

## **Kenneth Libo, 74, Scholar of Immigrant Life - Correction Appended**

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 **Correction Appended**

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### **Body**

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**Kenneth Libo**, a historian of Jewish immigration who, as a graduate student working for Irving Howe in the 1960s and '70s, unearthed historical documentation that informed and shaped "World of Our Fathers," Mr. Howe's landmark 1976 history of the East European Jewish migration to America, died on March 29 in New York. He was **74**.

The cause was complications from an infection, said Michael Skakun, a friend and fellow historian.

Mr. **Libo**'s contribution was acknowledged by Mr. Howe and the publishers of "World of Our Fathers," who listed his name beneath the author's on the cover of the book: "With the Assistance of **Kenneth Libo**."

**Scholars** familiar with his archival work credit Mr. **Libo** with adding a level of emotional detail, and a view of everyday **life** in the teeming tenements of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, that the book might have lacked without his six years of work. "I don't think 'World of Our Fathers' could have been written without the spade work done by Ken **Libo**," said Jeffrey S. Gurock, a professor of Jewish history at Yeshiva University. "He had a certain researching genius, a feel for visceral detail."

Mr. **Libo** worked with Mr. Howe on two more books and shared billing on both as co-author -- "How We Lived," a 1979 anthology of pictures and documentary accounts of Jewish **life** in New York between 1880 and 1930; and "We Lived There, Too," an illustrated collection of first-person accounts by Jewish **immigrant** pioneers who moved on from New York to settle in far-flung outposts around the country, like New Orleans; Abilene, Kan.; and Keokuk, Iowa, between 1630 and 1930.

He became the first English-language editor of The Jewish Daily Forward in 1980, lectured widely, taught literature and history at Hunter College, and later in **life** helped several wealthy Jewish New York families research and write their self-published family histories.

But throughout his **life**, Mr. **Libo** was known best for his involvement in "World of Our Fathers," a best seller that Mr. Howe, a socialist and public intellectual, once described in part as an effort to reclaim the fading memory of Jewish immigration from the clutches of sentimental myth, Alexander Portnoy and generations of Jewish mother jokes.

The book was a large canvas -- depicting a lost world of tenements, sweatshops and political utopianism -- written with elegiac lyricism.

By most accounts Mr. Howe gave the book its vision, its voice and its intellectual legs. Mr. **Libo** gave it people and their stories.

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He mined archives of Yiddish newspapers like The Forward, Der Tog and Freiheit; the case records of social service organizations like the Henry Street Settlement House; the letters of activists like Lillian Wald and Rose Schneiderman; memoirs by forgotten people whose books he found in the 5-cent bins of used bookstores. He interviewed old vaudevillians like Joe Smith of Smith and Dale (the models for Neil Simon's "Sunshine Boys") for the story of Yiddish theater.

In an essay about the book, published in 2000 in the journal of the American Jewish Historical Society, Mr. **Libo** wrote that in the summer months "Irving did the bulk of the writing while I remained in New York with an assistant to run down facts."

**Kenneth** Harold **Libo** was born Dec. 4, 1937, in Norwich, Conn., one of two sons of Asher and Annette **Libo**. His father was a Jewish **immigrant** from Russia, his mother American-born. His parents operated a chicken farm, friends said.

He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1959, served in the Navy and taught English at Hunter College of the City University until he began work on "World of Our Fathers" in 1968 with Mr. Howe, who died in 1993.

He received his Ph.D. in English literature from the City University of New York in 1974. He never married and no immediate family members remain.

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## Correction

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This article has been revised to reflect the following correction: An obituary on Monday about **Kenneth Libo**, a historian of Jewish immigration who contributed to Irving Howe's book "World of Our Fathers," misspelled the name of one of the Yiddish-language newspapers whose archives he consulted as part of the research for that book. It was Freiheit, not Freheit.

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## Graphic

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PHOTO: **Kenneth Libo** (PHOTOGRAPH BY PAUL DUCKWORTH)

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