

From Our Archives

This column is based on information in the TJHS Collection, housed at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas campus in Austin. It has been supplemented with online research. If you have corrections or additions, please submit them in writing to the TJHS editor at editor@txjhs.org. We want our archives to be as complete and accurate as possible.

Teaching the World by Vickie Vogel

In our last issue, we examined the life of Rosella Werlin, journalist and publicity director extraordinaire. We mentioned her husband, Joseph Werlin, who deserves his own article.

Joseph Sidney Werlin was born in Philadelphia on December 5, 1900.¹ He was the second child and first son

of Sarah Childs and Jacob Baer Werlin. Jacob and Sarah emigrated from Russia in 1890 as teenagers. They married in 1895. After operating a chain of tailoring shops in Philadelphia (which included a branch in Houston), Jacob learned of a national promotion to bring farmers to Texas. Coming from a farm in Ukraine, he was eager to return to the land.² In 1910, Jacob invested “his meager savings plus borrowed money” in a small farm in Pearland. Jacob’s dream of growing pears, strawberries

and pecans did not meet with success. The soil was poor, the rain was meager, Jacob lacked experience, and he and Sarah had six children.³ They were broke by 1913.

The family moved to Houston where Jacob is said to have owned the first Hebrew typewriter in Texas. He completed two manuscripts on Biblical subjects and many newspaper articles, as well as a manual on farm financing.

His son Joseph inherited his father’s love of writing. Giving up

formal schooling after half a year in high school to help support the family, Joseph began an intensive self-study program. When World War I broke out, he received a Congressional appointment as third alternate from Texas to the United States Naval Academy. When candidates ahead of him failed their examinations,

he was able to enroll in the fall of 1919. At the end of his first year, he decided it was not suitable for him and withdrew.⁴

Joseph took entrance exams for Rice Institute (now Rice University), which was virtually tuition free. Working part time and contributing his wages to the family, he completed his BA degree in 1924. Deciding an academic career was for him, he enrolled in the University of Chicago where he attained his MA in 1926.



The caption reads: “Extreme Left: Neighbor’s Auto Loaned for Photo. The Jacob B. Werlin and Family Go Farming in Pearland, Texas-1910-1912.” Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, di_09436, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

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Professional photo of Joseph Sidney Werlin taken for the University of Houston, circa 1940. Photo courtesy Joella Werlin.

The next year, he studied at the University of Berlin and did research at the University of Moscow.

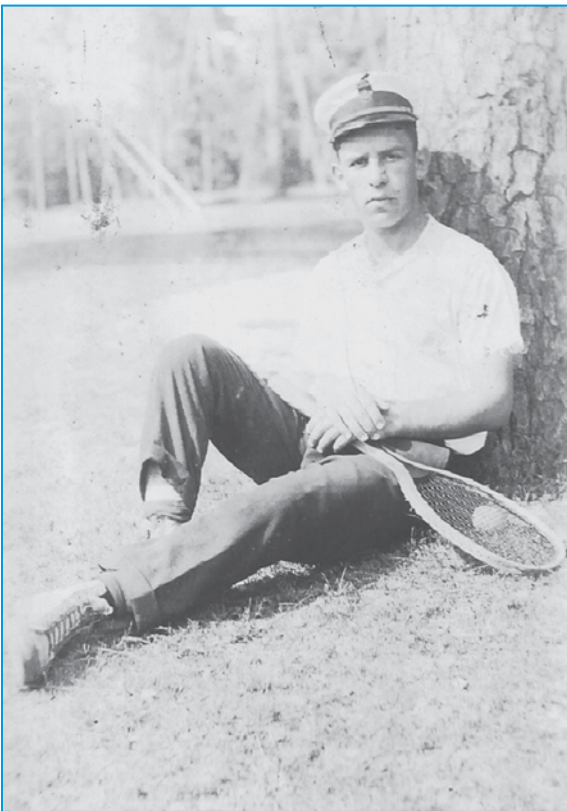


Photo of Joseph Sidney Werlin at Annapolis, 1919. Photo courtesy Joella Werlin.

