

## Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives

### A Look Back on our History of the North Shore Forum Lectures

By Merle A. Branner & Ellen (Katz) Block

North Shore Congregation Israel has a long history of providing cultural enrichment for all of the residents of the North Shore, starting shortly after the incorporation of the synagogue with the Forum Council Lecture, later known as the North Shore Forum Lecture Series. The North Shore Forum was run by the Forum Council Committee which had members from the Men's Club, Sisterhood and Board of Trustees and, over the years, presented guest speakers of great renown, such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Bill Clinton. (Photograph on right: 1992 Dennis Black, moderator, Hilary Clinton, Governor Bill Clinton and Rabbi Herbert Bronstein.)



On January 5, 1921, Dr. A. J. Todd, a sociologist from the University of Minnesota, gave the first talk. Subsequent lecturers were prestigious, influential leaders such as John Haynes Holmes of Community Church, New York City, Professor M.C. Otto, and Oswald Garrison Villard. Mr. Holmes was a Unitarian minister, an outspoken peace activist, and co-founder of both the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Professor M.C. Otto was an author, philosopher, and eventual Chair of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin. Oswald Garrison Villard was an American journalist and editor of both *The Nation* and *The New York Evening Post*, a civil rights activist, and a founding member of the NAACP. Admission to these lectures was \$1.00 for the series and even though the entire series brought in \$271.15 with a net profit of \$2.55, it was said that these lectures, on subjects of interest and open to the public, were “the Congregation’s contribution to the community...”

Drama ensued on March 12, 1935, when John Strachey (full name Evelyn John St. Loe Strachey), British socialist writer and Labour politician, regarded as an outspoken advocate of communism, was the speaker at the Forum Council Lecture. At the conclusion of his talk, Mr. Strachey was arrested *at the temple* by the Department of Immigration and Naturalization as evidence had been found which, in its judgment, sustained the deportation of Strachey back to Britain. Other guests who came to the Forum, spoke on relevant topics of the day such as Marvin Lowenthal, widely-traveled author, lecturer and Zionist, who, on January 28, 1936, chose “Must Europe Go to War?” as his topic.

Even though the lectures were well received, on March 25, 1936 there was a letter directed to the Board of Trustees from Allen B. Mecklenburger, a Board member, recommending discontinuance of the present format of the once-popular Forum Council Lecture Series and proposing in its place a series of lectures, all given by one speaker on one particular subject. In his analysis of the three years of the lecture series, Mr. Mecklenburger described the tremendous effort and time which the series entailed, and detailed a behind-the-scenes look at

the thought process and activities of the Forum Council Committee. He recounted the financial success of the first year, with a profit of \$650, followed by deficits of \$350 and \$100, the following two years. He cited as reasons necessitating a change: increased competition from other lecture programs in the community, decreased attendance at the Forum Series, particularly by NSCI members, and concern among some members that many of the lecturers had an anti-capitalist bent. Further, he noted that while many patrons of the series regarded it as a privilege to listen to an address by an author or person occupying a high public position “regardless of the content of the address,” others felt that speakers often use the lecture platform for political purposes. The suggestion of a less controversial series seemed to him a middle ground, retaining the intangible benefits and well-regarded position of a lecture series in the cultural life of the community while avoiding antagonizing members of the congregation and the public in general.

Following Mr. Mecklenburger’s proposal for a change, our Board of Trustees’ minutes have no mention of the Forum lectures until September 13, 1943, when James Loeb, a Past President of the congregation and current Board member, suggested a committee be appointed or an existing committee be instructed to resume the public lectures which had been dropped from the temple program a few years before. Loeb’s proposal was adopted, and the old Forum Council Lecture series was renamed the North Shore Forum Lecture Series.

Throughout the 1940s - 1950s, the North Shore Forum brought the North Shore community interesting speakers on current topics. The featured speaker at the March 15, 1949 North Shore Forum was Eleanor



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**W. COLSTON LEIGH, INC.**  
 521 FIFTH AVE.  
 NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

hereinafter referred to as the "BUREAU," party of the first part, and the engaging organization, hereinafter referred to as the "SPONSOR," party of the second part.

