

Growing Up in Syracuse

WILLIAM LEE PROVOL

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

A young West Pointer named Dwight David Eisenhower was once reportedly teased as a "Swedish Jew" — this despite his Texan birth and Mennonite ancestry. William Lee Provol (1877-1962) was, however, the "genuine article" — if Swedish birth and Polish parentage make a Swedish Jew. Immediately after their marriage, he tells us, his Polish Jewish parents settled in Sweden, where he and his sister Anna were born. In 1881, the elder Provol — he probably still called himself Provolsky — sailed for America, his wife Fanny returning with her children to her in-laws in Poland "until father earned enough money to send for us." Two years later, in 1883, the Provols were reunited in Syracuse, New York, where Willie's father supported the family as a pack peddler and occasionally officiated as a cantor at the Mulberry Street synagogue, which may have been identical with the "Steinberg Shul," housed in a building at 816 South State Street. This Shul reportedly functioned only during the High Holy Days. The "Rabbi Levy" whom Willie mentions may have been Dr. I. Harris Levy, who was a teacher — not an ordained rabbi — and conducted an excellent school at the Beth Israel — not the Mulberry Street — synagogue.

Willie himself, when the family's precarious economy required it, peddled from farm to farm in the Syracuse area. Later he became a retail furrier and established stores in Salt Lake City and San Francisco. Willie's "various social and humanitarian interests," his son George J. Provol, of Chicago, recalls, led to an acquaintance "with the Loyal Order of Moose program in 1909, at which time he joined forces with the late Senator James J. Davis [of Pennsylvania], to become one of the original organizers of this Fraternity."

*The John C. Winston Company first published Willie's book, *The Pack Peddler*, in 1933; a second edition appeared in 1937. The book, he wrote, was "the actual story of my own history and experiences," recorded "so that the children of this generation might know the hard-*

ships encountered by the preceding generation, as compared with the wonderful opportunities in life that are theirs." Willie's account, "told in a most ingenious strain" — no doubt he meant ingenuous — bubbles with the flavorful, exuberant charm of naïveté. It adds a colorful chapter to the still too little documented history — or perhaps we should say romance — of the poor, humble, unfailingly energetic East European Jewish immigrants, whose sons and grandsons, now a majority of American Jewry, have risen to grace America's spiritual, intellectual, and economic life from the local shoe store to the bench of the United States Supreme Court.

What was it that Harry Golden said? — "Only in America!"

"Growing Up in Syracuse" is, with a new title and a few minor revisions, basically Chapter II. of William Lee Provol's *The Pack Peddler*. The editors of the American Jewish Archives are grateful to George J. Provol for permission to reprint it here.

THE BONE TRUST

Motkey Finklestein and I formed a partnership. Every afternoon, after leaving Rabbi Levy's Hebrew school, we visited the backyards and alleys, picking up bones. When our sack was full, we would take it to Gross & Chapman's junk shop, and for it we would receive three pennies. This supplied us with our spending money.

One day Motkey betrayed our secret by telling the other kids how we secured our money for candy, marbles, and all those things so dear to a small boy's heart. As soon as I had learned this, I rushed to Gross, telling him that if he bought bones from the other boys, we would stop giving him our business. As Gross did not want to lose our trade, he made a deal with Motkey and me whereby we were to receive a cent for each bag of bones brought in by the other boys. Thus, we organized the first "bone trust" in America. Soon we had practically every Jewish kid in the ward gathering bones. We soon added old rags, bottles, and scrap iron to our line. There were nine wards in Syracuse, and we divided the territory among our bone collectors, assigning a certain number to each ward. Organization was our watchword.

Gross and Chapman, like many other partners, were unable to

agree. They dissolved partnership, and Chapman secured our business by making a better offer to us. He even bought small hand express wagons in which to carry on our operations.

Though we originated the idea, we were soon put out of business by older immigrants, who had settled in Syracuse. They used pushcarts and carried a stock of tinware, which they exchanged for bones, rags, and scrap iron. Besides, we were becoming unwelcome in many backyards because some of the boys were becoming a little overly ambitious. If the wind blew a shirt or suit of underwear off the clothesline, the boys would not stop to inquire, but would assume it to be a cast-off garment and would appropriate it as "rags." Occasionally a boy would come in with an entire iron fence. Fortunately, there were no cow pastures in the city. If there had been, it would have been no surprise to see some of these enterprising young junk collectors bring in a live bossie for her bones, without the formality of waiting for her to be killed, eaten, and the bones cast off in due course.

