

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

ON

MEYER W. WEISGAL

CHAIRMAN, WEIZMANN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE

(ELECTED PRESIDENT, 1966)

MEYER W. WEISGAL

(Biographical Notes on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday)

November 10, 1964, Meyer W. Weisgal, Master Builder of the Weizmann Institute of Science in Rehovoth, Israel, Chairman of its Executive Council, marks his 70th birthday.

A notable career of 50 years, almost wholly dedicated to the Renaissance of the Jewish People, has spanned three continents, embraced the worlds of journalism, drama, literature, science, and is studded with numerous firsts in achievement and enduring contributions to the creation of the State of Israel and to its development.

For 25 years the closest associate of Dr. Chaim Weizmann, in his political and scientific endeavors, at 70, Weisgal is the guardian of the Weizmann spiritual legacy which he has maintained as a living and growing catalyst for Israel and humanity since Dr. Weizmann's death in 1952.

The Weisgal personality, daring, imaginative, creative, always ready to set sail in uncharted waters and the broad scope and artistry of his goals and attainments have made him a legendary figure in the United States, Britain and Israel. A man of boundless energy, outspoken, humorous, a prodigious reader and inveterate theatre goer, a raconteur with a wealth of anecdotes in three languages, his style has always been his own, with a quality which has remained steadfast throughout the years: impeccable artistic taste and integrity.

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Role in the Jewish Renaissance

Born in the town of Kikol, Poland, on November 10, 1894, Meyer Wolf Weisgal was brought to the United States by his parents at the age of 11. He was educated in New York City public schools and at Columbia University where he studied journalism.

A Zionist from his earliest youth, one of the early members of the Hashahar, a Bronx Zionist society, he began, in 1915, to play a role, which became increasingly important, in the major events which forged a straggling Zionist movement into a powerful agency for the attainment of Jewish statehood.

A disciple both of Louis Lipsky and Chaim Weizmann, a profound and intimate kinship was established with these two giants of the Zionist movement which endured throughout their lifetimes. In the great schism of 1921 which split the American Zionist movement, Weisgal fought by the side of Louis Lipsky and Chaim Weizmann for the victory which was to produce the instrumentalities that equipped Jewish Palestine to become the forerunner of the State of Israel.

Interrupted only by service in the U.S. Army during World War I, Weisgal served officially with the American Zionist movement from 1915 to 1930. An interlude of 10 years followed, in which he played no official role in American Zionist affairs, but served the cause in unique and spectacular ways. In 1940 he resumed his official Zionist connection at the behest of Dr. Chaim Weizmann and as his personal representative in the United States.

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Editor of Maccabean

In 1915 Weisgal joined the staff of The Maccabean, official organ of the Zionist Organization of America, the first English language Zionist weekly, whose editor then was Louis Lipsky. In 1917, Weisgal succeeded to the post of editor.

Editor of New Palestine

In 1921, he became editor of The New Palestine, successor to The Maccabean.

In a turbulent era of scepticism and division, in addition to the vital task of promoting adherence to the Zionist cause through The New Palestine, Weisgal, as editor, conceived and published two notable supplements which remain as permanent reference works today: In 1925 a supplement on The Hebrew University, then in the process of establishment; in 1929 a supplement on Theodor Herzl, founder of modern Zionism.

National Secretary of ZOA

In 1921, Weisgal also assumed the post of National Secretary of the Zionist Organization of America, which he held until 1930.

From 1925 on, he was a delegate to all World Zionist Congresses.

Weizmann's Personal Representative

In 1940, a year after the beginning of World War II, with the shift of the world diplomatic and political center to the United States, Weisgal was invited by Dr. Weizmann to serve as his personal political representative there.

Shortly thereafter, he was also charged with the task of establishing an American Section of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the internationally recognized Jewish spokesman under the Palestine

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Mandate, then headed by Dr. Weizmann.

Subsequently, Weisgal became Secretary General of the American Section of the Jewish Agency, a post which he held until 1946, while also serving as Dr. Weizmann's principal aide here.

The American Jewish Conference

During this period he played a significant role in the negotiations which led to an agreement on the part of American Jewish leaders, Zionists and non-Zionists, the first of its kind, to mobilize the American Jewish community, in all its factions, in support of the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine at the end of World War II. From this agreement resulted the American Jewish Conference held in 1943, representative of the Jewish Community of America, which adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish State at the war's end. This unanimity played a signal role in securing and maintaining U.S. Government support for subsequent Palestine Partition and the creation of the State of Israel. Weisgal was one of the five Organizing Secretaries of the Conference.

