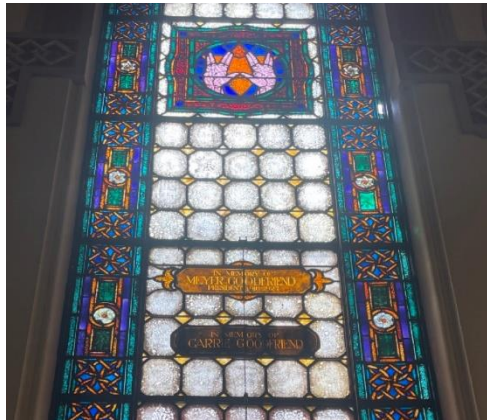


When the gavel banged down at a 2008 Christies auction marking the \$41.5 million sale of a Monet oil (*le Pont du chemin de fer a Argenteuil*/Train Bridge at Argenteuil), for certain no one made a connection between the value exchange of that moment and Ansche Chesed. But that painting once belonged to Meyer Goodfriend, who is memorialized in the middle of the three tall windows on the west-facing wall above the sanctuary balcony and whose name is read at Yom Kippur each year as we mark the synagogue's past presidents. Goodfriend sold the painting and 122 others, a collection described as "extensive and valuable,"ⁱ at auction early in 1923. I will wager that at least some of the proceeds of that auction helped fund the construction of Ansche Chesed in its current home.



In the spring of 1927, the "new" Ansche Chesed was under construction. The cornerstone would be laid in September of that year, and the building dedicated in the spring of 1928. Meyer Goodfriend, a moving force behind the building – was in a race against time. He was 66, and although three of his five older siblings were still alive, he was not in good health. So in April, feeling the effects of the heart disease



that would take his life in mid-July of that year, he ended a 20-year tenure as Ansche Chesed's President, taking on the title of Honorary President. When he died, his passing merited three entries in New York Times – first a brief announcement that he was taken to Lenox Hill Hospital from his summer home in Far Rockaway, then an obituary, and then a short article about the funeral.ⁱⁱ The obituary identified him as one of the founders, and first president, of United Synagogue and an early supporter of the Zionist movement. It mentioned his valuable painting collection and his more than 60 trips to Europe. It quoted AC Rabbi Jacob Kohn, who gave a eulogy at

Temple Israel on West 91 St.: "He loved the finest things in art, in religion and in people. To him faith was a thing of beauty and prayer was a passion. He was . . . devoted to the Zionist dream for the sheer beauty of it." When the funeral cortege left 91 St. it paused briefly at the new "temple" before proceeding to the cemetery. The death notices on the day of the funeral further attested to his character: "devoted and loyal friend of his fellow men;" "beloved;" "his kindly character and his generous deeds;" "a loyal Jew and ardent worker and friend;" "his example was an inspiration to loyal faith and noble conduct."

There was a time when a portrait of a kind-looking gentleman hung on the left side of the wall on the West End Avenue entrances to AC. A web postingⁱⁱⁱ identifies him as Meyer Goodfriend, and he does appear to be worthy of his name.



Jump back about 20 years, to November 1908, when the prior Ansche Chesed synagogue (designed by the same architect as the current building), at the northeast corner of Seventh Avenue and West 114 St., was being dedicated. Goodfriend had been the chairman of that building fund.^{iv} Forty-eight at its dedication, he was described as “completely overwhelmed” and having difficulty containing his emotions when he was given an inscribed silver loving cup in appreciation for his role. He would go on to be synagogue president for the entire period that the congregation was located in Harlem. For all of that time, he lived with various of his siblings and other family members, and household help, at 274 West 113 St., a three-story brownstone barely a full block from the synagogue.

