of those who had died. On 21 February 1945 seven trustees set an initial fund-raising goal of \$150,000. By the fall of 1946 that goal had been achieved.

Meanwhile, however, the devastation of the Holocaust had become evident. Recognizing its responsibilities as it had in the wake of World War I, when it had aided Jewish families in Europe, the Woonsocket community decided that its first priority was to raise money for Holocaust survivors and for Israel rather than to construct a new synagogue. Consequently, in 1949 the congregation purchased the rectory of St. James Episcopal Church on Hamlet Avenue and remodeled the simple two-story structure into a Hebrew school and community center.

Though it had neither grown nor shrunk, the Jewish community was becoming more widely dispersed, expanding beyond Woonsocket's North End and into neighboring

towns. Still, synagogue leaders were unprepared or unwilling to accept the fact that the Woonsocket community had already reached its maximum size at about two hundred families. For the sake of Medoff family unity, Israel's children and fifty-four nephews and nieces did not express their own preference for building not in Woonsocket but in Smithfield or Lincoln.<sup>9</sup>

By 1959 B'nai Israel's building fund had grown to \$250,000, a sum sufficient for the congregation's leaders to launch another, more ambitious campaign. Perhaps some congregants would have been flabbergasted to learn what their leaders sought; perhaps the five members of the executive and construction committee—of which Israel Medoff was a member and Darman the chairman—felt it was unnecessary to go public with their goal. In any case, the new goal was never announced.<sup>10</sup>

With the encouragement of his brother, Sam Medoff accepted the synagogue presidency in 1959, and with his extensive experience as a banker, he began searching for a suitable property. Prospect Street, in the North End, seemed ideal, and he purchased two parcels there adjacent to Our Lady of Victories Roman Catholic Church for \$28,500 and demolished the existing residence. In 1960, following his mother's death, he purchased a large home for himself on Prospect just three doors north of the intended construction site.<sup>11</sup>

With the location of the new synagogue determined, the executive and construction committee turned its attention to the selection of an architect. Although Darman—surely the dominant force on the committee—had some understanding of matters of value, use, and appearance in architecture, it is not known whether or to what extent he was familiar with issues regarding style. Surely not opposed to modernism, he saw himself as a friend and disciple of the Jewish Theological Seminary's Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, a notably progressive thinker. Yet Darman and his committee might also have known that if they engaged a true modernist—a radical ideologue or dogmatist—they might run the risk of losing control of their project.

If Darman and his colleagues followed recent developments, they knew that two of the most imaginative masters of synagogue architecture were no longer available. The distinguished German-Jewish refugee Erich Mendelsohn, who had built four American synagogues, all in the Midwest, had died in 1954. Frank Lloyd Wright, America's best-known and most cantankerous architect, had died in 1959, shortly before the completion of his Guggenheim Museum in New York and Beth Sholom Synagogue near Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup>

Darman's committee interviewed Percival Goodman, the Columbia University professor who built far more American synagogues than any other architect of the postwar era, and possibly of all time. In 1946, after a lengthy and extensive search led by Rabbi William Braude, Goodman had received the commission for Providence's Temple Beth-El.<sup>13</sup> Though not completed until 1954, it was one of the first modern synagogues in New England. But perhaps because Goodman had built three other synagogues in the region, and Darman and his committee wanted a novel approach, they decided against him.

The committee might have considered—but probably did not interview—Max Abramovitz. A prominent Jewish architect and a moderate, Abramovitz was the younger partner of Wallace Harrison in an influential New York City practice well connected to the Rockefeller family. Abramovitz obtained numerous commissions for the rapidly expanding campus of Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, which became best known in architectural circles for his Three Chapels—a campus symbol—completed in 1955.

Several Gentile architects in the Northeast had impressive synagogue experience. Philip Johnson, once a curator of architecture at New York City's Museum of Modern Art, had

donated his services to a Conservative congregation in Port Chester, New York, in order to atone for his anti-Semitic posturings during World War II.<sup>14</sup> Kneses Tifereth Israel, completed in 1955, was one of the era's most remarkable creations.

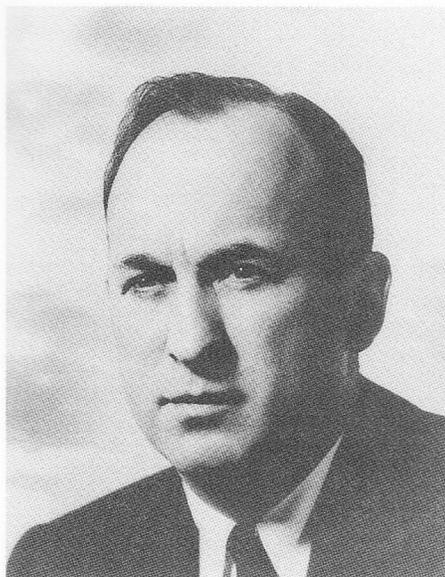
Johnson had studied architecture under Walter Gropius at Harvard. After arriving from Germany in 1937, Gropius, the founder and builder of the Bauhaus, had received several residential commissions, many from Jewish families. In 1946 Gropius and several of his former students formed The Architects Collaborative, a firm based in Cambridge, which obtained additional commissions from Jewish clients. Two were synagogues: Temple Reyim in Newton, Massachusetts, and Oheb Shalom in Baltimore. Gropius exerted a substantial influence on the latter commission, which was completed in 1957.<sup>15</sup>

By the 1950s modernism was also firmly established at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. One of the finest examples of avant-garde trends was its nondenominational Kresge Chapel, designed by Eero Saarinen.<sup>16</sup> Pietro Belluschi, a prominent modernist from the Pacific Northwest, had accepted several more ecclesiastical commissions after becoming MIT's dean of architecture in 1951.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most impressive of these was the new campus of Portsmouth Priory, the Benedictine preparatory school on Aquidneck Island. Belluschi built the first of his four synagogues, Temple Israel, in Swampscott, Massachusetts, in 1953.

Like Goodman and The Architects Collaborative, Samuel Glaser, a Boston architect, had recently built a synagogue in Newton. Designed for a new congregation of 530 families, Temple Shalom, completed in 1955, was an attractive but not eye-catching structure. Its sharply pitched roofs were reminiscent of Wright's highly original Unitarian meeting-house in Madison, Wisconsin, which had been dedicated in 1951.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike Wright's earthy sanctuary, however, Glaser's was extensively decorated with stained glass. Perhaps it was Temple Shalom's brightly colored windows, designed by Boston artist Albert Alcalay, that spoke most directly to Darman and his committee. The Woonsocket leaders were no doubt impressed by Glaser's extensive building experience and his take-charge attitude, and they surely noted the architect's strong identification with Conservative Judaism. Glaser probably also had the recommendation of Darman's brother-in-law, Abraham Anthony, a Boston decorator. By early 1960 the committee had chosen Glaser to design its new synagogue.

*Samuel Glaser, B'nai Israel's architect. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*



Beyond loving reminiscences from family, friends, and associates, Samuel Glaser (1902-1983) has been largely forgotten since his death.<sup>19</sup> Most of his office records, including correspondence, drawings, and plans, no longer exist. Though he achieved a measure of commercial success, Glaser was not a trendsetter who sparked controversy or fueled debates. Busy earning a living, he had little patience for theory or introspection.

Like Louis Kahn (1901-1974), perhaps the most gifted American architect of the post-war era, Glaser was born on the Baltic (Kahn in Estonia, Glaser in Latvia) and was brought to America at a very young age. Like Goodman and Abramovitz, he experienced a rough-and-tumble youth. Unlike his more illustrious contemporaries, however, Glaser may have benefited from a stronger and more satisfying religious upbringing. His father, Abraham, a carpenter, was a founder of Brookline's Kehillath Israel, the Conservative congregation with which Sam remained affiliated throughout his life.

Sam Glaser was a talented boy who could draw, make things with his hands, write for student publications, sing, and play baseball. After graduating from Brookline High School, he gained admission to the rigorous five-year architecture program at MIT, the

oldest in the country. There were only thirteen other graduates (three of them women) in his class of 1925.<sup>20</sup> A year later he was one of nine students who earned master's degrees in architecture at MIT.

Like his better-known contemporaries, Glaser was not educated as a modernist; instead, he was weaned on the heritage of French academicism and its Greek and Roman sources. At MIT he was required to take years of art history and architectural history, and with ten semesters of drawing he learned to compose monumental public buildings in an exquisite neoclassical style. He was also required to learn French; many of America's architecture professors were French citizens, and many young Americans sought scholarships for advanced study in Paris or Rome. In time Glaser would become an ardent Francophile.

Like most Jewish graduates of even the best architecture schools, Glaser found few job opportunities. In Boston, many of the most accomplished architects, like their clients, were Brahmins, and finding work there was difficult. After a trip with his father to visit relatives in Latvia, in 1927 Glaser secured employment in New York City with Clarence Stein, a graduate of Columbia and the Ecole des Beaux Arts, who was winning acclaim for his generously landscaped public housing developments.<sup>21</sup> Glaser may have been brought to Stein's attention by Robert Kohn, a member of MIT's advisory committee. Stein and Kohn would together gain renown for their design of Temple Emanuel, at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-sixth Street in New York City.<sup>22</sup> Completed in 1929, that enormous synagogue probably inspired Glaser to dream of building his own Jewish cathedral.

By 1933 Glaser was living in Brookline. Enjoying the turn-of-the-century brownstones, shops, galleries, and churches of Boston's fashionable Back Bay neighborhood, he hung out his shingle first at 162 Newbury Street, then at 234 Clarendon Street, then at 505 Boylston Street. While steadily gaining practical experience, Glaser sought a niche as a designer of moderately priced homes, particularly in the expanding suburbs where young Jewish families had begun living. In 1939 Coward-McCann published his *Designs for 60 Small Homes from \$2,000 to \$10,000: Showing How to Buy, Build, and Finance a Small Home*, a book based on a series of newspaper columns he had written. He could design in any revival style, or in something newer.

Although he was too old to have studied with Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, or Wright, Glaser must have gravitated towards those giants, who saw themselves as masters of a new order. In 1948 his attraction to modernism was dramatically demonstrated on Drumlin Road in the meadowy Oak Hill section of Newton, where a young couple, Robert and Eleanor Leventhal, hired him to build a spacious four-bedroom home.<sup>23</sup> The simple, box-like forms of his design represented a warmer and mellower version of Gropius's International style. Ironically, the Leventhal house took shape while a neighboring home was being built for George and Ethel Kaplan by The Architects Collaborative.<sup>24</sup> Sam and Dorothy Glaser built their own modest home, and another for relatives, a few blocks away.

By the late 1950s Glaser's practice had grown in scale and complexity. His firm, Samuel Glaser Associates, built numerous apartment complexes in Brookline, Cambridge, and Worcester, the Jewish Home in Brighton, the Midtown Motor Inn in Boston, Framingham High School, and hangars and a control tower at Logan Airport.<sup>25</sup> The Glaser building best known to suburban commuters, however, was the Star Market in Newtonville, a concrete block stretching across the Massachusetts Turnpike. It was one of the first structures in the United States built through the use of air rights.

However accomplished Glaser was in his work, his ability to fashion art could scarcely match his extraordinary ability to appreciate it. He had begun collecting art, even with

modest resources, since graduating from MIT. Over the years he and his wife had acquired splendid examples of American and European modernism. Attracted to sculpture, they purchased marbles and bronzes by Arp, Chadwick, Helpworth, Moore, and Pomodoro. Even more impressive was their collection of modern illustrated books by Bonnard, Braque, Chagall, Dufy, Léger, Miró, Picasso, and Vlaminck. Many of these books were featured at a 1961 exhibition, "The Artist & the Book: 1860-1960," organized by the Harvard College Library and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

While all three of the Glaser children enjoyed the art collection and pursued careers in the arts, Sam had an exceptional protégé. This was Vera, six years his junior and his only surviving sibling, who became one of the most successful collectors of younger American avant-garde artists. As major patrons of the arts and Jewish learning, she and her husband, Albert List, had particular enthusiasm for the Jewish Theological Seminary and its Jewish Museum. The stylish home that Glaser built for the Lists in Fall River in 1939 was featured that year in the *Architectural Record*.<sup>26</sup>

Glaser was no doubt delighted by B'nai Israel's \$800,000 budget, which exceeded Temple Shalom's by \$300,000. It was a golden opportunity—not to corner a market on religious structures, but to create a deeply reverent and personal edifice.

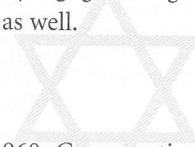
Although a modernist, Glaser must have revered two of Back Bay's nineteenth-century landmarks, H. H. Richardson's Trinity Church and McKim, Mead & White's Boston Public Library, both of which represented a perfect integration of function, form, and decoration. He must also have admired Harvard's Graduate Center, a complex of dormitories, dining rooms, and courtyards completed in 1950, which was Gropius's first campus commission and the fullest expression of his high-modernist thinking in New England. It, too, received extensive ornamentation, including an outdoor sculpture by Richard Lippold, painted murals by Joan Miró, Herbert Beyer, and Gyorgy Kepes, and relief murals in wood and brick by Jean Arp and Josef Albers. Albers's wife, Anni, designed drapery and bedspreads for the complex, and Glaser would call on her in his plans for the new B'nai Israel.

