

(Segment on development of *Rags* referred to on p. 161 and p. 376, note 45, in Paul R. Laird, *The Musical Theater of Stephen Schwartz: From Godspell to Wicked and Beyond*)

The Development of *Rags* in Scripts

The development of *Rags* as a show from its beginnings in the early 1980s to the latest revisions in 2007 may be observed in a number of scripts that were owned by Joseph Stein, three scripts in NYPL Billy Rose Theatre Collection, and other documents. (Each of these scripts is listed in the book on p. 410 of the Bibliography.) The basic themes of Jewish immigrants, the beginnings of the labor movement among garment workers, and the difficult world that immigrants encountered have remained throughout the show's history, as have some minor themes, such as the Yiddish theater, but characters have changed and songs have appeared, disappeared, taken on new meanings, and re-appeared.

Joseph Stein titled his first version of the show *A New Musical*, crossing out the word "Comedy" after this title. It is copyright 1981, and clipped to the first page of the script is a note to "Morris" that states, "Here's the first draft of my new show." The list of characters includes:

- Avram, in his 50s
- Esther, his older daughter, about 23 (later this entry was scratched out, reflecting her disappearance after this version)
- Bella, his younger daughter, about 19 (later an arrow was drawn to her name, perhaps showing that her character becomes more important)
- Harry, his son, about 30
- David, Harry's son, 8 years old
- Anna, Avram's sister
- Jack, Anna's husband
- Rachel Brodsky, a peddler, about 50
- Gertie, a prostitute
- Mike, a local gangster
- Bronfman, a shop owner
- Sam, a shop worker
- Max, a shop worker
- Saul, a shop worker
- Shop Foreman
- Rosa, a shop worker
- Mordecai Rosen, an actor
- Mike's Mother
- Two Rabbis
- Peddlers, Policemen, Workers, etc.

Avram here resembles Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*. He is an earthy, older man, given to witty sayings and trying to enjoy life. A summary of the play follows:

Act 1

Scene 1 – On a summer afternoon in the summer of 1912, on a section of the Battery. Avram and his family arrive as immigrants. People on the docks hawk places to stay and employment opportunities. Avram leads his family to find Sussex Street, where his sister and brother-in-law (Jack and Anna Blumberg) live.

Scene 1A – A pantomime of the family making its way through Lower New York, with Avram asking questions.

Scene 2 – They arrive at the Blumberg's apartment. Avram's sister invites his family to stay; Jack is not pleased.

Scene 3 – Avram and David start to sell from a peddler's cart stocked from Jack's store. David immediately shows his natural sales abilities and they meet Rachel Brodsky, who operates another cart and takes an interest in the unmarried Avram. They also encounter the prostitute Gertie, and Mike, a gangster who demands protection money. He gives Avram a break for the first week. Stein's stage instructions call for a song at the end of the scene and a market pantomime.

Scene 4 – Harry and Esther have found work in two different sweatshops. Harry works in Bronfman's shop, alongside Sam. Esther works elsewhere between Saul and Max. Stein suggests a "work-song" about the unpopularity of the bosses. Sam, a union organizer, befriends Harry. Max makes a pass at Esther and Saul defends her, but he can only push it so far because the foreman is Max's brother-in-law. They reprise the work-song.

Scene 4A – Esther and Saul are mutually attracted. Stein suggests a song either about a positive first impression, or with Saul admitting his foolishness in losing his temper with Max.

Scene 5 – At the Blumberg's apartment that evening, Bella complains that she must stay home, and Esther says that she met a man at work. Avram and David arrive home with their receipts for the day, but they receive little after Jack deducts his "expenses." They sing "It's Not What We Expected," and Stein suggests that Harry might enter, tired, during the number.

Scene 6 – Back at the two sweatshops. At Bronfman's, Sam presses Harry to join the union, but Harry wants no trouble. Sam resists Bronfman and leaves. At the other shop, the foreman will only unlock the door for Rosa to go to the bathroom when she complains loudly. Rosa meddles in the growing relationship between Esther and Saul, and Saul asks Esther to marry him.

Scene 7 – Among the peddlers, Avram and Rachel watch David, the natural salesman. Gertie takes a liking to David. Bella is there, pestered by the gangster Mike, and Gertie intervenes. Avram warns Bella to stay away from Mike. David accidentally trips a teenager who has robbed another peddler, foiling the attempt, and the young man threatens David.

Scene 8 – Later that day, in the market area, Bella meets Mordecai Rosen, a Yiddish theater actor. He charms her and invites her to a play, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, as "improved" by Boris Kaminsky. Avram sees them together and does not approve,

but Bella goes with Mordecai for coffee. Stein suggests that Bella sings about her interest in Mordecai.

Scene 9 – The teenager who threatened David returns with a friend and they assault David in a choreographed scene.

Scene 10 – Avram looks for David, whom he knows to be in trouble. He knocks on Gertie's door and finds her with Jack, who begs Avram not to tell anyone. (Avram does not tell, but he uses this knowledge to bargain for better treatment from Jack.) A policeman has found David and brings him to Avram, who closes the act while singing a song of comfort to the boy.

Act 2

Scene 1 – Jack now lets Avram and David keep more of what they have earned. Bella reads a play that Mordecai gave her, and Harry speaks of his hatred for Bronfman and his desire to become an independent tailor. Esther brings Saul to meet Avram, who is initially cool about the match, but by the end of the scene he has given his blessing to their marriage, spurred on by Saul urging David to attend school. The scene ends with a song about a new member of the family.

Scene 2 – On the roof of the tenement, Bella reads the play aloud. Mike finds her. Avram's family discovers them together and tries to force Mike to leave her alone, but his mother manages to pull him away, blaming everyone else for the incident.

