

**FITTING IN AND MOVING UP:
HARRIS ISAACSON IN LEWISTON-AUBURN, 1900 – 1922.
Elliott L. Epstein**

1. Introduction.

Harris M. (“Isaac Myer”) Isaacson, was born April 19, 1897, grew up the “New Auburn” section of the central Maine city of Auburn, and lived and worked for most of his life in the neighboring “twin” city of Lewiston. His early life illustrates that mixture of traditional Judaism, American assimilation and rapid upward mobility which characterized much of the first generation of Eastern European Jewish immigrants to Maine.

Harris’ father, Harry (“Zvi Hirsch”) Isaacson (born 1868), was an immigrant peddler and junk dealer. His mother, Eva (Halperin) Isaacson (born 1866), also an immigrant, worked at various times as a cook, shopkeeper, and boarding house proprietor, while toiling as a homemaker and caring for her three sons. Harris was raised in modest circumstances. Yet, as a young man of considerable intellect, curiosity, energy and boldness, he was more educated, traveled and sophisticated than most of his contemporaries, becoming one of the first Jewish attorneys to practice law in Androscoggin County, a municipal court judge and a respected civic leader. Along the way, he shed much of his parents’ religious orthodoxy, while retaining his Jewish identity and maintaining a selective adherence to Jewish tradition

We are fortunate to possess considerable detail about Harris’ early life from several sources. His children, Philip M. Isaacson (my former law partner and uncle by marriage) and Marilyn Isaacson Simonds (my mother-in-law) are both in their 80s and have shared their memories of their parents and paternal grandparents with me. In

addition, in October 1978, Philip interviewed his father and transcribed a long-hand account of Harris' recollections, ranging from his earliest childhood memories through his days as a student at Georgetown Law School. I have drawn heavily from that oral history for this presentation.

2. The Isaacsons emigrate from Belarus to Maine.

The Isaacsons emigrated to the U.S. from Belarus ("White Russia"), then part of the Russian empire and home to nearly one million Jews. The 1900 Census indicates that they were married about 1888, that Harry was the first to arrive in the U.S. in 1897, and that Eva followed in 1898 with their eldest son, "Bennie" (Benjamin or Ben), 10 years old at the time of the census, and an infant, "Mike," age 3 at the time of the census. It is reasonable to assume that "Mike" was Isaac Myer (Harris), although Harris himself would always insist he had been born in the United States. Harry was from Radoskowitz and Eva originally from Kraznoye, both rural market towns situated about 10 to 20 miles from one another and located some 60 miles northwest of Minsk. Harry's father, Jacob, operated a soap factory in Radoskowitz, though it is not known whether Harry worked in that business.

Harry's and Eva's departure from Belarus was part of a broad generational move by the Isaacson and Halperin/Alpren clans which occurred within about a decade or so. It can be inferred that they left the Old Country for reasons similar to those of other Jewish émigrés – to escape state-sanctioned pogroms, legal restrictions on movement and employment, limited economic opportunities, and the prospect of long terms conscription in the Russian army (though Harry reportedly served in the army).

The reason for their choice of Auburn, Maine as their destination can likewise be inferred. The arrival a few years earlier of Eva's kin (of whom Hyman Lempert was reportedly the first) and news of economic opportunities around the periphery of the booming shoe and textile industries in Auburn and Lewiston likely attracted them. In addition, although Auburn and Lewiston were industrialized, they were still very rural outside their urban core, covered with fields, orchards and woods, and dotted by farmhouses, a setting which must have seemed reminiscent of Belarus. By the early 1900s, the Jewish population of Lewiston and Auburn probably numbered in the hundreds and each city had its own Jewish congregation and other Jewish institutions.

