

RE: *The Jewish Post & News*, dated Dec. 11, 2013. The article, entitled "Exhibit on Jews and the garment industry in Winnipeg opens to huge audience December 2," described Lou Kliman as "the founder of Standard Knitting in 1967." This simple (mis)statement caused my mother, Lillian Mostow, née Halparin, great consternation because the article omitted the fact that Kliman (and a partner) had bought Standard Knitting Company Limited, her family's business in operation since the early 1920s in a factory built by her father, Moishe Halparin, next door to their home on Dufferin Avenue. My mother, the last surviving member of her immediate family, was keen to set the record straight. As she is in her late eighties, she delegated the task to me. In the process of researching what turned into a short memoir, I uncovered some surprising facts. Just as Lou Kliman did not "found" the company in 1967, neither did my grandfather in the 1920s. They both acquired going concerns, all with slight variations on the name "Standard Knitting."

## Standard Knitting – My Grandfather’s Sweater Factory

By Morri H. Mostow

I wish I had known my grandfather Moishe Hirsh Halparin (1883-1947). He died of a heart attack, at 63, two-and-a-half years before I was born. My parents named me in his honour: I have his first two initials – “M.H.,” which was his moniker. Our Hebrew names share the same letters, though different vowels (since I am female).

By all accounts, M.H. was quite a character: clever, stubborn and rigid (his three sons called him “the warden”) but also honest, generous and kindhearted.



*Moishe & Clara Halparin, NYC, 1909.*

With his father and younger brother, he fled the pogroms in what is now Belarus and settled in Winnipeg in 1904. After getting established, in 1909 he married his cousin, Clara Fiskin, whom he brought over from The Pale of Settlement. Shortly thereafter, he began bringing family members out of Russia to Winnipeg. He quietly helped them financially and, unbeknownst to his family until his death, also supported a poor Jewish boy in Palestine.

Though not particularly religious, M.H. was a founding member of Winnipeg’s Talmud Torah Synagogue. He and a learned friend held informal study groups on the Talmud and Jewish philosophy in the Halparin family home at 381 Dufferin Avenue, midway between Salter and Aikins streets.

An ardent Zionist, M.H. gave a great deal of money to the Jewish National Fund. In the 1920s, his \$5,000 donation bought 100 *dunams* of land for Sede Zvi, a *moshav* (cooperative agricultural settlement) in the northwestern Negev that still exists today. In 1931, he bought a 75 *dunam* (18.5 acre) orange orchard in Ness Ziona. His eldest son, Bill, managed the orchard for a time after he graduated in engineering from the University of Manitoba. Sadly, M.H. did not live long enough to retire to his orchard, or to see the 1948 birth of Israel.

Adventurous, M.H. loved to travel. His trips ranged from Alaska to Europe to Palestine. He often went to New York to buy his bespoke suits and shoes, a trip involving a train to the Head of the Lakes (now Thunder Bay), a boat across the Great Lakes and then a train to New York City. A dandy, he always dressed impeccably, sporting white linen suits in summer. His car was equally flashy — a 1921 touring Packard, four-door convertible, with canvas roof and clip-on celluloid windows. In this roomy vehicle, he drove his wife and five children to Watrous, Saskatchewan, for their summer vacations. As children, both my mother and I, decades apart, learned to swim in the buoyant salt water of nearby Manitou Lake, a place many call “The Dead Sea of Canada.”

My grandfather was truly an immigrant success story, becoming prosperous enough to provide a comfortable living for his family. However, like many entrepreneurs, he experienced his share of setbacks. His first venture, wholesale meats, failed.

Undeterred, he bought a small knitting company on Burrows Avenue called Standard Knitting Company, and moved its machinery to a factory he built in 1925 at 387 Dufferin, next door to his home. Why a knitting factory? He reasoned that in Canada's cold climate people would always need warm sweaters.

Incorporated in Manitoba in 1923 as Standard Knitting Company Limited, the business employed all four of my mother's siblings until 1967, when the family sold the business to Lou Kliman and his partner Hugh Lowery. The new owners changed its name and corporate structure several times, finally settling on the name, "Standard Knitting Ltd."

They moved the factory to various locations before building a large, modern plant on Inkster Blvd., where the business became a Winnipeg success story. By the 1980s, it employed several hundred people and sold its sweaters and knitted sportswear across North America and abroad. Kliman and Lowery sold the company in the early 1990s. (Competition from Asian manufacturers finally drove the business into receivership in 2006.)

My mother's elder sister, my Auntie Freda, spent her entire career with Standard Knitting. After graduating in the late 1930s from Wesley College (now University of Winnipeg), Freda handled the factory's administration and bookkeeping. She continued to do so for Standard Knitting's new owners (whom she greatly admired) until she retired in 1987.



*Sisters Freda & Lillian Halparin, in front of Standard Knitting, circa 1940.*



*Standard Knitting building, repainted, in its second incarnation as a community centre, circa 1975. The Halparin family home occupied the empty lot to the right.*