Scene 3 – On the street, Mike attacks Avram's cart and demands money, but his mother observes this and drags Mike away.

Scene 4 – Esther and Saul are to be married, but the rabbi is late, and they look for another. There are two musicians, but they have played every tune they know, so Mordecai entertains by reciting some of *Hamlet* and advertising his play. (Stein suggests that this might be a song.) The actor shows interest in another girl, and Bella walks away angrily. A second rabbi arrives to perform the wedding, but is humorously interrupted by the first, who had been detained. The scene concludes with a song.

Scene 5 – Saul and Esther have returned to work after the wedding, and their co-workers congratulate them. There is a fire in the shop and the door is locked. All manage to escape but Saul and Rosa, who perish.

Scene 6 – At Bronfman's shop, Harry rebels and everybody goes on strike with him, taking their machines with them because Bronfman charges them a user's fee and they believe they have purchased them.

Scene 7 – Harry, Sam, and others picket Bronfman's shop, and are joined by Avram, David, Esther, and Bella. Avram baits Bronfman, and some strikebreakers arrive, who start a fight. The police come and run off the strikebreakers, and Bronfman feels that he must negotiate.

Scene 8 – At the Blumberg's apartment, Avram's family prepares to move to Rachel's extra rooms, but Avram will not marry her. Harry is starting a tailor's shop in spare space in Jack's shop, and David is going to school.

As Stein continued to develop this story, he added the character of Rebecca. David becomes her son, and the characters of Harry and Esther disappear. Bella becomes more important, and Mordecai disappears, but a scene at the Yiddish

theater is added. Saul becomes the union organizer who shows interest in Rebecca, and she finds her husband a different man than when he left Russia.

The next script in terms of possible chronology appears to be an undated version in which Strouse, Schwartz, and Guber and their roles are named on the title page. There are a number of indications in this script that show it to be only a few steps removed from Stein's original draft. Changes in characters have taken place, and this version also has Schwartz's draft lyrics for several songs. It begins with a note that suggests that black-and-white photographs of immigrants that are "appropriate to the scene being played..." should be projected throughout the show.

Act 1

Scene 1 – The scene opens at Ellis Island in spring 1910 with guards calling out instructions for immigrants. "Greenhorns"—sung by immigrants and Americans who cynically exploit them—pervades the scene. Those who have fulfilled all requirements at Ellis Island are transported to the Battery. Immigrants greet family members while salesmen offer work and places to live. Rebecca looks for her husband Nathan; a policeman discovers that she is an unescorted female and starts to return her to customs. Bella convinces her father Avram to say that Rebecca is his niece. The families have not met before. Together they start to look for where their relatives live.

Scene 1A – The two families walk through Lower Manhattan while period scenes are projected and Avram asks for directions in pantomime. Rebecca and Avram sing phrases to Bella and David about how they are embarking on a new life, including "Now it belongs to you..." The script states that this is a motif that recurs.

Scene 2 – They looked for Nathan on his street, where people had heard of him but they did not know where he was. Rebecca and David go with Avram and Bella to the home of Jack and Anna Blumberg, his sister and brother-in-law. Anna allows Rebecca and David to stay, but Jack is hostile. Avram notes that he has left his son Herschel in Russia, and he will come to America when possible. Rebecca and David are left alone to sleep, and they sing "Old World Lullaby/New World Rag," later renamed "Brand New World."

Scene 3 – They are on the street the next morning, where Rebecca leaves David with Avram so that she can go to a job that she has found. Jack brings a pushcart with goods for Avram and David to sell; at one point he sang a song here called "That's Business," but it has already been cut and only the title appears in the script. Jack tells them the basics on selling from the cart. Avram meets Rachel, a woman selling from an adjoining cart, and the prostitute Gertie. Mike, a gangster, comes to collect his protection money, but he spares Avram on his first day and notices his pretty daughter.

Scene 4 – (Perhaps showing how the script was reworked; this was Scene 7, but someone wrote "4" over "7.") Rebecca is at a social worker's office, seeking help in finding Nathan. She flees the office when the social worker suggests placing David in an orphanage while Rebecca works.

Scene 5 – At the shop where Rebecca works, the seamstress Rosa wants to use the restroom, and the boss Bronfman reluctantly unlocks the exit door for her. Rebecca meets Saul, a secret labor organizer. Saul and Rebecca share the dialog heard

between Sam and Harry in the previous version. Rebecca admits that she seeks her husband, but he has not written her in years and had a history of disappearing from the family in Russia. Max, another worker, expresses interest in Rebecca and Saul objects, starting a fight that Bronfman stops, saying that the next time this happens Saul will be fired. At one point, they sang a song about how they hate Bronfman, but it has been cut.

Scene 6 – (A “5” has been written over the “6.”) Bella and Anna are at the apartment, and Bella is unhappy because all she does is stay home and sew. Jack arrives with bananas, a holdover from the first version. Also, as before, Avram and David return from the day’s work and Jack takes most of the money they earned. Bella cannot stand the situation and runs out, pursued by her father.

Scene 7 – Bella and Avram sing “Rags” with a rag-seller, occasionally offering his street-call. Avram tries to calm her, but she tells him to open his eyes. She sews rags all day and wears others. Bella flees north, reaching perhaps 14th Street, where there are shops selling fine clothes and well-dressed men and women in a vision, prompting Bella ruefully to sing of her ethnicity and ragged clothing.

