

AJHS Spotlight

From Neighborhood Grocery Store to Stop & Shop Supermarkets: *The Rabb Family Collection*

One of the most interesting personal collections at the American Jewish Historical Society–New England Archives is that of the Rabb (Rabinovitz) family, founders of Stop & Shop Supermarkets. The records of this family and their multigenerational business represent a Greater Boston immigrant family success story. From the seeds of the Rabinovitzes' small Boston store grew one of New England's most recognizable grocery chains. Although no longer family-owned, Stop & Shop continues to operate today.

In 1891, Nachman and Yente Rabinovitz and their children emigrated from Russia to the United States to avoid a son's conscription into the Russian Army. According to family lore, the Rabinovitzes spent two years trying to enter Palestine—ending up in the United States by default! Upon arrival, the family established a small neighborhood grocery store in Boston's North End. One son, Joseph Rabinovitz, worked in the family store and peddled housewares, eventually saving enough money to go into the wholesale grocery business. Joseph then joined forces with his brother Max and three other companies to establish the Standard Grocery Company. In 1914, two other brothers, Jacob and Julius, started the Economy Grocery Company, a small chain of stores which expanded steadily; by the end of 1918, the number of stores had reached thirty-two. This company was the forerunner of Stop & Shop Supermarkets.

The next generation began to be represented in 1918, when Joseph's oldest son, Sidney, entered the business after serving in the U.S. Marine Corps. Two more of Joseph's sons joined the company after graduating from Boston Latin School and Harvard University, Norman in 1925 and Irving in 1935. The company grew rapidly from 1920 to the mid-1930s, opening new stores and acquiring existing ones. In 1935, the