3. Harris' first home in Auburn.

Harris recalled his first home being located on First Street in New Auburn (now Riverside Drive), where he lived until about age 10 with his parents, Ben, and his younger brother, Samuel ("Sam"), who was born in March 1899. It was an apartment on the third floor of a six-unit tenement. His early recollections included vignettes of a man named Mike Shapiro reading serial stories from a Yiddish newspaper to the women in the building each night after supper, and of his wonderment at first hearing music from a "Victrola" phonograph, topped with a large acoustic horn, at the home of a neighbor on his street. (Harris would have a life-long fascination with gadgets and would always boast about being the "first in town" to have this or that device; the family still possesses an early hi-fidelity radio/record-player, which he purchased in the 1950s).

Behind the First Street tenement was a stable, where the Isaacsons kept a cow and a horse. Harris and Sam were responsible for caring for them. As a peddler, Harry needed a horse for work. Traveling by horse and sometimes horse-drawn wagon, he peddled

kitchen tin-ware in the fall and winter and fruit in the spring, selling to farmers along the roads and traveling as far as South Paris (a distance of about 20 miles) and back in a single day. He also bought junk and old clothes from the farmers, which he, in turn, sold to dealers in Lewiston and Auburn. Ben, while still in his teens, held several jobs and was in Harris' words, "already a good businessman." For example, he bought cherry-chocolates and hired girls to wrap and package them, peddling them door to door for Christmas. He was also something of a pool shark, playing at the barber shop where Harris got his hair cut.

Harris attended Lincoln School, a public grammar school on Sixth Street in New Auburn. When he was 5 or 6, he also started Hebrew school ("cheder"). The cheder was on Second Street, downstairs from the "shul." Harris later took lessons from his cheder teacher at the man's candy store on Cedar Street in Lewiston's Little Canada, a French-Canadian neighborhood across from New Auburn on the east bank of the Androscoggin River. He did not have any trouble with the French-Canadian kids there, he recalled, but he kept away from the Irish kids on Water Street, a reflection of the ethnic rivalries and suspicions which were pervasive in Lewiston as in other American cities with large immigrant populations. During winters, Harris remembered, Jewish peddlers in Little Canada were sometimes the target of snowballs thrown by Gentile children, who thought the bearded Jews "strange." As a result, over the years, the peddlers' sported shorter and shorter beards, and eventually wore only mustaches.

On First Street, The Isaacsons lived in conditions which would be considered primitive by today's standards. They took baths in a copper tub, hand filled with water heated on a wood stove in the kitchen. There was only one toilet per floor, located in the

hallway. Wood for the stove, along with pickles and preserves, were kept in the basement. The apartment was lit with kerosene lamps, although, at some point (probably after 1905 when the Deer Rips Dam went on line), electricity became available, and a single electric light was installed in the kitchen. Light bulbs were so expensive that Harris was sent to the Central Maine Power Co. headquarters on Main Street to buy them – one at a time.

Harris reflected that the family always had “plenty to eat,” so it was “hard to say whether we were poor or not.” They picked berries in “old Auburn” and as far away as Brunswick. Harris and Ben would travel to Brunswick by street car, at a cost of 40 cents per round trip, to pick blueberries and would bring back 11 quarts apiece. Their mother would use the berries to make hundreds of quarts of preserves a year. Aside from baked goods and preserves, which she prepared at home, Eva bought groceries and meats from Jewish grocers and a butcher in the neighborhood.

Harris had vivid memories of how hard his mother worked: she would rise at 4 a.m. on Fridays to begin washing the floor for Shabbat; then she would then do her cooking and baking, making dozens of molasses cookies which were enjoyed not only by her family but by the neighborhood kids, Jews and Gentiles.

Eva also sewed clothing for her children, with the notable exception of their suits. Each boy got a new suit for Pesach, purchased from one of the two Jewish clothing stores in New Auburn. One of the stores, owned by Moses and Jacob Shapiro, did a “tremendous” business, making the Shapiros “rich” and enabling them to buy a farm. Harris recalled passing out handbills for these merchants in Little Canada for 10 cents an hour. He remembered his family patronizing other Jewish merchants, including public

baths on Ash Street in Lewiston run by the mother of Peter Isaacson (a cousin who later clerked in Harris' law office and founded the Lewiston law firm, Brann and Isaacson, with former Maine Governor Louis J. Brann).

