

Winnipeg Pioneers Buried There

Transcona's Jewish Cemetery

By RUTH KAHANE



A visit to the old Transcona Cemetery yields insight into the beginnings of Jewish community life in Winnipeg. The 94 year old burial ground was the first to be established in Western Canada, and even now, though there are no immediate family members surviving those buried in it, it is still visited by

In 1883 when the cemetery was consecrated, there were about 360 Jews in Manitoba. The first 100 permanent residents had come in small groups of five to 10 people between 1878 and 1880 and by the time of the first wave of Russian Jewish immigrants in 1882, were considered established members of the community. The Russian immigrants

To meet the urgent need for a burial place, several of the pioneer settlers were approached and David Ripstein responded by offering a gift of land on Thomas Street for a cemetery. The infants were buried there, but because of the location was next to a disreputable neighborhood, it was considered only a temporary burial place, and the immigrants immediately began to look for a more desirable location.

They chose a parcel of land northeast of the city in Elmwood on the road to Transcona and it was purchased in March 1883 with \$300 in funds collected in a campaign organized by Simon Lechtzier, David Ripstein, and some of the immigrants. Later a company was formed called Children of Israel Cemetery Ltd.

One 1882 pioneer, Wolf Moskowitz recounted the consecration of the Transcona cemetery for an article about Jews in Winnipeg published in 1912 in *Der Kanader Yid*:

"We bought the cemetery in a mood of pessimism. We won-

ment, and a distant rumble and rush of traffic along Hwy. 59 hangs in the air.

Twenty years ago, after a large number of gravestones had been knocked over by weather and vandals, officials of Shaarey Zedek Synagogue met with seven descendants of the pioneers buried in the cemetery and a legal transaction was made to

archives of the Jewish Historical Society.)

At the south end of the cemetery are the oldest graves — those of the five infants and of three pioneers — Muriel Wertheim, Alfred Herman, and Jacob Tuch — buried during the first year.

It appears that every year after that no less than three and of-



Getting There

The 'Transcona' Cemetery is located at the rear of 474 Almay Rd.

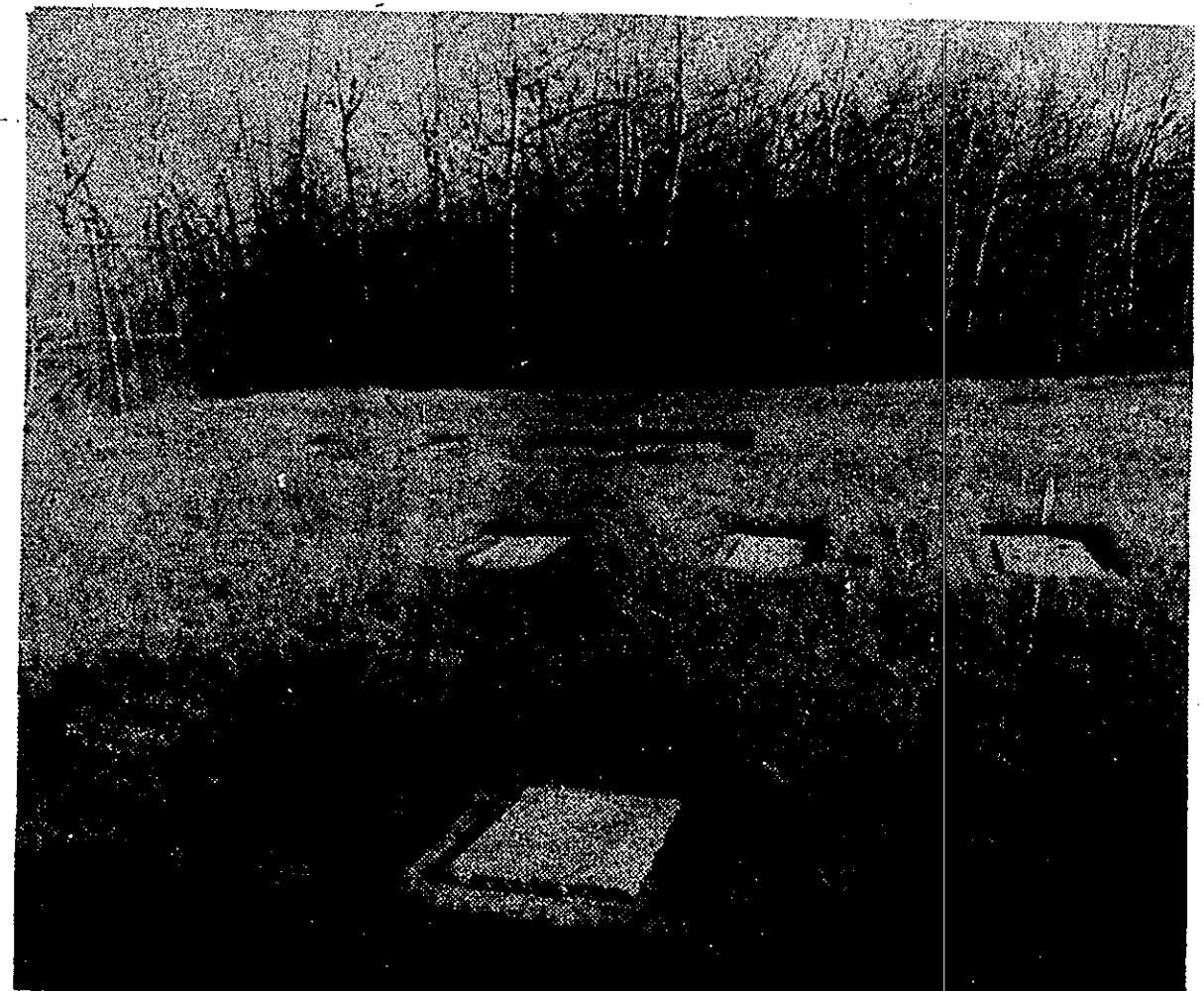
Travel east on Nairn to Hwy. 59.

