

INDIANA JEWISH HISTORY

**BONDS** *as*  

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**STRONG**  

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*as* **STEEL**

*A history of Indiana scrap metal  
dealers and their families*

by

The Indiana Jewish Historical Society  
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*Publication Number 39*

Indiana Jewish Historical Society

2011

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# THE TROCKMAN FAMILY

Some of the earliest scrap dealerships were established in the southern part of the state. Julius Trockman founded J. Trockman and Sons in 1892. He immigrated to the United States from Ponevez, Lithuania, which was then a part of the Russian Empire. According to his grandson, Stanley, records show that Julius came to the U.S. by himself and lived in New York City, Alabama, and Tennessee before settling in Evansville in 1890.

When Julius Trockman first arrived in the U.S., he worked in coal mines to earn money to bring his wife over from Lithuania. He did not want to be a coal miner forever and began peddling for economic and social reasons. According to Stanley, Julius did not speak English very well, which limited the jobs he could find. Peddling was a way for Julius to feed his family and to improve his knowledge of English.

Through the years, the Trockman family scrap business continued to grow and change. By the time the U.S. became involved in World War II, Stanley Trockman was old enough to understand some of the yard's involvement in the war effort. The government controlled prices through the Office of Price Administration (OPA) and began to tell the dealers when and where they could sell their materials. Stanley says he was too young at the time to understand how the work his father and uncles did at the yard was helping the war effort. He now feels they made a strong contribution. Part of the yard's war efforts was to supply raw materials that would be used in the production of Landing Ship Tanks, and P47s, which were being built in Evansville.

It was during the war when the Trockmans started a tradition of giving back to the community. Stanley mentioned that his father and uncle helped refugees from Europe start a business on land at the scrap yard. The Trockmans have also been generous in donating equipment to the community for civic improvement, such as clean-up work after massive destruction caused by a tornado that ripped through southern Indiana.

Many businesses, including J. Trockman and Sons, donated the use of their heavy machinery to the clean-up effort. Many of the workers also volunteered their time to the clean-up effort.

Trockman's employs approximately thirty people in Evansville. Jeff Trockman said his workers are, "loyal and hard-working." The scrap industry is a part of the recycling industry, and the industry is providing a vital service in processing metals to be reused for building and other projects.

J. Trockman and Sons is still owned and operated by the Trockman family. However, Stanley offered some insight into why other scrap dealers have sold their businesses. "Often they need to consolidate because of the cost of new improved equipment and the general cost of doing business," he said. These costs, as well as a younger family members' lack of interest in carrying on the business, are the main reasons why many scrap dealers have sold their businesses to other scrap dealers or larger conglomerations.

# THE JOSEPH KROOT FAMILY

The Kroot family started its business in a similar way to the Trockmans. Ephraim Kroot, who was a carpenter, arrived in Indianapolis with his family in the early 1880s. According to Ben Kroot, Ephraim's son, Joseph, started as a pack peddler. Later in 1899, with a horse and wagon, he started his business in Shelbyville, Indiana as a rag picker. Joseph Kroot would move his family from Shelbyville to Edinburgh and establish a scrap yard there in the early 1900s.

In 1907, Joseph decided to establish a second yard in Columbus, Indiana at the corner of First and Jackson streets. He was able to run both his Edinburgh and Columbus yards with the use of the traction line between Columbus and Indianapolis. There was a train car that would run between the two cities every half hour to hour. However, by 1913, the operation in Columbus had become more successful because there were more industrial factories and plants in the city. Joseph decided to close the yard in Edinburgh and move his family and operations to Columbus permanently. By this time, the yard was dealing in iron, rags, rubber, metal, hides, tallow, and wool.

Many scrap yards were established in areas where fledgling industrial businesses were beginning to take root, as well as in or near farming communities. According to his son, Ben, Joseph Kroot was friendly with the original owners of many of these companies that would later become huge corporations. They included Cummins, Arvin, Reeves, and Caldwell-Drake. These friendships allowed Kroot to establish working contracts with the companies for their scrap metal, paper and rubber. Farmers also would scrap old farm equipment, hides, furs, and bones after the harvesting and butchering were over.

