

Samuel Ullman and the Poem “Youth”

“Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind; . . . a vigor of the emotions; it is the freshness of the deep springs of life . . . Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals.”

Samuel Ullman, “Youth,” 1918.

“Its message is to live young, live strong, live a life of work.”

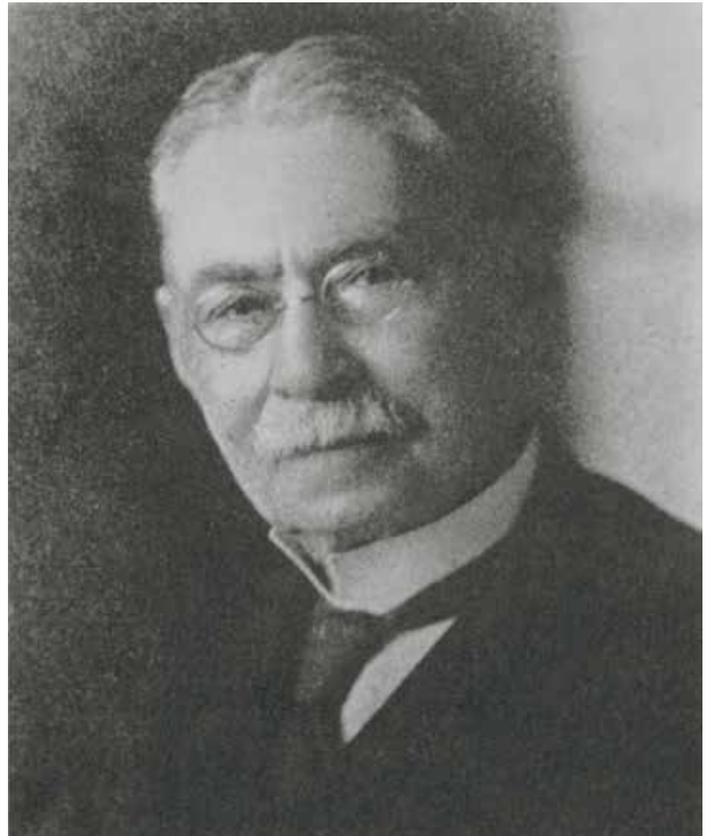
Jiro M. Miyazawa, Founder and longtime President,
Toppan Moore Company, 1987.

Civic, religious, and educational leader, Samuel Ullman penned the poem “Youth” in this Birmingham residence (*below, right*). Ullman was 78. The poem sums up his philosophy of purpose and service, and the optimism that defined his life and continues to inspire.

Who Was Ullman?

The eldest son of Jacob and Lena Ullman, Samuel Ullman was born in 1840 in Germany and named for his grandfather Rabbi Samuel Ullman. At age 11, he immigrated with his family to Port Gipson, Mississippi. Here his father operated a butcher shop in which the teenager worked each morning before heading to school. In his late teens, he studied “Hebrew, English, German, religion and elementary studies” with Rabbi Bernard Gotthelf in Louisville, Kentucky. Ending his formal education at age 18, he returned to the butcher business. Three years later, he volunteered for Confederate service, becoming a “musician” in a Regimental Band and serving in campaigns across Virginia. Wounded and deaf in one ear, his Mississippi unit decimated, the near 6-foot young man with brown hair and blue eyes returned to help his father.

After the war, Ullman moved to Natchez, Mississippi, and worked in the dry goods business. Here he met and married the love of his life, Emma Mayer, in 1867. To this union, eight children were born from 1869 to 1880. Ullman ran his



Samuel Ullman, circa 1920, about the time he wrote “Youth.” COURTESY MAYER U. NEWFIELD COLLECTION.



Newfield-Ullman House, shortly after construction, c. 1906. COURTESY MAYER U. NEWFIELD COLLECTION.



Samuel Ullman with Grandchildren, 1911. *Clockwise, from top right:* Emma and Mayer Newfield, Reese Rosenfield (seated), Lena and Semon Newfield. Ullman is holding Lincoln Newfield in his right arm and Ullie Rosenfield in his left arm. COURTESY MAYER U. NEWFIELD COLLECTION.

business and served on the school board. And both he and Emma undertook leadership roles at their synagogue and in the community.

