



Manuel Rosenberg, 1941.
(Courtesy the author)

The Rabbi and the Artist: My Family's Cincinnati Legacy (1921)

ANITA ROSENBERG

Famed orator and politician William Jennings Bryan was in Cincinnati on the night of 29 August 1921, having dinner before attending the theater, when my great-uncle Manuel Rosenberg took out his pencil and sketch pad and drew his portrait. Rosenberg was on assignment for the *Cincinnati Post*, and sketching the former secretary of state and three-time presidential candidate was his job.¹

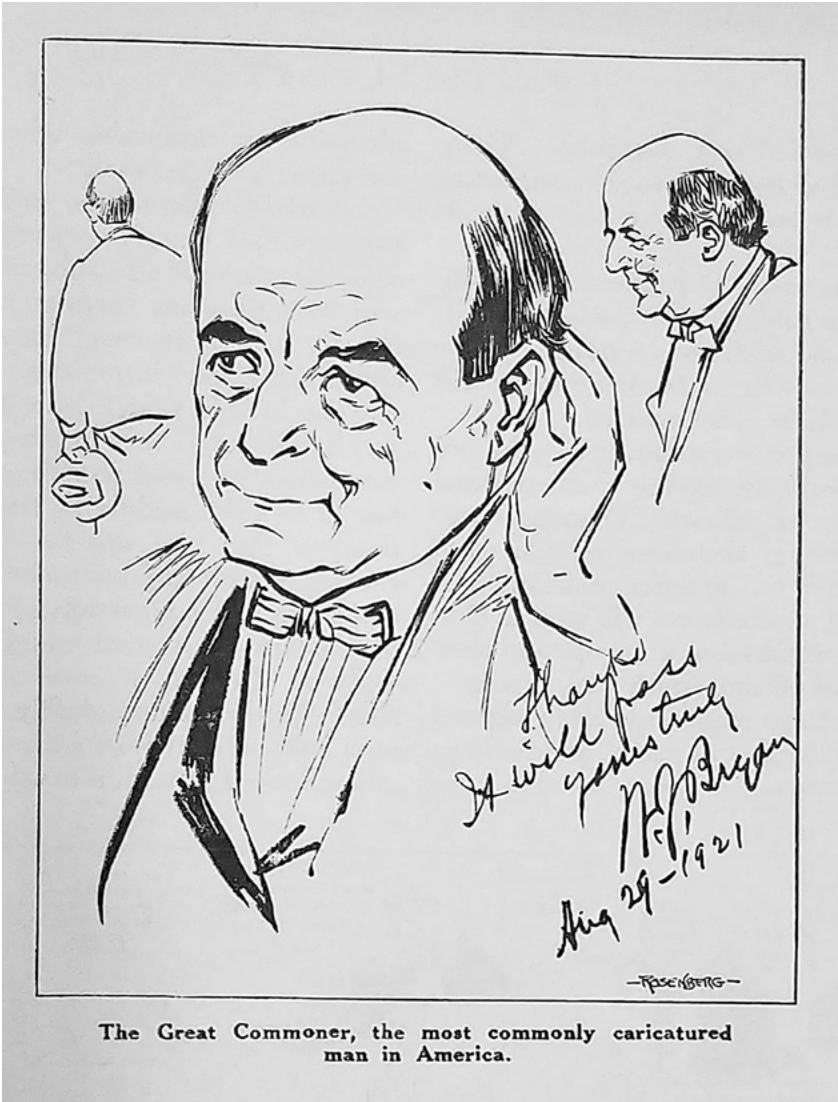
At age twenty-four, Manuel “Rosie” Rosenberg was the paper’s star sketch artist. In his 1922 book, *Manuel Rosenberg’s Course in Newspaper Art*, he described the technical aspects of sketching a visiting celebrity, with wry notes on the subject’s personal peculiarities, including Bryan’s nickname as “The Great Commoner”:

You can readily see that the Great Commoner’s head is easy to caricature. He was dining when I drew the large head, and as I usually stand when sketching, I saw more of his smooth bald head and correspondingly less of his ample double chin. Owing to the din coming in from the hotel lobby, in order to catch the remarks of his guests he would now and then cup his hand to his ear—as suggestively shown in the sketch.²

My great-uncle Manuel Rosenberg was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on 29 January 1897 to Russian Jewish immigrants. His father, Benjamin Rosenberg (1869–1941), was a cap maker born in Minsk and his mother, Celia Jasin Rosenberg (1873–1958), was born in Kyiv. In 1893 Celia traveled from the Bronx to New Orleans to marry

1 “Convention Gossip and Taft’s Wish,” *Cincinnati Post* (30 August 1921): 2; “After-Dinner Oratory at Cincinnati,” *American Bar Association Journal* VII, no. 10 (October 1921): 605.

