

## Harry H. Howard's Story: The Jewish-Mormon (Nee Harry H. Horwitz b. Chicago 1919 d. Hawaii 1974)

### Introducing this talk:

The **November 16, 1959 issue of TIME Magazine** published an article with a photo of my father, Harry Howard, under the headline "Jew & Mormon?" This article led to his becoming the best-known Jewish-Mormon in Mormon and Jewish history. [Note: The photo referred to does not remain in the archive of the Times article. ]

TIME's source for their article came from a story in a Los Angeles Jewish Newspaper about a president of a local lodge on trial for expulsion from the secular Jewish men's service club, B'nai B'rith.

### Talk By Bonny Harps (daughter of Harry) at B'nai Shalom Oct 2014

I would like to tell you tonight about one of the founders of B'nai Shalom and one of the pioneers of Jewish Converts. Harry Henry Howard was my father.

Harry Horwitz was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1919. His mother had immigrated from Rakof, Minsk, Belarus, then Russia, and his father had come from Rezekne, Latvia, then Russia. They were both from Orthodox Jewish families. But, as Dad grew up, his involvement in the Jewish community was superficial, growing up during the depression, his main focus was on survival! At 10 years of age his father was in a car accident and suffered a severe brain trauma that left him a dependant rather than a breadwinner.



My Dad started working at a gas station at that tender age and worked all through his school years to help support his parents and 2 brothers.

By the time he was 22 and was married to my Mother, Mary Peck, he owned 5 gas stations and was doing well.

Pearl Harbor was attacked about a month before they married and soon he was drafted into the Navy. He was stationed at the Navy Yard right there on Lake Michigan. He was an Aviation Machinist's Mate, First Class, working on plane engines for the duration. My brother and I were both born while he was in the Navy. After the war He decided that his business opportunities would be greater if he didn't have such a Jewish-sounding name, so he changed his name legally to Harry Henry Howard, and the rest of us of course, changed also.

My mother was raised as a generic Christian. When she married Dad she also embraced his religion. They took lessons from their Rabbi and she converted and they were married under a canopy according to Jewish tradition.



But, about 1947, Mom felt that we needed to move to California to find the True Church, the one that could answer her questions : Where did I come from, Why am I here and Where am I going and would include Christ as our Savior. We lived in Southern California only a few years before we met an LDS family who taught us the Gospel and mom and my older brother Dave were baptized. I was only seven at that time so I had to wait. It was several months later before Dad was baptized. *He explained that as a Jew he had been persecuted in the name of Jesus Christ.* That the one thing he knew for sure about his religion was that he didn't believe in Jesus Christ!

He found that what he could accept and believe was that only 150 years ago, Joseph Smith was visited by Heavenly Father and the Messiah, the Great Jehovah, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, like Moses. He accepted this understanding of who Jesus

Christ really was. The testimony of the Book of Mormon helped convince him as it promises to be another testimony of Jesus Christ : for the convincing of the Jew and the Gentile, etc. The Holy Ghost revealed these truths to him and he embraced the fellowship of good men who loved him into the true church. Soon after his baptism he went to the Stake Patriarch to receive a blessing.

The Patriarch, not knowing anything about him, hoped Dad wouldn't be alarmed to find out that he was from the tribe of Judah. Dad



reassured him that he was expecting to hear that! The blessing also indicated that he would be able to help his fellow Jews come to an understanding of the restoration of the Gospel and he would be a blessing to his people.

Dad took this blessing very seriously and really for the first time in his life, he was excited about being Jewish! So, he made an effort to associate more with the many Jewish businessmen there in So. Calif. He joined an International Jewish Service Organization called B'nai B'rith. It functions like the Kiwanis Club or the Rotary Club which raise money to provide awards or scholarships to promote education and charities. The name B'nai B'rith means "sons of the Covenant." The only restriction on its members is that they must be Jewish.

Shortly after his baptism, Dad joined the group and accepted a position as an assistant clerk. The next year he became the Clerk. The next year he moved up to 3rd vice pres. and so on until in 1959, he was installed as President of the San Gabriel Valley Lodge of the B'nai Brith. Besides presiding at the meetings, his most important duty was to sponsor fund raisers. He promoted more family-oriented activities than his predecessors had. Instead of gambling and card playing activities he had pot luck dinners and talent or fashion shows. By Sept of that year the lodge had made more money than ever before. His presidency was very successful!

Now, back at the beginning of the year, our Stake President had called Dad in to talk to him about his new position. Our Stake President was Howard W. Hunter.