The Isaacsons had many relatives in the area, including the Halperins, Alprens, Days, Lemperts, Stinemans, Bornsteins and Margolins, families which helped form the backbone of the Lewiston-Auburn Jewish community over the next 100 years. The men often started as peddlers and moved into other businesses as soon as they could afford to. These families also sprouted a large crop of cousins, many of whom were Harris' playmates.

Harris and his brothers spoke Yiddish with their parents at home, at least until Eva started attending night school and made them converse with her in English so she could pick up the language more quickly. Eva eventually mastered the English language, speaking it fluently. Harry, though he spoke English for business, did so with a heavy Eastern European accent and sprinkled his speech with malapropisms. ("go to home" instead of "go home," "short circle" instead of "short circuit" and "scratchers" instead of "crutches"). Harris spoke only English with his friends, since many of the children with whom he played were Gentiles, and, by the time he started public school, English had become his primary language. (In his old age, he prided himself on retaining his knowledge of Yiddish, but, though he could still understand it, his fluency had much deteriorated).

From his days on First Street, Harris recalled a Lithuanian named Alexander, probably Russian Orthodox in religion, who was brought to this country by his father, and who lived with the family for about five years and worked for Harry in the junk

business, sorting bottles and rags. Before emigrating, Alexander had been employed at the Isaacson soap factory in Radoskowitz. Harris remembered that Alexander used to play an accordion and sing, and the children all loved him. Later, when the Isaacsons moved to their second apartment, a fire broke out and Alexander carried Harris from the building in his arms, yelling, “fire,” either in Russian or Lithuanian. As soon as he could afford it, Alexander brought his wife to the U.S. and found an apartment of his own. He remained close to the Isaacsons, however, and named his first child, a girl, after Eva.

4. Harry leaves to find work in Boise, Idaho.

In 1907, as the result of a nationwide financial panic, Harry left Maine to seek work in Idaho, which had the reputation of being a land of opportunity. He moved to Boise, where a sister-in-law, Hinda Stineman, lived, and became a trader in animal skins. Harris remembered his father bringing home a large bearskin rug when he returned to Maine about 1911 or 1912.

When Harris was 10, the Isaacsons moved to a large apartment building on Broad Street in New Auburn. They were the only Jewish tenants there, although Harris recalled that traveling rabbis and religious teachers often stayed with them as guests. After Harry left for Idaho, Eva, Harris and Sam continued to live on Broad Street for a time before moving to a new double-decker on Second Street.

Harris may have celebrated his bar mitzvah in his father’s absence, although, in later years, he had no memory of it, because “we didn’t make as big a thing out of bar mitzvahs,” the celebration of which usually involved just “herring and kichel and that sort of thing.”

While Harry was gone, Eva and another relative ran a small grocery on Main Street in New Auburn, where they sold potatoes and herring. Harris and Sam held a variety of jobs during summers. They peddled thread and sewing supplies, which they bought at the five- and ten-cent store. Harris worked at Lunn & Sweet, a shoe factory, where he wore roller skates and skated up and down aisles filling orders. He was also employed at Field Bros. & Gross, another shoe factory, earning about seven dollars a week, first as a tack puller, then running errands to United Shoe Machinery Corp. and finally staining leather.

5. Harris attends public school.

As a student in grammar school, Harris' grades were not "as good as they should have been," because he did not study "as hard as the other boys did." Instead, he concentrated on playing baseball and football in a field behind the Barker Mill in New Auburn. Sports were important to the boys of his generation, but they were especially important to Harris, who was small and sickly as a child.