Returning to the United States, Joseph married Rosella Horowitz in 1928. She was the daughter of Rabbi and Mrs. Henry J. Horowitz of Galveston. The newlyweds moved to Chicago where Joseph received his Ph.D. in 1931, the first American to receive a Ph.D. for research into the Russian social/economic experiment of 1898-1905. Starting a family in the midst of the Great Depression, Joseph became a part-time social worker to make ends

meet while pursuing his academic work.

In 1934, he was invited to become a charter member of the faculty of the University of Houston, which was expanding from a junior college to a four-year institution. A creator of the Department of Sociology, he gained a full professorship in 1945. With the end of World War II and renewed travel opportunities abroad, Joseph developed a ground-breaking summer study center in Mexico under the university's auspices. The idea was so successful, it was broadened to include centers in Guatemala and in Cuba at the

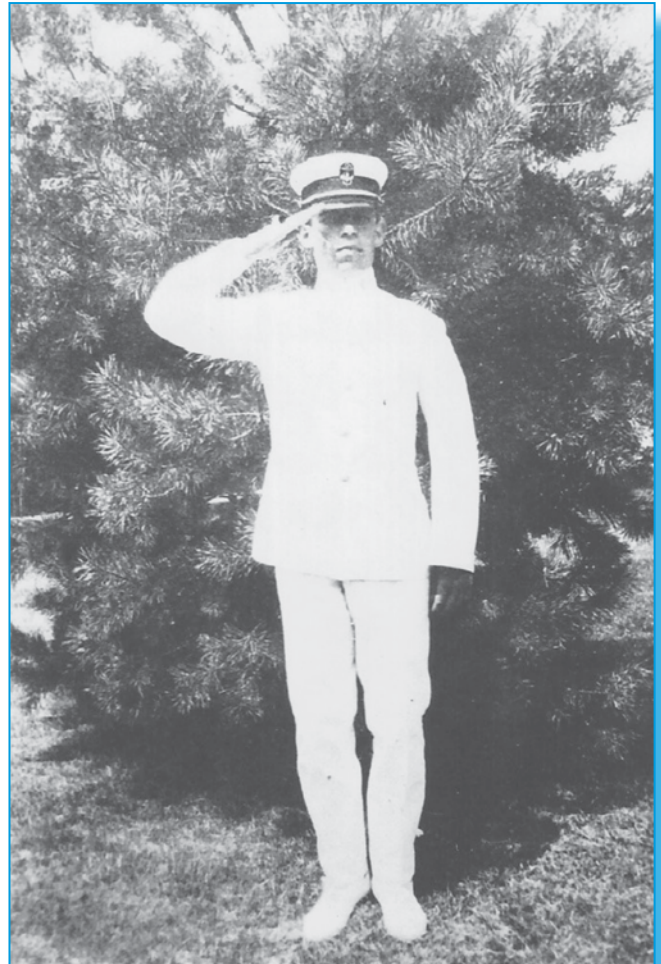


Photo of Joseph Sidney Werlin at Annapolis, 1919. Photo courtesy Joella Werlin.

University of Havana. He conducted similar programs in Europe for the rest of his life.

Joseph Werlin's lifelong interest in Mexican-American relations led to an award as Distinguished Visitor's Medal and Diploma from the Government of the Federal District of Mexico. He was working on a book, *Today's Mexico*, at the time of his death. A noted linguist, Joseph spoke Spanish, French, Russian, Italian, and German, and knew to a lesser degree Portuguese, Greek, Dutch, Danish and Sanskrit. He also studied several Latin America Indian dialects. He wrote and lectured extensively.

In 1948, Joseph Werlin was

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named “Man of the Week” by *The Jewish Beacon*. The article points out that the teacher who instructed the Werlin children in Pearland’s one-room schoolhouse took her graduate degree thirty years later from her former pupil.⁵ He received the Bronze Medal from the Belgian Ministry of Education in 1951 for his work on behalf

of international understanding. In 1959, Honorary Citizenship of Vieux Montmartre (Paris) was bestowed on him because of his “quarter of century of visiting, writing, and lecturing on Europe.”