Sol Gordon, one of Levy's older pupils, was the newspaper "king" of the seventh ward. Sol had a morning, evening, and Sunday newspaper route. His younger brother, Cupke, helped him deliver the *Syracuse Herald*, the *Standard*, and the *Times*. Sol was also an agent for the *Utica Saturday Globe* and the *Pennsylvania Grit*, which latter paper was printed in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and still is. This paper, together with the *Saturday Globe*, were as popular then as some of the weekly magazines of today.

After the pushcart peddlers put us kids out of the bone and rag-picking business, Cupke suggested that we peddle the *Saturday Globe* and the *Pennsylvania Grit*. It was a strict ruling that all of Levy's scholars had to attend services in the Mulberry Street [*sic*] Synagogue on Saturday mornings, but inasmuch as the papers arrived on Sunday morning and did not interfere with our Saturday morning services, our parents gave their consent to our selling them.

BERENSTEIN, BLACK BIRDS, AND SHAMROCKS

On Saturday afternoons, we usually played baseball. A seventh ward baseball team was organized by Berenstein, the North Salina Street clothier. He furnished the suits, which bore his advertisement.

We were known as the "Berenstein Baseball Club" and were very proud of our flashy baseball uniforms.

After each game, we had to return our suits to the store, where they were kept under lock and key, and before any of the players could get their suits out for a game, they had to peddle handbills for two hours each week. These bills advertised Berenstein's weekly clothing sale.

Most every Jewish boy in the seventh ward had worn a Berenstein baseball uniform at one time or another. We played all comers our age. Our games usually ended in a scrap about the fifth or sixth inning. When the umpire rendered a decision in our favor, the opposing team would call us names which were offensive to the Jewish kids and which meant a fight either with fists, bats, or balls.

We soon grew tired of baseball, and Berenstein, who was securing a lot of valuable publicity through the team, disliked losing us. He arranged a game with a colored team, called, appropriately enough, "The Black Birds." This game was the only peaceful one we ever played and won. The score was 12 to 0. After the game, however, we learned that Berenstein had promised each Black Bird a dime if they helped to throw the game in our favor.

Berenstein's only competitor, the "Famous Clothing Store," was managed by Tom Murphy. Tom, realizing the publicity secured for Berenstein through our baseball team, decided to organize a team composed of Irish kids living in the ward. He named his team "Murphy's Shamrocks."

Tom Murphy challenged Berenstein for a game to be played at Star Park. The thrill of playing in Star Park excited our imagination, and we were further encouraged to strive for victory by Berenstein's promise of a new suit of clothes for each of us, if we won the game. He then displayed similar suits in his windows with a showcard reading "Buy the New Championship Boys' Suit for \$3.95." Admission to the game was free to school children. However, the children had to be accompanied by their parents to the store where they secured the tickets to the game. While in the store, Berenstein or his salesmen would try to sell the parents a Championship Suit.

Almost every Irish and Jewish boy in Syracuse turned out to see

that game. A heavy rainstorm broke up the game in the fifth inning, with the score tied, three to three. Berenstein, however, appreciated our efforts and rewarded each of us with a new suit.

Berenstein, being a shrewd clothier, saw the opportunity of eliminating "Murphy's Shamrocks." He presented each kid on that team with a Championship Suit and at the same time made arrangements with them to play on his team. Thereafter, the Berenstein Baseball Club consisted of Irish and Jewish kids, which helped to eliminate all future fights — all of which was the means of cementing Jerusalem and Ireland, in so far as the seventh ward was concerned.

THE FARMER'S DEPARTMENT STORE

It was an interesting sight on a Monday morning to see the pack peddlers of the seventh ward making their way toward the railway station, with heavy packs strapped upon their backs and a grip in each hand.

The Monday morning trains carried what was known as the Peddlers' Special; each peddler had his starting point, and as the trains stopped at the various little towns to discharge passengers you could hear the peddlers saying good-by to their colleagues and wishing them luck in their week's work.