Glaser was also surely aware of several important churches recently constructed in France. The most unusual and evocative, built between 1950 and 1955 on a hilltop in remote Ronchampwas, was Le Corbusier's Notre-Dame-du-Haut, whose massive, curving walls were pierced with tiny windows, many emblazoned with colored blobs of glass.<sup>27</sup> Another glorious shrine of modern religious art was the Dominican Chapel of the Rosary, in Vence, for which Matisse, while in failing health between 1947 and 1952, created a resplendent ensemble of stained-glass windows and a set of six chasubles.<sup>28</sup> In Assy, a Dominican priest enlisted a number of avant-garde artists—Matisse, Rouault, Richier, Lurcat, and Léger—for the interior and exterior decoration of Notre Dame de Toute Grace.<sup>29</sup> Remarkably, the century's two leading Jewish artists also received commissions for the Assy church: Lipchitz sculpted a bronze Virgin and Dove, and Chagall designed a ceramic mural, plaster bas-reliefs, and two stained-glass windows, all on biblical themes. Crafted in 1957, Chagall's Assy windows—his first narrative in stained glass—led to windows for nine other churches.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their Christian connotations, decorated windows were widely used in contemporary American synagogues. Abstract and figurative imagery was employed by The Architects Collaborative in Newton and by Pietro Belluschi in Swampscott, though in neither case to much effect. Far more impressive were windows designed by painters: Abraham Rattner for Chicago's Loop Synagogue in 1960 and Ben Shahn for Buffalo's Temple Beth Zion in 1967.<sup>31</sup> For Providence's Beth-El, Percival Goodman called on the calligrapher Ismar David to create a flowing ensemble of Hebrew words and motifs.

In Connecticut, Glaser found two important precedents for the colorful treatment of windows. For the third home of Stamford's First Presbyterian Church, Wallace Harrison embedded 22,000 chunks of glass in scores of precast concrete panels.<sup>32</sup> The sensational effect was like walking through a rainbow—or an artist's paint box. For the sanctuary of Port Chester's Kneses Tifereth Israel, Philip Johnson placed slivers of colored glass in long horizontal bands.

However much Glaser might have admired Johnson's work at Port Chester, he also found it disturbing: the commission there might have gone to him rather than to Johnson. Johnson had been brought to the attention of Kneses Tifereth Israel by Vera and Albert List, and Glaser felt that he had been slighted by his own kin.<sup>33</sup> He also felt disappointed when the Lists did not prevail on his behalf when their friend and neighbor Joseph Hirshhorn decided to build a museum on the Mall in Washington. Consequently, when the Woonsocket commission materialized, Glaser saw it as a chance both to show that he was a better synagogue designer than Johnson and to prove himself to his sister and her husband as well.



On Sunday afternoon, 19 June 1960, Congregation B'nai Israel broke ground for its long-awaited synagogue. It was a festive and moving occasion, with more than five hundred Jews and Gentiles gathered under a large tent on Prospect Street. Various dignitaries were introduced by Israel Medoff, chairman of the building fund committee. Numerous World War II veterans were recognized. Perhaps the most emotional presentation was made by Mrs. Harold Sadwin, sisterhood president, who recalled how in 1939, as a child in Germany, she had seen her synagogue burn.<sup>34</sup>

These were halcyon—even giddy—times for American Jewry. Peace prevailed in the Middle East, and David Ben-Gurion was prime minister. Through Vatican II, John XXIII was beginning to search for interfaith understanding and reconciliation. Isaac Stern performed in the East Room of the Kennedy White House. Arthur Goldberg occupied the Jewish seat on the Supreme Court, and Abraham Ribicoff, formerly a senator from Connecticut, served as the nation's first secretary of health, education, and welfare. Leonard Bernstein conducted the New York Philharmonic, and Roberta Peters sang at the Metropolitan Opera. Jewish comics galore appeared on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, and Sandy Koufax pitched (except on Yom Kippur) for the Dodgers. Abigail Van Buren and Ann Landers were trusted family friends, and the whole world loved Levy's rye bread.

This buoyant, effervescent mood pervaded the ceremonies on Sunday, 16 September 1962, when the sparkling B'nai Israel was dedicated. More than nine hundred guests attended the gala affair. Five Torahs were carried into the sanctuary by five elders, the oldest of whom, Wolfe Brown, eighty-nine, lit candles with his great-granddaughter, Susan Sadwin, age six. Arthur Darman, chairman of the executive and construction committee, presented a symbolic key to synagogue president Samuel Medoff, who in turn presented it to a delegation of World War II veterans. Congregation leader Louis Macktaz proclaimed that the threat of communism, as represented by Russian achievements in space exploration, would not succeed because of America's religious superiority. Samuel Glaser, showered with praise, expressed his "deep humility and joy."<sup>35</sup>

Serving a variety of functions and a spectrum of emotions, the design of a synagogue can be perplexing. In designing B'nai Israel, Glaser sought an orderly progression of spaces to unify the sanctuary, chapel, auditorium, library, offices, classrooms, meeting rooms, lounges, kitchens, and ballroom. Indeed, for a congregation of only two hundred families, the synagogue was an enormous and sumptuous structure. Vicki Lieberman,

B'nai Israel's rabbi from 1993 to 1998, remarked that the building could easily accommodate a thousand members.<sup>36</sup>



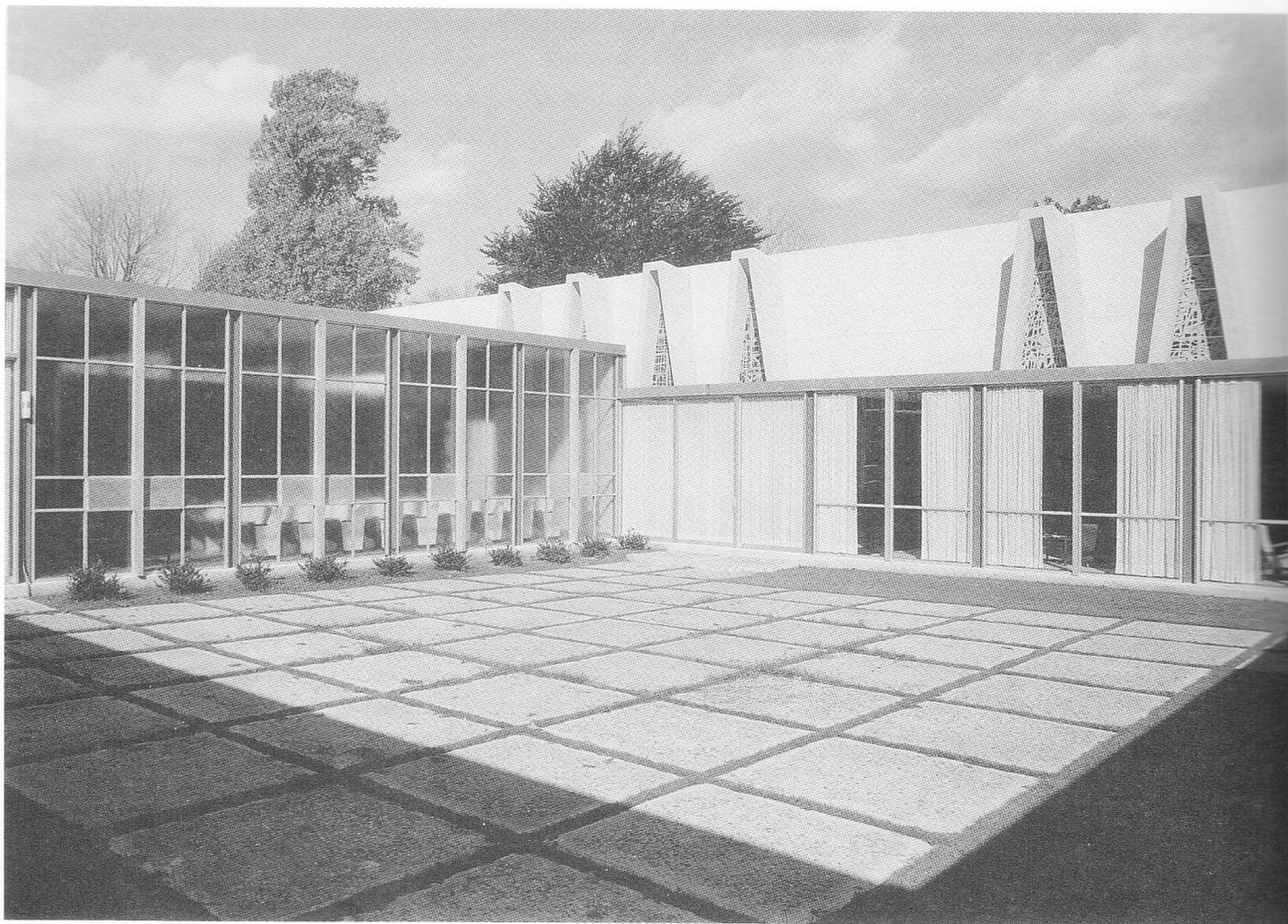
A spacious vestibule faces the synagogue's main entrance on Prospect Street. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.

As he had with Temple Shalom in Newton, Glaser devised an essentially symmetrical plan. The sanctuary and auditorium, bisected by a vestibule, form one long pavilion; when the sanctuary's 260 seats are occupied, 400 folding chairs can be placed in the auditorium. A garden courtyard, called a Court of Festivals, is reached through sliding glass doors. The corridor around the courtyard leads to a lounge, a kitchen, six classrooms, offices, a library, and a chapel. Most of these rooms face the courtyard; a few face a rear parking lot. These interiors are uncluttered, bright, and cheerful. The synagogue's lower level—reached from the vestibule by a grand curving staircase beneath crystal chandeliers, or via a rear staircase (there is no elevator)—contains a vast central space surrounded by kitchens, food service areas, cloakrooms, lounges, and exhibition cases forming a small museum.

B'nai Israel combines a rich variety of materials and textures. The main pavilion is reinforced concrete, decorated at its northern and southern ends by polychromed brick. Dark woods are used for hallway paneling and overhead beams. The corridor outside the chapel is clad with white marble. At the top of the corridor wall, inscribed in Hebrew, is the Kaddish, the prayer for the dead. Beneath, in neat rows, are the names of deceased congregants, now numbering more than six hundred.

Glaser's glassy hallways and courtyard recall Mies van der Rohe's spare elegance, which was popularized throughout the 1950s by such prominent American architects as Gordon Bunshaft, Richard Neutra, and Philip Johnson. In contrast to Louis Kahn's somber and shadowy forms, Glaser's show a lightness of touch and a fluidity of movement found in buildings by Edward Durrell Stone, John Carl Warnecke, and Gyo Obata. Though its style seems frivolous to some, B'nai Israel bears a further kinship with the delicate and languorous architecture of Minoru Yamasaki, who wed faith and sensuousness in two midwestern synagogues.<sup>37</sup>

Glaser also seemed taken with Marcel Breuer, a Gropius protégé who achieved an unusual sculptural power, especially in three Catholic churches.<sup>38</sup> This is evident in the concrete piers supporting the nearly flat sanctuary roof, as well as in the sanctuary's formality. High-backed leather chairs and two immobile wooden lecterns flank an imposing marble reading table. In a hierarchical progression of spaces, the *bimah* (podium) rises above the main floor, the ark above the *bimah*. High above the ark, the Ten Commandments



*The central courtyard, known as the Court of Festivals, is located behind the sanctuary. To the left is the chapel; to the right, a hallway and lounge. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*

are inscribed in gold leaf across a glimmering marble panel. This is a place to ponder mortality, not to nap or gossip.

With B'nai Israel's main entrance, Glaser faced a difficult, if not impossible, task: trying to bridge the delicacy of Yamasaki and the power of Breuer. Here was a building of moderate size, accessible to pedestrians and welcoming in manner, but lacking a vista, height, or external grandeur. Glaser needed a focal point—ideally, one bearing symbolic meaning—to demarcate a threshold. Attempting to carve an image out of a metaphor, the architect chose the eye of God—an audacious effort, but not an entirely successful one. The canopy representing the eye resembles the mandala of Hindu iconography. Though he otherwise avoided obvious symbols, Glaser also implanted a Star of David within the canopy.

B'nai Israel merits praise for its extensive decoration. Indeed, the sanctuary and auditorium's thirty stained-glass windows may be the finest ensemble in a modern American synagogue. Perhaps the architect thought about this medium in terms of his own name, although glass has meant something altogether different—and horrifying—to world Jewry since Kristallnacht in 1938.