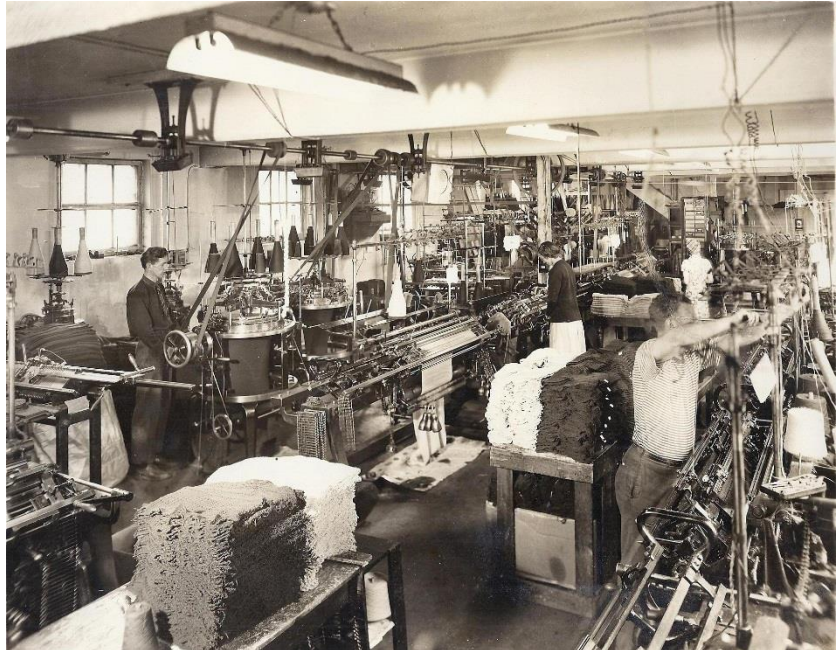
In the late 1960s, the City of Winnipeg was about to embark on an ambitious urban-renewal project in the North End. Auntie Freda and her family lived in the Dufferin St. home until the City expropriated and later demolished it. The expropriated factory building served as a community centre for a time, but was also torn down.

What a shame to lose such an historic building! It was an industrial gem, solidly constructed of concrete and steel, faced in brick. In my mother's day, it dominated the block, the only brick structure on a mixed-use street of wooden houses and businesses. The building overlooked a junkyard. Nearby were Manitoba Tent & Awning owned by the Cohen family, and a cooperage owned by the Kays, who later became cousins by marriage.

The Standard Knitting building was a long rectangle, its front façade abutting the sidewalk. With its rear loading dock, truck garage and two automobile

garages, it took up the entire length of the lot.

Inside, it had a full basement for storage. The first-floor office had a large picture window that looked onto the factory floor. A dumbwaiter carried knitted piece goods to the second floor finishing area, where they were sewn, pressed and packed.



*Standard Knitting's factory floor circa 1960.*





*Freda Halparin in front of the family home. Factory wall to left. 1937.*

Since my grandfather didn't know much about operating a knitting factory, he wisely hired a professional "knitter" from Scotland, a Mr. Penney, who ran the factory, managed the machinery and even designed the sweaters. The business grew and flourished. T. Eaton Co. and the Hudson's Bay, among many other retailers, carried Standard Knitting's sweaters. For curling clubs, Standard Knitting customized its very popular "Jumbo" sweaters, with sewn-on crests. In its heyday, the factory employed more than 25 workers.

As a child, in the 1950s, I often visited Auntie Freda. After cookies and milk in her oversized kitchen, I would run next door to see my uncles in the factory, with its clattering machinery. At one point, my grandfather had wanted to move the family to a larger house further north, but my grandmother refused to budge. Ever practical, she had liked the convenience of the factory next door.

Standard Knitting was the foundation of my grandfather's business "empire" – supplemented by his uncanny ability to make money on the stock market! In addition to owning the orchard in Palestine, M.H. built an apartment block and St. Boniface's first movie theatre, *Le Paris*. The apartment block and theatre were side by side on

Provencher Boulevard, across from St. Boniface's City Hall (*Hôtel de Ville*).

My mother, Lillian, the baby of her family, often helped out in the factory growing up. Her usual job was on the "winder," a machine that wound yarn from skeins onto cones. In her late teens, she worked weekends at *Le Paris*. Stepping off the streetcar at Dufferin and Salter on her way home from her theatre job late one May evening in 1944, she encountered my future father, Harold Mostow, leaning against a telephone pole at the corner, in his Navy uniform, talking to a friend. He was on medical leave from the Navy, recovering from a bout of scarlet fever that fortuitously saved his life: the ship on which he'd been scheduled to sail for Europe was sunk.



*Le Paris, St. Boniface's first movie theatre, 1939, Provencher Boulevard.*



*Newlyweds Harold & Lillian Mostow, March 1948, in front of Standard Knitting, with the Halparin home and Dufferin Ave. streetscape behind them.*

Although my mother would not learn this for some time, Harold lived above the cooperage just down the street, in an apartment rented from his cousins, the Kays. Harold, then 18, was living with his mother, a brother and sister-in-law. Harold and Lillian had once met briefly but she didn't remember him. He reintroduced himself and started to chat, but Lillian was tired and wanted to go home. She told him to call her .... he did! They went on their first date the following week, to a dance at the Auditorium (now a government building) at the corner of St. Mary's and The Mall.

Three-and-a-half years later they married. A few years after that, my father, who worked as a manufacturer's rep, added Standard Knitting's sweaters to the menswear lines he carried from the Head of the Lakes to Alberta. In the 1950s, he created the Tundra brand name for a line of Standard Knitting's sweaters. Under the subsequent ownership of Kliman and Lowery, Standard Knitting became world famous for their Tundra sweaters, which were worn by such luminaries as Bobby Hull, Bob Hope and Ronald Reagan.

I realize now that my grandfather's sweater factory on Dufferin Avenue initiated a chain of events that, directly or indirectly, affected the lives of his children, grandchildren, even his great grandchildren (although they may not be fully aware of it). While I never knew my grandfather, I feel his presence and am grateful for the role he played in my life.

*Former Winnipegger Morri H. Mostow is president of Fictive Press, a digital publisher based in British Columbia. Fictive Press recently published When I Die: A meditation on death for children & their families by Winnipeg author Carol Matas, and will publish her newest young-adult novel, Tucson Jo, this spring.*