Dad's route was out of Earlville, about thirty miles from Syracuse. From Earlville he peddled to Norwich, Oxford, Ithaca, and towns south as far as Binghamton. I often helped Dad on Sundays to arrange his peddler's packs with his stock, which consisted of men's socks, underwear, suspenders, handkies, ladies' underwear, shirtwaists, stockings, household linens, and a complete line of Yankee notions.

Many a cold winter morning I helped Dad to the railway station, drawing his packs on my sled. Upon arriving at his destination he would strap the packs on his back and carry a valise (as they were called in those days) in each hand. Aside from being loaded with these heavy packs, he wore a heavy woolen-lined leather jacket, with corduroy trousers, the bottoms of which were tucked into large leather boots. He was prepared for the winter, as it was hard walking along the rough country roads covered with ice, sleet, and snow. No man ever worked harder than did these pack peddlers.

The peddler in those days was the farmer's department store. People looked forward to his visits for their supplies. There were no paved roads, automobiles, department stores, or mail order houses then. The only means the farmers had of buying their wearing apparel and dry goods were the pack peddlers. Each peddler had his own territory, and they never invaded one another's districts. Their territories were usually assigned them by Shimberg or by Silverman, the wholesale peddlers' supply houses.

As a rule a new peddler would start out with a line of tinware until he had mastered the English language well enough to handle other lines. When I was a youngster the tinplate industry had just been introduced, and the Welsh tinplate workers were being imported to operate the tin mills. It was the pack peddler that helped to build the tinplate industry in America. We had a relative living in Pittsburgh, which at that time was the headquarters of the tin mills. It was this relative who had written Father when we were in Sweden, advising him to come to America. Dad first located in Pittsburgh, where he peddled tinware, prior to locating in Syracuse, New York.

The tinware peddlers scattered all over the United States, and as they became more prosperous they changed from peddling tinware to peddling Yankee notions, dry goods, and jewelry.

Peddlers were all well trained for the hardships they had to endure during the different seasons of the year. Long before migrating to America, these fellows were compelled as young men to serve in the army of their native land. Every boy of military conscription age, which was seventeen to twenty-one years, had to serve four years in the army. Army life developed them physically to withstand almost any hardship. When a young man received his discharge papers from the army in which he served, he usually found himself without work, so he would migrate to America to seek his fortune. Upon landing in America he would go to a city or town where some relative lived and there he was made to feel at home and given a start pack peddling. These sturdy men would travel miles a day over rough, dusty roads, in sunshine, rain storms, and heavy snow storms in winter. In each farmhouse the peddler would unpack his merchandise and display it all over the room, until one would really imagine it was a department store. In fact,

years ago the pack peddler was known as "the farmer's department store."

When the peddler had all his merchandise on display, the entire family, including the farm help, would gather around and select the things they wanted to buy. If the peddler did not have what the farmers wanted, it was placed on order to be delivered on his next trip. Some sales were very profitable, yet there were times when, after unpacking all his packs, he would leave without making one sale. But the peddler never left such a home discouraged. He always had a smile and a glad handshake, knowing that before the day was over, the law of averages would take care of his sales. The pack peddler was an ardent believer in the old proverb, "Seek and you shall find."

When the day's work was done and dusk hovered over the sky, the peddler would stop at some farmhouse to put up for the night. He usually exchanged merchandise for his supper, night's lodging, and breakfast. The peddler was always a welcome guest in the farmer's home, as he was always kind, interesting, and brought news from the remote neighborhoods that the farmers otherwise would never hear. In those days there were no radios or telephones, and sometimes it would be weeks before newspapers would reach some of these farmers. The children especially enjoyed having the peddler as guest. He would tell them stories of other boys and girls in foreign lands and the cities nearby. The older folk enjoyed hearing the political issues of the day. The most interesting moments for some of these farmers were spent in company of the pack peddlers.

SATURDAY NIGHT WAS FATHER'S NIGHT

I often accompanied Dad on his peddling trips, and still recall many interesting episodes that took place on the Peddlers' Special. For the enjoyment of my readers permit me to relate some of them.

The train's "news butcher," as he was called in those days, sold newspapers, candy, cigars, tobacco, and fruit to the passengers. One time as he came through the coach selling fruit, Finkelstein, a peddler, bought three bananas for a dime. Soon as the news butcher left the coach Finkelstein proceeded to sell two bananas to his

peddler friends for five cents each, getting his for nothing. After making the sale, Finkelstein started razzing his friends for being greenhorns.