A casual observer might speculate that Glaser's use of glass was inspired by Chagall's. Indeed, the Twelve Tribes of Israel, created for the chapel of Jerusalem's Hadassah



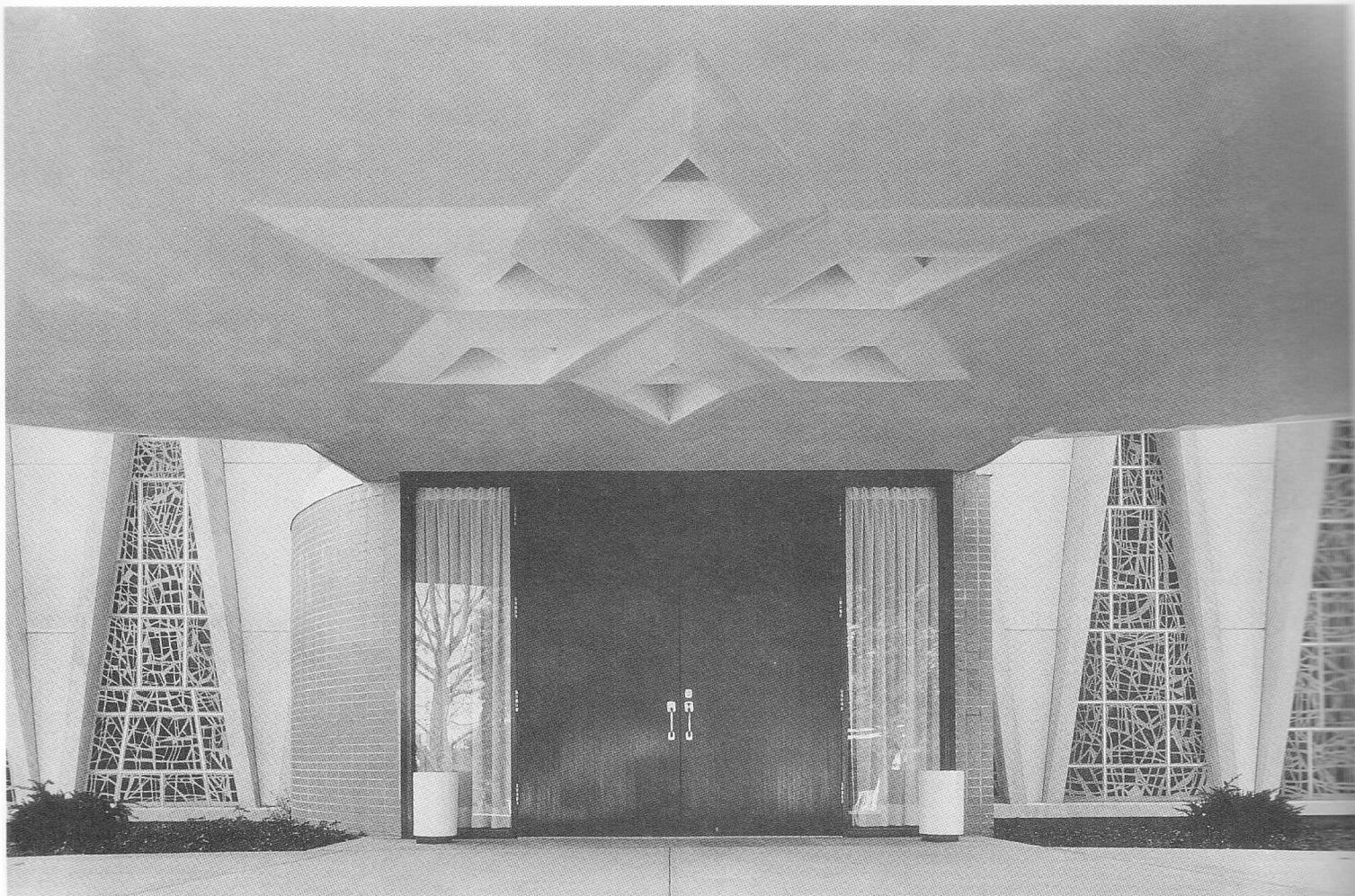
*The sanctuary as viewed from the Medoff Auditorium. Doors on both sides of the vestibule can be opened for expanded seating during High Holiday services. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*

Hospital, have come to epitomize Chagall's work and Jewish artistry. But the Hadassah commission was not offered until June 1959; Glaser's windows for Temple Shalom in Newton in fact predated Chagall's Assy windows by at least two years.<sup>39</sup> Glaser probably saw the Hadassah windows (each eleven feet high and eight feet wide) in the courtyard of the Louvre in the fall of 1961 or at the Museum of Modern Art in the winter of 1962, where they were exhibited to critical and popular acclaim before they were installed in Jerusalem.<sup>40</sup>

Already collectors of Chagall and experimental French art, the Glasers had another reason to visit Paris in late 1959 or early 1960. Their second child, Priscilla, had married Daniel Goldenberg, a French film director. Although she had initially sought a career as an actress at the Comédie Française, "Penny" became enthralled with horses and studied at Saumur, the French military's riding academy. Later she established a highly regarded breeding and training stable for show horses.

Whether or not Glaser had decided to make stained glass the dominant feature of his Woonsocket synagogue—and had presented the idea to Darman and his committee—he was probably searching for a suitable designer by the time of his trip to Paris. According to his children, he was strolling near his hotel in Paris when he noticed a painting or two in a gallery window. An epiphany occurred, or so the story goes, and the architect found his artist.

Avigdor Arikha was an Israeli who had spent much of the previous decade in Paris. Although he had exhibited some of his paintings and drawings—in Stockholm and Copenhagen in 1954, for example—he was still relatively unknown. But that was beginning

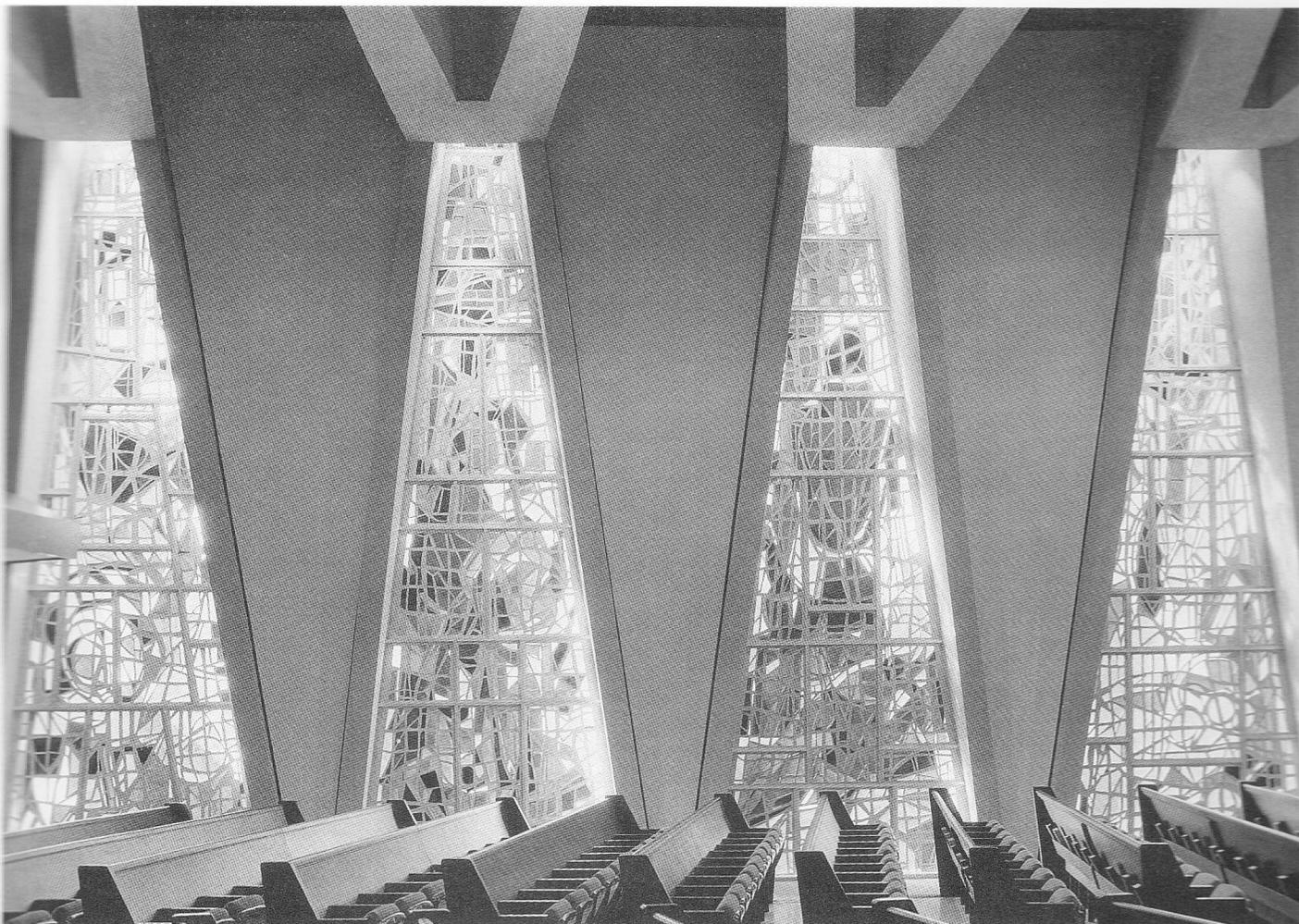


*Above the synagogue's front entrance is a concrete canopy implanted with a Star of David. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*

to change: an important exhibition of his work would be held at Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum in 1960, and he would represent Israel at the Venice Biennale of 1962. By the fall of 1961, when Glaser's plans for B'nai Israel were already formulated, Arikha would exhibit for a second time at the Galerie Karl Flinker in Paris. In 1972 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art would become the first American museum to display his work. Having gained representation by New York's prestigious Marlborough Gallery, Arikha would show widely and regularly from then on, emerging as one of the current era's most distinguished painters with his portrayal of the world around him: the human head and figure, family and friends, still lifes and interiors, cityscapes and landscapes.<sup>43</sup>

When Glaser stumbled onto some of Arikha's early paintings, however, the artist was working in an entirely different mode. Devoted to abstraction, he was also fond of using black. Glaser made an extraordinary leap of faith in imagining that Arikha could adapt himself to a medium in which he had never experimented, and to a religious institution as well.

Although it seems unlikely that Glaser felt or imagined a Jewish connection, he soon discovered that Arikha was not only an Israeli but a Holocaust survivor. Born in Romania in 1929, he had endured imprisonment in the Ukraine and his father's death during World War II before reaching Palestine under the auspices of Hadassah and settling on a kibbutz. He served in the Haganah and was severely wounded during the 1948 War of Independence.



*The sanctuary's stained-glass windows, about twenty-two feet high, were designed by Israeli artist Avigdor Arikha. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.*

An artist since boyhood, Arikha took classes at Jerusalem's Bezalel art school and was introduced, through Bauhaus-trained emigrés, to facets of the European avant-garde. In 1949 he received a scholarship for study in Paris, and the Louvre became the fountain-head of his further education. Another major influence was Samuel Beckett, the Irish writer, with whom he established a deep and lasting friendship. He also became acquainted with Baron Guy de Rothschild, the banker, and his first wife, Baroness Alix, who was active in Hadassah. A major collector of modern art, the baroness helped Arikha find a studio and living quarters in Paris.<sup>42</sup> She grew so attached to Arikha and his family that she came to Woonsocket for the synagogue's dedication in 1962.

Arikha's thirty windows form three groups. The first group consists of sixteen windows, eight each on the eastern and western walls of the sanctuary and auditorium. Except for four half-length windows on the western wall of the auditorium, all are large, approximately 22 feet high and 7 ½ feet wide at their base. The eight windows on the eastern wall bear explicit symbolic meanings. The first window, seen on the left from the Prospect Street side, represents the chaos preceding creation. The other seven windows stand for the days of creation. Synagogue members have given these windows an additional meaning for the celebration of Hanukkah: with one window illuminated each night, the windows become a menorah. The windows on the western wall have no identifiable imagery, and one can only speculate about what they might symbolize.

The twelve windows of the second group flank the ark. Each window, identified at the top in Hebrew letters, represents one of the twelve tribes of Israel. While the twelve large

windows of the first group contain a multitude of colors, these windows are tall, narrow bands consisting primarily of blues and reds. Their major function is to provide light for the ark end of the sanctuary.

The two remaining windows are almost hidden from the seated congregation. Like vertical scrolls, they adorn the niche that houses the ark. As identified in Arikha's watercolor maquettes, these windows represent "Shakris" and "Maariv," the morning and evening services—and, by implication, the heavenly course of the sun.