Aide to Dr. Weizmann in Crucial Years before Partition

During the crucial years when the Jewish Agency and Palestine Jewry were engaged in the grave struggle to prevent the stultification of the pledges of the Palestine Mandate, Mr. Weisgal was at Dr. Weizmann's side.

He was a delegate to the World Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland, in December 1946, when Dr. Weizmann's "Parting of the Ways" address took him out of Presidential Office for the next few months.

Similarly, during the Palestine debate at the U.N., which led to the November 29, 1947, U.N. decision for the partition of Palestine, in which Dr. Weizmann was a participant, and in the delicate negotiations which followed to prevent the nullification of this historic resolution, Weisgal served as Dr. Weizmann's aide.

In the two decades preceding the emergence of the State of Israel, in May, 1948, Weisgal visited Palestine some 10 times in connection with Zionist affairs.

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Meyer Weisgal and the Weizmann Institute of Science

In 1944, friends of Dr. Chaim Weizmann, Meyer Weisgal among them, conceived the idea of establishing the Chaim Weizmann Institute of Science at Rehovoth as a gift to Dr. Weizmann on his 70th birthday. This to be the outgrowth of the Daniel Sieff Research Institute established 10 years earlier, of which Dr. Weizmann was both Founder and President, and whose purpose was, as he said, "to create absorptive capacity" for Palestine.

Weisgal was charged with the responsibility of organizing the mobilization of funds with which to give substance to the idea. An initial goal of a million dollars resulted in a \$5,000,000 fund.

In the summer of 1946, the cornerstone was laid for the first building of the Weizmann Institute of Science, the Physics and Physical Chemistry Institute, in the midst of Palestine Jewry's struggle against the British Government's efforts to thwart the establishment of the Jewish National Homeland, even though it was abandoning the Mandate.

In 1947, Weisgal accepted an invitation to serve as Executive Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the Weizmann Institute and as Chairman of the Institute's Executive Council; the latter post was made permanent in 1952.

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In May, 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed, Dr. Weizmann became its first President. His home in Rehovoth became the official residence of the President.

One year later, in June 1949, Meyer Weisgal established residence at Rehovoth on the campus of the Weizmann Institute of Science, and took over the management of its affairs.

At that time he had already completed 39 years of dedicated service to the Renaissance of the Jewish People.

In November 1949, the Weizmann Institute of Science was dedicated in impressive ceremonies, organized by Weisgal, amidst the new struggle of the newly created State of Israel to maintain itself against the Arab armies intent upon its destruction.

A virtuoso at attracting friends and supporters, this great creative gift attained its highest peak in the Weizmann Institute. Since 1949, under his direction, the Weizmann Institute has developed into a 60-million-dollar complex, with 19 research units, 200 research projects, a staff of 450 scientists, and a Graduate School in the Natural Sciences. His success in securing large gifts for it on a continuing and expanding basis is unmatched.

The Institute has attained international stature in the scientific community; it counts among its Honorary Fellows and its Board of Governors many of the world's most renowned scientists, as well as leading lay leaders. It remains dedicated to the concepts of Dr. Weizmann, to serve science, Israel and humanity.

After Dr. Weizmann's death in 1952, Yad Chaim Weizmann, one of Israel's beauty shrines, was planned and constructed under Mr. Weisgal's direction as a living national memorial to Israel's first President. Here, set in a landscaped park, is Dr. Weizmann's last resting place, surrounded by the campus and the activities of the Weizmann Institute of Science.

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Service to the State of Israel

Israel Bonds

In 1951, Mr. Weisgal took a one year's leave of absence from the Weizmann Institute of Science to serve as Vice-President of the State of Israel Bond organization in the United States. He organized the successful visit of Prime Minister David Ben Gurion to the United States which launched the organization's first drive for \$500,000,000.

Chairman Israel's Tenth Anniversary Celebration

In 1957, at the request of Prime Minister Ben Gurion, Mr. Weisgal accepted the Chairmanship of the World Committee for the Observance of Israel's 10th Anniversary. Under his direction, worldwide observances were organized throughout the world, including Israel, the United States and Great Britain. The notable results obtained for Israel, through these observances, were recognized by the State of Israel in 1959 in an award presented to Meyer Weisgal by the President and the Prime Minister of Israel.

Science and the New States

In 1959 Weisgal initiated the organization of a Conference on Science and The New States, held a year later under the auspices of the Weizmann Institute of Science.

Attended by representatives of 40 countries, and addressed by the world's leading scientists, this two week Conference produced three major results:

1. It gave a new objective to the world scientific revolution, that of telescoping time and accelerating the development of new States.
2. It showed new States how science could overcome limited resources.