Scene 8 – On the street during daytime, Bella meets Mike, who wants to show her around. Gertie sees them and realizes that Mike wants to make her a prostitute. She objects and Mike slaps her. Avram warns Bella to stay away from Mike, and she meets the charming actor Mordecai. Avram and his fellow peddler Rachel start to talk; she clearly is interested in him. Avram is kind to Gertie after she takes an interest in David. Like in the last version, David inadvertently trips a teenage robber who is trying to escape, and the young man threatens David. (In this scene, there are at least two indications of how this script was adapted from a previous version. Bella’s meeting with Mordecai has several deleted lines and changed page numbers from another version of the scene. Also, David calls Avram “Grandpa” several times, their relationship in the first version, but not here.)

Scene 9 – Back in Bronfman’s shop, Saul and Rebecca share their sandwiches (as Sam and Harry did before), and Rosa teases them about their obvious attraction (as she did Saul and Esther in the first version). Saul objects to Bronfman about their lack of a day off, and Bronfman fires him. Rebecca acts dedicated to her work out of fear of losing her job, and nobody follows Saul out as he tries to organize the workers.

Scene 9A – Saul waits for Rebecca outside the shop and argues with her, but also kisses her. She reminds him that she is married, but he asks her to get a divorce. A possible song was deleted earlier in the scene, and Saul sings a small excerpt of “Brand New World.” She says she must get home to David but Saul may come if he would like, and he goes into the shop to get his tools. Rebecca, alone on stage, sings “Up Until Today” about how everything seemed clear until Saul came into her life.

Scene 10 – Saul comes to the Blumberg apartment with Rebecca and meets everybody. David says that he does not want to attend school, but Saul argues that he should, impressing Avram.

Scene 11 – Avram meets Bella with Mordecai on the street, and the men do not get along. Their dialog includes lines that pass between Avram and Nathan in later versions, moments that make Avram seem like Tevye. Bella and Mordecai leave, and Rachel tells Avram that Bella needs a mother. She sings “Three Sunny Rooms” to

interest Avram, and he joins in the song. They become engaged. The teenager that David tripped in Scene 8 returns with friends to beat David. He runs off, chased by the thugs and Avram.

Scene 12 – Avram knocks on Gertie’s door and finds Jack with her. The scene is similar to the first version.

Scene 13 – A policeman carrying the injured David finds Avram and hands the boy over.

Scene 14 – Avram brings David to the apartment. Saul and Rebecca enter. Anna goes to get a doctor. Nathan finds his family, but is at first mistaken for the doctor. He is unpleasant, calling the apartment a hovel and demanding food. Saul leaves the house since Rebecca’s husband has returned.

Act 2

Scene 1 – Rebecca and Nathan speak alone, but things are awkward. Nathan asks her about Saul and is surprised to hear that she works, but admits that they will need the money. Nathan lives on schemes. He sings “Yankee Boy” about his assimilation and desire for material success. Rebecca and Nathan get ready for bed and she responds to his advances. Nathan sings “Yankee Boy” as a duet with David.

Scene 2 – On the street, we learn more about Nathan. He obviously has been one of Gertie’s steady clients, and he also knows Mike, who asks him about a widow he had been seeing. Nathan asks Mike for money, but Mike is more interested in Bella.

Scene 2A – Mike finds Bella by herself and makes a strong play for her, but she rejects him. Mike slaps her and vows revenge on her father.

Scene 2B – Bella is with Mordecai on the stage of the Yiddish theater, and he gives her an acting lesson.

Scene 3 – Back with the peddlers, Avram announces that his son Herschel will join him soon. Along with David, he convinces Jack to stop charging rent for the pushcart. Mike and his thugs come to Avram to demand money, but together the peddlers fight them off.

Scene 4 – Nathan, Rebecca, and David are at home getting ready for the wedding of Avram and Rachel; Nathan comments obnoxiously. Saul, who earlier had told David about baseball, shows up with equipment to play with the boy, but Nathan does not understand his intentions and they argue. Rebecca asks Saul to leave.

Scene 5 – In a meeting hall, a scene ensues like the first version with two rabbis, but now Avram marries Rachel. Mordecai entertains again from his Yiddish version of *Hamlet*, and the script again suggests a song. Bella is at work, and a young woman comes in to say that she has died in a fire.

Scene 6 – Avram, his family, and mourners are at home singing “Kaddish” for Bella.

Scene 7 – Rebecca is back at work, where Bronfman says he wants to hear no more about the fire in the other factory. He infuriates Rebecca, who leads the employees out on strike.

Scene 8 – Saul, Rebecca, and the workers picket in front of Bronfman’s shop. Deleted is a moment when Saul asks Rebecca if she is happy with Nathan. Avram joins the picketing and baits Bronfman in a similar way that he did in the first version, and once again Bronfman’s strikebreakers are run off and he is forced to negotiate, this

time with Saul. Nathan arrives and leaves Rebecca when she will not stop picketing. Rebecca and Saul agree to discuss matters besides labor.

Scene 9 – Back at the Blumberg's apartment, Avram has found two rabbis: one to divorce Rebecca from Nathan, and the other to marry her to Saul. David has decided to go to school, and resolves to be strong and rich. He sings "It's Gonna Belong to Me," a strident declaration of his new goals, including the suggestion that he will be a better "Yankee Boy" than his father is. The scene changes to the Battery, where Americans are again singing "Greenhorns" and David continues his own song. Hershel arrives to be with his father.

