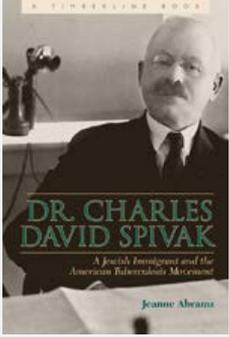


# Dr. Charles David Spivak: A Jewish Immigrant and the American Tuberculosis Movement

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**Author:** Jeanne E. Abrams

**Publishing:** Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2009. xi + 226 pages. Photos, endnotes, bibliography, index. 6" x 9". \$34.95 hardcover.

**Reviewer:** Rebecca Hunt

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Chaim Dovid Spivakofsky fled Russia in 1882 to make a new life in the United States. He began, as so many immigrants did, scratching out a living in New York City. But his destiny was not to be that of an ordinary man but one who worked to

obtain a medical education and then went on to become one of the international leaders in treating tuberculosis. His career took him to Philadelphia and eventually to Denver. As part of his journey he became Charles David Spivak.

Although he had a thriving medical practice in Philadelphia, Dr. Spivak moved his family to Denver in 1896 hoping to stave off his wife's lung problems. In Denver he found a vibrant Jewish community that was grappling with the ravages of tuberculosis. Unable to find a professional home at the new National Jewish Hospital, he helped create the Jewish Consumptive Relief Society (JCRS) in 1904. His care for the organization, his skill as a physician, and his tireless research and writing earned him a national reputation.

Author Jeanne Abrams amply documents Spivak's career. Unlike many biographies that tell of a man's professional career but neglect his family, she explores Spivak's private life, including his 1893 marriage to the talented, radical, and idealistic Jennie Charsky. The marriage produced David, Deena, and Ruth—all of whom contributed in both positive and negative ways to Spivak's life. Jennie had her own career teaching at Denver University as well as being a tireless advocate for JCRS and the Denver Jewish community. At the same time, she suffered for years from mental illness, causing her husband considerable anguish and driving him to seek further release in his work.

At the time of his 1927 death from cancer, Dr. Spivak had gained a reputation as a tuberculosis specialist, a leader in the American Jewish community, and as co-author of a Yiddish dictionary published in 1911. The eulogies at his funeral came from friends and admirers across the world. He was well loved, well respected, and sorely missed.

Jeanne Abrams is one of the leading scholars of both western American Jewish history and of the Jewish contributions to the tuberculosis movement in Denver. She teaches at Denver University and, as director, is the energy and spirit behind the Beck Archives at Penrose Library at DU. She has been instrumental in preserving buildings, artifacts, and archives from the Jewish Consumptive Relief Society.

Abrams's biography is solid work. She suffers a bit from the problem of many biographers of getting too close to her subject. At the same time, her book is well grounded in the study and historiography of American ethnic and immigration history. Readers are well served by her knowledge of the local medical establishment's battles with tuberculosis. Additionally her grounding in the broader Jewish-American history and her attention to detail make this more than a local history or biography. This book is a significant contribution to the study of Denver history and to Jewish American history.

### **Reviewer Info:**

Rebecca Hunt holds a PhD degree in social history of the American West from the University of Colorado Boulder. She is a senior instructor in history at the University of Colorado Denver. Her publications include *Swedish Medical Center: A Century of Caring* (with Sandy Durkin), published in 2005, and *Wyoming Medical Center: A Centennial History*, due out in December 2010. She also served as consulting historian on *The Presbyterian/St. Luke's Experience*, published in 2006, and on the documentary *A Woman to Match a Mountain*, released in 2008.