Schmarel Harrison had just been elected president of the Mulberry Street Synagogue. No sooner had Harrison stepped on the train the following Monday morning than Shipero, a peddler, shouted, "Harrison, what are you so proud about this morning? I knew you in the old country when you were a shoemaker, and you come to America and become a president."

Sandy Chapman, the train brakeman, was a great lover of chewing tobacco, and Sandy's favorite tobacco was the Horseshoe brand. This chewing tobacco was cut in squares, called plugs, and each plug had a little tin horseshoe clamped in one corner. Jake Lazrus, a peddler, had but one desire and that was to taste tobacco. One day Lazrus noticed Sandy take a bite from his plug tobacco and place the remainder in his coat pocket and hang his coat in a closet at the end of the coach. No sooner had Sandy turned his back, when Lazrus walked to the closet, took the plug from the coat pocket, bit a chew from the plug, and gently placed the plug back into the coat pocket. At that critical moment Sandy walked in. Lazrus had bitten the end that contained the tin horseshoe, and when he saw Sandy walk in, Lazrus swallowed the tobacco, horseshoe and all. Suddenly Lazrus became sick and pale. He finally confessed to Sandy about taking the tobacco and swallowing the horseshoe. But he was reconciled when Sandy assured him a horseshoe was an omen of good luck, and that it would bring him good sales for the week.

After a hard week peddling through the country, these sturdy fellows would turn homeward, reaching home on Friday afternoon, in preparation for their Sabbath. It was interesting to see these peddlers, transformed from their peddling outfits to Prince Albert coats, striped trousers, white silk vests, patent leather shoes, stiff-front shirts and top hats, swinging their gold-headed canes as they took their way to the various synagogues for worship.

Services over, they returned to their homes to enjoy the usual Friday evening feast. The peddlers always looked forward to their Fridays home, when families and relatives gathered to enjoy dinner, tell the happenings of the week, etc. Saturday was another busy

day for the peddler. Temple in the morning, then home with family and friends. But, Saturday night was Father's Night, as it were. He usually slipped out to some variety show or went to Shakespeare Hall, where for the small sum of a dime he could see a stock company that played such shows as *Rip Van Winkle*, *Jessie James*, the *Silver King*, or, *Saved from the Storm*. Those who were musically inclined enjoyed light opera, such as *Pinafore*, *The Mikado*, and *Mascot*, while others congregated at Harry Cohen's or Murphy's saloon to participate in a game of sixty-six, pinochle, or poker, and at the same time enjoy their favorite beverage and the free lunch that was served in all the saloons in those days. While the peddler enjoyed his drink, I never knew a more sober group of men. Sunday morning you could see them gathering at the corner of Grape and Harrison streets, exchanging greetings and relating their week's experiences.

Sunday afternoon was a busy one for the peddler. He could always be found at Shimberg's or Silverman's supply house, selecting his week's supply of merchandise. Sunday evenings the peddlers and their families would sometimes attend an engagement party, wedding, or a lodge meeting.

After a happy weekend with family and friends the peddler was again ready, on Monday morning, to start out with his packs for another week's work.

THE PACK PEDDLERS

As time went on the railroads eliminated the Peddlers' Special. It was about the time the Cortland Carriage Company started to manufacture box wagons for peddlers. These wagons were equipped with shelves and closets to carry the peddlers' merchandise. The wagon tops could be transferred from the wheel-base to sleigh runners for winter travel. A peddler, financially able, would purchase one of these wagons and a team of horses. The wagons could be purchased on the installment plan. I knew a peddler that had a specially built wagon, in which he carried a complete line of Yankee notions, dry goods, men's and boys' clothing, cooking utensils, jewelry of every description, also a complete line of lenses for eyeglasses.

This peddler's wagon represented a fair-sized department store of today.

Peddlers in those days were also traders. When the farmer did not have the cash, the peddler would trade his wares for butter, eggs, poultry, pelts, cattle hide, sheep wool, and tobacco. Julius Marquisie, a peddler, traded his merchandise for leaf tobacco. He became the largest leaf tobacco wholesaler in America, and had warehouses in the states of New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut. Myer Ableson, a seventh-ward peddler, also exchanged his wares for leaf tobacco. Ableson opened a cigar factory, and within a few years became the leading cigar manufacturer in Syracuse, New York. Max Shipero traded dry goods for scrap iron. He established foundries in Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo, N. Y. Finally he branched out to the Canadian cities. Abe Goldstein traded Yankee notions for sheep wool that he wove into cloth that was used in his clothing factory. Phil Harris traded jewelry and diamonds for horses, and became a horse trader and shipper. Many of America's outstanding industries and manufactures were founded by the early pack peddlers.

