

From the Ruins

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Jacob H. Schiff, who died in 1920, would have good reason -- were he still alive -- to rejoice over the news that the Harvard Semitic Museum at 6 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, is now a born-again treasure house.

You cannot call the museum a repository. For one defines a repository as a place where things may be laid up for safety. And the Harvard Semitic Museum, which owes its beginnings to Mr. Schiff's munificence, has lived with much more neglect and assault than security.

The story of the Semitic Museum, occasionally glorious, often dismal, appears in the March-April, 1982 issue of "Harvard Magazine." Therein, Janet Tassel, a teacher and writer, sets forth the dramatic history of this great cultural enterprise, blemishes and all.

The heroes of the piece comprise a small army led by Jacob Schiff who thought of the museum as his own child and properly so. In 1893, the New York philanthropist offered to provide \$50,000 on a matching basis to make the museum possible. By mid-1899, when only \$40,000 had been raised for the project, Mr. Schiff increased his own gift to \$76,000. Eventually, his benefaction amounted to \$275,000; and this included a gift to the Teachers' Endowment Fund.

The Museum was dedicated in February 1903. It was a day of true rejoicing. Henry Lee Higginson and Ralph Waldo Emerson's daughter were there. Early treasures were already in place. President Charles W. Eliot shared speaking honors with Jacob Schiff and others.

President Eliot loved the Semitic Museum. Undoubtedly, he grasped the significance of Mr. Schiff's primary purpose for rearing the structure, i.e., to repudiate and combat anti-Semitism in Europe, social prejudice and ostracism in America by creating opportunities for a more thorough study and a better knowledge of Semitic history and civilization.

President A. Lawrence Lowell apparently did not share President Eliot's warm feelings about the Semitic Museum. When David Gordon Lyon, professor of Hebrew and other Oriental languages, was in retirement, he sought Harvard financing for the museum of which he was curator. Dr. Lowell vetoed the effort. Little wonder then that Janet Tassel, in her "Harvard Magazine" article, notes that Mr. Schiff "sensed with a father's disappointment" President Lowell's coolness toward the museum.

Little wonder, indeed. For it was President Lowell, a long-time Vice President of the Immigration Restriction League, who set in motion Harvard's project to establish a Jewish quota at Harvard. It was President Lowell who recommended that Jews intermarry with Christians, convert and/or "adopt complete assimilation."

Louis Marshall was inclined to disagree rather vehemently with President Lowell's advice. Lowell, he complained in a letter to his sister-in-law "has played with fire, and has given the sanction of his great office to what, after all, is a vulgar expression of Jew-baiting."

The Harvard Semitic Museum was damaged by more than Lowellism. In 1942, it was rented to the U.S. Army as a school for chaplains. The Navy picked up where the Army left off by establishing a Japanese Language School in the building to which scholars had come to learn much about ancient Nuzi and sparkling collections of Arabic and Hebrew manuscripts along with Palestinian coins, pottery, and models of the Temple of Solomon.

Came the day when the Navy moved out and the artifacts really began to gather dust. Items were misplaced; displays were covered with tarpau-

lins, and eventually the Semitic study courses were moved to other buildings. After the war, "Schiff's child began to look like an orphan," Janet Tassel tells us. In 1957, it was decided the museum had outlived its welcome.

Then the blow of blows: On October 14, 1970, Harvard anti-Vietnam activists detonated a bomb on the top floor of the Museum as a sign of contempt for Henry Kissinger, former associate director of the Center for International Affairs, housed in the Semitic Museum.

But there are good tidings: the museum has been saved and refurbished. Hundreds are drawn to 6 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, to view the exhibit, "Danzig 1939." This consists of treasures of a Jewish community, a community targeted for destruction by the first Nazi government in Europe.

THE LAND OF IMMIGRANTS

BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM

"If I were to be born again, I would want to be born in the U.S.A., for America is the bastion of freedom, the protector of the weak, and the hope of the free world." Those words were spoken by -- of all people -- Sir Winston Churchill -- after the Allied victory over the Nazis in World War II.

Sir Winston's former daughter-in-law, the beautiful Pamela Harriman, recalled Churchill's appreciation of American democracy at a luncheon last week sponsored in New York by the Citizens' Committee for Immigration Reform. The luncheon honored 37 distinguished American citizens, all of whom came to this country as immigrants from every part of the globe.

There were present such distinguished immigrants and former refugees as Ambassador Arthur Burns who came from Austria; Nobel-Prize economist Wassily Leontieff from the Soviet Union; the architect I.M. Pei from China; actress Viveca Lindfors from Sweden; and Banker Felix Rohatyn also from Austria. These people who have so greatly enriched the life of America, Mrs. Harriman rightly said, brilliantly illuminate why America's immigration policy must be fair, just, and humane.

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