In consideration of the mutual and dependent covenants hereinafter set forth on the opposite page of this agreement, which is understood to be part of said agreement:

the Sponsor engages and the Bureau shall furnish the services of the ATTRACTION specified to appear at the time and place designated.

The SPONSOR shall:

A. Furnish a well heated, lighted and licensed place for the performance, in good condition, together with all necessary stage accessories and properties.

B. Furnish STEREOPTICON or MOTION PICTURE MACHINE with both license and EXPERIENCED OPERATOR if necessary in connection with said performance.

C. Do all advertising and pay all express charges, printing and publicity, if any, of any material furnished by the Bureau.

D. Pay any and all Federal or State Amusement taxes.

E. Remit check, or draft on a New York bank, for fee specified in agreement to **W. COLSTON LEIGH, INC.** immediately after the lecture or recital has been completed.

F. If for any reason not within the control or by the fault of the Bureau, the Lecturer is prevented from appearing, then this contract shall be deemed terminated, and the engaging organization shall have no claim for damages against the Bureau by reason thereof.

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ATTRACTION MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT  
 DATE JANUARY 13, 1954  
 HOUR 8:00 P.M.  
 CITY GLENCOE, ILLINOIS  
 AUSAICES THE NORTH SHORE FORUM  
 SUBJECT Early  
 CORRESPONDENT Mr. Melvin Tades  
 Room 1308  
 ADDRESS 33 North La Salle St.  
 Chicago, Illinois  
 TELEPHONE State 2-9861  
 TERMS ONE THOUSAND (1000.00) DOLLARS  
 IT IS FURTHER AGREED that this shall be  
the first appearance on the North  
Shore during the season 1954/55  
 APPROX. LENGTH OF LECTURE ONE HOUR  
 AUDITORIUM No. Shore Congregation Israel  
 & ADDRESS 840 Vernon Street  
**W. COLSTON LEIGH, INC.**  
 By William B. Scott  
 SPONSOR THE NORTH SHORE FORUM  
 By William B. Scott Exec Director  
 DATE MAY 13, 1953

Roosevelt on “The Declaration of Human Rights,” and was held at New Trier High School due to the size of the crowd. Illinois Governor Adlai E. Stevenson II presented a word of greeting prior to her talk. Eleanor Roosevelt spoke again as part of the North Shore Forum on January 13, 1954 on the subject “Much to Be Done by U.S.” She also spoke at an Israel Bond dinner, held at NSCI, making her 3rd appearance with our

congregation. (Photograph on right: Eleanor Roosevelt and contract on left is from her May 13, 1954 Forum speaking engagement.)

In 1959, the Forum and the Adult Seminar of Jewish Studies became a coordinated project for Adult Education. Rabbi Edgar E. Siskin stated in the Bulletin on September 28, 1959, "this is a most significant undertaking and I earnestly hope it will prove beneficial to both the Forum and the Seminar." He urged the congregation to set aside their Tuesday evenings to participate in these unique opportunities. The first guest, on October 27, 1959, was New York Congressman and Chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Emanuel Celler, speaking on "Civil Rights - Our Liberties Threatened."

Dr. Frederick L. Schuman, American historian, political scientist, and international relations scholar focusing on the period between World War I and World War II, followed next on December 15, 1959, with a talk on "The Riddle of Germany." Two more lectures comprised the 1959 - 1960 fall/winter series.

On January 26, 1960, Maurice Samuel, the American Jewish Congress Stephen Wise Award winner for outstanding contributions to Jewish culture and education, spoke on "Judaism and Christianity - Their Basic Differences and the Early History of Their Division. A few months later, on March 1, 1960, Hal Lehrman, foreign correspondent for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the London *Daily Express* and *Fortune* magazine, radio and television commentator and two-time winner of the Guggenheim Fellowship for Middle East reporting, spoke on "North Africa, Middle East and Cold War."

All types of speakers and performers came to NSCI through the Forum Lectures/Adult Education series during 1960 and 1961. The first "lecture" on November 16, 1960 was a musical program "An Evening of Piano Quartets," performed by Sidney Harth, violin; Milton Preves, viola; Robert La Machina, cello; and Lillian Siskin (Rabbi Siskin's wife) on the piano. Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, social reformer, and influential American Bishop in the Methodist Episcopal church in Washington D.C, spoke on December 7, 1960 on "Separation of Church and State." Rabbi Irving Koslowe, Chaplain at Sing Sing prison and Rabbi at the Westchester Jewish Center in Mamaroneck, New York talked on "What Every Parent Should Know." - relative to juvenile delinquency, on January 25, 1961. The final program was given on March 8, 1961 by the well-known actor, Vincent Price, who presented "Three American Voices" - Walt Whitman, J.A. McNeil Whistler, Tennessee Williams."