Pack peddlers settled in all parts of the United States, and what applies to the peddlers in Syracuse also applies to the peddlers from other states and cities. Solomon Levinton [Levitan] migrated to America from Prussia. He peddled through the states of Maryland and Pennsylvania, drifted to the state of Wisconsin, opened a department store, and eventually became the leading merchant and banker in the city of Madison, Wisconsin. Levinton was an ardent admirer of Robert (Bob) LaFollette, Sr. Bob knew Levinton as a pack peddler, and often told the story of having bought his first pair of suspenders from Peddler Levinton. Levinton stumped the eastern states for LaFollette when he was a candidate for United States President in the campaign of 1924. In 1936, "Uncle Sol" Levinton, as he was called, was elected State Treasurer for the state of Wisconsin at the age of seventy-four.

Pack peddlers were always invading new territory; they tramped the roadways and byways with their heavy loads through the picturesque mountains of Vermont and New Hampshire, the valleys and hills of New York State. They traveled through the mountain

towns of Pennsylvania and the Virginias. The pack peddler followed the gold rush to California, Nevada, and far-away Alaska.

The pack peddlers were ambitious. They did not want to see their children go through the hardships which they were compelled to endure. They lived and worked for their families, their principal ambition being to educate their children.

The pack peddlers, who had the courage and pioneer spirit to migrate to America, gave us, in their sons, some of our most successful amusement magnates, physicians, professors, and statesmen.

If you scan the list of America's leading merchants since the turn of the century, you will find that the Jewish immigration about the middle of the last century contributed some of the greatest merchandising minds of this age. Julius Rosenwald, the late president of Sears Roebuck, was one of them. Isaac Gimbel, founder of the Gimbel Stores, was a pack peddler in the lower Wabash before opening his own store. Nathan Straus, a native of Bavaria, peddled his wares in Georgia and other southern states before he settled in New York and built the great Straus Store. David May, a German Jewish immigrant, developed a national chain of stores, the largest link of which is located in Cleveland, Ohio. Harris Nevin immigrated from Russia fifty years ago and became a peddler. In his later years, he opened a store, and then became a successful real estate operator in Jamaica, Long Island. Nevin is now the head of the Nevin Bus Lines, operating from coast to coast. In fact, upon investigation, you will find that the leading mercantile institutions in most of the cities of America were founded by pack peddlers.

All of the above proves that America was, in word and truth, a land of opportunity for a man with ability, vision, and ambition.

Every pack peddler, however, did not become a merchant prince. There were those who never rose above their trials, troubles, and tribulations. If a father were unable to succeed, the children would "put their shoulder to the wheel." My Dad was one of those whose life was mapped out for hard work and struggle; therefore it was my duty, at the tender age of ten, to try and eke out the family income. I sold newspapers and peddled candy bars at one cent each in the office buildings and factories in Syracuse. I would purchase a box of one hundred candy bars at Thalheimer's Wholesale Grocery

for sixty cents. I averaged a box a day, making a profit of forty cents. Then, from four to seven in the evening, I sold papers and earned another forty cents. The eighty cents I earned each day was a welcome addition in helping to keep our family, which had numerically increased. Mother shed many a tear when I put the eighty cents in her hand as my contribution towards the family's finances. Of course, she would have rather seen me in school, but I felt that, inasmuch as Dad had such a struggle to make ends meet, I, the oldest son, should help. When I was a youngster, it was a common occurrence to see boys as young as seven years of age peddling newspapers, earning money to help at home, with no thought of attending school.

A PARTNERSHIP WITH SAMMY

My first experience earning money by collecting bones, rags, and bottles spurred my desire to earn more money, as it made me especially happy when I could help Mother buy a new dress, shoes, or other little necessities of life. To attend public school was out of the question for me — I was in the business world and there I was fated to stay.

As soon as I found a line that was profitable, I told the other boys about it, in the meantime arranging with Thalheimer that for every new candy peddler I brought him, I was to receive a commission on their sales.

