

# 'The Room Where It Happened'

*About the Man Who Loved His City and Helped Shape Its Future*

## **Abraham L. Freedman: The Man and His Thoughts**

*Edited and with notes by*

*Robert L. Freedman.*

*468 pages*

*\$30, Amazon, 2016*

"...No one else was in the room where it happened..."

No one really knows how the game is played.

The art of the trade, how the sausage gets made..."

**T**hose lines from the Broadway show "Hamilton," refer to the secret meeting in New York between Representative James Madison, Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton and Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, resulting in "The Compromise of 1790," eventually leading to the establishment of our national banking system, and the Capitol moving from the North to Washington, D.C. New York Attorney General Aaron Burr, who knew the importance of being in "the room where it happened," was excluded from that room where that decision was made. Google "The Room Where It Happens" from the musical for the whole picture.

Although Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter is often cited as the polestar of our local governance, we might never have known precisely what was happening when, from 1949-1951, the 15 Charter Commission members met, had it not been for the diary of Commission Member and Member of the three-person drafting Committee, Abraham L. Freedman, who was always

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prominently "in the room." This book contains Freedman's diary, which reveals the disagreements, the arguments, and the politicking involved in organizing the Commission to do its work.

Freedman's extensive diaries detail not only how our Home Rule Charter came into being, but also how Freedman foresaw changes needed in racial and social justice causes, long before they came to prominence. The many causes Freedman championed included his early efforts to integrate Girard College; making certain that the Commission on Human Relations was a body with real power to effectuate change; turning the City Solicitor's Office into a highly skilled "law firm" where racial and ethnic diversity and intellectual rigor

were at its core; his resolution of religious factionalism in the Jewish community; and his judicial and personal philosophy, his view from the bench of certain trials, and his views of improving the legal system. In addition, he painted vivid, not always complimentary, portraits of the powerful and influential men he knew and worked with who then formed the heart of Philadelphia's power elite.

Freedman's diary of important events of which he was a part forms the backbone of this meaty book. His favorable portrait of Mayor and U.S. Senator Joseph S. Clark Jr., as political reformer and staunch supporter of merit selection, and his criticism of Mayor Richardson Dilworth as a patronage practitioner, whose backsliding on the

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reforms of merit selection instead of political patronage prompted Freedman's sudden resignation as city solicitor, likely contrast sharply with the image some may have of these two men.

This book also includes tributes, observations, and anecdotes about offered by some of his law clerks including Judge Jed S. Rakoff, Past Chancellor David H. Marion and Barton J. Winokur, as well as tributes from former ABA President Jerome J. Shestack, former City Solicitor and Past Chancellor Sy Kurland, Judge Dolores K. Sloviter and more.

This book will remind us that while we often take note of the singular importance of Philadelphia's Home Rule Charter in our local governance, alas, we have relegated the drafters, the process, and Freedman especially, to a

distant memory. Fortunately, not only was Freedman in many a room where the reforms were put into effect, he was no mere observer or scrivener, but was a protagonist in virtually every important decision for at least three decades and helped set the course of the anti-discrimination and "good governance" movement in Philadelphia during the 40s and 50s. The Charter movement also led to the consolidation of different governments of the City and County and ushered in the replacement of the long-entrenched Republican Party with the "new" Democrats and the long sought 'elimination' of political cronyism and patronage.

I had the good fortune to meet Judge Freedman only once. I applied to be his law clerk when he was a federal judge.

He was considered one of the most gifted jurists on that bench, and working for him was a coveted plum position. From the moment he invited me into his chambers for a personal interview, I knew he was a man of stunning brilliance, worldly knowledge and stern, but thoughtful, countenance. Although I did not get the job, I never forgot that encounter.

For anyone who loves this city and wants to know how we came to be what we are from a man who was in the rooms where it happened, this book is a "must read." ■

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