Goodfriend was born in New York on November 23, 1860, the youngest of six children, all born in the United States. His father, Samuel, was from Alsace-Lorraine; his mother, Deborah, from Baden-Baden.^v His father came to the U.S. in 1846, at about age 30. His mother likely immigrated at or around the same time, because their first child was born in the U.S. in 1848. In the 1860 Census, recorded just before Meyer was born, the household consisted of the parents, five children, a “laborer” named Joseph with the same last name (described in a later census as an uncle to Meyer), a servant, and two others (perhaps tenants or other relatives passing through). They lived in 19th ward, in the east 70’s, then a neighborhood of immigrants.^{vi}

The family continued to live in that then-immigrant neighborhood for at least 20 years, through the 1880 Census. Samuel was a cattle dealer,^{vii} Deborah kept house. In 1870, all four sons and two daughters were in residence. Jacob, the oldest, was 22 that year, and Meyer, the youngest, nine. The value of their personal estate was \$5000 in 1870, up from \$800 in 1860. By 1880, sons Louis and Simon had moved on, but Jacob, Rebecca, Caroline, and Meyer, now ages 31, 29, 21, and 19, were still with their parents, as was Joseph, the relative, who remained part of the household through the 1900 census. Meyer’s father, then in his early 60s, must have been retired, as the Census listed no occupation. Meyer was listed as a bookkeeper; it was reported elsewhere that he went to City College. Caroline, just two years older than Meyer, was a part-time dressmaker. Only one or two of the children would ever marry.

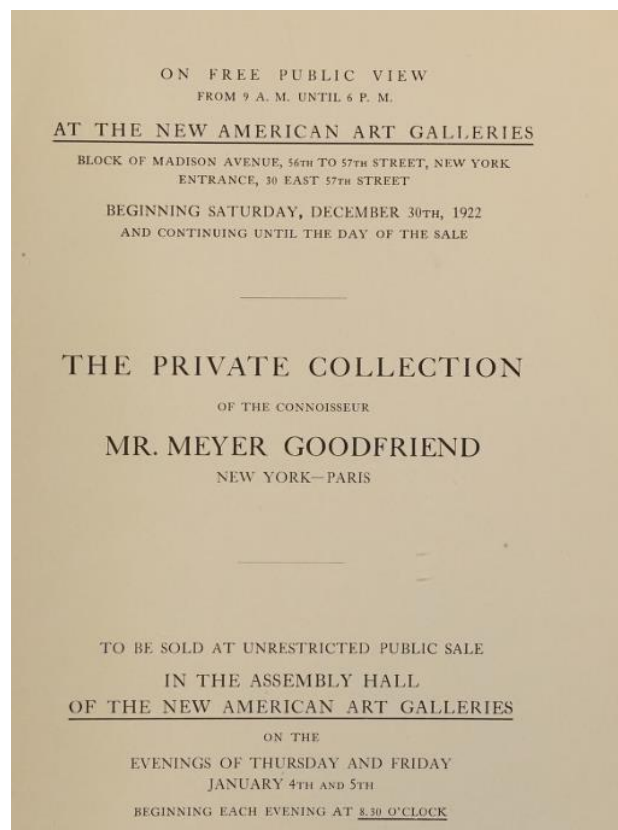
In 1884/84, Trow’s New York City Directory^{viii} listed Meyer Goodfriend as a clerk. But the next time he appeared in the Directory, 1889/90 when he was almost 30, he was a jeweler at 41 Maiden Lane (home address, 118 East 123 St.). Within the next few years he was in business with his brother Jacob,^{ix} 12 years his senior, as Goodfriend Bros. They would have various addresses on Maiden Lane in lower Manhattan and later at 542 Fifth Ave., and for a while in Paris.



By 1900 Goodfriend was almost 40 and was the head of a household of five, living at 14 East 125 St. There was his sister Caroline, now listed as Carrie; his widowed sister-in-law, Clara; Clara's 11-year-old daughter Cora – she will reappear in this story; -- Joseph, the "laborer," now listed as an uncle; and a servant. (Clara had been married to Meyer's brother Louis, who died in 1892, when daughter Cora was young.) Meyer's profession, per the Census, was "dealer in precious diamonds." In 1907 or 1908 he had moved to the West 113 St. brownstone that would be his residence until he died; the 1910 census lists him there with his sister, sister-in-law, and niece, along with Simon* – who had rejoined the family – and a servant.