Turn left on Hwy. 59. Travel a short distance to Almay Rd.

Turn right on Almay Rd. No. 484 Almay Rd. is the residence of the Tyndall Family who maintain the cemetery. Park in their driveway.

At the rear of the driveway is the beginning of the path that leads to the cemetery, which is about two minutes further.

The phone number of the Tyndall residence, should you wish to let them know you are coming, is 222-6239.



relatives and other members of the community interested in their roots. Shragge, Wertheim, Paul, Black, Ripstein, Pierce, Frankfurter, Vineberg, Zimmerman, Kluner, Bronfman, Tobias, Copleman — these are some of the family names engraved on the 105 headstones to be found today in the cemetery, memorials to some of the most prominent pioneer families of the early Jewish community.

arrived with little warning in June 1882 — a mass of 260 people — and despite the 'established' community's attempts at relief, there was great difficulty integrating a group almost three times their own size.

During the winter of 1882, the immigrants lived in government sheds near the mouth of the Assiniboine River, and conditions were so harrowing, five infants died of malnutrition and exposure.

dered, each of us to himself, whose children would be buried there first? And yet at the same time we dedicated the burial ground with a sense of consolation knowing that we would now have a dignified Jewish resting place. We borrowed several sleighs with horses, seated ourselves close together and took with us eighteen bottles of liquor. We had decided to measure off the grounds properly in preparation for eventual need.

When we arrived at the Elmwood location we got off the sleighs and in parties we circled the area as if to lay official claim to the place. After this procedure we recited a number of chapters out of Psalms, we sang Hymns and partook of the liquor each man shouting 'Le-chayim!' We then danced on the snow-covered field and completed thereby the dedication ceremony. Several months later, in June around the Shavuot Festival, we transferred the bodies of the infants from the old site to the new and the Hebrew Cemetery of Winnipeg began to serve its purpose."

In 1883, the land was still bush and open prairie. Today, the cemetery still sits quiet and undisturbed, and the approach to it is along a grassy path through a wooded lot. But the area around it has been taken over by residential and industrial develop-

transfer the responsibility to the synagogue.

With funds from the \$2100 assets sold to the synagogue for a sum of \$1, the cemetery was brought into its present state of repair. A high iron-wire fence enclosure was erected, and the markers, originally in an upright position, were laid flat and embedded into solid concrete foundations.

