

David Coen Remarks at Dedication of Lazarus Park

Middlebury VT · August 21, 2021

Governor Scott, Secretary Flynn, Chairman Carpenter, Senators Mazza and Bray, Representative Sheldon, invited guests, and fellow Vermonters. On behalf of the Lazarus Family, I want to thank the Town of Middlebury and all those citizens who worked so hard to create this beautiful park and to remember the Lazarus family in its naming. As Chair of the Transportation Board, I also want to congratulate the Town on the completion of this important rail project and to convey my appreciation for the sacrifices that the citizens endured during its construction.

I have been asked to share a little history of the Lazarus family, which is primarily from stories that were handed down through the generations.

Harry and Stella Lazarus opened a store in Mineville NY in partnership with Harry's brother in the early years of the 20th century. Stella was my mother's aunt and my sense was that she was not very happy in Mineville. It was a long way from Burlington, where she was born, the youngest daughter of Solomon Wolk, the first Hebrew teacher in Burlington. And it was a long way from her sister Carrie, who had married Max Fishman, my grandfather, in Vergennes; her brother Hyman and his wife Alice in Rutland; and her sister Mary, who was still in Burlington but soon would move with her husband to

Claremont NH. All of them had opened some form of clothing and dry good store.

Stella very much missed her family and must have persuaded Harry to move because he sold his share of the Mineville store to his brother and in about 1911 they set up their own store in Middlebury, which, in those days, was far enough from Rutland and Vergennes to not be in competition with the family's businesses in those towns. This Middlebury store would become the Lazarus Department Store that we remember today.

The business prospered and so did the family. Eugene (Mike) was born followed by Freda, Stanton, and Herbert. The Lazaruses were one of the first Jewish families in Middlebury and they were observant. Keeping kosher was challenging and they would have kosher meat and food shipped by train from Albany. Traveling to Burlington to attend synagogue for the holidays was a long journey but the children were all well versed in traditional Jewish learning and values.

Education was important to the family and the children enjoyed the Middlebury schools. Gene and Stanton both graduated college and served in the army during World War II. Gene went onto law school but never practiced and started the United 5&10. Stanton joined his father in the business and he and Stella ran the store after Harry passed away until Stanton finally took over himself. Freda carried on the retail tradition of the family and married into the Lipman family in Barre, who owned

Harry's Department Store, which our governor is certainly familiar with. Freda lived in Barre for several years until the marriage fell apart and she moved back to Middlebury with her two daughters, Lyn and Joy. Herbert became a dentist and opened a practice in Burlington, where he lived with his wife Gidge and daughter Linda. Gene finally married Annette later in life and they adopted and raised their son Richie, the love of their lives. Stan remained a bachelor with many stories to tell.

There was a sense of civic pride in the Lazarus family. Both Gene and Stan became very active in the Middlebury community, Gene in local politics as a justice of the peace and member of the Board of Civil Authority. Stan ran for the legislature as a Democrat, which was unusual in Addison County at the time. In Montpelier, he joined a group of bipartisan progressive legislators known as the Young Turks that included Dick Mallory, Franklin Billings, Ernest Gibson, John Downs, and Phil Hoff. When Hoff was elected governor, he asked Stan to join him on the 5th floor, where he became executive clerk, what today would be titled Secretary of Government and Military Affairs. Following that service, he returned to Middlebury and focused on the store and the community.

The Lazarus family was not only involved in the community but also very generous, through scholarship awards at the high school, the Lions Club, and the gift of the family home to the Chavurah of Addison County among countless other gifts. But

there was more. I would suggest that there are even those in the audience today whose family may not have been able to afford a pair of shoes or a winter coat and Stan would simply make them a gift. It was Stan whom I was closest to. When I took over Fishman's Department Store in the late 70's when I wasn't yet 30, Stan was not only my cousin but became my friend and my mentor . . . and I miss him today.

They are now mostly gone. Herbert, the youngest, died of cancer in the 70's. Freda and then Stan passed away in the 90's and Gene in 2001. Richie, Gene and Annette's son, was tragically killed in an automobile accident in the 80's. Freda's daughter Lyn Lifshin, an internationally renowned poet, died about a year and half ago, and Annette, Gene's wife, passed away this past January. Freda's other daughter, Joy Fagan, has suffered some health problems and lives in an assisted living facility in South Burlington and Linda Lazarus, Herb's daughter, moved to Philadelphia over 50 years ago. There are no grandchildren and thus no one to carry on the Lazarus name and that is probably the most important reason why the dedication of this park today in memory of the Lazarus family is so timely . . . because it honors the history of this very vibrant and giving Middlebury family where there is no one left to tell the story and thus captures a certain well-deserved immortality.

Thank you very much.