I formed a partnership with Sammy Shubert, whose parents were also poor. The Shuberts and my family were neighbors. Sammy and I became the boy "candy kings" of Syracuse. Sammy was a clean-cut little fellow. He was rather delicate in health, but very shrewd and full of new ideas and ambition. I was a strong, healthy, stocky boy, full of mischief and fight. We were complementary to each other and made a practical pair of working partners.

Whenever Sammy got into a fight, he would yell for "Willie." We had our troubles when the kids would try to steal Sammy's candy, and it was always up to me to defend him.

In 1890, there was a great migration from Europe. Syracuse,

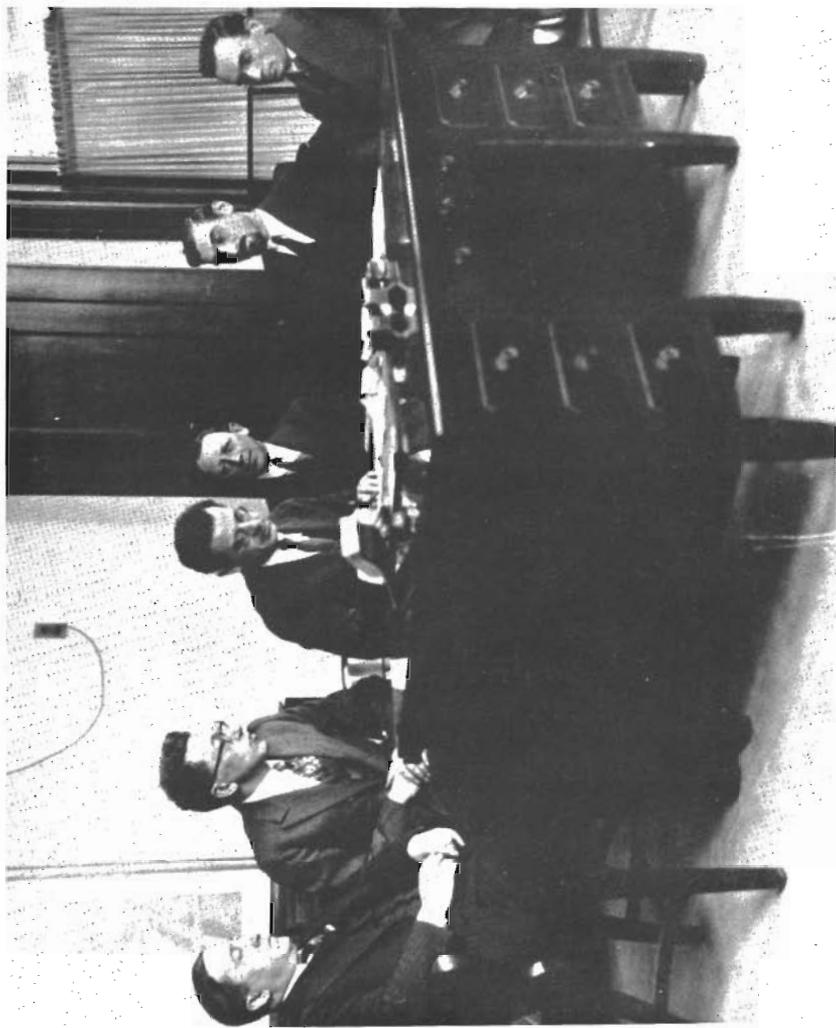
being on the main line of the New York Central, was midway between New York and Buffalo. Nearly all of the immigrant trains on their way west would lay over on the side tracks at Syracuse for two or three hours while changing engines, oiling the wheels, and cleaning the cars.

On Sunday morning, I met all trains, which was the beginning of my Sunday newspaper route. At that time, the Mormons had missionaries all over Europe inducing peasants and agricultural workers to come to Utah. They gained many converts in Norway and Sweden. Sammy Shubert and I conceived the idea of peddling fruit to the immigrants, instead of papers, as they were unable to read. We bought a bunch of red bananas from Thalheimer. We sold them at five cents each — one banana to them was a meal. Our business flourished for several weeks, but it wasn't long before we had competition. The other ghetto kids began to peddle edibles to the immigrants. However, I had the edge on them, being able to talk to the customers in their native tongue. The very thing for which the kids at Levy's School poked fun at me — my Swedish speech — now proved a valuable asset.