Today, on approach to the gate of the cemetery, the low-lying stones are almost invisible in the grass. Even once within the grounds, it is difficult to discern the total number of graves until the entire area has been surveyed on foot.

The markers, made of granite or limestone, and less often of marble, are small and often narrow. Most inscriptions are written in English, though a few are in Hebrew and Rumanian.

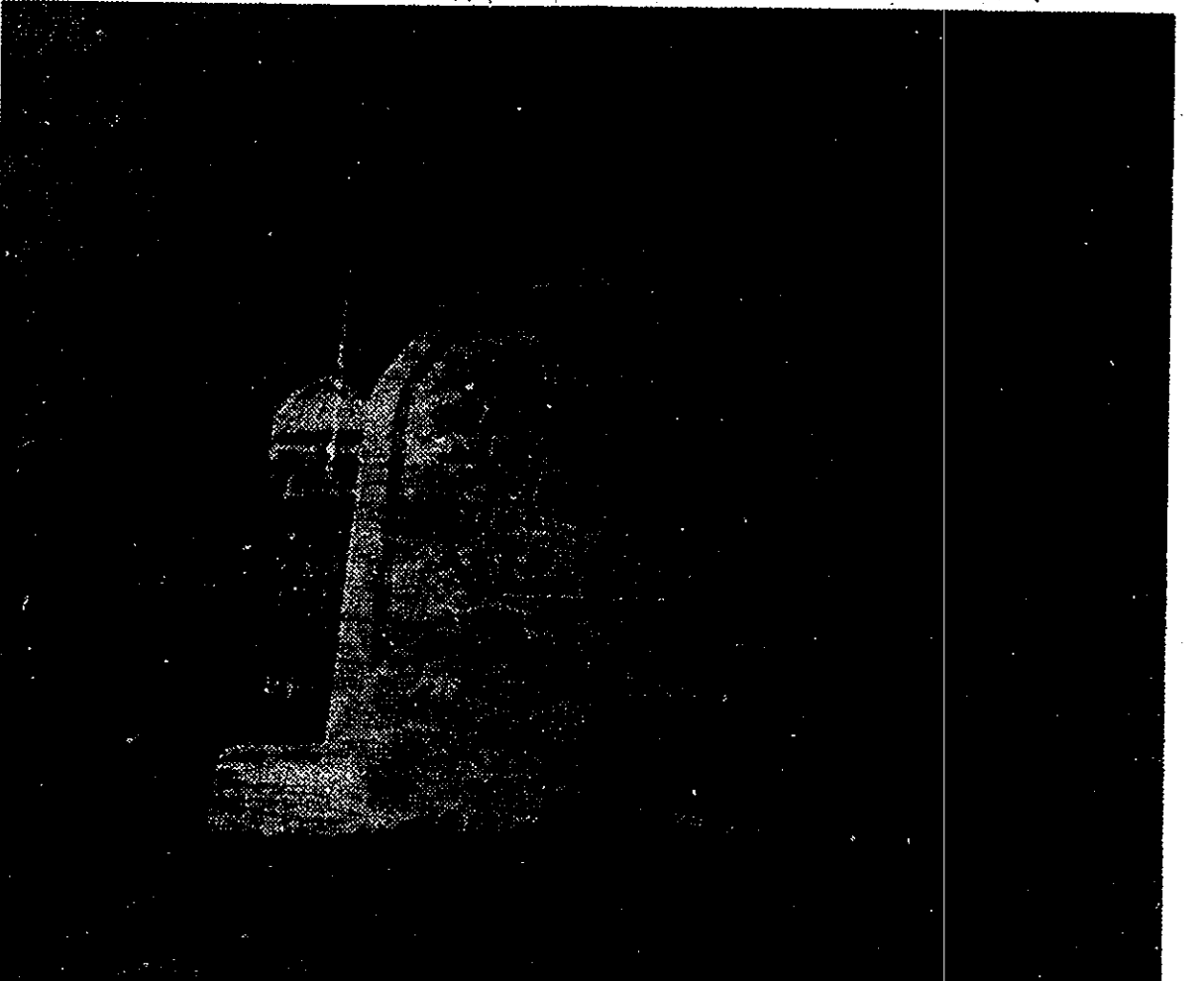
In some areas of the cemetery depressions can be made out in the ground but there are no markers. This may be due to vandalism or to the fact that some graves were once marked by hut-like wooden structures which could have been destroyed by weather.

