

MICHOELS, RWR & THE GIRL FROM LENINGRAD

The visit concludes, July 1943

By Leonard J. Lehrman

Special to The Advocate

BOSTON—Soviet Consul Eugene D. Kisselév came up from New York to be one of the speakers at the July 18, 1943 Symphony Hall reception. Emily Rosenstein translated.

The next day, newspapers highlighted his speech. The Boston Herald noted, "2500 Attend Goodwill Fete: Soviet Envoys Ask Anti-Axis Unity."

The Boston Globe article quoted Rosenstein's translation of Solomon Michoels' speech.

"The Red Army is an anti-Fascist army," he said. "The victory of the Red Army will be a death blow to anti-Semitism, which became the axis of the Nazi plot to enslave Germany, Europe and the world. In this war against Fascist enslavement, our army is joined by the great armies of our allies. Together, and only together, shall we achieve victory."

Later that day, in the State Suite at Copley Plaza, where the guests were staying, Michoels and Itzhak Feffer each spoke at a Massachusetts Council of American-Soviet Friendship reception. Rosenstein translated.

Having heard about Russian War Relief's drama skit competition, Michoels happily posed for a picture on the sofa with Rosenstein, Revere Journal reporter Rita Hammel, and Olga and Dolly Bogach. Said photo appeared in both *The Jewish Advocate* of July 23, with the headline, "Prof. Michoels Reads Contest Scripts"; and the *Revere Journal* on Aug. 26, headlined, "Looking over Contest Scripts." The latter seems much more likely to be accurate, as they were in English, presumably summarized in Russian for Michoels by Rosenstein.

But the best coverage of the visit was yet to come.

On July 23, *The Jewish Advocate* featured three front-page stories, continued on the next two pages. One headline read, "U.S.S.R. 'Good Will Ambassadors' Are Enthusiastically Received and Honored Here"; and another read, "Miss Rosenstein Gets [Advocate] Rose: Acted as Interpreter for Visiting Delegation from the U.S.S.R."

"During the visit of" Michoels and Feffer, the story noted, "she endeared herself to them and to everyone with whom she came into contact because of the brilliant manner in which she transposed [sic] their profound messages into English which lost none of the flavor or meaning of the original."

On July 27, *The Jewish Advocate* published a letter to the editor from Rosenstein thanking the newspaper for the honor, and listing her address as that of Russian War Relief, 128 Newbury St., Boston.

"But of course, it is our guests from the Soviet Union who really deserve it," she wrote.

After the visit, Rosenstein tried to correspond with Michoels, and to get

Looking Over Contest Scripts



Professor Solomon Michoels looks over some scripts submitted to the Russian War Relief Junior Committee one-act play contest, assisted by a group of well-known girls. The professor took time off from his nationwide good-will tour to read the stories. The girls in the photo, from left to right, are Emily Rosenstein, Rita Hammel, Revere Journal writer; Olga Bogach and Dolly Bogach.

From *The Jewish Advocate* of July 23, 1943

Concert: "Remembering Solomon Michoels & Emily Lehrman," with Leonard Lehrman & Helene Williams, Nov. 11, Temple Reyim, Newton, 617-527-2410; Nov. 12, 7 p.m., Center Makor, Brookline, 617-771-4870

him to sign more than just the one copy of one translation she had done for him. In a handwritten letter to "My dear Miss Emily Rosenstein" from Montreal postmarked Nov. 13, Ruth Pressman apologizes for Michoels, expressing his appreciation to Rosenstein and his regrets for being "extremely busy."

Afterword

Solomon Michoels was killed Jan. 13, 1948 by order of Stalin, in what was staged to look like a traffic accident, near the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Minsk. In June 2016, the director of the Gorky Theater said there is still no plaque in his memory because of disagreement as to whether he actually died there or was killed elsewhere and had his body dragged there.

Emily Rosenstein Lehrman went on to study Russian literature at Columbia University, receiving her master's degree on Dec. 17, 1947. Her principal teachers were Ernest J. Simmons, for whom she later served as secretary — the way she had for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana at Harvard — and Roman Jakobson, for whom she wrote a thesis on Pushkin in Soviet criticism. Simmons later remarked that Rosenstein, who took his course, could have taught it herself. A plaque hangs in her memory at Queens College, to which she donated dozens of volumes of Russian books and periodicals.

Jakobson urged her repeatedly to continue her studies toward a doctorate. She did not, but put her Russian expertise to use, working for

the American Soviet Medical Society and later teaching Russian in adult education in Roslyn, N.Y. and at Adelphi College.

Having been a member of the American Communist Party from 1946 to 1948, she was unable to accept a teaching job in the U.S. public schools because of the required loyalty oath. In 1967, she acquired a second master's degree in library science from Long Island University, proceeding to catalogue the Russian collection at Hofstra and working as a faculty member at L.I.U. for 28 years.

Along the way, her translations of Nagishkin and Baranskaya were published by Harry N. Abrams and Massachusetts Press, and she collaborated with this writer, her son Leonard Lehrman, on translations of numerous poems and three classic operas: Mussorgsky's "Marriage," Glinka's "A Life for the Tsar" and Dargomyzhsky's "Rusalka," as well as works by Sholokhov and Chekhov.

One of the last tasks she accomplished before her death was to go through with him the nuances of the Russian libretto for the opera "The Passenger" by Michoels' son-in-law, Mieczyslaw Weinberg, so Lehrman could include it in his lectures on Jewish opera at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and Community Church of New York. The Ravello CD, "Harmonize Your Spirit with My Calm" was released Jan. 13, 2017, the second anniversary of her death, and dedicated to her memory.