

Henry Jacobson

Henry Jacobson, who served Beth Israel as president from 1947 to 1954, came to Waterville from Rumsika, Kovna, when he was seventeen years old. His sister, mother, and uncle smuggled him across the border at 1 A.M. His father cried and tore the hair from his head, certain that Henry would never be seen again. Henry promised he'd be back, and in 1923, when he was twenty-nine, he did go back to Lithuania to visit his family.

Henry spoke Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, and German when he came to live with his sister, Sarah Jolovitz, in Waterville. She had married a Hebrew scholar, Barnet Jolovitz, who came to his landsleit, the Rosenthals and Levines. His linguistic skill did not help him earn a living. His first job, for a tobacco wholesaler, was not very satisfactory. His second job, for a shoemaker, ended when the employer, Cherner, failed. Then Moses Rudman, who was in a thriving bottling business, lost his wife and took his children to Boston. Harry Gitlin, who worked for Rudman, took over the business and offered to take Henry in as a partner if he could contribute \$150. For \$300 he bought the whole business and kept it going for twelve years. While he was an immigrant boy in Boston, he had learned to make ice cream. He developed a thriving business in Waterville even though he had to deliver his product on the trolley car. Indeed, he was so successful he sold the business to the Hood Dairy Co. In addition, he was in the beer business for thirty-three years as a distributor for the Mineral Springs Soda Co.

Gertrude Poikowsky was a twenty-eight-year-old supervisor for the New England Telephone Co. when she married Henry in 1927. He was thirty-four and had been living with his sister and her husband for fifteen years, but he was never happier than he was while Gertrude lived. They had four children: Phyllis Westerman, married to an attorney in Boston; Kenny, a teacher in the New School in New York who writes songs and plays; Estelle Ostroff, whose husband has a men's clothing business; and Ruth Gambert, a teacher who went to China in 1976 for five weeks and wrote a book about Mao's wife.

Henry was active in the community almost from the start. He raised \$1,400 to provide a home for the schnorrers (beggars) who came to Waterville. He persuaded William Levine to part with \$100 for his project when he wrote a check for this amount and really shamed him into it. They put up an average of four people every week.

He has been to Israel twice, and his son, Kenny, took him to Europe to visit Paris, the Rhine River, Switzerland, and Austria.

At the dedication of the new synagogue, Henry was given the honor of attaching the mezuzah (the prayers enclosed in a work of art, usually on the doorpost of a Jewish home). He was Orthodox to begin with, but welcomed Conservatism and worked well with every spiritual leader they had. He contributed to every drive for the "improvement of his fellow men."