I built up a profitable newspaper route along James Street. We were usually out at three o'clock on Sunday morning, and, regardless of weather conditions, made our accustomed rounds. Whether the sky was clear or cloudy, blizzard or zero weather, we assembled at the newspaper office in time to start out with the first edition of the *Sunday Times*, *Herald* and *Standard*.

My first stops were the New York Central, West Shore, and Delaware depots. We had the trains timed. After making the trains, we would deliver our newspapers to our regular customers, placing them in vestibules, hallways, and mail boxes. We usually finished delivery about nine o'clock and then started back over the route to make collections.

I had a customer by the name of Fatty Lynch, who weighed some three hundred pounds and who, naturally, took a special interest in eating. I always made it a point to visit him last on my route as he invited me to breakfast with him. It never occurred to me then that Fatty undoubtedly took pity on the poor newsboy; to my youthful and ambitious mind I was the guest of honor.



Courtesy, Robert Shostack, B'nai B'rith, Washington, D. C.

Sidney Hillman (*third from left*), Jacob S. Potofsky (*fifth from left*), and other leaders of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Association

(see p. 19)



Courtesy, Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, N. Y.

The Shubert Men's Store
at Syracuse during the early 1900's
(see p. 27)

Fatty's father owned the Syracuse Grand Opera House. Jacobs & Proctor operated a chain of theatres in New York and were his managers. When they took over the management of the Grand Opera House, they placed a man named Plummer, from Rochester, New York, as the local manager. He advertised his weekly programs through handbills and circulars. Fatty recommended Sammy Shubert and me for the job of peddling the handbills. This marked the entry into the show business of the first of the Shuberts. Little did he, or I, dream of the dominating influence the Shubert name was to wield in the development of the American theatre.

As more boys were needed, Sammy and I gathered together our former syndicate of "Berenstein's Baseball Club" bill peddlers. We paid them with free passes for the show.

Sammy made such a favorable impression on Mr. Plummer that, before long, he was made program boy, at a salary of \$1.50 per week. He then secured the concession for renting opera glasses; this activity was turned over to me. We rented the glasses at twenty-five cents each, and of this, we received ten per cent commission. Sometimes we rented as many as twenty-five pairs at a single performance. Opera glasses at that time were not as common as they are today. It was a real thrill for the audience to use the glasses, giving an uncanny closeup of their stage favorites.

CELEBRITIES IN SYRACUSE

Jacobs & Proctor booked most of the well-known actors and actresses of the day. We had the privilege of seeing all the big stars and stage successes of that time not only from the front of the house, but also back stage. We highly prized the honor of personally meeting and shaking hands with many of these famous stage luminaries, whom most people could only read about or see across the footlights.

Among the many stars and attractions then playing the Grand Opera House which crowd my memory are: Frank Daniels in *The Wizard of Oz* and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*; Richard Mansfield in *Corsican Brothers* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*; Joseph M. Weber and Lewis M. Fields, German comedians, who

in later years became noted stars in musical comedy, and who now at the age of seventy are still interested in the show business [Weber died in 1942, Fields in 1941]; Lillian Russell, America's most beautiful prima donna; and Gus Hill, the world's champion club swinger. As the years went on Hill became a producer and theatrical manager; he passed away in 1936 at the age of seventy-eight years. There were also Vesta Tilly, English star and famous male impersonator; Mrs. John Drew [*née* Josephine Baker] and John Drew in Shakespearean plays, and Mr. Drew's mother, Mrs. John Drew, Senior [*née* Louisa Lane], the grand old lady of the stage, the grandmother of the noted screen stars of today, Lionel, John, and Ethel Barrymore; Edward Hugh Sothorn and Julia Marlowe in Shakespearean plays; the Russell Brothers, female impersonators; Maggie Cline, the Irish queen; Pat Rooney, the soft-shoe and clog dancer; Lew Dockstader, famous minstrel; Chauncey Olcott, the famous tenor; Joe Walsh and Frank Bush, the Hebrew comedians; Sam Bernard and Billy Watson, burlesque comedians; John W. Kelly, the rolling man; Dan Dailey, the versatile comedian; Ward and Volkes, singers and dancers; and McIntyre and Heath, colored comedians of ham tree and minstrel fame. James McIntyre passed away on August 19, 1937, at the age of seventy-nine, at his home in Southampton, New York, while his lifelong partner, Thomas Heath, at the age of eighty-four, lay stricken in his home at Setuket, just a few miles across Long Island. In 1928 they appeared in *Headin' South*, under the auspices of the Shuberts. Their final appearance was in the month of October, 1934, at the Forrest Theatre in the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Sammy Shubert, at that time, never dreamed that many of the stars for whom he was then peddling bills would later work under his management. Sammy was a genius and a born showman. On Sunday afternoons, while the other kids were swimming or playing ball, he would spend his time in the basement of his humble home, constructing an opera house from old soap boxes and other cast-off lumber. He built his own shifting scenery, as well as drop curtains which worked the same as those he had seen at the Grand. He gave frequent performances of his basement show to us kids, and the admission charge was one cent.