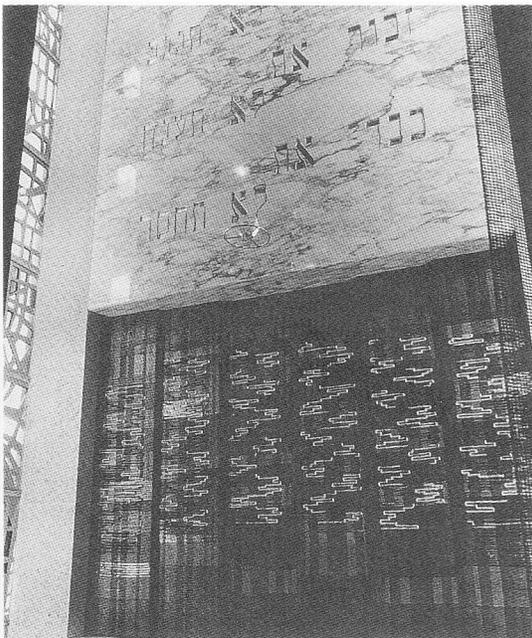
Transforming the light that passes through them, releasing their own radiance, Arikha's windows provide extraordinary sensory stimulation. With their diverse hues, their patterns and shadows, they seem to make God's presence perceptible in the synagogue's sanctuary and auditorium.



Two remarkable weavings were contributed to B'nai Israel by Anni Albers. Born Annelise Fleischmann in Berlin in 1899, Albers had Jewish ancestors, but she did not receive a Jewish education and probably never entered a synagogue. In 1922 she enrolled at Weimar's legendary Bauhaus and soon married Josef Albers, one of her instructors, in a Catholic ceremony.<sup>43</sup> At that time Josef was a glass designer; he would later gain prominence as a painter, a printmaker, and a color theorist, as well as a legendary teacher.

In 1933, after the Nazis closed Europe's most innovative design school, Josef and Anni were able to emigrate to America. Thanks, ironically, to Philip Johnson of the Museum of Modern Art—a Nazi sympathizer—the couple obtained teaching positions at Black Mountain College, another bold educational venture taking shape in North Carolina. They remained there until 1949, when Josef obtained an appointment at Yale. That year Anni received a one-woman exhibition at the Modern of Modern Art, the first ever extended there to a weaver.

A curtain designed and woven by Anni Albers covers the ark in the sanctuary. Above the ark the Ten Commandments are inscribed on a marble panel in gold leaf. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.



Glaser was probably aware of both Josef and Anni Albers even before their involvement in Gropius's Graduate Center. He may also have seen Anni's retrospective exhibitions at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum in 1954 and at MIT in 1959. Anni received another high honor, a gold medal for craftsmanship from the American Institute of Architects, in 1961, and it may have been around that time that Glaser purchased a fine example of what she called "pictorial weavings." Before her contribution in Woonsocket, when she was producing her most illustrious work in textiles, she received commissions from two other synagogues, Temple Emanuel in Dallas and Har Tzeon-Agudas Achim in Silver Spring, Maryland.<sup>44</sup>

Anni Albers designed the *parochet* (curtain) covering the ark in the B'nai Israel sanctuary. This shimmering textile creation, the size of an easel painting (64 inches high by 84 inches wide), is woven of cotton and Lurex in black, white, tan, and gold. Attached to the ark doors, the weaving consists of six parts, the inner four of which disappear from sight when the sliding doors are opened to remove the Torahs. The weaving is extraordinary for its flowing, curvilinear forms, which richly evoke Hebrew letters.<sup>45</sup> In addition to this *parochet*, Anni Albers designed a long, diaphanous curtain to hang at the top of the stairs before the ark.

Glaser considered the work of still another Jewish emigré artist, Louise Nevelson (1900-1988), to embellish his sanctuary. Though the Whitney Museum had acquired her *Black Majesty* in 1956 and the Museum of Modern Art her *Sky Cathedral* in 1958, Nevelson was still known to only a cadre of dealers, curators, and collectors. Glaser may have encountered her bewitching abstractions through her first and only show at Boston's Pace



Flanking the sanctuary ark is a two-part wooden pulpit screen, designed and built by Antonio DeCastro in a style inspired by the contemporary artist Louise Nevelson. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.

loft on an upper level. The screen's intricate design provides niches for resting Torahs, as well as fixtures for displaying the *lulov* (frond) and the *etrog* (citron) used for Sukkot celebrations.

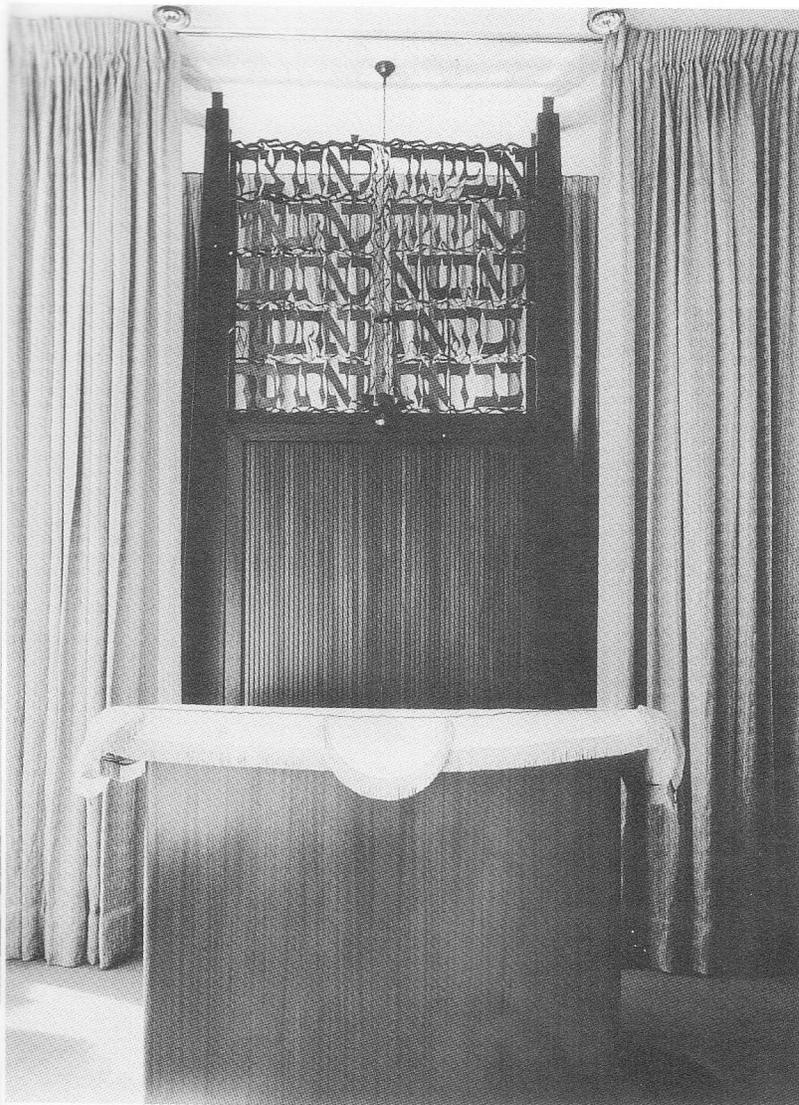
Probably as a result of a suggestion by Arthur Darman, a master choreographer, the screen also allows for dramatic entrances. One end of the *bimah* can be approached through a private passage from the rabbi's office, and the opposite end by a stairway from a downstairs robing room. Accordingly, both the rabbi and cantor can make sudden entrances before the congregation. Overseeing the construction and decoration of the synagogue, Darman left no detail to chance. For instance, he saw to it that the vestibule contained shelves for prayer books and drawers for *tallit*. He also insisted on a buzzer system so that the rabbi could communicate with the cantor, organist, and ushers (and possibly even with florists, caterers, and musicians stationed around the building). As a result of his suggestion, Albers's outer Torah curtain was motorized to open and close without human assistance.<sup>46</sup>

Surely grateful for a client who could appreciate and pay for every detail, Glaser turned to still another Holocaust survivor and European emigré, Ludwig Wolpert, to embellish the chapel ark. Born near Heidelberg in 1900, Wolpert studied sculpture and smithery under Bauhaus influence. Having abandoned Germany in 1933, he settled in Palestine, where he became a professor at the Bezalel school and the most distinguished Jewish metalsmith of the modern era. Two decades later he came to New York, where he directed a workshop at the Jewish Museum and crafted scores of liturgical objects for synagogues around the country. Wolpert's work forged a deceptively simple but elegant link between traditional function and contemporary fashion.<sup>47</sup>

Under Glaser's supervision, B'nai Israel acquired a handsome array of sculptures by Wolpert. The most prominent of these is the metal sculpture of the Ten

Gallery in the spring of 1961. He may also have learned about her through his sister, Vera, who may have become acquainted with her after the sculptress bought a cottage in Westport, Connecticut. But although he probably wanted a Nevelson for Woonsocket, a commission would simply have been too costly.

In Nevelson's place, Glaser turned to one of his associates, Antonio DeCastro, an architect trained at MIT who also had experience as a sculptor. In a style inspired by Nevelson's haunting assemblages—but without their geometrical complexity or textural variation—DeCastro built a two-part wooden pulpit screen to surround the ark. Painted a midnight black, the screen forms a stark contrast to Arikha's vibrant windows. Although never referred to as a Holocaust memorial, the screen was intended by Glaser to symbolize Jewish suffering. It also serves a number of practical purposes, such as focusing attention on the magnificent ark and concealing an organ and choir



The ark in the chapel is adorned with a metal sculpture of the Ten Commandments by Jewish Museum artist-in-residence Ludwig Wolpert. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G. Kantar.

Commandments, in Hebrew letters, displayed atop the chapel ark. A *Ner Tamid* (eternal light), resembling an ancient vessel, is suspended by chains above the ark. In an adjacent alcove hangs a *yahrzeit* (memorial) lamp. Wolpert's most unusual contribution to B'nai Israel was the *Ner Tamid* in the main sanctuary. Nearly invisible from the pews, it consists of a silver ring, only eight inches in diameter, supporting a crystal.

Despite its originality and magnificence, the decoration of B'nai Israel was relatively inexpensive. Out of a total building cost of \$821,259.78, the art accounted for a little over \$60,000. Arikha's thirty windows—including the artist's fee, manufacturing in France, and shipping—cost \$41,460, Albers's weaving approximately \$4,000, DeCastro's screen \$10,000, and Wolpert's decorations about \$5,000.<sup>48</sup> In appreciation for the Woonsocket commission, Glaser gave the synagogue several works of art, the largest of which, a stainless steel menorah by Beverly Pepper, was placed in the garden courtyard in memory of his and his wife's parents. Moved by the commission's success, Vera List donated seven framed prints by Leonard Baskin, Chaim Gross, and Larry Rivers.

In 1965 B'nai Israel's ballroom, previously known as Founders' Hall, was rededicated in honor of the Darman's golden anniversary. The Woonsocket Jewish community lost its most illustrious leader, and the city one of its most public-spirited citizens, when Arthur Darman passed away in 1978 at the age of eighty. His death occasioned a front-page obituary and a glowing editorial in the local newspaper.<sup>49</sup> His funeral attracted numerous dignitaries, including Christian clergy; his four grandsons, including Richard Darman, who served in the Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush administrations, helped bear

the coffin.<sup>50</sup> A string quartet from the Rhode Island Philharmonic performed at B'nai Israel in Darman's memory. Of Darman's six grandchildren, none resided in Woonsocket, and none have married Jews.

In 1976 the auditorium of the synagogue was rededicated in honor of Israel and Samuel Medoff. Izzy passed away in 1984, Sam in 1994. The only Medoff relative remaining in Woonsocket is Sylvia, Edward Medoff's widow. A Medoff grandnephew completed his rabbinic studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City in 1999.

In 1967 Anni Albers completed *Six Prayers*, a commission that she had received from Vera and Albert List. Woven of cotton, linen, and silver Lurex, it was an early and highly unusual example of Holocaust memorial art. It was presented to the Jewish Museum but is seldom exhibited.

Vera and Albert List funded the expansion of the Jewish Museum in 1963, providing much-needed gallery space and a new entrance on Fifth Avenue. The addition (obliterated in 1991 to make way for a larger expansion) was designed by Sam Glaser. The Lists also supported a number of schools, such as the New School for Social Research, Swarthmore College, Kirkland College, and Harvard, where they endowed a professorship in Jewish studies. They made numerous gifts to MIT in honor of both Sam Glaser

and the Glasers' cousin Max Wasserman, an engineering alumnus of 1935 who became a major collector of modern art. Vera, a trustee, donated a large Henry Moore bronze to MIT for outdoor display. The Albert and Vera List Visual Arts Center—designed by I. M. Pei, an MIT alumnus who had been in Glaser's employ as a young architect—was established at the school in 1985.<sup>51</sup>

Sam Glaser's practice thrived during the 1960s. His commissions throughout Massachusetts included apartment complexes, industrial offices, shopping centers, and schools, as well as a number of government facilities. Glaser courted Democratic and Republican politicians at every level. In 1961 Glaser's and Gropius's firms together won a contract from the General Services Administration to build Boston's new federal office complex. Bringing together "Mr. Ingenuity" and "the Brilliant but Nutty European Professor," it was a strange but productive partnership. The million-square-foot complex was completed in 1965 and named in memory of President Kennedy. The Architects Collaborative took full credit for everything, even for the selection of paintings and sculptures. Glaser's name was misspelled in the official record.<sup>52</sup>

Perhaps Glaser had grown accustomed to such slights by 1971, when the Albert and Vera List Art Building was dedicated at Brown University. Despite their involvement with Philip Johnson's Port Chester synagogue, the Lists had no part in the selection of an architect for the Art Building;<sup>53</sup> Johnson was hired, rather, on the basis of a previous work of his on campus, the Thomas J. Watson, Sr., Computer Science Center, and his friendship with university chancellor John Nicholas Brown.<sup>54</sup> When Johnson resigned from the project, the Lists played no role in the recruitment of Glaser to complete it. Though the donors, the client, and Johnson were all gratified by the result—probably the outstanding contemporary landmark in Providence—Glaser was not recognized at the building's dedication.