How or why Goodfriend became a dealer in precious stones is unknown, but the eight-page "Introductory" to the 1923 auction catalogue^{xi} hints at the connection between his profession and his art collection.

In early life he felt what is now called the "urge" to be an artist, but turned from it and gave his eye for color to gems, without abandoning the love for art. A room of his office suite in Paris has at times been given over to an artist to exhibit his works. At one time in the course of his collecting Mr. Goodfriend had the idea that he might form a collection with the definite motive of presenting it to an American museum, ultimately, but the complex reasons for and against that object determined him otherwise.



The catalogue described the art that Goodfriend collected over many trips to Paris as including "Barbizon painters and their contemporaries, impressionists and others of the third quarter of the nineteenth century, and a few of the newer men of the present. . ." We are told that he stopped [collecting] "at the threshold of neo-impressionism" and that he had no paintings by "the wild men" (the Fauves from the early 1900s.) Most of the artists' names are not known to the general public today, but in addition to Monet, he owned works by, among others, Courbet, Corot, Cezanne, Gauguin, Sisley, and Pissarro.

Goodfriend's generosity was mentioned here only briefly, but a catalogue from a later auction of works he owned told of his support for artists and his sometimes anonymous philanthropy. An exception to his anonymity, noted there, was his lead role in 1917 in organizing a fund raiser in New York City to support artists struggling during the war. That fundraiser itself merited two articles in the New York Times.

* * *

It is too bad that there is not a Meyer Goodfriend archive in some library's special collection. Such a collection might have had memorabilia from the trips to Europe, letters to or from some of the artists whose work he owned, financial records revealing the allocation of funds from the 1923 auction sale. Instead we have these digital traces summarized here, and a few others that show him to be engaged with his times. For example, he was a simple dues-paying member of Jewish Protectory and Aid Society, established in the early 1900s by the "Our Crowd" gang (Wertheim, Schiff, Strauss, Solomon, Guggenheim) to address the problem of "unruly and wayward" Jewish boys through discipline, education, and work at a school the organization started in Westchester. Then there was the American Zion Commonwealth, that purchased land in Palestine to enable individuals who wanted to settle there to subscribe and buy land certificates over time. The September 25, 1914, edition of *the Jewish Criterion* of Pittsburgh reported on the organization's first board meeting, naming Meyer Goodfriend as one of the board members. Finally, who remembers Henry George (1839-1897), a popular supporter of funding government via a (single) tax on land rather than income tax? George's book *Progress and Poverty* was published in 1879, and he made a decent showing in New York City's mayoral race in 1886. (He ran ahead of Theodore Roosevelt but lost to Abram Hewitt.) Well, when Goodfriend died, someone wrote an appreciation of him in the movement's magazine *Land and Freedom*. "In early life [Goodfriend] became a convert to the Single Tax. . . He never failed to advocate the Georgian philosophy in its widest application when an opportunity presented itself. . . . "And this: "He was of a sociable and hospitable nature and his home was ever open to his many friends."^{xii} One can imagine Single Taxers from elsewhere visiting Goodfriend when they passed through New York.

A last remembrance of Goodfriend and his home came from his great nieces, Judith (Kohn Endelman) and Louise (Kohn Gabel. They were born in 1919 and 1921, respectively, and were 70 and 68 in 1989 when the Ansche Chesed [160th Anniversary Journal](#) was created.) They were practically AC royalty and were interviewed about the "early" days. On their father's side, the rabbi was their uncle Jacob Kohn (he served from 1911 to 1931). On their mother's side, their great uncle was none other than synagogue president Meyer Goodfriend. For a short time, the girls and their parents actually lived at his 113th St. home.^{xiii} Judith remembered Sunday board meetings at the house hosted by Meyer and peopled by "Dickensian characters" who smoked heavily. She described officers at the old Ansche Chesed building sitting on the bimah wearing morning suits at Shabbat and holiday services, and black silk top hats when

they left the building. Her memories of the new building included the May 1928 dedication ceremony that took place before the sanctuary painting was finished.