Many years later, when my home was in Boston, I visited him in Syracuse. Sammy was then manager of the New Bastable Theatre. He was rehearsing a stock company which he had organized. I well remember how he pointed, with pride, to the scenery, curtains, and drops, all of which he had designed. "I'm as proud of this theatre as I was of my first soap-box opera house," he said. He told me how he worked his way from program boy to treasurer of the Grand and how he had finally become the lessee of the New Bastable.

This was the beginning of his spectacular and brilliant career in the theatrical world. He was heralded as the youngest manager in the show business, being then only twenty-one years of age. At twenty-three, he made his first trip to New York City for the purpose of leasing new theatres.

Broadway raised its cynical eyebrows — who was this country boy from up-state trying to show Broadway how to play its own game? At first, he was the laughing stock of Broadway. However, he managed to lease three previously prominent theatres, the Lyric, the Herald Square, and the Casino, which were then in a run-down condition.

"This is Shubert's finish," was common gossip. Remarks were made as to the nerve of this hick kid from Syracuse coming to New York to compete with theatrical magnates such as Charles Frohman, Marc Klaw, Abraham L. Erlanger, Jacobs and Frederick F. Proctor, David Belasco, and other established managerial giants.

When these famous managers saw his theatres successfully presenting musical comedies and dramas, with such famous stars as DeWolf Hopper, Lillian Russell, and Richard Mansfield, they realized that he had made good. His success amazed the amusement world. Soon he began to build and lease theatres all over the country — but his meteoric career came to a sudden and untimely end.

Returning from a theatrical dedication in Pittsburgh, Sammy Shubert was injured in a train wreck, which a few weeks later caused his death [1905]. The entire theatrical profession mourned for him. He was one of its youngest theatrical geniuses, possibly the most outstanding the world had known. He was but twenty-seven years of age, yet in that brief span of years he accomplished far more than scores of older showmen had in a lifetime.

Sam Shubert's spirit will live on in the show world for many decades, as the Shuberts are directly responsible for many famous stage and screen stars. The Shuberts have also developed some of America's foremost producers and builders of the show world, who are today nationally known.

Sam was the founder of the Shuberts enterprises, and after his death his brothers, Lee and Jack, carried on the work, becoming America's foremost theatrical producers.

Syracuse, New York, has given more talent to the stage and screen than any other city of its size in America. Some of the outstanding producers are from Syracuse. The Shuberts; Marcus Hyman, who for several years was president of the Orpheum Vaudeville Circuit and who now is president of the United Booking Office, which controls practically all the legitimate theatres in America; Sam [?] Balaban [Katz?] of Balaban & Katz, founder of the Publix movie houses, the finest in the United States; the Lumbergs, who founded the large chain of movie houses in the state of New York; Bob Rubin, executive for the Metro-Goldwyn studios at Hollywood, California; Louis and Ralph Murphy, directors in Hollywood. Then there are such stars as Leila Hyams, Madge Evans, Dorothy Mackaill, Hugh O'Connell, Joe E. Brown (big mouth), Norma Shearer, and Reginald Denny, all of whom had their first professional start in Syracuse, New York. Arlen, the composer who is writing music for musical comedy in Hollywood, also came from Syracuse. Harold Arlen [né Hyman Arluck] wrote the music for one of Eddie Cantor's late pictures, *Strike Me Pink*. Arlen's younger brother [Jerry Arlen, né Julius Arluck] is assistant director in Paul Whiteman's band.

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