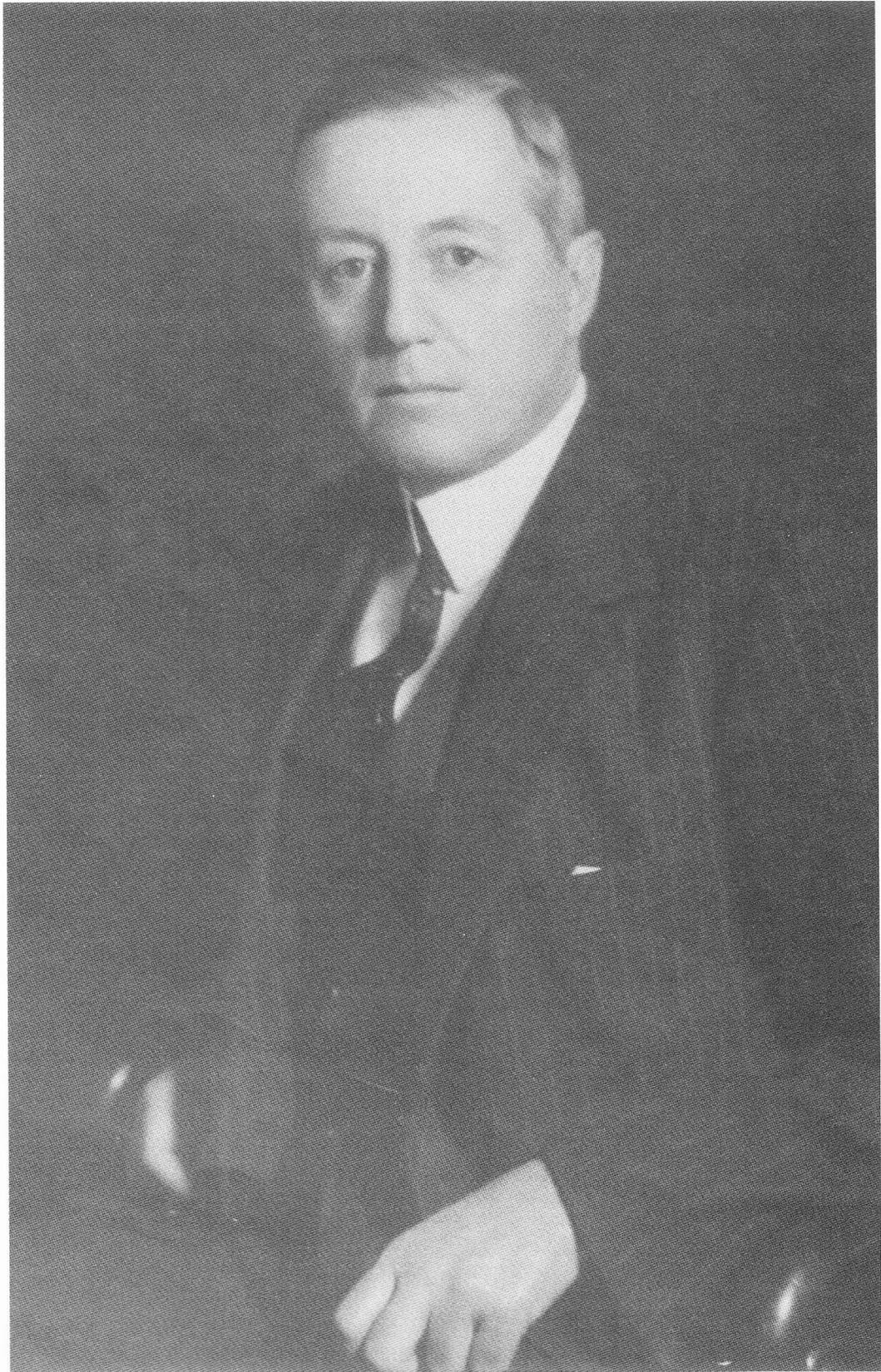
B'nai Israel, dedicated when Glaser was sixty years old, was the architect's last synagogue commission. During his several years of retirement he spent winters in Palm Springs near his son, Paul Michael, the actor and film director, who had himself once flirted with architecture. Glaser took drawing classes, served on an advisory committee at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and, until his final days, spoke enthusiastically with former colleagues about new projects. When he died in 1983, services were held at his lifelong synagogue, Brookline's Kehillath Israel. Ten months later his older daughter, Constance Kantar, still a resident of Newton, organized a memorial service at B'nai Israel.

Of all Sam Glaser's buildings, B'nai Israel is one of the few that have survived, and it remains in pristine condition. That seems fitting: for Glaser, as for Woonsocket, the synagogue proved to be an ideal commission.

## Notes

1. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. "synagogue."
2. Neil Gilman, *Conservative Judaism: The New Century* (West Orange, N.J.: Behrman House, 1993), 6.
3. See, for example, Eleanor F. Horvitz, "The Jews of Woonsocket," *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 9 (1986): 325-36, and "The Jews of Woonsocket: A Further Study," *ibid.* 10 (1987): 45-60; Geraldine S. Foster, "100th Anniversary of B'nai Israel, Woonsocket: 1993," *ibid.* 11 (1993): 354-58.
4. The following details of Darman's life are from Sylvia Medoff (Darman's daughter), interview by the author, Woonsocket, 2 Feb. 1986. See also Darman's obituary in *Rhode Island Jewish Historical Notes* 7 (1978): 552-53.
5. *The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations: Biographical* (New York: American Historical Society, 1920), 5:504-5. See also John Simons, ed., *Who's Who in American Jewry* (New York: National News Association, 1938), 3:200.
6. Darman's showmanship in Woonsocket might be compared to Louis B. Mayer's early career in Haverhill, Massachusetts. See Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), 87-8.
7. T. E. Murphy, "Book Me at Woonsocket," *Saturday Evening Post*, 23 June 1945, 41-43.
8. Eve Medoff Goldberg (Israel Medoff's sister), interview by the author, Providence, 25 July 1996.
9. Arthur Robbins (Medoff nephew), interview by the author, Providence, 14 March 1996.
10. The Medoff brothers contributed approximately one-third of the funds, as did the Arthur Darmans. Samuel Medoff, taped interview by the author, Woonsocket, 30 Oct. 1991.
11. *Ibid.*
12. See George M. Goodwin, "Wright's Beth Sholom Synagogue," *American Jewish History* 86 (September 1998): 323-48.
13. See George M. Goodwin, "The Design of a Modern Synagogue: Percival Goodman's Beth-El in Providence, Rhode Island," *American Jewish Archives* 44 (spring-summer 1993), 31-71.
14. Rabbi Joseph Speiser, interview by the author, West Palm Beach, Fla., 27 Oct. 1991. Johnson's political (and sexual) escapades received careful scrutiny in Franz Schulze's *Philip Johnson: Life and Work* (New York: Knopf, 1994).
15. John C. Harkness, ed., *The Walter Gropius Archive*, vol. 4, 1945-1969: *The Work of The Architects Collaborative* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 170, 177. Oheb Shalom was one of only twenty-eight commissions undertaken by The Architects Collaborative for which Gropius claimed major responsibility. For an overview of Gropius's work, see Reginald Isaacs, *Gropius: An Illustrated Biography of the Creator of the Bauhaus* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1983).
16. See Roger G. Kennedy, *American Churches* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), 56-57.
17. See Meredith L. Clausen, *Spiritual Space: The Religious Architecture of Pietro Belluschi* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1992), and *Pietro Belluschi: Modern American Architect* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994).
18. Paul E. Sprague, ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright and Madison: Eight Decades of Artistic and Social Interaction* (Madison: Elvehjem Museum of Art and University of Wisconsin, 1990), 179-87.
19. For the following biographical details, I am deeply grateful for interviews with Constance Glaser Kantar in Newton, Mass., 10 and 27 Feb. 1996; Paul Michael Glaser in Santa Monica, Calif., 10 Mar. 1996; Arthur Vershbow in Boston, 16 Feb. 1996; Antonio DeCastro in Boston, 9 Feb. 1996; and Vitolds Vitols in Newton, 25 Feb. 1996. See also "Samuel Glaser, Architect, at 81," *Boston Globe*, 8 and 9 Aug. 1983.
20. Several Jewish students, mostly from greater Boston, were enrolled at MIT. Glaser was one of twelve members of Sigma Alpha Mu's Xi chapter, established in 1919. MIT had a larger Menorah Society, but Glaser did not belong to it. See *Technique: The Yearbook of MIT*, 1925. I am grateful to MIT's Elizabeth Andrews, reference archivist, and Michael Leininger, architecture librarian, for providing student and alumni records.
21. Eugenie L. Birch, "Clarence S. Stein," in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, ed. Adolf K. Placzek (New York: Free Press, 1982), 4:123.

22. Kennedy, *American Churches*, 258-59.
23. Eleanor Leventhal, taped interview by the author, Newton, Mass., 2 Mar. 1996.
24. Ellen Sulkin (Kaplans' daughter), interview by the author, Weston, Mass., 25 Mar. 1996; Harkness, *The Walter Gropius Archive*, 4:xv. The Kaplan House was the first building designed by The Architects Collaborative.
25. George S. Koyl, ed., *American Architects Directory*, 2nd ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1962), 250.
26. *Architectural Record* 86 (November 1939): 102.
27. Le Corbusier, *The Chapel at Ronchamp* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957).
28. John Elderfield, *Matisse in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1978), 154-57.
29. See William S. Rubin, *Modern Sacred Art and the Church of Assy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).
30. See *Marc Chagall: Works from the Collections of the Musée National d'Art Moderne Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris* (Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts, 1988). This catalogue contains a detailed chronology of Chagall's oeuvre.
31. Rattner's window, *The Journey of a Mystic*, is reproduced in H. A. Meek, *The Synagogue* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 218. For a glimpse of Shahn's, see "Temple's Slanting Walls Create an Upwardly Directed Symbolic Form," *Architectural Record*, 6 Mar. 1968, 133-36.
32. Victoria Newhouse, *Wallace K. Harrison, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1989), 171.
33. The Lists introduced Johnson to the leaders of Kneses Tifereth Israel at their home in June 1953. They had previously introduced him to leaders of Temple Sholom in Greenwich, where they were members. Norma Perlstein (administrator of Temple Sholom, Greenwich, Conn.), interview by the author, Greenwich, 26 Dec. 1991.
34. *Woonsocket Call*, 20 June 1960.
35. Edward Berman, "A Cherished Dream Comes True," *Woonsocket Call*, 17 Sept. 1962.
36. Rabbi Vicki Lieberman, interview by the author, Woonsocket, 13 Mar. 1996.
37. See *Minoru Yamasaki: A Life in Architecture* (New York: Weatherhill, 1979).
38. Kennedy, *American Churches*, 60-61.
39. *Marc Chagall*, 189.
40. Extensive press coverage of the Hadassah windows is found, for example, in *Newsweek*, 10 July 1961; *Time*, 4 Aug. 1961; and *Look*, 24 Oct. 1961. For the architectural press, see Wolf Von Eckardt, "Translucent Beauty," *AIA Journal*, February 1962, 106. For reproductions of the windows, see Jean Leymarie, *Marc Chagall: The Jerusalem Windows* (New York: George Braziller, 1962).
41. See Barbara Rose and Maurice Tuchman, *Arikha* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985); Dan Hofstadter, "A Painting Dervish," *New Yorker*, 1 June 1987, 37-56; and Duncan Thomson, *Arikha* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994). The last reference contains an extensive bibliography and exhibition chronology.
42. Raymond Cogniat, "The Collection of Baroness Alix de Rothschild," *Studio International*, March 1965, 112-17.
43. I am grateful to Nicholas F. Weber, executive director of the Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, for information about the Albers' religious backgrounds. He believes that age and dedication to work were more important factors than Anni's Jewish ancestry in the couple's decision not to have children. Letters to the author, 5 and 25 Mar. 1996.
44. "Lofty Shrine: Dallas Congregation Dedicates Synagogue," *Life*, 25 Feb. 1957, 62; David Dillon, *Dallas Architecture: 1936-1986* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 54. Glaser may deserve some credit for suggesting Anni Albers to Temple Emanuel, since he and the co-architect, Max Sandfield, were classmates at MIT. For Albers's life and work, see Gene Baro, *Anni Albers* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1977), and Nicholas F. Weber, *The Woven and Graphic Art of Anni Albers* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985).
45. The weaving is reproduced in Avram Kampf, *Contemporary Synagogue Art: Developments in the United States, 1945-1965* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1966), 60.
46. Darman's attention to artistic detail was so acute that it could be unnerving, even to seasoned rabbis. Not only did Darman critique sermons as to length and content; he also suggested where the rabbi should stand for greatest visual impact. If "Mr. Darman" reminded some of Napoleon, this was probably no mere coincidence. A bronze statuette of the emperor stood on the mantle of his Prospect Street living room.
47. *Ludwig Yehuda Wolpert: A Retrospective* (New York: Jewish Museum, 1976). I am grateful to Sumner and Shirley Halsband of East Greenwich, R.I., for their recollections of Wolpert and his associates.
48. "Final Report of the Building Commission, Submitted by Arthur I. Darman, February 23, 1964," B'nai Israel archives.
49. "Civic Leader Arthur Darman Succumbs at 88," *Woonsocket Call*, 1 June 1978; "Arthur I. Darman," *ibid.*, 2 June 1978.
50. "375 Attend Funeral of Arthur I. Darman," *Woonsocket Call*, 3 June 1978.
51. In recognition of her patronage, Vera List was presented with a 1996 National Medal of Arts by President Clinton. *New York Times*, 4 Jan. 1997.
52. Harkness, *The Walter Gropius Archive*, 4:372.
53. Vera List, interview by the author, Greenwich, Conn., 23 Oct. 1991. Johnson may have been selected even before the Lists made their gift to Brown.
54. Thomas J. Watson, Jr., letter to the author, 4 Nov. 1991. See also the folder on the List Art Building in the archives of the John Nicholas Brown Center, Providence.