While in grammar school, Harris also dropped his given name, Isaac, at the suggestion of an early public school teacher, a "landsman" of his father who thought that "Isaac Isaacson" would not do as a name, and began calling himself Harris Myer Isaacson or simply Harris M. Isaacson. He liked the sound of Harris, and it was a way of "trying to be a part of American society as fast as we could." Besides, it avoided the confusion caused by the fact that he had many cousins called Myer, all named in memory of his maternal grandfather.

After grammar school, Harris' studied for a year at Edward Little High School

(later re-named Great Falls School) in New Auburn. He became a more serious student at Edward Little and earned good grades. When school let out, he spent the summer in Old Orchard Beach, where his mother worked as a cook in a Jewish hotel. (Old Orchard Beach, a favorite seaside vacation destination for Canadians from Quebec Province, had several hotels which catered to Jews). There he met the eldest daughter of the Luria family, well-to-do Jews from New York City who were related to Harris through his paternal grandmother. She worked as a bookkeeper for her parents' store on the Lower East Side. Their business sold silverware, and other silver and silver-plate household articles, and later became a highly successful retail chain.

6. Harris works in New York City.

At the invitation of the Lurias, Harris traveled to Manhattan, lived in their Lower East Side apartment and worked as a clerk in their store. His trip to New York City was an adventure in itself, involving a series of trains from Auburn to Fall River, Massachusetts, followed by a boat ride to the city. He would later wistfully recall the creaking of the boat and the music of a string quartet concert playing on board. Harris described the Lurias' apartment as a "railroad flat." The Lurias were "wonderful" to him, but he hated being cooped up in the apartment since he was used to "more space to move around in."

Harris had other relatives in New York City, the Steinmans, who were in the office-supply business in the Bronx. The Lurias could see he was unhappy on the Lower East Side, so, after about four months, they arranged for him to move to the Steinman's home. Harris worked for the Steinmans as a clerk, delivering checks to the bank, keeping up inventory and waiting on trade. However, he was tired of city life and homesick for

his family, so after about 14 months away, he returned to Maine. Although he would visit New York City repeatedly in later years, stimulated by its energy and enamored of its music and opera, he never wanted to live in a big city.

7. Harris returns to Maine.

By the time Harris returned to Maine, probably in 1914, his family was living on Lisbon Street in Lewiston, in an apartment above some stores and a pool room. Eva ran a boarding house for six or seven regular boarders in the building. Harris “hated” the boarding house, because it was “too much work for my mother.” However, he and his brothers also worked hard. Harris and Sam rose at 4:30 each morning to pick up the Lewiston Daily Sun, the local daily newspaper, for delivery routes in New Auburn and at the Central Maine General Hospital in Lewiston. In addition, they sold the Police Gazette, the popular Saturday Evening Post magazine and other weeklies at the bars in downtown Lewiston. He and Sam sold as many as 2,500 copies of the Post per week, which one year earned them a solid-gold watch for achieving the second highest annual sales in the country. They were also paid to tend a furnace.

A new family member had joined the household for the summer. She was Goldie Resnick (born December 25, 1900), a first cousin from Cleveland, Ohio, whose mother died when she was a young girl. Her father had remarried, and she probably had a tense relationship with his new wife, so she came to Lewiston to visit her aunt and stayed to attend school. She would return sporadically to Cleveland over the next several years. In 1922, Harris and Goldie were to marry, a marriage strongly encouraged by his mother and one that would last until his death 61 years later.

Harris went back to school in the late fall, enrolling at Jordan High School in Lewiston. Studies were difficult for him at first because of his delayed start, but he soon caught up in French, Latin and all his other subjects, except geometry. When the year ended, he did well in all his finals, including geometry. He returned to Jordan for his sophomore and junior years. His grades continued to improve, he competed in track, joined the debate team, and, during the school year and summers, worked odd jobs, including on a farm, in a clothing store and in a bleachery.