Alan J. Altheimer, President of the congregation, stated at the Annual Meeting on June 11, 1961 that the North Shore Forum Lectures would be absorbed by Adult Education due to lowered attendance over the past few years. He acknowledged that "It has become apparent that the formalized lecture series, so popular for so long in the Chicago area, is beginning to lose favor in the community. Our North Shore Forum is no exception." He went on to say, "On the other hand, interest in Adult Education is increasing rapidly. Year-by-year the Adult Education program of North Shore Congregation Israel has increased in popularity and acceptance. In an

effort to stimulate interest in both the Forum and Adult Education the two programs were combined for the first time in the 1959 - 1960 season. This combination cultural program was tried again this year. Unfortunately, the Forum, in spite of the valiant effort of the Forum Committee, lost further ground, while on the other hand, Adult Education gained further acceptance. As a result of the substantial financial loss suffered by the forum this year, the Men's Club and Sisterhood have voted it out of existence, at least for the present."

Even though the name North Shore Forum was removed, guest lectures continued to speak to the congregation and the community. In 1968, the Adult Study Program opened their public lectures to the community at large, beginning with Dr. Irving Greenberg, American scholar, author, Orthodox Rabbi and a strong supporter of Israel who was known for his promotion of greater understanding between Judaism and Christianity, Dr. (Rabbi) Greenberg spoke on "Judaism and the New Morality." His lecture, as part of the Adult Education series, was held at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park on October 9, 1968. The next time the word Forum appeared in our history was in 1969 with the Men's Club Breakfast Forum. The inaugural speaker was none other than our own Dr. (Rabbi) Edgar Siskin speaking on "Israel: 1969 - From Border to Border," on October 12, 1969.

In 1970 - 1971, The North Shore Jewish Community Forum became a multi temple program featuring prominent and esteemed guests. B'nai Torah, Solel, Lakeside and Beth El all in Highland Park, Beth Sholom in Northbrook, Conservative Congregation of the North Shore in Northfield, Beth Hillel Congregation in Wilmette. Congregation Beth Or in Deerfield, Beth Emet in Evanston and our own North Shore Congregation Israel in Glencoe were participating synagogues with the lectures moving around to the different congregations. The whole series of six lectures was \$15.00 per couple or \$10.00 per person and \$5.00 for students. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Holocaust survivor and political activist was the featured speaker when the series came to NSCI on November 1, 1970. His well-attended lecture was titled "A Beggar in Jerusalem."

Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, a former Rabbi of Temple Emmanuel in Chicago, was the founding director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism in Washington D.C., and Chairman of the Israel Committee of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. He was well known for his role in establishing Reform synagogues and, in subsequent years, for his leadership in the Zionist world. He was also a civil rights leader, involved with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, an organizer of the Jewish participation in the March on Washington and helped pass the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964. Rabbi Hirsch spoke on "Israel and American Jewry", on November 8, 1970, a week after Elie Wiesel's talk.



In 1971 - 1972, the word "Forum" was dropped from any lecture series name as the program rolled back solely into Adult Education; all lectures were held at NSCI. At times during the following years, the Men's Club/Brotherhood brought in speakers to their Breakfast series, sometimes calling it the Breakfast Forum. The Sisterhood sponsored a Political Forum with then Presidential candidate Governor Bill Clinton, on March 15, 1992. That incredible evening featured oratory by Clinton, former Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas, and Congressman John Porter, designated by the Bush-

Quail campaign to represent them. Hillary Clinton was a surprise speaker that night who urged "all of us - to try to be more than we are each day." (Photograph on left: 1992 Governor Bill Clinton and Rabbi Herbert Bronstein.)

No matter what the lecture series has been called throughout the long history of our congregation right up to the present day, NSCI has long educated and enriched the lives of our members and the entire North Shore community with interesting, relevant speakers on thought provoking subjects.