2 *The Manuel Rosenberg Course in Newspaper Art* (Cincinnati, self-published: 1922), 189.



Sketch of William Jennings Bryan by Rosenberg, 1921.

(Published in *The Manuel Rosenberg Course in Newspaper Art* [Cincinnati: self-published, 1922])

Benjamin. New Orleans in the late nineteenth century had a vibrant Jewish community, but the city's terrible sanitation during the yellow fever pandemic, when Manuel was a year old, forced the family to move first to Atlanta, where Celia's sister Mary lived, and then to Cincinnati, where her older brother, Joseph, lived.

Rabbi Joseph Jasin was in the 1904 graduating class of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. His father, Israel, was a rabbi in Europe before him, and once the family immigrated, Joseph moved to Cincinnati to become a rabbi as well. Rabbi Jasin was an influential leader in the Jewish community and the first full-time secretary of the Federation of American Zionists from 1908 to 1910.³ His close friendship and correspondence with William Jennings Bryan, among other political and cultural luminaries of his time, are well documented in the American Jewish Archives.⁴

The Rosenbergs were a working-class family living in the Over-the-Rhine immigrant neighborhood near downtown Cincinnati. Rosenberg's two siblings—my grandfather Simon (1899–1967) and Jessie Rosenberg Tyroler (1901–1987)—were both born in Cincinnati. Simon ran the family dry-goods store, named Rosenbergs, with his mother Celia. Jessie married an optometrist and moved to Columbus. Father Benjamin headed for the West Coast—Los Angeles and San Francisco—and fell out of touch with most of the family. The disappearing husband was not uncommon during the turn of the century. Overwhelmed by new possibilities in America, husbands were known to take off for a fresh start in a new city.⁵ Manuel stayed in communication with his father.⁶

3 Michael A. Meyer, *Judaism Within Modernity: Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 363.

4 See, for example, SC-5681 and SC-5682, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH. Joseph Jasin, "Bryan Through Jewish Eyes—A Personal Tribute," *The Jewish Digest: Tropical America's Jewish Organ* 1, no. 10 (19 March 1926).

5 Reena Sigman Friedman, "'Send Me My Husband Who Is In New York City': Husband Desertion in the American Jewish Immigrant Community, 1900–1926," *Jewish Social Studies* 44, no. 1 (Winter, 1982): 1–18.

6 "Cartoonist on a Trip to Canyon," *The Ogden Standard* (29 Nov. 1918): 12, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/65454487/> (accessed 27 May 2022).

From the start, Manuel sought out Cincinnati's cultural offerings. Unlike the rest of the more business-minded Rosenbergs, he longed for an artist's life. Manuel, who taught himself to speak five languages, had a talent for drawing and getting his work published. His first cartoon appeared in a New York City publication when he was fifteen. In 1915, he created a page of cartoons for the *London Herald*. He sold newspapers to earn money to attend the Cincinnati Art Academy, where he studied portraiture with portrait artist Frank Duveneck and landscapes with impressionist Lewis Henry Meakin. Manuel's talent and artistic ambitions caught the attention of local Cincinnati realty operator Walter S. Coles, who sent him to the National Academy of Design in New York City, the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, and to study in Paris. According to the *El Paso Times*, in 1918, when he was only twenty-one, Rosenberg was "a real artist. Not one of those much heard of correspondence school products. His work can be classed with the best, which is all the more remarkable, due to his age."⁷

My great-uncle Manuel Rosenberg became known throughout the country as an illustrator, cartoonist, writer, lecturer, teacher, editor, and publisher. From 1917 to 1930 he was the chief artist for the Scripps-Howard chain of newspapers in addition to overseeing the *Cincinnati Post's* graphic design in the days before printing technology had fully incorporated photography. In 1928 he launched a second career as the founder and publisher of the *Advertiser and Markets of America*, a widely circulated monthly trade publication devoted to the advertising industry in the United States and Canada. Later in his career, Rosenberg was considered one of the foremost authorities on illustration and cartooning and recognized as one of the greatest newspaper sketch artists of his time.⁸ He was the author of four books on art and art instructions, used in many art schools and libraries throughout the world: *Course in*

7 "Ah! Now Watch 'Em Sit Up and Take Notice of Miss 'Beauty and Brains' Out in Phoenix, Ariz.," *El Paso Times* (27 May 1918): 3, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/82934841/el-paso-times/> (accessed 27 May 2022).

