

Arthur Roth: A Trail Blazing Banker

By Janet Marks

The bank credit card, the bank parking lot, the drive-up bank window, things we take for granted today, are just some of the services consumers owe to an innovative Long Island banker. Arthur T. Roth's banking papers and memorabilia from 1926 through the 1970s recently were donated to the University by his son, Donald Roth, a 1964 graduate of C.W. Post. The story of Arthur Roth is the stuff of legend.

It was 1934, a time when Long Island was greener, communities sleepier, and banks were monuments to tradition. Roth, a high school graduate from a blue-collar family in the Bronx, joined a foundering Franklin Square National Bank and, as he moved up, turned Franklin into a force on Long Island and the 18th-largest bank in the country. At the same time, he changed the face of banking, by reaching out to small businesses, working people, returning G.I.'s, and fighting for new banking rules. Cherishing plumbers as much as plutocrats, his countless changes made loans and mortgages readily accessible and banks user-friendly. In doing so, he financed the homes and businesses that built Long Island.

With the same visionary spirit, Roth banned smoking (as early as the 1950's), hired the handicapped, and fought for equal tax treatment for commercial and savings banks. He worked for civic, educational, and cultural causes, and served as a trustee of Long Island University from 1954 to 1976.

The final chapter of Arthur Roth and the Franklin National Bank takes on a darker tone. Roth was forced out and the bank, under the control of financier Michele Sindona, was milked into insolvency. It was taken over by European American Bank and, in what might be called dramatic justice, its consumer-driven philosophy is strong and well and is carried on

today by Chief Executive Officer, Edward Travaglianti.

Arthur Roth died in 1997 at the age of ninety-one. His legacy continues and, through his papers, the complexities of banking, the social and economic growth of Long Island, and the mind of a dynamic man can be explored by researchers for generations to come.

The Roth papers are housed in the Center for Business Research in the B. Davis Schwartz Memorial Library at C. W. Post. To access the papers of Arthur T. Roth, please contact Martha Cooney, CBR Director, at 516-299-2310. You may also visit the CBR Homepage at www.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/cbr/rothpapers.html.

Janet Marks is the University Archivist. This article originally appeared in the Winter/Spring 2000 issue of the Long Island University Magazine.



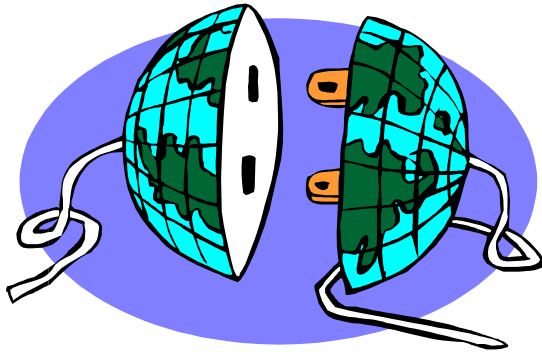
Arthur T. Roth

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