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Michoels, Feffer visit Boston, 1943

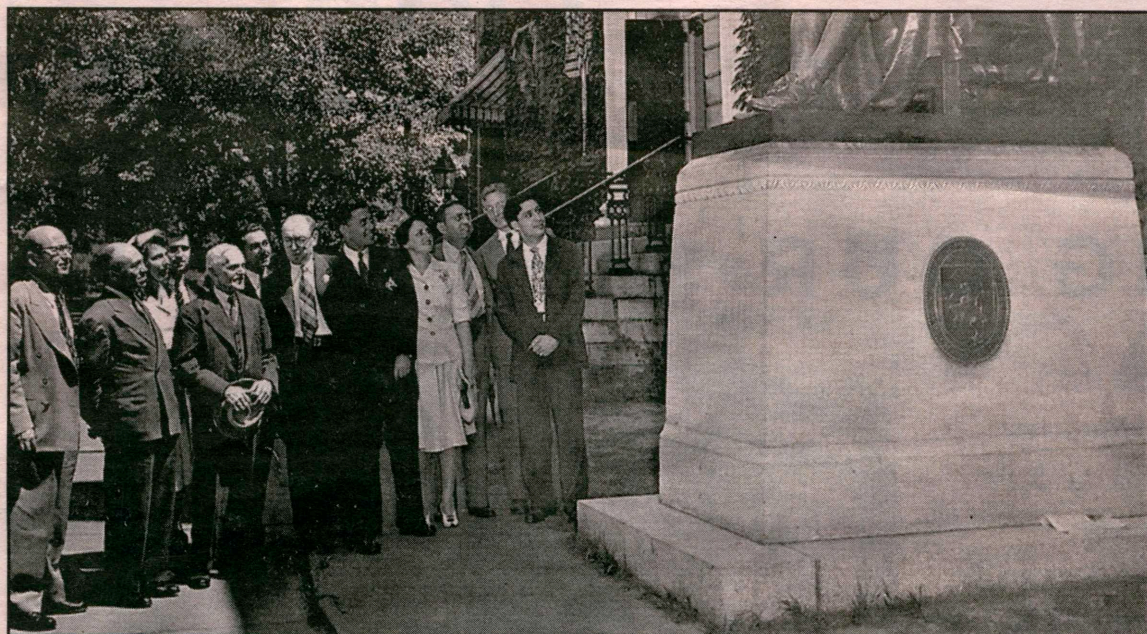


PHOTO COURTESY LEONARD LEHRMAN

Visitors to the John Harvard statue included Benjamin Z. Goldberg, Solomon Michoels, Emily Rosenstein, Larry Shubow, George H. Chase, Sol Vail, Itzak Feffer, Mrs. & Mr. Seifert, Dirk Struik and Moses Finkelstein

By Leonard J. Lehrman

Special to *The Advocate*

BOSTON – The first mention of the visit to Boston by Solomon Michoels and Itzak Feffer in Emily Rosenstein's

archive is a photo that appeared on the front page of the July 23, 1943 *Jewish Advocate*. The caption noted Rabbi Stephen Wise greeted Soviet Jewish delegates Feffer and Michoels on July 8, 1943 at a Polo Grounds

reception in New York with 47,000 attending.

Solomon Michoels (1890-1948), probably the greatest Yiddish actor who ever lived, and director of the Moscow Yiddish Theater, had been

“Remembering Solomon Michoels & Emily Lehrman,” with Leonard Lehrman & Helene Williams; Nov. 12, 7 p.m., Center Makor, Brookline; 617-771-4870

selected by Stalin to head the Jewish Anti-Fascist League; in 1943, he raised millions of dollars for Russian War Relief, speaking at rallies throughout the U.S., the U.K. and Canada. Accompanying him was the well-known Yiddish poet Itzak Feffer (1900-1952). Stalin would later murder both.

The file continues with the documentation of Michoels and Feffer's July 17 arrival in Boston, with a July 17, 1943 Boston Traveler story headlined, “Hub Welcomes Soviet Envoys of Good Will” and a photo featuring the “United Nations friendship” of Mayor Maurice J. Tobin, Feffer and Michoels.

The accompanying article mentions translations by Prof. Serge Polevoy of Cambridge and Emily Rosenstein of Roxbury.

“This is not quite accurate,” Emily noted at the bottom of the page. “The mayor spoke in English, Prof. Polevoy, as a representative of the Russian community in Boston, spoke in Russian. I translated into English for the American guests both the Michoels and Palevoy speeches.”

Said speeches took place at a breakfast held by the mayor at Copley Plaza, attended by two congressmen, the president of the state Senate, a bishop, several leaders of Jewish organizations and George B. Chase, dean of Harvard College.

Emily would later explain her interpretative process in a Dec. 9, 2008 letter to Susan Goodman of the Jewish Museum.

“I had followed Michoels' words as he spoke them,” she wrote, “and interpreted them a few sentences at a time, writing down his words in English and then typing my translation at home.”

Using the patronymic based on the Russian version of the name of Emily's father, Michoels signed his copy of the speech at the mayor's breakfast, “Thank you, Emilia Osipovna.”

Itzik Feffer, however, addressed her as “Emilia Yosifovna,” using the Yiddish version of her father's name, Yosif. As Emily later recalled, Michoels, even though he was best known for his acting in Yiddish, spoke only Russian in public while in the U.S., leaving it to the Yiddish poet Feffer to speak in Yiddish, which they spoke among themselves.

The visitors' first day in Boston included a tour of the Boston Public Library and Harvard, including Widener Library; the Russian art section of the Fogg Museum; the statue of John Harvard in Harvard Yard; Longfellow House, the residence and office of Prof. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Dana; and the 1935 portrait of John Reed in the Adams House Dining Room.

Emily later became secretary to Dana, the leading American authority on Soviet drama, as well as the grandson of poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and author Richard Henry Dana, who wrote “Two Years before the Mast.”



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