There are obvious weaknesses in this version. Characters require further fleshing out. Avram remains a sort of Tevye-like figure, but he is no longer the primary character. Bella starts to emerge, but her story has too many holes. Her relationship with Mordecai is left incomplete and we did not know that she had a job at a sweatshop before her death. It is strange that she misses her father's wedding. Rebecca is a major figure, but more needs to be made of her choice between Saul and Nathan, and her sudden conversion to the union cause at the end was not prepared. Nathan is a mystery at this point because we do not know what he has done for a living, and we do not understand why he would object to Rebecca's union activities. It is not even clear how he found his family. David has learned about America, but the lesson announced in his final song is expedient rather than uplifting. Several scenes still require songs. On the positive side, the story captures a number of worthwhile themes and there are some strong scenes with songs, including "Old World Lullaby/New World Rag," "Rags," and "Three Sunny Rooms."

Clearly, of course, the collaborators noted these, and other, problems and continued work. The next evidence of revisions available for study was a script of Act 1 dated 20 July 1985 in the NYPL Billy Rose Theatre Collection. This is more than a year before *Rags* opened on Broadway. The story has traveled far since the last, undated version, with Rebecca's character more compelling and more songs. New characters have appeared. Bella, for example, now has another love interest. Ben got to know her on the ship coming to New York, and he is anxious to become a success so they can marry. A number of the elements found in the Broadway version of 1986 appear here. The following includes what is distinctive about the July 1985 version.

The show opens on the deck of the ship bringing immigrants to the United States. An immigrant plays a concertina and, nostalgic for his home, sings "I Remember." Rebecca and Bella are already friends. Rebecca sings "Hiding in the Wheatfield," a memory of the terror she felt during the pogrom. (In later renderings, the text of this song becomes the introduction to "Children of the Wind.") The scene at Ellis Island is similar, again with the song "Greenhorns." They cannot find Nathan, and everyone ends up at the apartment with Avram's relatives. Rebecca and David sing "Brand New World," but with many of the same lyrics as the previous "Old World Lullaby/New World Rag." Rebecca leaves David with Avram at the pushcart and goes off to find work and assistance in locating Nathan. They sing the trio "A Way to You," with Rebecca and her son longing for Nathan and Avram looking forward to seeing his son Herschel again. She puts an advertisement in a newspaper

for Nathan and goes to a social worker. The song "Penny A Tune" introduces life in the sweatshops and other characteristic scenes in a long montage. Avram and David learn about protection rackets their pushcart. In a composite scene that begins with Rebecca in Bronstein's sweatshop, Saul fails to unionize the shop because Rebecca needs the work. When she leaves the shop that evening, Saul confronts her. He tells her in the song "Make Trouble" that one must demand better conditions, and they are attracted to each other. Saul starts to teach English to Rebecca and David, and takes them to the Yiddish theater, where they see a Jewish version of *Hamlet*. Hamlet sings "It's Hard To Be a Prince," which ends with a strong Zionist call. Saul and Rebecca realize they are falling in love, and once alone she sings "Up Until Today." Ben, a young man from the ship who is interested in Bella, buys an expensive gramophone for her.

At the Blumberg apartment, Bella and Rebecca are like sisters. Ben finally finds Bella and gives her the gramophone. He plays a recording of an Irish song, "For My Mary" and adapts the lyrics to describe Bella. He will say anything to impress her, which Avram discovers quickly when he gets home. Avram asks Ben to leave. Jack and Anna have arrived and a general argument ensues, causing Bella to flee. Avram catches her in the street and they sing "Rags." The cast sings "On the Fourth Day of July." Bronstein has made his workers report for the holiday, and Saul objects, so the boss fires him. Saul sings a reprise of "Make Trouble" and tries to inspire a walkout, but Rebecca will not join him, and her intransigence causes Saul to leave alone. The scene also includes a lyric called "Golden Land," perhaps part of "On the Fourth Day of July." When Rebecca returns to the Blumberg's apartment, she finds that David has been injured in a fight. A note in the script says that the lyrics for her song at this point will follow. Soon thereafter Nathan finds them, and the act concludes.

Although this rendering includes only the first act, the story now makes more sense and the role of the music is clearer. Rebecca is the dominant character instead of Avram. Bella emerges as a figure with desires and motivations, and Ben's introduction gives her a reason for hope. Jack and Anna have receded into the background, now little more than those who put up with the visitors at their apartment. Gertie is gone and Jack is no longer her client. Avram's longing to see his son again appears in one song, removed in subsequent versions. The relationship between Saul and Rebecca has drawn more attention, allowing Rebecca's feelings for Saul and sense of duty for her husband to become a major issue in the second act. With this version, the essential events of the first act that appear in the Broadway version one year later are in place.

The next available script was again at the NYPL Billy Rose Theatre Collection. It is dated March 1986, three months before *Rags* began its out-of-town run in Boston. It has much in common with Act 1 as it existed the previous summer, described above but there are differences as well, which will be highlighted below.

The act now opens in the ship's steerage, where poor immigrants rode. The action is similar with the song "I Remember," but "Hiding in the Wheatfield" is no longer present. The new song is "Don't Forget Me," sung by Rebecca and Bella as they acknowledge the friendship they have found on board. The scenes at the Battery and what follows are similar to the July 1985 version until Rebecca flees from the social worker. The song she sings here is "Children of the Wind," which