Joseph also bought scrap from other dealers in the surrounding area, including the Kronenberger and the Sulzer families of Madison. In 1927, the Sulzer family sold their business to Joseph Kroot. Joseph's son-in-law,

Isadore Weinberg, and his wife, Lillian Kroot Weinberg, moved from Columbus to Madison with their son, Jerry, and operated the former Sulzer scrap yard, as I. Weinberg Co.

By 1930, Joseph's sons, Abe and Ben, were both working for their father in Columbus. Joseph passed away in 1931. Soon after, his widow, Jennifer, sold the J. Kroot Co. to Abe and Ben. The brothers owned and operated, and expanded, the business through the Depression and World War II.

World War II was an important time for scrap dealers because the government needed metal for war munitions. The J. Kroot Co. expanded during this time, employing almost 50 workers instead of the eight to 10 they had during the Depression.

In 1949, when the A. Cohen and Sons scrap yard in Indianapolis decided to sell to new owners, the middle brother, Sam Kroot, bought the entire operation. It was then Sam retired from the practice of law and took over the Indianapolis business that would later become KF Industries.

Changes began to occur within the J. Kroot Co. in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1954, Abe Kroot bought out his brother, Ben, who moved from Columbus to California with his wife, Myra, and sons, Jeff and Arthur. Abe continued running the business in Columbus until his failing health didn't allow him to work full time. He invited Ben Kroot to come back as a co-owner of J. Kroot Co. in 1965. Also in 1965, the J. Kroot Co. moved to its current location on State Street in Columbus.

Arthur Kroot graduated from college in 1968 and joined his father at J. Kroot Co., adding to the third generation of Kroots working in the scrap industry. This arrangement continued for a few years.

In 1974, Ben Kroot decided he wanted to retire and moved to California. Arthur Kroot then took over his father's holdings in J. Kroot Co. and continued to run the yard with his cousin, Joe Kroot, until 1986. In that year, Arthur bought out his cousin and became the sole active member of the Kroot family working in the family business in Columbus. This continued until 2002, when Arthur's son, Joshua, became the fourth generation of Kroots to enter into the family scrap business.

Arthur and Joshua Kroot are currently running Kroot Corp. Industrial scrap continues to be the majority of its business. Arthur says 75 percent

of the scrap they buy and sell comes from their industrial contracts, mostly auto; while 25 percent of the scrap it buys and sells comes from individual or retail trade. Much of the retail scrap is obsolete farm or automotive equipment, but scrap can also include anything from cans to metal shavings.

Because the Kroot Corp. is involved in the retail trade, they must be cautious of buying scrap metal that has been stolen. This is a sentiment shared by all scrap dealers. If stolen scrap is found in a yard, the dealer is responsible. Arthur says he has seen everything from utility poles to manhole covers come into the yard in order to be sold. In his attempts to avoid stolen scrap, Arthur has maintained a working relationship with the Columbus Police Department. Arthur says the community knows about this relationship, and also knows he will report stolen scrap to police.

The Kroots have a long tradition of giving philanthropically in Columbus. "Our family has always been that way; and if we feel there is anywhere we can help, we help. There has never been a problem between us on that," Ben Kroot said.

Ben Kroot had a special interest in assisting the Columbus Regional Hospital over the years, and Arthur and his wife, Bobbie, carried on that tradition. Combined, the Kroots have given enough for a large meeting room, auditorium, and an Infant Special Services Unit at the Columbus Regional Hospital. Arthur feels the company has a larger impact on the middle- to lower-income community in Columbus, acting as a sort of middleman between factories, plants, and their employees. The Kroots plan to continue to serve and work with the Columbus community for years to come.



Joseph Kroot (third from the right) dealt in iron, rages, rubber, metal, hides, tallow and wool using a horse and wagon to haul salvage materials from surroundings areas. In 1907, he moved his operation to Columbus, Indiana.