8. Bennie and Harris break with religious tradition.

By 1914, Harris' father had gone from being an itinerant peddler to becoming the proprietor of an established scrap metal and used machinery business on Oxford Street in Lewiston. Ben and Sam worked for Harry, while, at the same time, engaging in their own independent business ventures. In time the reverse would become true, but the World War I years were bountiful for Harry. (In the late 1920s, Ben would take a bold step on the way to improving the family's business fortunes, opening a foundry at Corner Brook, in Newfoundland, Canada to service the huge Bowater paper plant there. Although Bennie died in 1931, his business prospered and was later followed by other ventures in Corner Brook, started by his brother Sam, including a car dealership and bus line).

During World War I, Ben served in the Army for two years, coming out as a sergeant. Either just before or after his Army service, he did something almost unthinkable for the time. He married a non-Jew, an Italian girl who had been adopted by a family named Biron from Gardiner. Ben, in Harris' words, was a "remarkable fellow" – popular, a gifted athlete, a banjo and mandolin player, and a good dancer. His wife was also a talented dancer, and the pair gave dance lessons at the Old Orchard Beach pier and

in Gardiner. Harris described her as a “lovely girl,” who “couldn’t have been nicer.” However, both the Isaacson and Biron families strongly disapproved of the match, and the marriage itself did not turn out to be successful. Ben was a boom-or-bust business visionary. He was on the road working much of the time, and, when not traveling, liked to spend his spare time playing cards and gambling (past-times not shared by Harris). Harris believed Ben and his spouse might have separated before her untimely death. They had a son, Calvin, who was later raised by Ben and his second wife, Louisa Rosenberg, a Jewish girl from Chelsea, Massachusetts, who subsequently adopted Calvin. (In addition, Bennie and Louisa had three children together).

Ben’s marriage to a non-Jew was just one indication, although a dramatic one, of the weakening of traditional religious ties. Harris’ parents, especially his mother, were religiously observant, but he and his brothers were increasingly secular. One of Harris’ anecdotes illustrates the point. In 1914, Harry bought his first truck, a Reo, from Auburn’s first automobile dealer, Darling Automobile Company, located across the street from the Androscoggin County building. Motorized vehicles were so rare that driver’s licenses were not required to operate one, and driving lessons usually consisted of a few minutes’ instruction from the automobile salesman. When Harry purchased the Reo, he brought Harris along, and, after the salesman showed Harris how to operate the vehicle, Harry asked his son drive him to Topsham to check out a business prospect. Because of Jewish dietary laws, Harry only ate dairy when he was away from home, but, in Harris’ words, “he didn’t impose his feelings on us.” That day, Harry gave his son a dollar and told him to go to a well known seafood restaurant, where Harris enjoyed a full lobster dinner, apparently his first but certainly not his last.

9. Harris attends Hebron Academy.

At Jordan High School, Harris had competed twice against debate teams from Hebron Academy (both at Hebron and in Lewiston) and won both debates. Talking with members of the opposing team sparked his interest in attending Hebron Academy. He started thinking about getting a college education, an ambitious step for someone of his generation, and Hebron, as a college preparatory school, would help him achieve that goal. Undoubtedly he also wanted to follow in the footsteps of his much admired older brother, Ben, who had gone to Hebron on a football scholarship. Harris wrote to William Sargent, the Hebron headmaster, asking to be admitted to the school and received a “wonderful” letter back, telling him to show up in the fall.

Harris spent the summer before Hebron working as a laborer at the BIW shipyard in Brunswick, along with a Jordan High School friend and track teammate, Robert Legendre, who was now also a Hebron student. Legendre was an outstanding athlete, who would later become an Olympic medalist in the Pentathlon. They slept at the house of Legendre’s sister in Brunswick. Because of the brisk demand for new cargo ships during World War I, the job paid well, over \$30 a week. Harris hauled coal for the riveters’ furnaces and drilled plates onto the ships.