includes some of the same lyrics as the earlier "A Way to You." "Children of the Wind" is also the trio sung by Rebecca, David, and Avram when Rebecca leaves them at the pushcart. Later, onstage klezmer musicians begin "Penny A Tune," in which they imitate peddlers' street cries and sweatshop sounds. One of the song's lyrics speaks of how street songs and factory sounds help develop jazz. There is much action during the song. Rebecca goes to work in Bronstein's shop and becomes disgusted with his treatment of workers. She leaves with her machine (for which she pays a user fee) to the accompaniment of the union song "Bread and Freedom." Bella, working at the Blumberg's apartment on piecework with Anna, sings about her boyfriend Ben who will someday find her and marry her. Avram pays the protection racket. The stage directions state that at times more than one scene on the stage is visible, and by the end of the song all of the tunes and situations combine as the actors form a frieze similar to a photograph of workers on the Lower East Side. For some reason, the next scene in this version contradicts Rebecca's previous departure from the shop. The song "Make Trouble" has now become the introduction of "Easy for You," an extended sequence where Rebecca and Saul both find the other self-serving in their position on labor issues. They also become mutually attracted, and in a montage that takes place over time, Saul starts seeing Rebecca and David, teaching them to read English and espousing socialist principles. They visit the Yiddish theater, which again includes the song "It's Hard to Be a Prince." Rebecca and Saul are falling in love, but Rebecca asks him to leave for the night. She sings a new song, "Blame It on the Summer Night," replacing "Up Until Today." Much is similar to July 1985 to the end of the act. The final scene again opens with "On the Fourth Day of July." Saul and Rebecca kiss. The protection racket asks David for one dollar (Avram is not there), and the boy refuses to pay, quoting Saul's socialist philosophy. The hoods assault the boy. Rebecca is furious at Saul for teaching David things that have resulted in his injuries. She starts to sing "Nobody Will Hurt Us Again," and by the end of the song Nathan arrives to be with his family, apparently having finally seen the newspaper advertisement.

Act 2 opens with a spotlight on Nathan, looking dapper with his hat and cane, singing a short reprise of "On the Fourth Day of July" with Rebecca. In dialog with his family and their friends, we learn that he has changed his name to "Nat Harris" as he tries to assimilate, and he works for the Tammany Hall political machine. Nathan, Rebecca, and David sing "Yankee Boy." Nathan hopes to be named a ward leader and is concerned because Rebecca already told friends that he will get the job. Nathan cannot afford a new suit to impress his colleagues, but she has saved enough money. On the street among the peddlers, Bella comes to announce to her father that she will no longer work at the apartment. She wants a job at a sweatshop, and ignores his objections. With Avram concerned about Bella, he starts to speak with Rachel, who sings "Three Sunny Rooms," about how they could be happy at her large apartment and she could help with Bella. They become engaged. At the Cherry Street Café, the singer presents "The Cherry Street Café" about their distinguished and varied clientele. Nathan is there in his new suit with his political boss, "Big Tim" Sullivan, hoping to impress him. Rebecca joins them in a new dress, but she says several things that embarrass Nathan, who leaves her at the café. Saul is there and sees this, and he approaches Rebecca, who is cool to him. After Saul walks away,

they sing the duet “Wanting” about their continuing feelings for each other. Ben has a new job selling gramophones, but is having little success. David is there and curious how the machine works. He records a song. A family becomes interested after hearing some of the recording, and Ben realizes that the gramophones will allow families to record their children. In “The Sound of Love,” he becomes a successful retailer. Ben, in a new suit, finds Bella who gladly takes his arm.

At an evening meeting of the East Side Democratic Club in a decorated hall, Rebecca dances with “Big Tim” Sullivan dances with Rebecca, whom she charms. Sullivan names Nathan the new ward leader. Jack and Anna anticipate favors from Rebecca, a wish they express in a song perhaps titled “Mrs. Somebody.” David comes rushing into the hall to tell his mother that there has been a fire in Bella’s shop. Rebecca goes to the fire and sees her friend jump to her death. The stage changes to the service of mourning where Rebecca, bucking tradition, joins Avram and other men in singing “Kaddish.” (The script states that Rebecca’s lyric would follow.) On the street in front of Bronstein’s shop, workers picket, reprising “Bread and Freedom.” Nathan arrives and tells Rebecca that he will leave her if she does not come home with him. Rebecca sings “Dancing with the Fools” as she considers her options, and decides to stay. Nathan leaves, and Saul invites Rebecca to speak at the platform. At the Blumberg’s apartment, Avram mourns for Bella, singing some of “I Remember.” He has married Rachel, but he cannot bring himself to help her pack for him to move to her place. Ben is leaving New York and comes to say farewell. When he hears that Avram might return to Russia, Ben berates him for not living his life; Bella no longer can. This startles Avram, who says good-bye to Ben, and starts to help Rachel pack. Saul leaves Rebecca and David because he has been asked to help organize workers in Boston, but he allows that he might return. For the finale, the scene shifts to the Battery, where new immigrants and Americans reprise “Greenhorns.” The finale includes segments from “Now It Belongs to Me” and “Children of the Wind,” the latter sung by Rebecca and chorus.

The script from March 1986 confirms that much of the basic plot of Act 1 had been worked out by the previous script, from July 1985. The March 1986 includes most major events as they appeared in Act 2 when the show opened in August. Rebecca has found Nathan, but they have adjustment problems after six years of separation. Nathan is desperate to become a ward leader and wants his wife to help impress Big Tim Sullivan. Bella is determined to get a job outside of the apartment, and Avram marries Rachel, partly to help him deal with Bella. Nathan gets his position with Rebecca’s help, but Bella’s death in a shop fire radicalizes Rebecca and she helps lead a strike. This causes Nathan, whose party opposes labor, to leave his wife. A major issue at the end is what to do with Saul. Here, the script allows that he might return, less certain than previous versions.

Work on the script continued through spring 1986 as they prepared for the Boston opening on 8 July. The next script available for this study bears the date 22 June 1986, and Stein identified it as the “Boston Script.” It does not provide a single moment in the show’s development because the scene and song list dates from 23 May, and there are dated revisions in the script from both June and July, some that conflict with the 23 May list, meaning that this source documents the summer’s creative struggle. Included with the script is a fascinating “Outline—Rebecca’s

Story” dated 14 July 1986, telling her story alone in the context of each scene. It was perhaps recognition that she was the most important character and that the show’s success depended on how well her story was told. This document also shows that major plot points remained undecided. Below we consider the most important points and changes from the script.