President Hunter had many Jewish associates and they had told him about Dad. Pres. Hunter told him that this should be a great missionary opportunity for him and said that he would be released from his church callings as Elders Quorum Pres. and even from being a Ward (Home) Teacher so he could concentrate on this unusual opportunity. **Then, in an unprecedented action, President Hunter laid his hands upon Dad's head and set him apart as President of the San Gabriel Valley Bnai Brith Lodge!!!** Surely no other Jewish Lodge President had ever been set apart by a Mormon Stake President!!

Maybe that's why he was having such a great year. He had purposely had a couple of the activities at the Pasadena Stake Center so his Jewish friends could see that there were no offensive crucifixes in our buildings, etc. and they could feel comfortable with LDS people.

Well, in September of the year of his presidency, 2 young full-time missionaries visited the Rabbi at a Jewish Temple that was across the street from the Las Flores Ward Chapel there in Pasadena Stake. They proceeded to give Rabbi Einhorn a Book of Mormon and to tell him about Joseph Smith. The Rabbi gave the book back protesting that "no good Jew would ever believe this!"

I guess that maybe the Elders may have sounded a little cocky when they answered: "Well, the Pres. of the B'nai Brith is a Mormon Elder!"

Rabbi Einhorn started a protest against Dad claiming that he couldn't possibly still be a Jew because of his membership in the Mormon Church. A week or so later Dad was notified of this protest. He received a letter typed on the Lodge letterhead—with his name listed as President—stating that a special hearing would be held the next week. The main item of the agenda was: the trial of Harry Howard.

Now, when Pres. Hunter had set him apart for this special mission, he had also given him a prophetic blessing, that was soon to be fulfilled. It was an echo of the Patriarchal Blessing that stated "every effort that you put forth in this great mission will bear fruit."

The trial was very real. Two attorneys for defense and 2 for prosecution and 5 men for a jury were selected. They were all B'nai Brith members and the attorneys were attorneys by profession. He was on trial to see whether or not he was still Jewish even though he was a Latter-day Saint. (Other members went to church with their Protestant wives and had no such problem with membership!)

The trial started at 8pm on a Wednesday evening. They thought it would be simple to resolve and could reach a verdict that evening—but it was getting to be about 5 am and the arguing was still going on and on! Dad approached them to say "Brethren, I have to teach a Seminary Class to the LDS youth in about an hour, you'll have to excuse me!"

They decided to adjourn until the next week, but it continued on for 5 years! Over a thousand hours of testimony was given and carefully recorded. Before long it became not just a personal issue of whether Dad was still Jewish or not, but rather the question: "What is a Jew?"

Dan explained that there are a few different ways that someone would be identified as Jewish. By observing the religion called Judaism, several versions. Someone living in Israel could consider himself Jewish ( like Nephi the prophet in the Book of Mormon ).

But the real Jew is Jewish by heritage—his lineage. By being a descendant of Judah, the son of Jacob or Israel. He explained that all Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. Israel had 12 sons which became identified as tribes. Actually, one son, Joseph became 2 tribes because both his sons Ephraim and Manasseh received inheritances in the promised land. The Lord made a covenant with Abraham that all the world would be blessed through his innumerable children who would have the Priesthood as

long as they were faithful. Through Joseph Smith all these blessings were restored to Israel and we are now part of the great Gathering of Israel. When we accept the Gospel and make our baptismal covenants we join the church and become children of Israel, if not by lineage, by adoption!

Dad sincerely felt that as a LDS he didn't have to give up being Jewish because we are all Israelites in the church. Many times I remember him saying that "Mormons are better Jews than the Jews of today because they keep the laws and covenants of ancient Israel."

Well, as the trial continued the prosecuting attorneys would quote from the Book of Mormon, (they called it "Harry's Book") and conclude: "See, he's not Jewish anymore." Then, the defense would stand and read from the Book of Mormon and say "See, this means he is still Jewish!" Nothing conclusive was reached but at least it got them reading the Book of Mormon!

These were supposed to be closed sessions but not long after this all got going, the news of it leaked out and a Jewish Newspaper published in the LA area contacted Dad for an interview. I have a copy of it here—its title is "Problem for B'nai B'rith: Can Mormon be a Jew?" Dad was quoted as saying most emphatically that the Mormon's concept of Christ is very different than that of other Christian Churches. Mormons believe that Jesus is Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.—the God of Israel and the true Messiah. That concept is missing in other Christian Churches.

He was excited about these opportunities to tell the Jewish people about how their customs and traditions are practiced in a pure form by the Mormons. It was obvious that his life was being transformed and would never be the same as it had been!

Especially when he got a call from Time Magazine! The reporter said something like—"we understand that there is a trial going on in B'nai B'rith and we'd like to know what's going on and we'd like to hear your side of the story as soon as possible." Trying to be accommodating, Dad had the reporter come to the church at 6am the next morning when Dad would be there to teach our 6:30 Seminary Class. (Old Testament.)