These 'ohelim' or tabernacles were customary in the old country. About four feet long, two feet wide, three feet high, and slat-roofed, they marked but did not cover the full length of the grave. At one end of the ohel a wooden marker was erected and it was lettered in Hebrew to commemorate the deceased.

(One of these markers still remained in 1957 when the cemetery was repaired, and it is now stored in the basement of the Chesed Shel Emet, as part of the

ten more people were buried until 1933. Frank Druxerman was the last person to be buried there.

By that time other cemeteries had been established for several years and were closer to the community. The Transcona Cemetery was abandoned.



Anne Frank's Forgotten Friend

(Holland Herald)

A balmy afternoon in a pleasant suburb of Toronto, Canada. The well-manicured lawns in the middle class neighbourhood of Weston are verdant after a heavy downpour of rain. Victor Kugler, 77, is gazing out the window of his small, two-story home, seemingly lost in thought. The surroundings suggest that Kugler is preoccupied with the present. The only hint of the past is an old

1930s and had seen the madness from its genesis. With the help of Kugler and a few other workers in the shop, Frank had long ago begun preparations for his inevitable move.

The rear, upper two floors of the house at Prinsengracht 263 were separated from the main part by a stairwell, hidden by a false bookcase. It was in this 'secret annex' that the Franks, their two daughters, the Van Daans and son and a dentist would spend the next two years. The story of the daily tension,

Kraler in the diary? Little is known of the man who played such a vital role in caring for the fugitives and assuring their anonymity. It was, in fact, Kugler who took part in a plan whereby Mr. Frank would have a letter (postmarked from a border town) sent to Kugler bidding him farewell.

The intention was to give the Nazis the impression that the Franks had fled the country. It was also Kugler who conceived of and helped build the famous bookcase, behind which the

siege in the 'Secret Annex'. With the help of another employee, Mr. Kleinerman (referred to as Koophuis in the Diary) and two women in the shop, Kugler organized a plan which would assure working hours, the group would have to walk without shoes so as not to arouse the suspicions of employees who were unaware of their secret," says Kugler. "They were not even allowed to flush the toilet during the afternoons. The two women, Miep and Elly, were responsible for buying the daily groceries for their charges. This was no easy matter in an occupied country. Food was scarce and ration cards were the key to survival. The girls sometimes had to go to several stores in one afternoon so as not to attract attention with their larger than usual rations."

Sifting through his cardboard box of photographic memories, Kugler pauses when he comes across one of the pictures he took of Anne in the annex in 1943. "She was always busy writing in her diary," he recalls, "always inquisitive, sometimes melancholy."

"I often brought her magazines to read—although her mother didn't approve of that at all. I remember Anne would always be waiting for me at the top of the hidden stairway, saying nothing but the look in her eyes told me that she hoped I had remembered. I would put the magazines in my pocket as if I had forgotten them and pull them out as I came up the stairs."

"Probably the greatest regret that Otto had during the years in hiding was that his daughters were not able to study at school. So I managed to enrol Anne in a Latin correspondence course. And she did quite well."