# THE WEINBERG FAMILY

The Weinbergs entered into to the scrap industry through family connections. Isadore Weinberg was originally from Louisville, Kentucky, and had moved to Columbus to work in a men's store. While at the store, Isadore met Lillian Kroot, who was working at a linen store.

In 1927, when Joseph Kroot bought a scrap yard from the Sultzer family in Madison, Indiana, he decided Isadore and Lillian should run the scrap yard. Interestingly, as their daughter, Joan Wolf, pointed out, Joseph Kroot put the deed to I. Weinberg Co. in Lillian's name, not Isadore's. Perhaps this was a way to ensure the company would stay within the Kroot family.

The Sultzers also were an important family in Madison. They established their scrap yard in Madison on Mulberry Street in 1864, and it was owned and operated by them for 57 years before it was sold to the Kroots. The Sultzer yard was a bit unique, specializing in the roots and herbs market. The roots and herbs were bought from the surrounding farming community then sold to pharmaceutical companies around the world. The Sultzers established their business to become the largest crude drug firm. The Sultzer brothers, Marcus and Louis, were looked upon as authorities on the subject of market changes within the wholesale druggist community.

Isadore Weinberg carried on the roots and herb business once he took over the yard from the Sultzers. Both he, and later his son, Jerry, studied the business and knew exactly which herbs and roots were ready for market just by looking at them. Much of these products were brought to I. Weinberg Co. from farmers in Indiana and Kentucky. While this was a large part of their business, the yard was also active to purchasing and selling metals, hides, furs, spices, rubber, and paper.

While the I. Weinberg Co. continued to grow as a business, the owners were faced with natural disasters. Since Madison is situated on the Ohio River, flooding often takes place in the town. During the 1937 flood, Joan said I. Weinberg Co. was completely underwater, as the floor waters rose all

the way from the river to First Street. Joan also remembered how the tires Isadore had in the yard were floating down the Ohio River. This was an event that would stick in the minds of those who lived it for years to come.

Madison experienced an economic boom in the 1940s. This was due, in part, to the construction of the Jefferson Proving Ground where ammunition was tested for the U.S. Army. The Jefferson Proving Ground brought an influx of government personnel to Madison, which increased the amount of business taking place in the town. This was also helpful to the scrap industry because the dealers were asked to bid on the used materials from the Jefferson Proving Ground at government auctions. The government auctioning of scrap materials was not uncommon during this time.

Another area of great importance for the I. Weinberg Co. was the start of World War II. Scrap was a vital resource for the war effort. Joan remembered that while gasoline was rationed at the time, the Weinberg family never had to worry about getting a supply of gasoline. The government provided



Isadore Weinberg and his son, Jerry, at the scrap yard circa 1936. After his father passed away in 1949, Jerry took over the family business and continued at the helm until he retired in the 1980s.

enough gasoline for I. Weinberg Co. to continue running its trucks in order to ship metals to foundries.

The Weinbergs also participated in the home front efforts during World War II. Lillian was a volunteer for the Red Cross, and taught women how to knit scarves, hats, and socks to send to troops in Europe. Isadore also participated at home during the war. One of his biggest ideas was to plant a Victory Garden in his scrap yard. However, at the time he did not think about how the metals from the scrap yard had leached into the soil of the yard. Joan remembered how the carrots tasted like iron, as did the rest of the vegetables. Needless to say, the Weinbergs did not eat the produce from the Victory Garden, however, it was a good idea to participate in the war effort.

Isadore Weinberg ran the I. Weinberg Co. from 1927 until his death in 1949. After Isadore passed away, his son, Jerry, came back to Indiana from Cincinnati and took over running the family business. Jerry, who had a metallurgical engineering degree from Purdue University, continued to run the business until he retired in the 1980s. Jerry sold the business, however, the business did not prosper and the yard was closed shortly thereafter. The building that stands at the original spot of the Sultzler yard still has the I. Weinberg Co. writing on it to stand as a memory to the yard that was there.