## Wilsonian Moralists: Senator Peter G. Gerry and the Crusade for the League of Nations

LEONARD SCHLUP

**P**eter G. Gerry (1879-1957), a leading Rhode Island political figure during the first half of the twentieth century, was a nationally prominent supporter of United States participation in the League of Nations. Created to maintain peace among the nations of the world, the League was originally one of the Fourteen Points, a program of liberal objectives in World War I as defined by President Woodrow Wilson in an address to Congress on 8 January 1918. Wilson feared that wars would continue as long as each nation held sole responsibility for its own defense. The League would afford mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to all member nations.

Gerry was one of Wilson's loyal Democratic allies in the great struggle to redefine America's place in post-World War I foreign affairs. Pursuing this endeavor in 1919 and 1920, Gerry was more practical than the president in predicting the obstacles to Senate ratification of the Versailles peace treaty, which contained the covenant of the League of Nations. Gerry's role in the debate over the League constituted an important phase of his political career and underscored his convictions and idealism as a so-called Wilsonian moralist, a political leader claiming commitment to the principles of right conduct, ethical truth, stable values, and honorable dealing with foreign nations.

Gerry was a member of a distinguished New England family. His great-grandfather Elbridge Gerry signed the Declaration of Independence and served as vice president of the United States from 1813 to 1814.<sup>1</sup> His grandfather made a fortune in New York City real estate. After graduating from Harvard University in 1901, Gerry studied law and was admitted to the Rhode Island bar in 1906. A Democrat, he served as a United States representative from Rhode Island's Second Congressional District from 1913 to 1915 and as a United States senator from 1917 to 1929 and from 1935 to 1947. As the first popularly elected senator in the state's history, he authored the Gerry Corrupt Practices Act of 1918, which prohibited the buying of votes in primary, general, and special elections by or on behalf of congressional candidates. An advocate of a strong navy, he became a member of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee and worked for the development of naval installations in Rhode Island. In 1917 he voted for war against Germany.<sup>2</sup>



*Senator Peter G. Gerry. Library of Congress photo provided by the U.S. Senate Historical Office.*

Serving as the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Committee during the congressional campaign of 1918, Gerry urged Democratic candidates to capitalize on Woodrow Wilson's prestige. He summarized his party's argument for Democratic control of the next Congress forcefully:

If President Wilson is to receive whole-hearted support; if entire confidence and credit are to be given him; if he is to stand forth as the spokesman of a united people, it can only be done by electing to the Senate men of his political faith. To argue that a Democratic President can work with Republican Senators with the same degree of harmony, no matter how loyal they may be, is an absurdity, for a Republican majority in the Senate means reorganization of that body, with a change both in the leadership and the complexion of the various committees.<sup>3</sup>

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But the Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress in the 1918 elections. Gerry was discouraged, but he did not interpret the electoral results as necessarily a popular repudiation of Wilson's foreign policy in conducting the war or proposing an international organization for peace. The electoral outcome, he believed, was more the result of political partisanship and opinion on domestic matters.

On 16 November Gerry advised the president that some Democrats doubted the wisdom of his decision to attend the forthcoming peace conference in Paris at a time of intra-party disarray in Washington:

I have also heard the hope expressed that if you do decide to go, it will not be until after preliminary questions and matters have been agreed upon and when your presence would enable you to speak with the most telling effect. In that event, it is expected that it would not be necessary for you to be long absent from Washington. On the other hand, there does not seem to be much doubt that your presence would give the United States a prestige and a force that would make it the dominating power at the Council table.<sup>4</sup>

Ignoring the advice that he delay his trip, Wilson sailed for Europe in December 1918. Republicans criticized not only his decision to attend the conference but also his judgment in excluding senators and prominent Republicans from the American delegation.

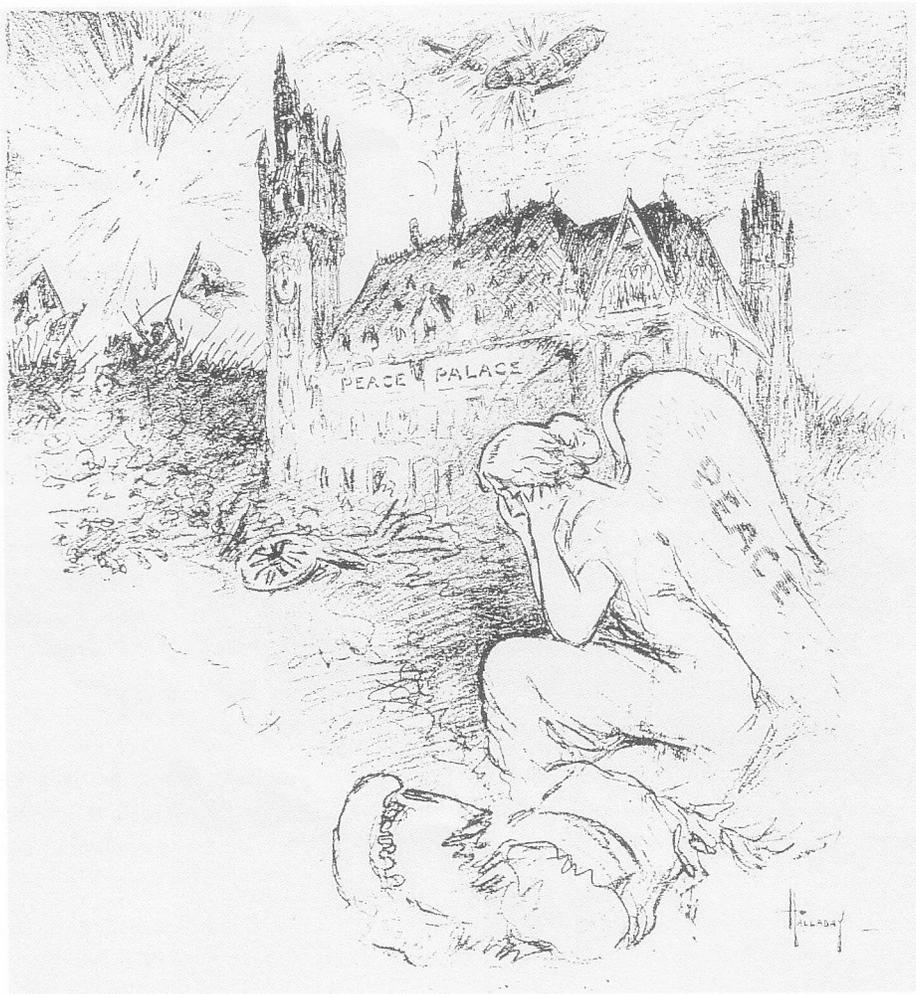
On 4 March 1919 Gerry harshly denounced a Senate resolution expressing the opposition of thirty-seven Republican members to the president's stance on the League of Nations.

The resolution condemned the League's constitution and criticized the attempt to combine the League and the peace treaty into one integral unit. Gerry called the Republican action an unfortunate example of how far partisanship could blind individuals in a great crisis. He accused the signers of the manifesto of being unwilling to wait to examine the actual treaty and of trying to undermine the role of the delegates at the peace commission and usurp the president's power to conduct foreign policy.

This attempt to discredit and hamper the American delegates at the conference [Gerry declared] cannot fail to have a bad effect on the statesmen of the world who are trying to prevent a second Congress of Vienna and to make practical an enduring peace based upon those great moral truths which should be the fundamental principles of all civilized nations. A great part of Europe is in chaos. The situation will be permanently hopeless unless the common people throughout the world believe that a nobler condition of a new era is to be born for mankind.<sup>5</sup>

Anxious to survey the European situation firsthand, Gerry traveled abroad in May and early June. On the eve of his return to the United States on 6 June, he issued a statement in which he deplored "partisan demagogues," especially Senate Republicans, while praising the pro-League stands of former president William Howard Taft and President Abbott Lawrence Lowell of

"This Christian World." Cartoon by Milton R. Halladay, from *Cartoons by Halladay* (Providence: Providence Journal Co., 1914). RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9270).



former president William Howard Taft and President Abbott Lawrence Lowell of

Harvard University. The best course, said Gerry, was to endorse the effort being made by Woodrow Wilson.<sup>6</sup>

Defending Wilson's conduct of the war, Gerry deprecated the current retrospective questioning of certain military operations. Such questioning, he claimed, would compromise America's leadership at the conference table. Further,

An American who undertakes to pick out the faults in a battle where the general effort was so splendid and so fully vindicated by the result is doing a disservice. . . . The initiative is what counts, and in this war . . . we were fortunate in furnishing to the whole allied cause North American leadership, which history will show resulted in an energetic action which shortened the war and saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

Having studied Wilson's negotiations with the European leaders and conferred with the president, Gerry observed that

people who sit in their armchairs in America and criticize . . . do not have a full conception of the difficulties of the European situation. In the first place, far away from the scene, they do not realize to what extent Europe was ruined and shattered. . . . The President came into that situation with his high ideals and having no narrow self-interest of any kind, but representing that spirit of good will and ideality which animates the American people.

Gerry admitted that the president had not been "very practical" on some matters, and he contended that Wilson had been "too considerate" of the European point of view. "It is not for me to defend the President," said Gerry. "He is amply able to defend himself. He has not chosen to keep himself or his activities before the American public and perhaps in that regard he has made a mistake. As a matter of fact he is a poor publicity man."

The signing of the Versailles peace treaty in June 1919 elicited a variety of responses from senators, whose formal debate on the strengths and shortcomings of the agreement eventually embrangled the nation. For Gerry, the conclusion of the peace conference brought a sigh of relief. "It is the big step in putting the world upon a normal peace basis," he said, "and is the culmination of the diplomatic efforts of the statesmen of our nation and the allied countries. It is undoubtedly a great triumph for the President and for American ideals. I believe the feeling of the country is that the Senate should not delay any more than necessary lending its consent to the approval of the treaty." But Gerry was under no illusions; privately he knew that the road to ratification would be rough.

Faced with its constitutional obligation to approve or reject treaties, the Senate ultimately divided into four groups on the issue of the League of Nations. One group, headed by Senate minority leader Gilbert M. Hitchcock, consisted of senators who supported Wilson and favored United States participation in the League. Gerry belonged to this group, though he maintained his characteristic streak of independence. A second group, including Frank B. Kellogg of Minnesota, was composed of "mild reservationists," who were prepared to accept the treaty with minor alterations and clarification. This was a group with which Gerry was perfectly willing to work. A third group, led by Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, the Republican chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, was made up of "strong reservationists," who would approve the treaty only with major amendments to protect American interests and such traditional policies as the Monroe Doctrine. Scorning any plan for world peace based on the idea that law and morality were stronger influences in international affairs than force, and opposing the covenant's commitment that members would guarantee each other's independence and territorial integrity, Lodge proposed fourteen reservations to the treaty, a series of clarifying amendments designed to assure American interests through a fundamental reshaping of the League's covenant. The fourth group, the "irreconcilables,"

advocated complete rejection of the covenant. Among the sixteen senators in this group were William E. Borah of Idaho, Hiram W. Johnson of California, and Robert M. LaFollette of Wisconsin.<sup>8</sup>

Senate debate during June and July 1919 resulted in some of the most important discussions on the League that year and signaled the paths to be taken by the upper chamber and the executive branch. Gerry delivered his most important speech on 30 June, a day of tempestuous debate precipitated by Senator Borah's assertion that big business was behind a propaganda campaign designed to force the Senate to ratify the treaty. After a scathing attack on the League and Wilson, spearheaded by Republican senator Albert B. Fall of New Mexico, Gerry rose to the defense.<sup>9</sup>

Principally concerned with the overwhelming need for peace in the world, Gerry expressed his belief that the League was the product of the world's best minds, and while not a perfect organization, it would be the most effective instrument available for achieving the goal of universal peace. To meet the charges of the irreconcilables and Fall that United States membership in the League would nullify George Washington's warning against European entanglements, he lectured the Senate on some fundamental lessons of history. Modern means of transportation, communication, and warfare had weakened the geographic barrier of distance that had separated America from Europe, he

said. There was no justification for believing that in 1919 Washington would entertain the same views he had held in 1796. In 1914 the United States had relied upon a policy of isolation to protect it from becoming involved in a European conflict, said Gerry, but that effort had proved futile, just as it had in 1812; ultimately the nation could not avoid being drawn into that conflict. If there should be another world war, he declared, America would surely be involved in it.