The Werlins had three children. Sons Herbert Holland Werlin and Ernest Pyle Werlin followed their father’s academic footsteps, as did daughter Joella Barbara who was Phi Kappa Phi and studied cultural anthropology. She married neurologist Dr. Lawrence Zivin in 1961. At the time of his death, Joseph had two grandchildren: Adam Henry Zivin and Joselyn Amy Zivin.

A heart attack or cerebral hemorrhage brought a sudden end to Joseph’s life at his home on May 30, 1964. He was 63. Herbert was studying for his doctorate in Nairobi, Kenya at the time. Ernest was at the University of Texas, and Joella was living in Seattle. Three of his brothers



Joseph and Rosella in front of Rockefeller Chapel, University of Chicago, when he received his Ph.D. 1931. Photo courtesy of Joella Werlin.

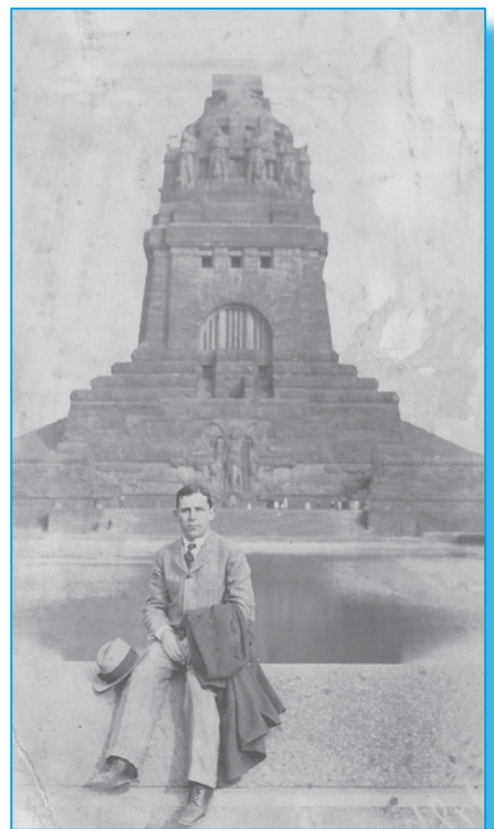
were living in Houston (Reuben became a patent attorney, Eugene an architect, and Samuel an optometrist), and his sister Nadine, who had been a nurse in Havana, was in the Canal Zone. Rabbi Robert Kahn officiated at the funeral at Levy Memorial Chapel, with burial in Emanu El Memorial Park.

A letter from one of his students, Bill Stalker, was published in

the *Houston Chronicle* on June 8 of that year. “He was a kind and understanding man with a sense of humor. He could laugh uproariously at a funny joke, and even on serious subjects he would have a tongue-in-cheek chuckle. Just like when he assigned me to study the prostitution racket in Houston. I protested. He replied: ‘I don’t think they’ll get next to you, Bill.’ How laconic can you get?”

The University of Houston passed a Memoriam Resolution, a copy of which is in our archives, and a Joseph S Werlin Memorial Scholarship was set up. On May 30, the *Houston Post* lauded Werlin, writing, “He will be long remembered by those whose privilege it was to know him.” A *Post* editorial of June 2 praised his life’s work as a professor of sociology and anthropology.

Joseph Werlin’s love of learning and teaching carried him around much of the world, spreading knowl-



Joseph Werlin sits in front of the Volkerschlachtdenkmal (Monument to the Battle of the Nations) in Leipzig in 1928. The monument was dedicated in 1913 to commemorate the defeat of Napoleon at Leipzig. Photo courtesy Joella Werlin.

edge and understanding with the aid of his extensive language skills. He lived his life doing what he loved.

Endnotes

- ¹ Unless otherwise stated, all information is from Rosella Werlin’s biography of her husband in Box 3A167, Texas Jewish Historical Society Records, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.
- ² Roselyn P. Krinsky, “Man of the Week,” *The Jewish Beacon*, Thursday, May 20, 1948.
- ³ Joseph, Reuben, Eugene, Samuel and Nadine. The sixth child is not named in our archives.
- ⁴ Rosella Werlin, in a letter to TJHS Past President Lionel Schooler in 1984, said Joseph resigned “because of extreme anti-Semitism.”
- ⁵ Krinsky, op cit. 