The Weinbergs also gave back philanthropically to the community of Madison. One such example is how the Weinberg family donated a memorial park at the foot of Mulberry Street, in memory of Jerry Weinberg. This donation, and similar ones made by other families have created a beautiful memorial park along Madison's Ohio River front to be enjoyed by all who reside in or visit Madison. Joan Wolf has also donated to different preservation efforts to restore and upkeep historic parts of Madison. The Weinbergs felt it was important to give back to their hometown community.

eggs; and then sold them. This business venture did not last long, and a bad shipment of chickens in 1934 forced Nate and Henry to apply for bankruptcy of their business. This did not keep the brothers down for long, and soon they were on to their next business venture.

In early 1935, Nate and Henry started another joint business effort. They found an old foundry in Michigan City, where the Winski family had a summer cottage. In order to start their business, the brothers borrowed \$500 from their father, rented the building and opened their own scrap company called the Indiana Salvage Company. Nate and Henry, with the help of their father, Lou, discovered that their business site was a very valuable asset. Because the site had been a foundry, there was several hundred tons of breakable cast iron under the floor of the building. This proved most valuable in the first year, because whenever money was needed they would break up some of the cast iron and sell it. Six months after the company was formed, the next youngest brother Mort came to Michigan City to work with his brothers in 1945, and the youngest brother Jack would also join his brothers in their business venture.

As time went on the brothers expanded and diversified their business. Scrap metal would remain the stable product that would provide the income and capital for the brothers to expand into other branches of business. Through the 1940s the brothers were working in the creation of precision machine tools, new steel, baby walkers, playground equipment and tricycles. The expansion into other branches of business occurred in part to the restrictions and regulations that scrap dealers had to adhere to in World War II. Because times were difficult for scrap dealers, the brother branched into other businesses in order to support their families. This trend in growth and expansion would continue into the 1950s.

In the 1950s, Indiana Salvage Company was incorporated into Northern Indiana Steel Company (NISCO). This was done because it encompassed all the different divisions the brothers had operating in their business. Their business continued to grow and expand. NISCO would grow to include operations in grain storage, mining, manufacturing of scrap and steel hauling trailers and roofs for mobile homes. The brothers would also expand to have scrap yards not only in Michigan City, but also in Elkhart

and La Porte, Indiana. While business was not always steady for the Winski brothers, it did provide enough means to support all four of their families.

In the 1960s, there were more changes and expansions. The Winski brothers merged the Indiana Salvage part of their business with a long time competitor to form AMI Metals. To add to the newly formed AMI Metals, Burns Baling was bought. This division bought, baled and sold steel scrap. Burns International Dock Company was also organized to load and unload vessels that docked in the Port of Indiana. The brothers also formed another division called Dispos-All, which picked up and disposed of industrial waste in the Michigan City area. The many divisions within Northern Indiana Steel Supply Company were very diverse, but suited the personal and business interests of all involved in the company.

By 1970, Nate and Henry Winski were sole owners of NISCO, their brothers having sold their interest back to Nate and Henry in order to pursue their own business interests. By 1971, the two brothers had an interest in developing new and different businesses within Michigan City after they purchased the land and buildings of the former Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing Co. The decision was made by the brothers to liquidate their business holdings at NISCO, but they kept the Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing Co. In 1972, Nate and Henry sold their entire business and all of its remaining divisions to the Joseph Behr Company. This left the brothers free to pursue other business interests in Michigan City.

The Winskis were civically and philanthropically involved in the Michigan City community. Nate Winski, for example, was a member of the Citizens Development and Advisory Committee, the Michigan City Chapter of the American Cancer Society, and was president of the Indiana Chapter of the Institute of Scrap Iron & Steel Inc., as well as many other organizations. Nate was a very personable person, and appeared to never know a stranger.

Nate, who never knew a stranger, was so well known in Michigan City that many people called him Uncle Nate, as a sign of endearment. Nate also received a Sagamore of the Wabash from Governor Bowen for his distinguished service to his community and state.