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3. It shattered the power blocs which for 12 years had been creating a semi-political isolation of Israel. It opened the way for Israel's technical aid to new States, now a major facet of its foreign policy.

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Weisgal as Journalist, Author and Editor

A fifteen year journalistic career, 13 years of them as editor of The Maccabean and The New Palestine, has been supplemented by other activities as writer and editor.

In 1926, Weisgal edited a volume of poems by Hebrew poet Chaim Nachman Bialik in an English translation.

From 1930 to 1932, he was the publisher and editor of the Jewish Standard of Toronto, an Anglo-Jewish weekly which commanded wide attention both in the United States and Canada.

In November 1944, Dial Press published a book entitled CHAIM WEIZMANN -- STATESMAN, SCIENTIST, BUILDER OF THE JEWISH COMMONWEALTH, to which many notables contributed. The book was planned and edited by Weisgal as a 70th birthday tribute to Dr. Weizmann. The volume was translated into a number of languages, including Hebrew.

In 1962, on the 10th Anniversary of Dr. Weizmann's death, Weisgal was responsible for CHAIM WEIZMANN -- A BIOGRAPHY BY SEVERAL HANDS, published in Great Britain and the United States. Edited by Weisgal, with Joel Carmichael as associate editor, the volume received favorable reviews by leading critics in both countries.

Weisgal has contributed articles to many periodicals throughout the world, general and Jewish. He has also lectured extensively in the United States, Britain, Israel, Canada and Mexico.

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Meyer Weisgal as Impresario

Beginning in 1932, Meyer Weisgal acquired a new stature and a new reputation in a new field, this time as a theatrical impresario -- the first to focus, through drama and spectacle, national and international attention on the sufferings of the Jewish People and on the role of Palestine in resolving their problems.

The Romance of a People

In 1932, Weisgal presented in Chicago, at a Chanukah Festival, the Chicago Opera Company and several hundred actors, in the first version of a spectacle, "The Romance of a People". Twenty-seven thousand people saw that spectacle which became the precursor of the annual Chanukah Festival of the State of Israel Bonds.

A year later, in 1933, soon after the Nazi persecutions of the Jews had begun, he presented a more elaborate version of "The Romance of a People" with a cast of 3,000 at the Century of Progress Exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair. Dedicated to Jewish Day, this musical pageant was seen by 131,000 people at Soldiers Field. Dr. Chaim Weizmann was persuaded by Weisgal to come from London for one day to address the audience. \$100,000 was turned over, from this performance, to the Central British Fund for German Jewish refugees.

Meyer Weisgal's imaginative production prompted the Chicago Tribune to sponsor a second performance of the spectacle at the Chicago World's Fair.

Other cities clamored to see the spectacle, with the result that a tour of major cities was organized by Weisgal in 1933 and 1934. In New York, 20,000 people saw the performance nightly (with a cast of 6,000) for a number of weeks at the Kingsbridge Armory.

The Eternal Road

Spurred by the public and critical acclaim of "The Romance of a People" and the drastically sharpened persecution of European Jewry in 1937, Meyer Weisgal organized and became the Executive Producer of the Biblical musical drama, "The Eternal Road". Its theme was Hitler's persecution of the Jews.

Three world-famous figures, refugees from Hitler persecution, were brought to the United States by him to compose and direct this drama -- the distinguished playwright and poet, Franz Werfel; the celebrated composer, Kurt Weill; the world-renowned theatrical director, Max Reinhardt. Norman Bel Geddes, then America's foremost scenic designer, designed the sets. Hundreds of thousands of people saw this great spectacle of a people's struggle against oppression, which also drew wide critical acclaim.

Prior to it, Max Reinhardt and Meyer Weisgal produced together "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream", which was seen in a number of cities and later made into a motion picture.

The Palestine Pavilion

In 1938 when a World's Fair was being organized in New York, Weisgal conceived the idea of building a Palestine Pavilion at the Fair as a means of putting the spotlight on Jewish suffering under Hitler and on the Jewish National Homeland in Palestine as home and refuge. Though the Jewish National Homeland had no status as a state, Weisgal succeeded in securing from the Fair authorities official status for a Palestine Pavilion as a national pavilion equal with that of other states.

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Thereafter, he conceived and personally planned the construction of the Palestine Pavilion and directed its activities for two years. The Pavilion was critically judged to be one of the most artistic at the Fair and attracted millions of visitors.

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Weisgal as Commuter

Since 1949 Mr. Weisgal has shared his time equally between Israel and the United States where he continues to be responsible also for the activities of the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science.

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Mr. Weisgal has been married to the former Shirley Hirshfeld since June 10, 1923. They have three children: Emanuel, Helen and David.

September, 1964.

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