* * *

A silver lining, perhaps, to Meyer's death was that he was spared the financial crash and all the difficulties that would have followed for his business and the activities he had poured his heart into. From the AC Journal: *With the Depression, Judith heard a new refrain around the house: "The note is due ... the note is due" People sold things to pay off the notes for the temple. There was sometimes bitterness. It was terrible.* So terrible, in fact, that the synagogue could not pay Rabbi Kohn's salary, and he and his family moved to the west coast. Likely it was the Depression that marked the end to morning coats and top hats at services – a small additional silver lining.

The last word is reserved here for Caroline, aka Carrie, Goodfriend, who has a somewhat darker plaque below her brother's in the stained glass window. One of the paid obituaries for Meyer is from the AC Sisterhood; it requests that members attend the funeral of the brother "of their esteemed member Carrie Goodfriend." Beyond the obituaries, census entries, and her name as one of the executors in the 1928 auction catalogue, she is a ghost in the digital world. Here's to whoever memorialized her in a more material substance.

ⁱ *American Art News*, 12/2/1922, p. 3; "Meyer Goodfriend's Art Will be Sold".

ⁱⁱ *New York Times*, July 15, 16, and 17, 1927.

ⁱⁱⁱ Posted by Zachary Braiterman. jewishphilosophyplace.com/2014/06/07/religion-ethics-meyer-goodfriend-at-anschei-chesed-1907-1927/

^{iv} *The Hebrew Standard*, Nov. 27, 1908.

^v A death notice posting at geni.com for one of their offspring lists Zipporah as the mother's name, and Gutfreund as the last name of the parents.

^{vi} They lived on Stanton St. in 1856 when their fourth child was born and moved from there to the east 40's. (Obituary of Simon Goodfriend, *New York Times*, 11/8/1939)

^{vii} Reporting in the 1870 Census.

^{viii} Trows was a kind of precursor to the phone book (itself now a relic), but with a male slant, since it listed people by their business affiliation (though it did also include home address).

^{ix} Jacob and Meyer remained partners until Meyer died; Jacob died a few months later. According to a short *New York Times* obituary (12/21/27), his "chief interest" was Temple Israel, he was a board member and where Meyer's funeral had been held.

^x Simon Goodfriend (1855-1939) had been a baseball reporter and later a press agent. His was likely a character and with his lifelong devotion to baseball evidently won the admiration of some *NY Times* sports editor: the paper ran two articles about him in his early 80s, and included a photo with his obituary. One of the articles covered his deep knowledge of the lore about the identity of "Casey" in the eponymous baseball poem. "Si Sets Things Right"; *New York Times*, 9/5/1938.

^{xi} Paintings and Pastels by the Barbizon Masters, Their Contemporaries The French Impressionists and Modern French Painters Forming the Private Collection of Mr. Meyer Goodfriend. Accessed at [#1 - Illustrated catalogue of the valuable pictures ... c.1. - Full View | HathiTrust Digital Library](#).

^{xii} *Land and Freedom (formerly The Single Tax Review)*, July-August 1927. Accessed at <https://cooperative-individualism.org/land-and-freedom-1927.htm>.

^{xiii} It was Judith and Louse's mother, Cora, who had been raised in Meyer's home after her own father died when she was a child. Cora's mother died in 1921, when her girls were young. Cora and her husband had been living in Newark; it may have been then that they moved temporarily to Meyer's home. In the AC Journal, Meyer and his sister Carrie were referred to as Cora's adoptive parents.