Remarking on the horrors of war, Gerry painted a bleak picture of the tribulations and deprivations that the late conflict had caused. In Rheims there were only fourteen undamaged houses, he said; people throughout the area had been no more than "the cogs of a great war machine." Unemployment and despair were now sowing the seeds of turmoil, and if Europe were to fall into the grip of anarchy and Bolshevism under these conditions, there would be serious problems for the United States. "The greatest danger is not from what may come in the distant future, but what is now threatening and impending at our very doors," declared Gerry. He urged senators to recognize that it was now necessary to turn war industries into machinery for peace, and that postwar readjustment and renewal, which would

"The Crowning Glory of German Culture." Cartoon by Milton R. Halladay, from *Cartoons by Halladay*. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9271).



include such tasks as demobilizing armies and finding employment for their soldiers, would require a united effort.

The question to be decided, said Gerry, was whether the United States should have a voice in European matters to help prevent another war or whether the country should continue its policy of noninvolvement until another war forced it to become involved to protect its interests. The former alternative was by far the preferable one, he believed. Assuring the senators that the League would not undermine the nation's sovereignty, he noted that the United States had entered the war without selfish motives and had asked for no indemnities or territories in return; it wished only to end the German horror, protect the rights of the individual, and make the world safe for democracy. His concluding endorsement of the League drew applause from the floor and the galleries:

In this League of Nations we may not have been able to carry out all the high ideals and we may not have righted all the wrongs that we desired, and it undoubtedly does not contain everything that each Senator may wish, but the fact remains that it is the greatest practical advance in establishing a method for the prevention of wars that has as yet been devised or proposed. From the knowledge that I have gained of the conditions in Europe and the analysis I have made of the covenant, I believe that the League contains provisions absolutely essential to the safety of our country and the sustaining of civilization.

Gerry failed to persuade the irreconcilables and strong reservationists to reverse their positions, but it was unlikely that anyone could have performed that miracle. Still, forceful as it was, it is possible that his speech might have been more effective if it had addressed certain specific concerns that had been expressed in regard to the League, something that Gerry might have done without incurring the president's wrath. Many of the mild reservationists, including former president Taft, had raised cogent questions that needed answers. Would Congress still have the constitutional power to declare war? Would domestic matters involving tariff and immigration policies remain the prerogative of the United States? Would there be special recognition of the nation's right to uphold the Monroe Doctrine?

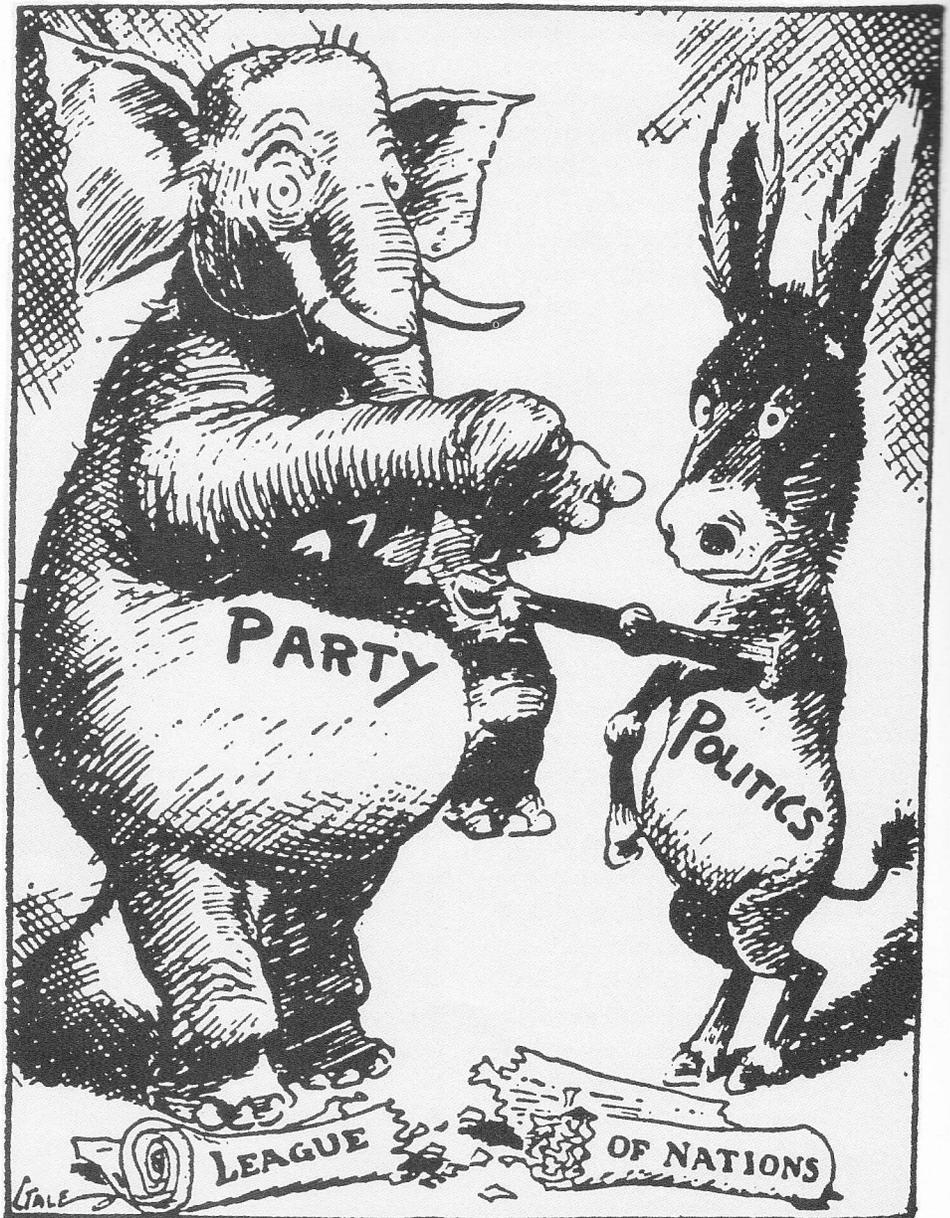
On 19 November 1919 the Senate rejected the treaty in three test votes, with supporters falling far short of the two-thirds majority necessary to approve treaties. First, on the question of ratification with reservations, the senators voted 39 in favor and 55 against. A second vote on the same question, revived by a motion to reconsider, was 41 in favor, 50 against. Finally, on the question of ratification without reservations, the outcome was 38 to 53.<sup>10</sup> The votes were an overwhelming triumph for the opponents of the League.

Debate on the League continued for the next four months. Aware of the powerful pro-Irish Catholic voting bloc in New England, Gerry introduced a resolution formulated by a bipartisan group of senators expressing American acceptance of the principle of self-determination for Ireland. It passed the Senate on 18 March 1920 by a vote of 45 to 38, with Republicans and Democrats divided almost evenly, and was added to the fourteen reservations that had been proposed by Henry Cabot Lodge. Offered independently of Wilson, Gerry's resolution received support from a coalition composed primarily of irreconcilable Republicans and northern Democrats. All five Irish American senators—Gerry, John K. Shields of Tennessee, James D. Phelan of California, David I. Walsh of Massachusetts, and Thomas J. Walsh of Montana—favored the resolution. Other supporters included Republicans Charles L. McNary of Oregon and LeBaron B. Colt of Rhode Island and Democrat John B. Kendrick of Wyoming. Among those opposing the resolution were Democrats Atlee Pomerene of Ohio and William F. Kirby of Arkansas and Republican Harry S. New of Indiana. Reservationist Republican Frank Kellogg,

another opponent of the measure, declared that its adoption would constitute American interference in British internal affairs, alienate Great Britain, and violate international law. Lodge also frowned on the resolution, preferring that the Senate consider the matter of Irish self-determination separately. In the end, there was no correlation between the vote on Gerry's resolution and the senators' views on other League issues, which were generally consistent.<sup>11</sup>

Gerry's resolution was the last of the reservations and the only one that the Senate approved during the League debate. Although it drew a good deal of opposition, it was not, as some charged, an attempt to scuttle Lodge's reservations on behalf of the president. Gerry had long advocated Irish self-determination, and he hoped that his resolution would advance the cause of an independent Ireland while winning additional support for the treaty. He was well aware, however, that the Senate would never approve the treaty without other reservations.

"He Did It!" Los Angeles Times, 1920. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9273).



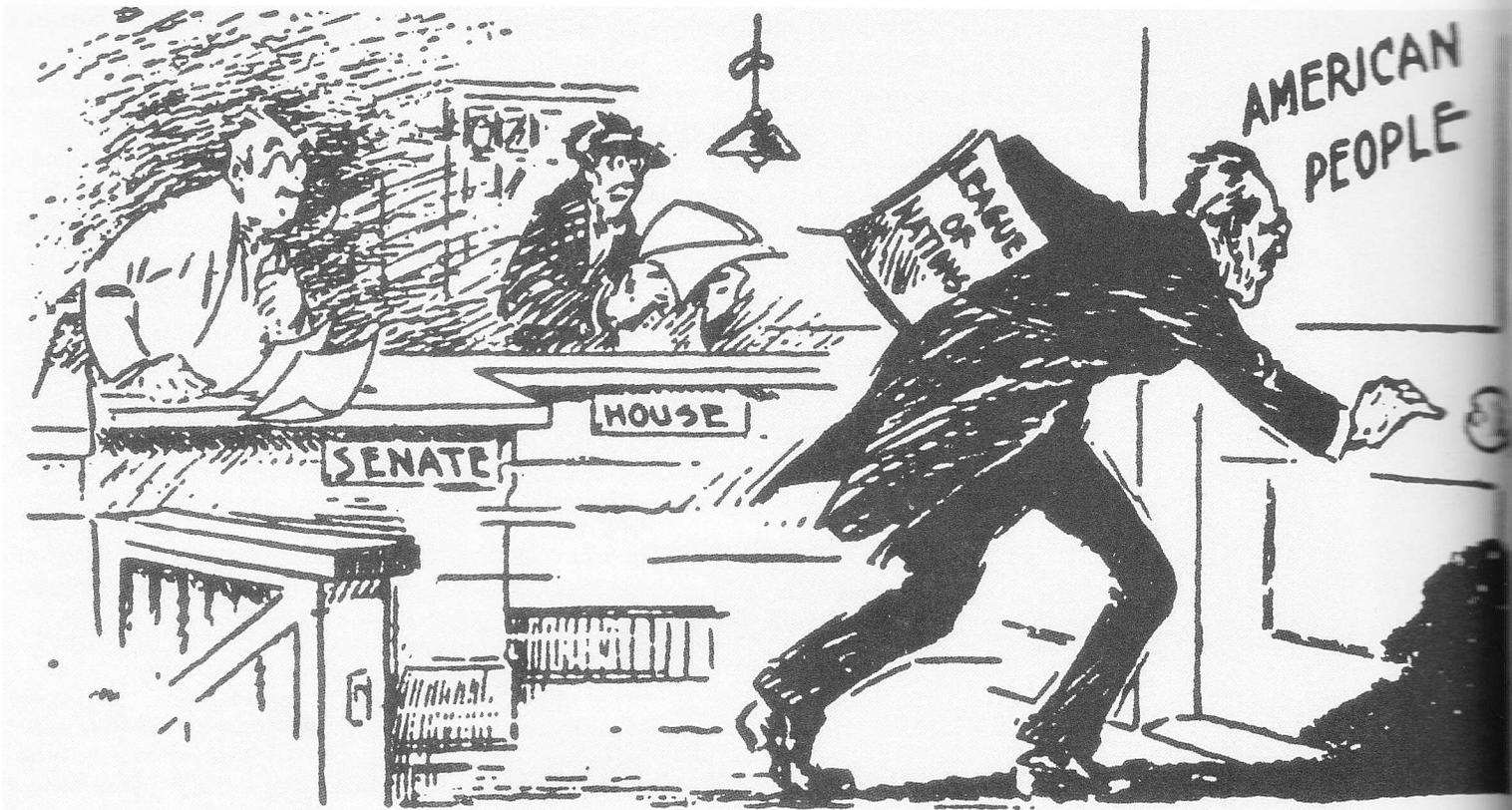
The fourth and final vote on the treaty took place on 19 March 1920. A substantial majority favored approval with reservations, but the 49-to-35 vote fell seven votes short of the two-thirds margin needed for ratification. The defeat of the treaty meant that the United States would not enter the League of Nations, and that technically it was still at war with Germany. Ironically, a combination of Wilsonians and irreconcilables found themselves on the same side as they voted against the covenant with reservations. Gerry and Democratic senator Andrieus A. Jones of New Mexico were paired for ratification against Democrat Marcus A. Smith of Arizona, who opposed it. In a last effort to win ratification, Gerry had offered before the final vote to separate his resolution on Ireland from the other reservations; putting the interests of his country above his loyalty to the president, he was willing to accept the treaty with Lodge's reservations, and without his own, as an alternative to its outright defeat. Gerry's reservation was included with the others for the final vote, but by then it was clear that the treaty would not pass, with or without that reservation. The effort to secure American participation in the League of Nations had become a lost cause.<sup>12</sup>