On board ship, Rebecca and Bella no longer sing “Don’t Forget Me,” but they do sing a few lines about their friendship at the end of “I Remember Summer Evenings” (a new title for “I Remember” in the 23 May list). There remains uncertainty as to when Rebecca, Avram, and David sing “Children of the Wind” in this scene, and Rebecca does not go to the newspaper office, meaning that we do not know how Nathan finds his family at the end of act. In a new idea from 22 June, Rebecca speaks to her missing husband in the social worker’s office, comparing her life as a Jewish woman in Russia with her current need to find work. Her faith pulls her through, because she knows that God will bring them together soon. The basic thrust of all of the action during “Penny A Tune” remains, but Rebecca returns to thwarting Saul’s attempt to organize Bronstein’s shop rather than stalking out with her machine. Bella sings of her Ben to Anna as they do piecework, and we see Ben working in a cigar shop loathing the smell, hardly the tycoon that Bella describes. Later, the song from the Yiddish theater scene has become “Cheer Up, Hamlet,” rather than “It’s Hard to Be A Prince.” Late in the act, David is still beaten by hoods when he refuses to pay protection money, but his mother is not there to protect him. Instead, Avram returns before the hoods come, and he tries to protect the boy. As David flees at the end, the choir sings about the July 4 celebration. The essential action at the end of the act, with Nathan’s arrival and Rebecca rejecting Saul, did not change from the previous version.

Early in Act 2, the song “Uptown” was added at this point, and it remained in the show. At the end of the scene Nathan subtly says that he will move the sleeping David to the chair so that as husband and wife they will have most of the room to themselves. Alone on stage after he leaves, Rebecca sings a bit of “I Remember,” a final remembrance of her homeland. Bella announcing her intention to find a job and the engagement of Rachel and Avram proves to be movable in this source, and this is certainly the case because both are disconnected from Rebecca’s story. The scene at the East Side Democratic Club was shortened, with the deleting of the song for Jack and Anna and the extraneous dancing. Rebecca dances with Big Tim Sullivan and charms him, obviously helping Nathan become ward leader. Sullivan names Nathan to the post, and then David comes in to tell his mother that there is a fire in Bella’s shop. Rebecca leaves immediately. Added here was an attempt to explain Rebecca’s sudden interest in labor activism. She arrives at the fire and sees Bella jump to her death. Later she sings “Kaddish” with the men. Avram, despite Jewish tradition, joins her mourning. Rebecca’s lyrics for the prayer, primarily in Hebrew, have been added since March. Action then shifts to Bronstein’s shop, where Rebecca still works, despite Nathan’s return. She places a black bow on her sewing machine, and her co-worker Rosa expresses her condolences about Bella’s death. Bronstein yells that he wants no talking and removes Rebecca’s bow from the machine. She protests, and Bronstein tells her to leave. All workers leave with their machines and sing the union song, “Bread and Freedom.” In this script Saul makes his final

appearance at the subsequent union rally; his possible future with Rebecca remains unaddressed. The finale at Battery Park changed substantially. Rebecca and David sing together "Now It Belongs to Me," and then we return to the Battery where the Americans sing "Greenhorns" while Avram and his family greet Herschel. Rebecca concludes the show by reprising "Children of the Wind" in front of a silhouette of the Statue of Liberty. David runs to join her, and they walk off together.

The plot to *Rags* is now better defined than it has been in previous versions, but questions remain. Perhaps the biggest problem is the character of Nathan, who remains shallow, short on motivation, and with holes in his story. How has he found his family? What is his backstory? This lack of information not only affects his character, because this is Rebecca's husband, the man that she crossed the ocean to meet. If she is going to reject him now and start out a life on her own with a son, the audience needs to know more about Nathan to understand her decision. Another issue becomes Rebecca's job, which Nathan dislikes. After he has been named ward leader, why would Rebecca still be working in a sweat shop? Even if they could use the money, it would seem that Nathan would want her out of that situation, especially since he is now on the management side of any labor issue.

Rags is a crowded plot. Musicals traditionally had at least two couples, often one more serious and the other intended for comic effect. This is a serious musical play, so a truly comic couple would be out of place, but the relationship between Avram and Rachel is lighter. They are older, looking for companionship, and their story can be told with a few lines of introduction in earlier scenes and with one scene that includes "Three Sunny Rooms." Rebecca is caught between Nathan and Saul with the union movement, a complicated story that requires considerable exposition and development. In the Boston script there is no closure for her relationship with Saul, but this changes in later versions. The third couple in *Rags* is Bella and Ben, which helps crowd the plot, but the character of Bella develops usefully in her chafing at her father's strictures, driving him towards Rachel, and it is Bella's death that radicalizes Rebecca and resolves the lead character's situation with Nathan. Ben is less necessary, but he represents the younger generation and how it questions traditions (like Perchik in *Fiddler on the Roof*) and helps illustrate another side of Bella.

With the Boston script the creators have reached an important point on where songs should be and how they should advance the story, but some tunes still could play more significant roles. Each couple has musical moments, but a song for Nathan before he meets his family might help define his character. The songs for other characters include "Greenhorns" and "On the Fourth Day of July," and each adds to the overall effect, but a brief reprise of "Greenhorns" in the middle of show might further develop the theme of commercial exploitation of the immigrants.