8 "Meet Manuel Rosenberg: Post Sketch Artist, to Visit Many Cincinnati Institutions," *Cincinnati Post* (13 September 1927): 13, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/101861235/meet-manuel-sept-13-1927/> (accessed 27 May 2022).



Manuel, Celia and Simon Rosenberg, c. 1940s.
(Courtesy the author)

Newspaper Art (1922); *Practical Art by Manuel Rosenberg—A Complete Illustrated Manual for Art Students, Cartoonists Commercial Artists Fashion Artists & Illustrators [sic]* (1924); *Manuel Rosenberg Course in Cartooning and Drawing* (1927); and *The Art of Advertising* (1930), co-written by E. Walker Hartley and published by Harper and Brothers.⁹

During Manuel's thirteen years as chief artist for the *Cincinnati Post*, he carried his drawing board to every corner of the world to cover major news stories. He was one of the first journalists to travel and report back on life in Russia in 1929.¹⁰ He interviewed and sketched almost

9 Isaac H. Schwartz, "Ballyhoo Comes of Age," *Writer's Digest* (May 1929): 39–41, https://archive.org/details/sim_writers-digest_1929-05_9/page/40/mode/2up (accessed 25 May 2022).

10 Anita Rosenberg, "An American correspondent visited Russia and Ukraine in 1929. He

every famous personality of his time, including politicians, soldiers, chorus girls, and criminals. He had audiences with a royal procession of kings, popes, and dictators of early-twentieth-century Europe. He knew and sketched U.S. Presidents William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight D. Eisenhower.¹¹

And on this particular night in 1921, he sketched William Jennings Bryan and got Bryan's autograph on the drawing.¹² As Manuel later recalled:

The classic view of Mr. Bryan, that most preferred by the caricaturist and easiest to draw correctly, is his profile. Incidentally, of the two head sketches that view pleased him the most. The noted statesman was greatly pleased when the orchestra played that lively, delightful Spanish composition, "La Palma"—"The Dove."¹³

I am not sure how well Manuel knew his uncle, Rabbi Jasin. It was not until I started adding to our family tree on Ancestry.com that I even discovered Jasin's role in bringing the Rosenberg family to Cincinnati. The rabbi and the artist were two men with different approaches to life—one creative and the other religious. Yet both made their own unique impact on the cultural and political life of Cincinnati.

Although I was only ten in 1967 when Manuel died of cancer, I remember him as a tall, handsome man with brown, curly hair, wire-rimmed glasses and a warm smile. When he came to visit from New York City with his Parisian wife Lydie Bloch Rosenberg—who spoke in her thick French accent and flaunted flaming red hair—I adored their exotic

had some surprising insights," *The Independent* (31 March 2022), <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/russia-ukraine-american-correspondent-cincinnati-post-b2047457.html> (accessed 25 May 2022).

11 H.B. (Doc) Kerr, "Around the Town," *Akron Beacon Journal* (18 August 1936): 14, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/81476661/the-akron-beacon-journal/> (accessed 27 May 2022).

12 The Manuel Rosenberg archive is at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library of Columbia University: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4079587/ (accessed 25 May 2022).

13 *Manuel Rosenberg Course*, 189.

style; they were adventurers. Now that I am older and have studied who they were and the exciting life of travel they led, I understand they are the artists who I have always aspired to be.

And in some ways, by learning who Manuel is, I have come to understand who I am in the world as an artist, photographer, filmmaker, and traveler. My great-grand uncle Rabbi Joseph Jasin may have brought my great-uncle Manuel Rosenberg to Cincinnati, but the city I know, love, and grew up in is the city of Manuel's art, celebrity, and culture. Cincinnati is where the Rosenberg family put down roots, and for that, we are forever grateful.

Anita Rosenberg is an artist, filmmaker, and writer who lives and works in Los Angeles. She is currently working on a book project about her beloved great-uncle Manuel Rosenberg.