The Reporter came and even had a photographer with him. They took several pictures and the kids in the class were excited and impressed. The reporter was a little nervous because, as he explained to Dad, in the Religion Section of the weekly Magazine, whenever they wrote about other religions no one worries, but if they would write anything controversial about the Mormons, if they don't get it exactly right, every Mormon threatens to cancel their subscription!

So, Dad kept it simple—"I'm still Jewish even though I'm a Mormon." "I saw that my tribe, the tribe of Judah, was so fraught with internal disorder, that I merely decided to walk across the street and live with my cousins, the tribe of Joseph."

As Dad talked with the reporter he seemed impressed with Dad's reasoning and explanation. He was excited about it and he said "That's wonderful, I know that we are going to publish your picture in the magazine, how shall we identify you? As a Jew or a Mormon? Remember, nothing controversial, I don't want to get in trouble!" Dad answered, "Well, that's what the trial is all about, to make that decision!" Then the reporter said he would just send the story in and let his editor decide how to identify him! Dad was amused when he saw the published article—the caption said "Israelite Howard."

Well, as a result of the Time Magazine Article (Nov.16, 1959) Dad received mail from all over the world, mostly asking questions. Jewish people wanted to know more about how the Mormons tied in with the Jewish People. The persecution that the Jews have suffered throughout history has left them in the unique position where not too many others wanted to claim any kinship to them, and here are the Mormons making that claim---they wanted to know if it were really so!

Other letters indicated that when Mormons were being ganged –up on by local churches, the Jews were defending them. (In England) They wanted to know more so they could defend them better!

Because of the trial and the subsequent publicity he began to get invitations to speak, both from LDS and from Jewish groups. He spoke at Sac. Mtgs., firesides, Institutes and taught classes at BYU Ed. Week when they had them in So. Calif. Jewish Temples had youth groups interested, too and in just one year he spoke 54 times---more than once a week. He traveled to Petaluma and down to San Diego in California and then to Las Vegas and even Hawaii---all at his own expense.

He spent the rest of his life as a go-between for his two tribes. He explained the Jews to the LDS and the LDS to the Jews.

Many times he would be called a couple of weeks after he spoke somewhere to go back and baptize someone who had been in his audience! *Most of the time they were the Jewish friends of LDS people.* He experienced great joy in bearing his testimony and being a missionary with his unique style.

There is more to the Harry Henry Howard story, of course, but not enough time to tell it all here tonight. I will conclude by saying that he died defending President Howard W. Hunter at a community meeting in Laie, Hawaii in July of 1974, at the age of 55. He was serving on the Community Council there and was



also the President of Kahuku Branch at the time of his death.

I believe that the Missionary work he did had a good influence on many hundreds, if not thousands of people and as a father of 21 children he will never be forgotten. He and his wife Mary opened their home to many children at the same time they were so busy doing missionary work. They adopted 14 and fostered 5 others. Mary passed away just 4 weeks ago (Sept 4, 2014) and they are finally together again after 40 years of waiting.

[B'nai Shalom Home Page](#)

[Top of this page](#)

# TIME

Monday, Nov. 16, 1959

## Religion: Jew & Mormon?

Blocky, sandy-haired Harry Howard, 40, general manager of a Los Angeles machinery company, is president of San Gabriel Valley Lodge 1710 of B'nai B'rith, the national Jewish benevolent association. Last week he filed an appeal with B'nai B'rith Grand Lodge headquarters in Phoenix, Ariz. to prevent his expulsion. The ground for the proposed ouster: Harry Howard is an elder of the Mormon Church; therefore he is not a Jew.

Mormon Howard contends that there is no reason why he cannot be both. He is still a Jew, he says, even though he practices very little orthodox Judaism. And the Mormons, who claim to be descended primarily from the tribe of Joseph, are themselves Israelites. "My tribe, the tribe of Judah, is so fraught with internal disorder that I merely decided to walk across the street and live with my in-laws—the tribe of Joseph. Mormonism is a continuation of Judaism; all Jews are Israelites, but not all Israelites are Jews. Mormons are Israelites, too. The Jews are always claiming that Moses was the greatest Jew of them all. He wasn't a Jew at all. He wasn't a member of the tribe of Judah—he was a member of the tribe of Levi."

Said Reform Rabbi Ephraim Einhorn of Temple City, Calif., who began the move for Howard's expulsion: "Even though Harry Howard may personally believe that he can be a Jew and a Mormon at the same time, the fact remains that the Mormons give Jesus Christ divine status, and this destroys the indivisible status of God in which we Jews believe."

[B'nai Shalom Home Page](#)

[Top of this page](#)