Just how far the creators thought *Rags* still needed to come during the Boston run may be seen in the abovementioned document inserted in the Boston script. Entitled "Outline – Rebecca's Story," it is a scene-by-scene consideration of the principal character's motivations, actions, and reactions. It is dated 14 July 1986, six days after *Rags* opened in Boston. No author's name appears, and although it makes sense that Joseph Stein would have written it. This outline does not correspond to the Boston script in every detail, and it mentions moments that someone believed

needed changing. In the early scene at the Battery, the document suggests that part of Rebecca's backstory, such as her husband's six-year absence, might be presented, and more of her backstory might appear when she talks to the social worker, such as the way the Cossacks attacked David with whips. A simple parenthetical "why" in the document, when Saul tries to persuade Rebecca to help him, suggests that the audience does not know enough about Saul's union activities and what has happened in this shop. Late in Act 1, the writer describes a discussion between Saul and Rebecca that shows how much she has changed and become more American. Early in Act 2, when Nathan and Rebecca speak alone, this document suggests that Nathan might say that he does not know a trade, but in the United States he can live off the fact that people like him. This comment appears in other versions, but not in the Boston script. At the Democratic Club, the author suggests that we need to see Rebecca's conflict about helping Nathan get this job, because she must realize that he is against the unions. There are signs of this motivation in other versions. The author's suggestion for when Rebecca leads the strike at her sweatshop cannot be resolved with the Boston script. The scene appears in the script, but this outline seems to indicate that scene was not always in the script during the Boston preparations, because it says that something is needed showing Rebecca back at the shop before she is picketing. The author also wonders why she is there after Nathan is back in her life. In the picketing scene, the author asks if the audience needs to know that this is dangerous, that police or thugs might break up the demonstration with violence. (In a later version, Nathan does warn Rebecca that goons will be arriving soon.) Also, the outline's writer asks how Saul's story might be resolved. Clearly many questions continued to nag the creators.

As may be seen in the description above of the Broadway version, most of these questions were addressed in some way before the Broadway opening in late August, and there were other changes. In the August version, Bella does not know Rebecca before she induces her father to lie that this young woman in trouble is his niece. Rebecca places her newspaper advertisement, and after telling some of her backstory in anger to the social worker, she sings a solo version of "Children of the Wind." The song is no longer a trio for Rebecca, David, and Avram in the next scene. As Saul tries to organize Bronstein's shop we learn that he had worked there and been fired, giving him motivation to plague Bronstein. After singing "Rags" with her father, Bella flees north (as she had in versions before Boston), and has a lengthy fantasy watching well-dressed couples dance before she sings the last, solo verse of "Rags." A scene was added to provide backstory for Nathan. He is at a bar with Big Tim Sullivan and two other party hacks, telling them what he had done for them in Buffalo. Nathan lobbies hard for the position of ward leader and sings "What's Wrong with That?" with his colleagues, where he establishes that he is willing to do anything for the party. One of the men reads Rebecca's ad in the paper, and Nathan leaves to find his family, filling in that detail as well. He sings a solo verse of the scene's song that shows his ambivalent feelings about working for these men. Early in Act 2, Nathan tells Rebecca that he needs this job because he has no trade, but in America being liked makes politics a potential profession. Unlike the Boston script, he takes Rebecca's savings to buy new clothes to impress the party, and after he leaves Saul comes to see if David is better. Rebecca and Saul then sing "Wanting."

Rebecca only meets Big Tim Sullivan once, first embarrassing Nathan, and then impressing Sullivan while dancing with him. Ethnic dances from earlier versions of the scene are also back. Late in Act 2, Nathan warns Rebecca that she must leave the labor rally with him because he knows thugs are coming to break it up. This convinces Rebecca to side with the strikers.

After the brief Broadway run, the creators remained hopeful that it might be possible to rewrite the show and give it, if not a decent run on Broadway, at least a respectable life as a rental property for regional, community, and school theaters. Our study of *Rags* scripts, therefore, cannot stop here. The following scripts were also available for this study:

Candlelight Dinner Playhouse, Summit, Illinois, opened 7 May 1987.

A possible London production that never occurred, dated 13 January 1988.

Paper Mill Playhouse, Millburn, New Jersey, April 1999.

Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 2000.

Script available for rental from Rodgers and Hammerstein Library, revision from November 2005.

Script retitled "Brand New World," revisions of January 2007.

The revisions that Stein, Strouse, and Schwartz made for the Candlelight Dinner Playhouse came only months after the failure in New York. Stein, Strouse, and Schwartz tightened and shortened the show, but these changes seem to have been conceived for the limited possibilities of a dinner theater, because the next version included the restoration of several scenes deleted for the Candlelight version, which should not be considered a central part of the show's development.

The London script finds Stein and his collaborators planning for a large West End rendering of *Rags* with fourteen scenes in Act 1 and eleven scenes in Act 2. The creative team did make some major changes in this script, especially in the use of the song "What's Wrong With That?" The song "Children of the Wind" appears three times in the first five scenes: Rebecca sings it about her terrible Russian experiences to Bella in the first scene, then after fleeing from the social worker, and soon thereafter with Avram and David as a trio. Saul's experiences with teaching Rebecca and David about America have expanded to three scenes, the final one at the Yiddish theater. The scene before the Yiddish theater includes the "Learning Song," a title that has not appeared before, but similar material in earlier versions has been part of "Easy for You." The opening scene of Act 2 is again with Nathan, Rebecca, and her friends in the Cherry Street Café. The scene at the Democratic Club Hall has changed in terms of action and intention. There has been no previous meeting between Rebecca and Big Tim Sullivan. She enters with Nathan, both in their new clothes, and Rebecca at first embarrasses her husband by saying the wrong things, but later she dances with Sullivan and charms him. He jokes with Nathan about borrowing his

wife some day, and then Sullivan, Rebecca, Nathan, and cronies sing "What's Wrong With That?" The script includes no indication of discomfort for Rebecca when they sing about using violence to get rid of strikers. Sullivan names Nathan as new ward leader, and then David comes in with the news of the fire at Bella's shop, and Rebecca leaves with him. The remainder of the show is similar to the Broadway version, but Saul is present here at the end and he says that he is going to organize workers in Boston, but then he might return to be with Rebecca and David.

