



CELEBRATION For many decades, Danny Stein has photographed Orthodox Jews on the Lower East Side, including these men at a wedding.

Old Neighborhood Vanishes

A CENTURY ago, when Israel Zangwill's play "The Melting Pot" opened in New York, the immigrant protagonist, David Quixano, proclaimed from a Lower East Side tenement: "What is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labor and look forward?"

Few neighborhoods have embodied the melting pot — and its successor agenda, multiculturalism — more than the Lower East Side, which has been evolving from the first home for newly arrived foreigners to a neighborhood for gentrification.

For nearly half a century, Danny Stein has captured that demographic churning in an archive of photographs celebrating the Orthodox Jewish community that resisted Zangwill's metaphor a century ago but that has dwindled in the past decades.

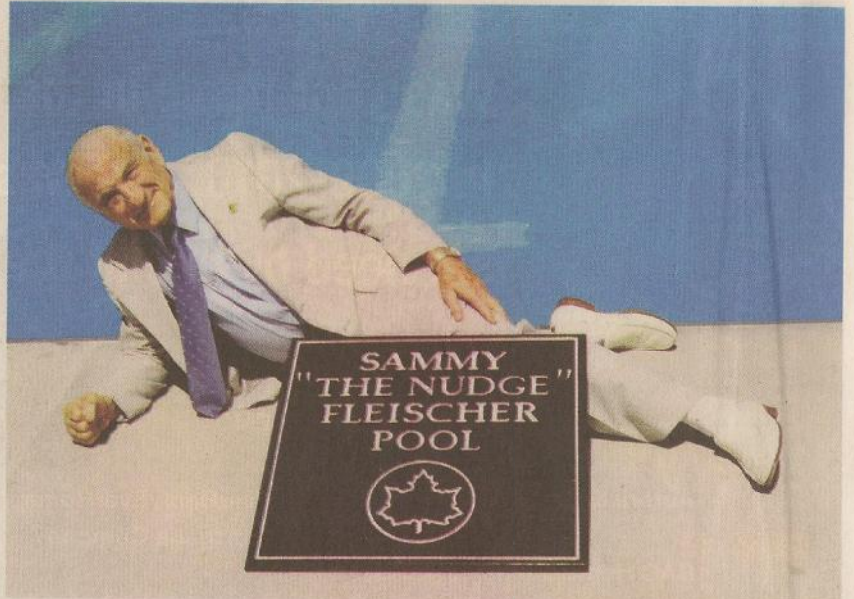
"The Lower East Side Jewish community has lost to the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side and the suburbs," said Juda Engelmayer, an owner of Kossar's Bialys on Grand Street.

An Orthodox Jew himself, Mr. Stein was born on the Lower East Side, as was his father. He has lived there for most of his 58 years except for a few after his family moved to Israel when he was a child. His brother-in-law gave him a camera about 50 years ago. "I didn't stop," he said, even as the cerebral palsy that afflicted his legs and left arm restricted his movement.

Mr. Stein has chronicled countless religious and civic rituals and, as a professional photographer and civic advocate, has become a gregarious community fixture himself. "The Orthodox are slowly declining because a lot of the original congregants have been dying or moving away," he said. "But new blood comes in, and the neighborhood still has a very upbeat mode."

The neighborhood may have changed. Mr. Stein has not.

SAM ROBERTS



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANNY STEIN

CHANGING TIMES Sammy Fleischer, a neighborhood advocate, with a pool sign at Hamilton Fish Park in 1993. Mr. Fleischer had led a campaign to renovate the park and pool, which over the years had been neglected by the city and became a center for drug activity. Left, Essex Street between Grand and Hester Streets in 1992.



rites Left, a scribe copying the Torah by hand. Below, a bride standing under a traditional wedding canopy. "Danny's archive is a story of a community," said Clayton Patterson, a neighborhood artist and videographer. "He has a history that no one else has, though it continues to be overlooked."



CEREMONY A kaporot ceremony on Delancey Street in 2001, in which Orthodox Jews swing live chickens over their heads to symbolically transfer sins to the chickens, and then slaughter them on the eve of Yom Kippur.