In the fall, Harris arrived at Hebron with \$1.50 in his pocket (having turned over most of his earnings to his mother), a blue double-breasted suit, a pair of pants and a few shirts. He did not have money for tuition, so he had to work his way through school. Sargent asked him if he could tend a boiler, and Harris said he could. The headmaster asked him if he minded sleeping in the boiler room, and Harris readily agreed. As a result, he started at Hebron bunking in the boiler-room of Atwood Hall.

Late in the fall term, the Hebron football coach asked Harris to tutor Robert Legendre in math so that Legendre could qualify for admission to Bowdoin College. Harris agreed and was compensated by being named a dormitory proctor. He moved up to the third floor, spent the rest of the year as Legendre's roommate and worked out with him on the track team.

If Harris was bothered by the Baptist religious orientation of Hebron, where chapel services were mandatory five days a week and on Sundays, he never mentioned it. He did well at Hebron, carrying six subjects. He was also manager of the track team. When he went to the state track meet at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, he stayed at the "Deke" (Delta Kappa Epsilon) fraternity house, where he was told by the fraternity brothers that he was the first Jew to "grace" their door. In the spring, he played third base on the Hebron varsity baseball team, but he did not finish the season. He had too much else to do. Besides his school work, maintaining the dorm boiler, and tutoring, he was hired to dig a trench for a waterline between Atwood Hall and the gymnasium, for which he was paid \$40 a week. Harris' Hebron friends called him "Hap," and he was, indeed, very happy at Hebron and felt the experience made a great difference in his life.

10. Harris joins the Army.

When Harris returned home from Hebron in June 1918, he was faced with the military draft, imposed by the Selective Service Act of 1917 for all men between the ages of 21 and 31, enacted to provide sufficient manpower for American forces fighting in Europe during the First World War. He duly reported to the Lewiston Draft Board, who sent him to a local physician for examination. The doctor informed him that his capacity

for chest expansion (three inches) was unusually large for someone who did not play a musical brass instrument.

That summer, Harris traveled by ferry to Peaks Island in Casco Bay to compete with the Lewiston YMHA baseball team against the Portland YMHA. On the ferry, he met a Georgetown Law School student, who touted the school and convinced him to study there. According to Harris, this might have been “the first time that I thought of becoming a lawyer.” However, he was still subject to the draft, so he joined a military cavalry training program at Norwich University, a military college in Vermont.

Harris loved horses, which he had cared for and ridden since he was a boy, and was happy for the opportunity to serve in the cavalry. In the fall of 1918, he took the train to White River Junction to join the Norwich program. After his arrival, he caught the flu, the result of a deadly influenza epidemic which claimed as many as 50 million lives worldwide between 1917 and 1920. Twenty soldiers at Norwich and four of his friends back in Lewiston died from the disease. Harris was one of the lucky ones who survived, even though he refused to take the medication prescribed for him (because he was convinced the pills were a sugar placebo) and recovered after two weeks. Harris enjoyed his time in the service. He got to ride many different horses and parade on horseback every day. He kept his spurs and riding crop for the next 60 years, finally giving the crop to his longtime legal secretary in 1978 and the spurs to a grandson.

With the war’s end in November 1918, Harris was discharged just before Christmas. In his absence, his parents had moved to a third-floor of an apartment building, owned by a cousin, on Minot Avenue (on the periphery of the present-day Auburn Rotary).

11. Harris attends Bates College.

After a brief stint as a jewelry store clerk in Rumford over Christmas, Harris met a former Jordan High School classmate, who persuaded him to enroll at Bates College in Lewiston, a private college originally founded as a Baptist seminary, which still had a strong Baptist orientation. His brother Ben had preceded him at Bates as a student just as he had at Hebron. Harris entered Bates in January 1919 and completed the spring semester. He lived at home and walked several miles to and from school every day. While he liked the courses at Bates and won second place in the Freshman Prize Speaking contest (the title of his topic being, "In His Own Defense"), Harris was just "marking time" there. He had already decided to go to Georgetown Law School, part of the Jesuit-run Georgetown University, in Washington, D.C. Because a baccalaureate degree was not a required for law school at the time, he was able to study law after only one semester in college, and, since Georgetown Law offered classes at night, he was able to work his way through school.