Over a decade later, the Paper Mill Playhouse production of *Rags* in November 1999 was directed by Jeffrey B. Moff and choreographed by Barbara Simon, wife of Charles Strouse. This version of the show has eleven scenes in Act 1 and eight scenes in Act 2, and it is clear that the show had changed over the last decade. Scene 1 in the ship's hold, along with "I Remember," again includes the song "Don't Forget Me" sung by Rebecca and Bella. Scene 2 at Ellis Island is similar, but the song "Brand New World" has now been moved here, sung by Rebeca, David, Avram, and Bella, meaning that it no longer sung by Rebecca and Bella at the Cohen's apartment. In Scene 3, they again go to Nathan's street address and find out that he has gone to Milwaukee, and in Scene 4 a more assertive Rebecca gives Jack her mother's silver brooch to pay for their lodging because she desires no charity. She sings a lullaby to David ("Shasha, Shasha, Duvedel"), which before had been an introduction to "Brand New World." Her interactions with the newspaper clerk, social worker and singing of "Children of the Wind" occur in Scene 5, but in a slightly different order. Scene 6 includes all of the action that surrounds the song "Penny A Tune" as well as Saul and Rebecca arguing through "Easy for You," and then Saul helps Rebecca and David to learn English. Scene 7 is at the Yiddish theater and Scene 8 is Saul kissing Rebecca and her performance of "Blame It on The Summer Night." In Scene 9, at the East Side Democratic Club, Nathan sings "What's Wrong With That?" with Sullivan and other cronies, and sees Rebecca's advertisement. Scene 10 progresses from Ben finding Bella at the Cohen's apartment to Bella and Avram singing "Rags." In the act's final scene, Rebecca pays to save David and then sings to Saul "We Didn't Come to America to Be Hurt Again." When Nathan shows up, Rebecca first attacks him for not being there when they needed him, but then he sings "Nothing Will Hurt You Again."

Act 2 opens on the tenement rooftop, and Nathan sings "Yankee Boy" with David, a song that earlier had disappeared when the act began at the Cherry Street Café. New dialog in Scene 2 is Bella and Rebecca, where they pledge to always be friends and Bella sings a short new song called "You Promised Me." Much of the remainder of the action is familiar, and the songs include "Uptown" and "Wanting." The second act proceeds in a recognizable fashion then until Scene 6, in the Cohen's apartment, before the confrontation at Bronstein's shop. Rebecca and David are getting ready to move to Nathan's apartment in the midst of the usual action, including Ben lecturing Avram about living life and spurring the mourning father back into action. As Rebecca and David leave, the boy starts to sing "Brand New World," but Rebecca silences him as if she has seen enough of America. Scene 7 is then Rebecca leading the strike at Bronstein's shop, and the final scene is the picketing where Nathan leaves Rebecca after she sings "Dancing with the Fools." The

finale takes place there rather than at Battery Park with the union song “Bread and Freedom” and Rebecca singing “Children of the Wind.”

The production at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Theatre was May 2000, only six months later, but the creators of *Rags* continued rewriting. The “Prologue” is now in the ship’s hold, and includes the songs “I Remember” and “Nobody Will Hurt Us Again,” the latter sung by Rebecca to David. Here, Rebecca and Bella have not met, but Bella and Avram rescue them at Ellis Island. Except for minor changes in action, Act 1 is very similar to the Paper Mill script. Some dialog between workers in Bronstein’s shop in Scene 7 was copied directly from a script dated 31 May 1987, showing how old versions remained part of the discussions. What have often been the first two scenes of Act 2 combine here, and there are a few new touches (such as Nathan singing some of “I Remember”), but the material is familiar. In Scene 2, Bella wants Rebecca’s help in finding a job and getting out of the apartment. As part of the scene they dance “The Brand New World Rag,” and then jointly inform Avram that Bella wants a job. Avram and Rachel conclude the scene with “Three Sunny Rooms.” Scene 3 is new, with Rebecca running into Saul. He wants to give a book to David and asks about him, but he is disgusted when he learns that Nathan works for the politicians at Tammany Hall. After he walks away, they sing “Wanting.” In Scene 4, Ben sells gramophones, and David brings Bella to see him, the boy’s own idea. Bella convinces Ben to tell the truth, and come see her father, and to get a hat to show some observance of Jewish laws. Ben sings a reprise of “Rags” with hopeful words. In Scene 5, Nathan and Rebecca meet Big Tim at the Democratic Club Hall. The three sing “What’s Wrong With That,” but Rebecca expresses her ambivalence about what Nathan has promised to do. Sullivan names him ward leader. Rebecca rushes out with David when he tells her that Bella’s shop is on fire. Scene 6 is the fire and “Kaddish,” and Scene 7 is Rebecca leading the walkout at Bronstein’s shop. The labor demonstration is in Scene 8, where Nathan confronts Rebecca. The song “Dancing with the Fools” has been cut. The ending has been changed back to an earlier version—not what concluded *Rags* at the Paper Mill—and Scene 9 proceeds very much like it has in earlier versions, first at the apartment and then the Battery.

(At this point the reader should return to p. 166 of *The Musical Theater of Stephen Schwartz* for the section on Schwartz’s email message to Joseph Stein from 7 April 2005.)

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