Tempers flared as each side blamed the other for the rejection of the treaty. Republican senator Irvine L. Lenroot of Wisconsin called Wilson's stubbornness indefensible. An editorial in the *New York Times* faulted Lodge:

The Senate's prolonged and disgraceful exhibition of mean-spirited partisanship and incompetence came to an appropriately miserable ending. . . . Senator Lodge has accomplished his purpose [preventing ratification of the treaty without reservations], but not in the way he had planned. . . . It was his purpose to ratify his own League covenant. . . . He was balked in that design by the offensive and impossible reservation respecting Ireland proposed by . . . Gerry . . . and adopted by the Senate. As a retort to Mr. Lodge's partisan tactics, the Gerry reservation is politically understandable. . . . The Senate is Republican, and there rests the responsibility for the rejection. . . . [Lodge] has been beaten at his own game, a most despicable, deadly game, and upon him, as the leader of the Republican majority, the actual responsibility falls and will rest. . . . The wreck of the Treaty is so complete that the country may well despair of any salvage.<sup>13</sup>

A disappointed Wilson hoped to recover from the paralytic stroke he had suffered in the autumn of 1919 and seek an unprecedented third term in 1920, with the election to serve as a solemn referendum on the League; but that was not to happen.<sup>14</sup> The international issue was obfuscated by both major-party presidential candidates in 1920: James M. Cox, the Democratic nominee from Ohio, generally favored American membership in the League, while the Republican candidate, Senator Warren G. Harding of Ohio, who had voted against Gerry's Irish resolution, talked vaguely of an international association of nations to prevent war. Following his landslide victory, Harding realized that nothing could be stamped with more finality than American nonparticipation in the world body.<sup>15</sup> Wilson's dream had crumbled to ashes.

Wilson suffered defeat not only because of domestic political opposition but also because he tried to internationalize American thinking too quickly in the great national debate over the League. Impelled by a desire to create a peaceable postwar kingdom, he experienced great difficulty in reconciling his idealistic instincts with the harsher realities of human nature. His impracticality and intransigence only compounded the dilemma for himself, his party, and the nation. His refusal to compromise with his opponents, combined with the reluctance of most Senate Democrats to break with him, frustrated the efforts of the mild reservationists to come to terms with him. It was this latter group of senators that held the key to success in the vote for ratification, and the inflexible Wilson erred badly in not working with them for the good of his cause.



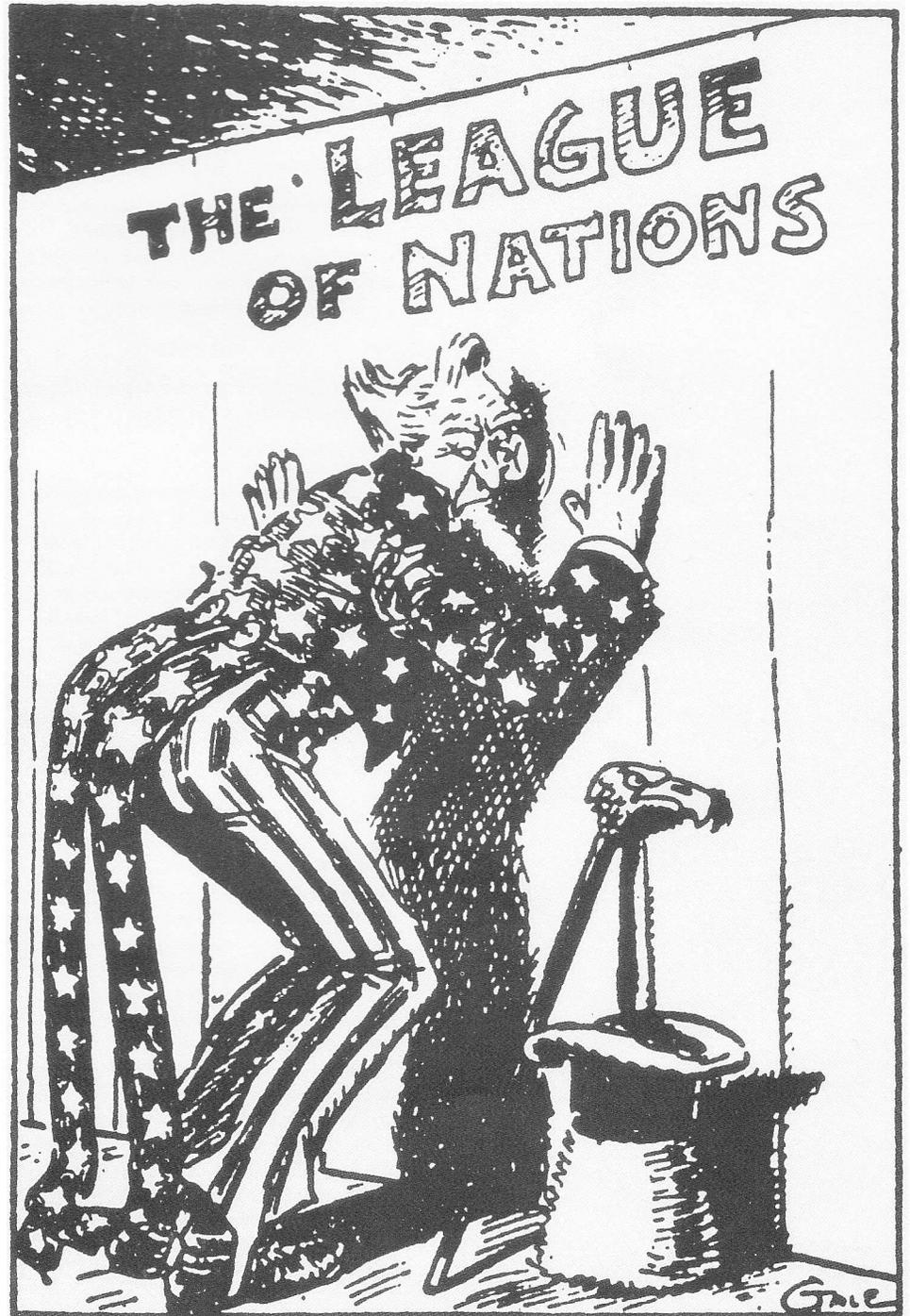
"Going to Talk to the Boss." Chicago Daily News, 1919. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9274).

Like Wilson, Gerry was subject to a continual tug-of-war between idealism and pragmatism. Gerry had a stronger sense of the pragmatic than Wilson did, but he was constrained by his loyalty to the president, whose policies he was powerless to change. Though his support for Wilson may have been good for party unity at the time, it was not necessarily good for the country. At times Gerry was chagrined by Wilson's intransigent behavior.

Witnessing one of the most important foreign policy initiatives ever undertaken in the Senate, Gerry recognized that the debate over the League represented a pivotal episode in American history. Unlike the irreconcilables, he understood that it was the long peace after Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, not a strict adherence to isolationism, that enabled the nation to stay out of European conflicts for a century. But Gerry, like Wilson, was too optimistic about the possibilities of the League: United States membership in that organization would not have prevented the horrors of the 1930s, which had their roots not in the League's inadequacies but in the Versailles peace treaty.

Gerry continued to be an active figure on the national scene, and a leading force in Rhode Island politics, for the next three decades. From 1919 to 1929 he was the Democratic whip in the Senate. After purchasing the *Providence News* in 1921, he acquired the *Providence Tribune* and merged the two newspapers. Gradually growing more conservative during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, he opposed several New Deal measures and denounced Roosevelt's attempt to enlarge the Supreme Court. In December 1941 he voted for declarations of war against the Axis powers.

Declining to seek renomination, Gerry left the Senate for the last time in 1947, and for the next few years he practiced law. He died in Providence in 1957.



"On the Outside Looking In." Los Angeles Times, 1920. RIHS Collection (RHi X3 9272).

## Notes

1. Elbridge Gerry was the only vice president whose name has been adopted as part of the English language. Gerry was the governor of Massachusetts when his party redistricted the state to its political advantage in 1812. The shape of the redistricted Essex County resembled a salamander, and thus the new district became known as a gerrymander. To gerrymander a state or county is to divide it into electoral districts, sometimes of unusual shape, so as to give one political party a majority in many districts while concentrating the voting strength of other parties into as few districts as possible.
2. Gerry obituaries in *Providence Journal*, 1 Nov. 1957; *Pawtucket Times*, 31 Oct. 1957; and *New York Times*, 1 Nov. 1957.
3. *Washington Post*, 22 Oct. 1918.
4. Gerry to Wilson, 16 Nov. 1918, Woodrow Wilson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. Gerry left no collection of papers. Some of his letters are in various manuscript collections at Brown University.
5. *New York Times*, 5 Mar. 1919.
6. *Ibid.*, 11 June 1919. The following quotations are from this issue of the *Times*.
7. *Ibid.*, 29 June 1919.
8. For information on these groups and leaders, as well as on the issue of the League of Nations, see Henry Cabot Lodge, *The Senate and the League of Nations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925); Denna Frank Fleming, *The United States and the League of Nations, 1918-1920* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1932); Robert F. Patterson, "Gilbert M. Hitchcock: A Story of Two Careers" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 1940); Thomas A. Bailey, *Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal* (New York: Macmillan, 1945); Robert James Maddox, *William E. Borah and American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Ralph Stone, *The Irreconcilables: The Fight against the League of Nations* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970); William C. Widenor, *Henry Cabot Lodge and the Search for an American Foreign Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); F. S. Northedge, *The League of Nations: Its Life and Times, 1920-1946* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986); Herbert F. Margulies, *The Mild Reservationists and the League of Nations Controversy in the Senate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989); Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Derek Heater, *National Self-Determination: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy* (New York: Macmillan, 1994).
9. For the text of Gerry's speech, see Peter G. Gerry, *The League of Nations* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), 1-15.
10. *New York Times*, 20 Nov. 1919; *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 1st sess., 1919, 58, pt. 9:8786, 8800, 8802-3.
11. *New York Times*, 19 Mar. 1920; Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 248; Oscar W. Underwood to A. E. Lyons, 26 Mar. 1920, Oscar W. Underwood Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; "The Senate's Action on Ireland," *Gaelic American* 17 (March 27, 1920): 4; and William E. Borah to Daniel F. Cohalan, 9 Feb. 1920, Daniel F. Cohalan Papers, American Irish Historical Society, New York.
12. *New York Times*, 20 Mar. 1920; *Congressional Record*, 66th Cong., 2nd sess., 1920, 59, pt. 5:4599.
13. *New York Times*, 20 Mar. 1920.
14. Kurt Wimer, "Woodrow Wilson's Plan for a Vote of Confidence," *Pennsylvania History* 28 (July 1961): 279-93, and "Woodrow Wilson and a Third Nomination," *ibid.* 29 (April 1962): 193-211; Wesley M. Bagby, *The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962); H. Maurice Darling, "Who Kept the United States out of the League of Nations?" *Canadian Historical Review* 10 (September 1929): 196-211; and Robert Lansing diary, 1919-1920, Robert Lansing Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress.
15. Irvine L. Lenroot to Warren G. Harding, 30 Mar. 1920, Harding to Cornelius Cole, 12 Aug. 1919, and Harding to Frederick Gillett, 4, 30 Aug. 1920, Warren G. Harding Papers, Ohio Historical Society Library, Columbus. See also Hiram Johnson to William Jennings Bryan, 14 Sept. 1920, William Jennings Bryan Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress. Interestingly, Irving Fisher, a distinguished professor of political economy at Yale University and an advocate of the League, claimed that Harding favored the League but kept his views hidden because he was against the "Wilson League." See *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 1923.

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Cover

*The sanctuary of Woonsocket's B'nai Israel  
Synagogue, as seen from the synagogue's Meadoff  
Auditorium. Courtesy of Mrs. Constance G.  
Kantur.*

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