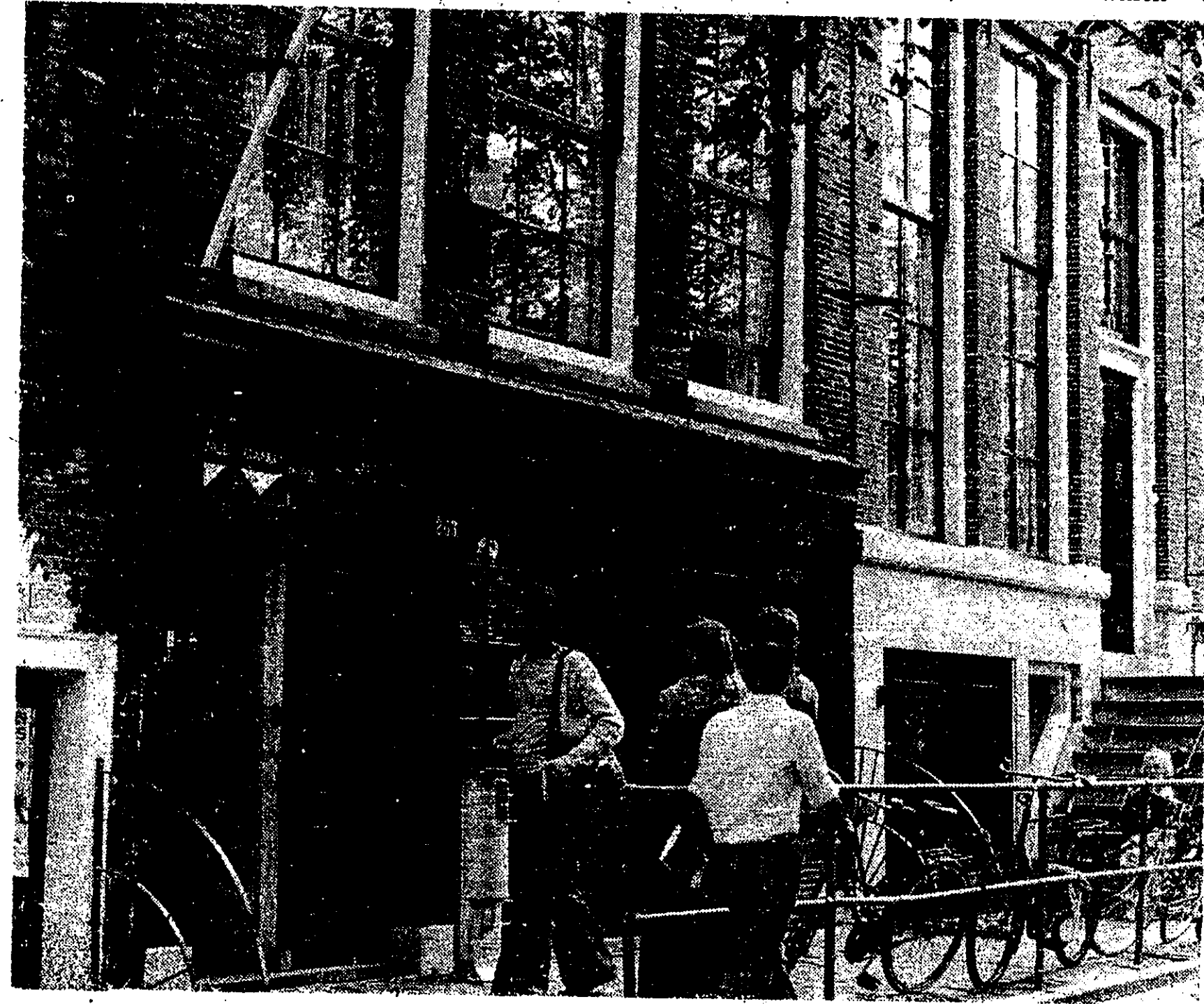
As the Franks, along with the Van Daans and Mr. Dussel, tensely waited for the Allied convergence on Amsterdam, Kugler says he carried on the spice import and jam preserve business for Mr. Frank. And despite the burden borne by Kugler in caring for the Franks, Victor and Otto were said to have remained somewhat formal business associates.

But the structure, formality and daily routine came to an abrupt end on August 4, 1944. Kugler remembers the events of that summer morning as if they had happened the week before. "I was sitting at my office desk. There was a loud knock at the door. I looked at my watch. It was 10:30. I opened the door and was confronted by four policemen. Three were Dutch, the fourth, a Nazi officer, appeared to be in charge. One of the Dutchmen was Maarten van Rossum. He was a well-known collaborator who was executed shortly after the liberation. The Nazi was an Austrian named Silberbauer. Who is the owner of this place?" Silberbauer demanded. I began to give him the address of the real owner. But the Nazi insisted on knowing who was in charge. I admitted it was me.