Seeking greater opportunity, in 1884 Ullman moved his family to the fast-growing industrial city of Birmingham. Here he entered the hardware business, supplying households, railroads, and mines. He also served as a religious leader, city alderman, school board president, and the leading advocate for educational advancement for all Birmingham children. The family lived at 715 18th Street North, a Northside residence that Ullman owned mortgage free. In 1896, his wife Emma, age 57, died. His eldest daughter, Leah, took charge of his household, which included children ages 15 to 24. The extended family included daughters Leah and Carrie and sons Sidney, an architect; Monte, an attorney; Isaac, clerk at his father's hardware store; and Edward, an associate in an electrical contracting company. The Hungarian-born Morris Newfield, whom Ullman had recruited to serve as

rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, boarded with the Ullmans. After an extended courtship, Newfield married Leah Ullman in 1901. The family continued to live together until the early 20th century, when the younger generation had established their careers, married, and moved to their own residences. In 1894, Samuel Ullman became an agent with The New York Life Insurance Company, serving until his retirement in 1908.

In 1906, Leah and Morris Newfield moved to a new residence at 2150 15th Avenue South, a two-story, eight-room residence in the popular Craftsman style of the era. With cool and clean breezes, home building on Red Mountain's forested slope found favor with extended family groups who moved away from the city's early residential areas into which the commercial core was fast expanding and away from the soot generated by the prosperity of the industrial center. Nearby the Newfield's Southside residence, the Phoenix Club (today's Zydeco, a live music venue) would become the center of social activity for Birmingham's Jewish community, and Temple Emanu-El would rise by 1912. Samuel Ullman and his youngest daughter, Carrie, then a kindergarten teacher at the temple, moved in with the Newfield children, Seymour and Emma, ages 4 and 2. The arrival of Mayer, Lena, Lincoln, and John Newfield would fill the residence with youth. Ullman's room was an upstairs bedroom. It is probable that Ullman acquired the property and paid for the construction of the residence and that his son Sidney Ullman designed the residence and that a downstairs room served as the rabbi's office and study for more than 30 years until his death in 1940. Servants, a cook and nurse, lived in the basement. Leah Newfield remained in the family home, selling it just prior to her death in 1948.

Throughout his life, Samuel Ullman engaged in civic affairs, leading by actively participating. In his later years, he penned his thoughts on contemporary matters, submitting opinion to the press and writing poetry on diverse subjects. As was common practice at the time, Ullman kept a journal and



Newfield House, 2150 15th Avenue South, 1940. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY BIRMINGHAM PUBLIC LIBRARY ARCHIVES.



Samuel Ullman, gathered with his sister Matilda Block's family at the Phoenix Club, celebrating Ullman's 80th birthday. Ullman, *top right*, above his nephew Laurens Block. 1920. COURTESY MAYER U. NEWFIELD COLLECTION.

wrote long letters in addition to his poems. His nephew Laurens Block, the founder of Birmingham's Parisian department stores, encouraged his literary pursuits, giving him a desk and a secretary to type up his writings. In 1918, his 78th year, Ullman wrote the poem "Youth." His family published his poems as *From the Summit of Years, Four Score*, placing the 53 poems in the public domain in 1922. Ullman died two years later and is buried in the Temple Emanu-El cemetery in Birmingham's Enon Ridge neighborhood.

"Youth" Inspires Japan

In 1945, General Douglas MacArthur, detailed to oversee the rebuilding of Japan in the years following World War II, established his headquarters in the "Dai-ichi" Building, then the Norinchukin Bank and Dai-ichi Seimei Insurance Company Building. Built in 1933 and since 1993 restored as part of the DN Tower 21, the neoclassical-styled office complex has served Dai-ichi Life, founded 1902, since 1938.

MacArthur's biographer, William Manchester, records that MacArthur's choice for headquarters for the allied command was one of few buildings remaining in the bombed out city and directly opposite the Imperial Place. Very quickly, the edifice became known as the "Dai Ichi" ("Number One").

On the top floor of the building, MacArthur gave the corner offices to his generals, choosing for himself a walnut-

paneled, interior storage area. Here on the wall behind his desk, he posted pictures of Presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and his favorite poem, "Youth." From 1945 to 1952, MacArthur worked long hours, his comings and goings closely followed and admired by the Japanese people. The General regularly quoted from "Youth" in his speeches. The poem became familiar throughout Japan, inspiring Japanese citizens and business leaders, who drew courage from "Youth," while rebuilding their war-ravaged country.

In 1945, *Reader's Digest* published the poem and reported that MacArthur posted the poem in his office. Yoshio Okasa, a Japanese businessman, upon reading the article, was inspired to create a beautiful and moving translation in Japanese and display it in his offices. The popularity of "Youth" in Japan soared. Many carried folded-up copies of the poem in their pockets and wallets.

In 1985, the Youth Association was formed in Tokyo. Its corporate and individual members across Japan are encouraged to study "Youth" and the writings of other philosophers and to share the joy and hope expressed in the poem.