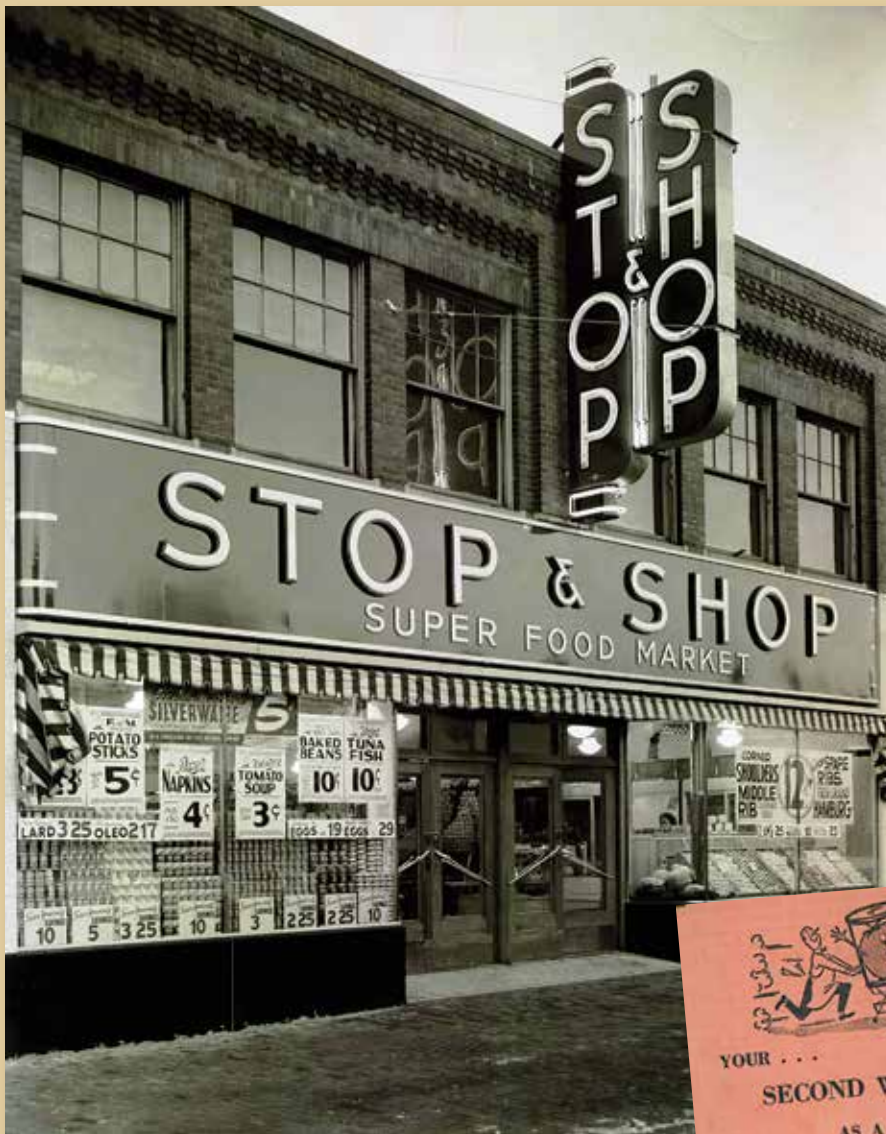


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Economy Grocery Company opened its first self-service supermarket, located on Memorial Drive in Cambridge, under the name of R. H. White Food Mart. By 1937, noting the food mart's success, the company began opening more self-service supermarkets and converting existing stores to the self-service model, all under the new Stop & Shop name. With the shift to self-serve supermarkets, the company gradually began closing the Economy stores and, in 1946, changed its name to Stop & Shop, Inc. At the same time as the company name change, the three brothers changed their surname from Rabinovitz to Rabb.

By the 1940s and 1950s another generation of the Rabb family began working in the business as Sidney Rabb's daughter Carol and her husband, Avram Goldberg, joined the company.



Previous page, top to bottom: 1930s flyer for a pre-Stop & Shop Rabinovitz-owned grocery store; Albert Einstein and Norman Rabb, 1948. Left, top to bottom: Photograph of an early 1950s Stop & Shop grocery store from an unidentified Massachusetts location; a 1950s employee orientation card.

Goldberg families. The documents date from 1912 to 1989, and include both family and business papers. The collection includes biographical materials, photographs, films, oral histories, and scrapbooks documenting the lives of Rabinovitz, Rabb, and Goldberg family members. Many records document how family members participated in local Jewish and community organizations. Additionally, extensive materials document the growth and development of the Stop & Shop chain over time. Among the business papers are meeting minutes, policy manuals, financial and shareholder reports, company newsletters, advertisements, promotional materials, photographs, and employee orientation cards. The Rabb Family Papers are a prime example of a collection that documents a multigenerational family business, started by immigrants, which flourished over much of the twentieth century.



The American Jewish Historical Society–New England Archives holds twenty boxes of this prominent Jewish family’s records. Anyone interested in learning more about this collection or the

other collections housed at AJHS–NEA should visit our website at ajhsboston.org or visit us at our home at the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston.^[2] ♦

Notes

- ¹ “The Stop & Shop Supermarket Company History,” fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/the-stop-shop-company
- ² Some information for this article is from the Rabb Family Papers finding aid at ajhsboston.org/collections.

In 1971, Avram Goldberg was elected president of Stop & Shop. Carol succeeded him as president in 1985, when he became Chairman of the Board.

Originally a retail food company, Stop & Shop soon diversified, acquiring Bradlees Junior Department Stores, Medi Mart, and the Charles B. Perkins Tobacco Company. The three Rabb brothers also expanded the grocery business to include its own bakery, potato operation, perishable distribution center, dairy plant, quality control laboratory, and meat-processing facility. With all this diversification, in 1970 the corporation became the Stop & Shop Companies, Inc. By the mid-1990s, after the Rabb family had been involved in the grocery business for seventy years, the company was acquired by the Dutch global food retailing giant Royal Ahold N.V.^[1]

During these seven decades, the Rabb family not only managed one of the largest and most successful supermarket chains in New England but also contributed to the community. Over a long period of philanthropic involvement in civic and religious activities, the family assisted such organizations as Beth Israel Hospital, Brandeis University, the Boston Public Library, and the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston.

The Rabb Family Papers were donated to the American Jewish Historical Society–New England Archives, during the 1990s, by both the Stop & Shop Company and members of the Rabb and