"In the back of my mind I hoped that my Austrian accent—I was born there—would ingratiate me to the Nazi. But no chance. I was forced to give them a detailed tour of the warehouse. I tried to control the waves of panic I felt inside me. I still hoped that it was a routine investigation, no different from earlier ones. But my heart sank when Silberbauer barked: 'Now we'll look for weapons.' I knew then that there was nothing routine about this visit.

"Silverbauer made straight for the bookcase, tore it loose from its fastenings and exposed the secret doorway. I realized we have been betrayed. The Nazis drew their guns and motioned me to climb the stairs ahead of them." So ironically, after serving as the pipeline to the outside world, and protecting the Franks and their fellow fugitives for 25 months, Kugler now had the grim task of ushering in the Nazis.

He recalls: "As I entered the living room, I saw Mrs. Frank sitting there, motionless. 'Gestapo' was all I said. She seemed stunned and rose, glued to the spot. The others soon filed out of the other rooms. No one uttered a sound, except for Anne's sister, Margot, who quietly wept." Perhaps Margot anticipated her family's fate. They were sent to Westerbork Concentration Camp, then on to Auschwitz (where four million Jews died) and to Bergen-Belsen. All but Otto Frank would perish in the death camps only months before the Allies reached them. Mrs. Frank, described as almost mute after the capture, died at Auschwitz. Otto Frank, himself, witnessed Mr. van Daan's march to the gas chambers. At the end of the war, Peter van Daan was



This is where Anne Frank of Amsterdam lived with her family during the terrible days of the German occupation during World War II. It is a museum and national shrine today, attracting tens of thousands of tourists annually. The house is well preserved. Victor Kugler, the man who helped shelter Anne, and her family, were recipient of Nicholas and Hedy Munk Award, worth \$10,000, Nov. 14.

Frank's private world would begin.

And yet, there is little mention of Kugler in the photographic exhibits in Prinsengracht 263. In a way, Kugler views his action during the war as the natural response to a friend's call for help. "I did it because they were my friends," he says. Kugler underplays the level of intimacy he shared with the fugitives and the risks taken, to such an extent that he neglects to even display his numerous photos of the Franks—many of them never

Leica camera sitting on a bookshelf. It is the only clue to the fact that Kugler is a living part of history.

Like many other Dutchmen during World War II, this unassuming man ignored Nazi edicts to abide by their "final solution" for the Jewish people. Risking his own life, he hid, for two years, a group of eight Jews in an office annex in Amsterdam.

The only difference between Kugler and many other Dutchmen during the war was that one of those eight fugitives was a 14 year old girl named Anne Frank whose diary preserved a legacy of her life and death.

Casting his mind back 35 years, Kugler recalls the events in Amsterdam between 1942 (when the Franks began their hiding) and the end of the war.

"It was a warm day in July, 1942. I went to work as usual at Prinsengracht 263. I was working with Otto Frank (Anne's father) in a small, spice importing business. To my surprise that day, Otto was waiting for me at the door. 'The time has arrived to go into hiding,' he said to me."

A day before, the Franks had been ordered to deliver their 16 year old daughter, Margot, to a collection point for shipment to Germany. Otto Frank was one of the few who understood the truth behind Nazi lies of 'routine population relocation' and 'humane work camps'. He had lived in Germany during the

adolescent love affairs, joy and melancholy so eloquently recorded by Anne are known throughout the world. The revelations of a young girl, groping her way into womanhood in the most trying of circumstances have been shared in a score



Kugler (alias Kraler): 'I hid them because they were my friends'

of foreign languages, made into a Broadway Play and depicted in a major motion picture. At least 60,000 people a year visit the quarters where the young girl hid and Kugler protected her. But what of the role of Kugler—referred to as Mr.

seen by the outside world. Indeed it's only out of pride in his hobby ("Photography has been my lifelong passion") that he can be persuaded to show his scrapbooks replete with rare photos of Anne and family. Victor got to know the Franks well during the quiet



Anne pictured by Kugler: 'She was always busy writing'

And Mrs. van Daan, deemed