Writing in 1992, Jiro M. Miyazawa, who wanted to share the message of the poem and who had distributed more than 10,000 copies across Japan, stated:

"Japan has been completely rebuilt since the devastation of World War II. I believe Samuel Ullman's poem 'Youth' played a part in this process by sustaining the Japanese mind with its inspiring message."

When in 1993, Dai-ichi expanded its headquarters, constructing a new tower at the rear of the original building, MacArthur's office was restored. The famed "Youth" poem remains up on the wall.

When General MacArthur returned to the United States in 1951, quotes from "Youth" were sprinkled in his well-publicized speeches. Many speechwriters quoted the poem, and it also



DN Tower 21, headquarters of the Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company, since 1938. PHOTOGRAPH REPRINTED FROM TOKYO CREATIVE BY MIKE B.



Samuel Ullman Museum, 1993. PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY UAB.

appeared in popular literature of the era, including Ann Landers' syndicated column.

Back to Birmingham

In 1989, the Japan-America Society of Alabama was formed to encourage international relationships between Japan and the United States.

Several years later in 1993, Kenji Awakura, a Japanese businessman working in Alabama, visited the residence where Ullman penned "Youth," finding it in poor condition and up for sale. Awakura raised \$285,000 from Japanese and American firms to purchase and renovate the residence, requiring a matching endowment of \$125,000 for continued maintenance that was provided by Ullman devotee Wyatt Haskell and the Alabama Power Company. The renovated residence and the Japan-America Society of Alabama Ullman Museum Endowment established April 21, 1995, were presented to the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). The Ullman Museum displaying artifacts and furnishings opened in September 1994. Margaret Armbruster, UAB historian and author of the definitive biography *Samuel Ullman and "Youth"—The Life, The Legacy* published in 1993, served as part-time curator of the newly created Ullman Museum honoring the civic leader's life and work. When she retired, the museum lost its finest champion.

Sources for this article: Margaret England Armbruster, *Samuel Ullman and "Youth"—The Life, The Legacy* with a Foreword by Jiro M. Miyazawa, Birmingham City Directories, United States Census Records, Jefferson County Tax Assessor Records, Wyatt R. Haskell Papers. Research assistance, Gerry Waters.

YOUTH

Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind; it is not a matter of rosy cheeks, red lips and supple knees; it is a matter of the will, a quality of the imagination, a vigor of the emotions; it is the freshness of the deep springs of life.

Youth means a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity of the appetite, for adventure over the love of ease. This often exists in a man of sixty more than a boy of twenty. Nobody grows old merely by a number of years. We grow old by deserting our ideals.

Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. Worry, fear, self-distrust bows the heart and turns the spirit back to dust.

Whether sixty or sixteen, there is in every human being's heart the lure of wonder, the unfailing, child-like appetite of what's next, and the joy of the game of living. In the center of your heart and my heart there is a wireless station; so long as it receives messages of beauty, hope, cheer, courage and power from men and from the infinite, so long are you young.

When the aerials are down, and your spirit is covered with snows of cynicism and ice of pessimism, then you are grown old, even at twenty, but as long as your aerials are up, to catch the waves of optimism, there is hope you may die young at eighty.

“青春”について

引退したのち、ウルマンは、これまで以上に、彼が情熱を傾けてきたことの一つである、手紙、随想、詩を書くための時間をもつことができるようになりました。その詩と詩的な随想の中で、彼は、愛、自然、信仰、家庭、忙しい生活をしている友人のこと、若さを保ちつつ生きること等、さまざまな主題について書いています。詩人としてのウルマンが有名になるのに貢献したのは、マッカーサー将軍 (General Douglas MacArthur) です。第二次大戦のあと、マッカーサー将軍が日本を占領したアメリカ軍の司令官であった時、彼の東京の執務室の壁には、ウルマンの詩“青春”が掛けてかかっていました。マッカーサー将軍を避けて、日本人は“青春”を発見し、この詩を作ったウルマンについてもっと知りたいと感じるようになったのです。

人々が、この散文詩“青春”をきっかけとして、ウルマンの生涯に興味を持つようになったことは、適切なことだといえるでしょう。“青春”のなかで、彼は、希望を持ち続けることの大切さを歌い、人々に自分の理想に忠実であることを呼びかけますが、これこそウルマンの人生の核心を表しているからです。ユダヤ人移民として出発し、敗北した兵士の経験を経て、進歩的な地域社会の活動家となっていたサムエル・ウルマンの物語は、彼の死後七十年の現在でも、世界の人々にアイデアと励ましを与え続けていると思います。