

## Hyman Norkin

Waterville Jews obtained a charter for a synagogue in 1902 (twenty years after Bangor) with seven peddlers—Julius Levine, William Levine, Louis Wolman, John Paikowsky, Philip Levine, Moses Silver, and John Williams—who prospered and raised families there. The Levine Men's Store was most recently managed by the two sons of William and a nephew; the Louis Wolman Metal Company is owned by his son, Gordon, and his two grandsons; Moses Silver acted as *shochet*. Mr. Hyman L. Shenson acted as spiritual leader. The sons of the others became lawyers, doctors, and merchants.

These people came from Lithuania and Russia and were not affected by the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 or the Musur movement (the Enlightenment), but they were hard to please. Until the Reverend Abraham M. Hains, a *shochet* and cantor, came from St. John's, New Brunswick, in 1921 to act as rabbi, many spiritual leaders came and went. He served until he died in 1953. He was president of the Zionist organization and was active on behalf of the Jewish National Fund and the United Jewish Appeal.

Hyman Norkin and his wife, Celia, came to Waterville to teach in the Hebrew School under Hains in 1924. The living quarters above the synagogue were two rooms heated from below by a coal stove. At that time there were forty or fifty families but only a handful contributed the dues of five dollars per year. The women held fundraisers to pay the teacher and the

mortgage on the rebuilt barn. Hains had steam heat, which was really modern! Mrs. Norkin made nightgowns for Palestine and later was very active in Hadassah. There was no hot water in their apartment, but the living conditions were better than what Mr. Norkin left in Cholya, Minsk, at age nineteen. He had come to a cousin in Brownsville, New Jersey, and married Celia when he started to teach in Passaic, New Jersey. In Waterville he not only taught the children but formed a minyan, a group of ten men for prayer, every day.

After three years he accepted a position in Portland where there were about one thousand Jews. He stayed for twenty years in this more prosperous community and raised his son, Meyer, and daughter, Ann Lipman.

Norkin's school accommodated 200 children in two sessions; one group met from 4 to 6 P.M., the second met from 6 to 8 P.M. Many children walked long distances four days a week and on Sunday mornings. In addition, there were assemblies and bar mitzvah classes. Norkin loved the school. He had classes for girls in singing. Although most schools taught Hebrew as prayer by rote, Norkin taught so that the students comprehended what they read and could converse in Hebrew. Even after thirty-two years he remembered some of his brightest students: Dr. Arthur Wein, now an orthopedic surgeon; Chute, a linguist at Harvard who compiled a Chinese-English dictionary; and Margolin, who was an aide to General George C. Marshall.

Norkin was a Zionist in the early days when the dreamers who talked of restoring the Jewish homeland were called Degal Zion. They met each year in a kosher hotel built by Canadian Jews in Old Orchard Beach. He had been a Zionist for seventy years.

When Portland went through hard times, the teachers were not fired. Their salaries were cut from thirty-five dollars to twenty-five dollars and no one asked for relief. The members were not rich. They, too, were peddlers, junk men, retailers, and tailors, but most Jews belonged to one of the three synagogues.

Anti-Semitism was minimal. Norkin remembers a drunkard sitting in the park who taunted him with quotes from Hitler. Norkin was young enough to hit him and was arrested. He never forgot the drunkards and prostitutes with whom he shared a cell.

In one election, sixty Jews were able to defeat an anti-Semitic mayor or so they said, but they must have had help. There were many Italians in Portland then who sympathized with the Jews.

Norkin's daughter Ann (Mrs. Frank Lipman of Augusta) remembers Portland as a boom town before and during the U.S. entry into World War II because of the shipbuilding and army bases. A cousin who was a fine artist in New York and his friend came to Portland to look for work. They came by train and trolley car. The friend could not take the small town—there were no night clubs or theaters—he went back to the big city. Ann could hardly sympathize when he admitted he had never been to a night club or a theater! She lived in Augusta most of her adult life. Her brother, an accountant, lived in Silver Spring, Maryland. Both Hyman and Celia Norkin died in Rockville, Maryland.