

This article appeared in the March 20, 2015 Jewish Advocate.

# THE JEWISH ADVOCATE

Established 1902

## Evelyn Davidson: Up on Beacon Hill in the 1950s - a young Jewish staffer remembers

By Susie Davidson  
Advocate correspondent



[Mrs. Davidson returns to her old stomping grounds.](#)

Evelyn Davidson realized her career goal at the age of 17.

"I always had a dream of working at the State House," said the [Brookline](#) resident, who grew up behind the gilded seat of the Commonwealth, in [Boston's](#) old West End neighborhood. Last month, with daughter Lisa Plosker and grandson, [Boston University](#) student Aaron Plosker, she finally returned to her former workplace, where they met with family friend, [Northeastern University](#) student and State House Tour Guide Perry Howell.

As Davidson rounded the building, using a walker now for good measure, she filled them in on insights and recollections that were just as sharp as they were decades ago.

"To my friends and I, it was a prestigious job," said Davidson, then Evelyn Abrams, who worked there from 1946 to 1954, during the gubernatorial terms of Maurice Tobin, Robert Bradford, Paul Dever, and Christian Herter. What was it like for a young Jewish woman to work there in those days?

"I never encountered any anti-Semitism at the State House," she said. "The Jewish workers were treated very well. We were allowed to stay out on Jewish High Holidays without a problem, and in return, we filled in on holidays like Good Friday."

Following a first summer job at the age of 15, managing records at [Boston City Hospital](#), which she had obtained through her father's connections at Mayor John E. Kerrigan's office, Davidson took the Civil Service exam at [Harvard](#). It took about two months to learn that she had passed, but once again, her father's influence had stepped in, and she had already landed her dream position. "I was already working in a temporary, three-month position at Corporations and Taxations," she said. She went on to become a clerk typist in the Auditor's Department. "All I did was type, however, and I couldn't stand it," she recalled.

One day, she went outside and saw her former boss, Marion Still, from Corporations and Taxations. "She said that I could come back, and I did, although my current boss told her that she could not have me," she recalled.

After two weeks, Davidson found out that the head stenographer was the personal secretary to the Commissioner, Henry Long. "Her name was Bessie Kessler, and she actually ran the whole department. Through her, I found out that there were a lot of Jewish people working in the building, and I got acquainted with all of them." One, Helen Kaplan, later Helen Richmond, became a lifelong friend. "Her father, Red Chapman, from [Chelsea](#), was a boxer, just like mine," she said. "I went home and asked my father, Sammy Abrams, who went by Sammy Ford, if he knew him. He said 'of course I do!'"

State House workers were privy to many distinguished visitors in the day, including, among them, General Eisenhower, who arrived in a motorcade while he was running for president. "Comedian Fred Allen came in one day with his wife, because he owed back taxes from a home they owned in [Massachusetts](#)," said Davidson. Vaughn Monroe, a bandleader and actor who hosted CBS-TV's "The Vaughn Monroe Show" in the '50s and appeared on popular television shows including "Bonanza," "The Ed Sullivan Show," and "American Bandstand," led an orchestra before the

House of Representatives.

"Cardinal Cushing came in regularly for his donations, and one time, I was in the same elevator with him," she recalled.

When **Israel** became a state, David Ben-Gurion was invited. "He came with about ten soldiers from Israel, and most were black," said Davidson. "They lined up outside, across the front steps."

Ben-Gurion spoke, and was acknowledged by Governor Paul Dever. "I remember his white hair flying in the air," Davidson recollected. "And not one of us had a camera."

Davidson finally left her employment at the State House when she began raising three children, but the memories remain.

*(Full disclosure: the author of this article is one of those children.)*