12. Harris attends Georgetown Law School.

In the fall of 1919, Harris moved to Washington, took up residence in a fraternity house, and began classes, attending evenings from 4 to 7 p.m. He was one of a class of 505, dubbed the "war babies." He found the courses challenging, and, in addition to his academic studies, held a full-time job. After working brief stints at the Veterans Administration and the Land Office of the Department of the Interior, he got a position as a patent examiner with the U.S. Patent Office. His job was to examine applications to determine whether the designs presented revealed "substantial novelty." He worked on applications for internal combustion engines, carburetors and inventions of the

photographic giant, Eastman Kodak. He liked the work, and his employer was satisfied with his performance. His experience at the Patent Office would later enable him to become the first registered patent attorney in Maine.

13. Conclusion.

In 1922, Harris graduated from Georgetown, returned to Lewiston, married Goldie Resnick and established his own law office, the second Jewish attorney to practice in Androscoggin County (the first having been Benjamin Berman, the founder of Berman & Simmons, who would also become step-father to the husband of Harris' niece, Natalie Isaacson Woolf). He was a general practitioner, representing many of downtown Lewiston's Jewish retail merchants and a number of Auburn's shoe manufacturing companies and allied businesses, as well as a host of other clients. He was particularly noted for his intellectual approach to the law and his skill and competence in drafting complicated court pleadings and business transactional documents. Like his father (who always wore a suit and tie and went to the barber shop daily for a trim and shave), Harris was handsome and very conscious of his looks and attire. His photographs invariably depict him elegantly clothed and impeccably groomed.

Harris' son, Philip, was born in 1924 and his daughter, Marilyn, in 1928. Like Harris, Philip graduated from Hebron Academy and, in 1950, after serving in the Navy in World War II and attending Bates College and Harvard Law School, joined his father's practice, which has since grown to seven lawyers and is now known as Isaacson & Raymond. Indeed, the practice of law has become a sort of "family business." In addition to Philip Isaacson and myself, two of Harris' grandsons, David Simonds and Thomas Isaacson, are attorneys in private practice. Harris also served as clerk and later judge of

the Lewiston municipal court, the forerunner of the Maine District Court. He retired from law practice in the 1970s and died on October 23, 1983 at the age of 86. (His wife, Goldie, died June 5, 2003 at the age of 102).

Harris lived life with gusto. He was an enthusiastic outdoorsman, devoted fly fisherman and fanatical golfer (probably the first Jewish member of Auburn's Martindale Country Club). He had many friends, and was known for his generosity. He had a wry sense of humor. (For example, he inscribed the inside cover of all his books with the words, "This book was stolen from Harris M. Isaacson," as an admonition to those who might borrow and forget to return them). He was an avid reader of history, biography, politics, magazines and newspapers, and never lost his intellectual curiosity.

Although he remained culturally a Jew, Harris was an assimilated one who was not especially observant and moved comfortably in non-Jewish circles. He was a long-time member both of Beth Abraham, the Auburn synagogue, and Beth Jacob, the Lewiston synagogue, and attended high-holiday services, but he did not observe Shabbat, and his celebration of other Jewish holidays was selective. Jewish-style cooking was served at Harris' and Goldie's home, but the dietary laws were not observed, and Harris enjoyed lobster and shellfish (though he abhorred pork).

These compromises should not be surprising. Like many other talented, intelligent and energetic American Jews of his generation, Harris Isaacson relished the opportunities offered by an open society, was anxious to fit into its culture and was ambitious to rise in its ranks, while, at the same time, desiring to retain his ties to his parents, extended family and the traditions they represented.

