

Old Timers



Exhibit pays tribute to businesses that started in Detroit more than 100 years ago.

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Special to the Jewish News

More than 150,000 visitors to the Detroit Historical Museum have viewed the exhibit "Frontiers to Factories: Detroiters at Work 1701-1901." It includes some of the Jewish entrepreneurs plying their trades in early Detroit.

One segment of the exhibit, "City of Industry," dramatizes the lives of 19th century workers representing various ethnic communities. One actor portrays Abba Keidan, owner of the Keidan Store that sold dry goods and general clothing.

Other Jewish entrepreneurs are represented in another segment, "In Business for a Century," which showcases the area's enduring firms. Although today they may not be in the hands of the Jewish families that started them, the 100-year-old companies include Albert Kahn Associates, Butzel Long, Detroit Store Fixture Company, Henry the Hatter, Lachman & Co.,

Lowenstein Poultry, M. Jacob & Sons and Salasnak Fisheries.

The permanent exhibit, which opened just over a year ago at a cost of \$500,000, updates "Furs to Factories," which debuted in 1992.

"I know people who have taken their children and grandchildren to the exhibit and loved it," says Judith Levin Cantor, a descendent of Abba Keidan and former president of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan (JHS). "The inclusion of the Jewish community delights them.

"This exhibit comes at a time when we have identified considerable resources to provide information. The (JHS) journal circulates to historians and museum staff, and the Leonard N. Simon Jewish Community Archives also has material."

While Cantor helped enrich the exhibit with information recorded in her mother's personal journal, Paul Wasserman, current owner of Henry the Hatter, loaned business artifacts that he has treasured. There is an old wooden plaque with the store's name

When this picture was taken in 1910, M. Jacob & Sons was 25 years old. The company is still in existence today.

and a 100-year-old top hat kept in a tan leather case lined with red satin.

Wasserman, who operates locations in Southfield, Hamtramck and downtown Detroit, has a strong sense of the history of his business, which started in 1893.

"Henry Komrofsky was the original owner at a site that would become the property of Crowley's in 1936," Wasserman says. "I knew Gus Newman, who became a partner in the business, which my father bought in 1948.

"Mr. Komrofsky always was concerned about whether his store would succeed and supplemented his income with part-time jobs."

He worked as a drummer and a term as Detroit's boxing commissioner. "All the time my father had the store," says Wasserman, "I never doubted I would do anything else but work here."

Carrie Lachman Lenchner, president of Lachman & Co., enjoyed the high-tech part of the exhibit, which refers to her family's jewelry store in Detroit.

The business evolved into an outlet for selling corporate gifts and awards and now is located in Southfield.

"Basically, I like that the exhibit lets us ask our own questions and get answers," Lenchner says.

- Parts of the exhibit include:
- "City of Commerce, 1825-1865," an interactive display tracing the role of steamships and trains in bringing people of various cultures to the area.
 - "Heavy Industry," an examination of the national impact of various enterprises.
 - "Making Goods for Detroiters," a retrospective of commercial mainstays, such as Hudson's and Kresge's (now Kmart).
 - "The City Where Life Is Worth Living," an interactive display of landmarks.
 - "Ready to Be the Motor City," a tribute to the automobile. □

The Detroit Historical Museum, at Woodward and Kirby, is open 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesdays-Fridays and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Cost: \$3 adults, \$1.50 seniors and children 12-18. (313) 833-1726.