

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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# Southern Jewish History

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Zionism on the West Texas Plains

by

Stuart Rockoff\*

**Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District:  
January 14, 1948; November 3, 1948; March 1, 1949;  
December 6, 1949; May 2, 1950; November 12, 1951**

*When visiting the Southwest Collection at the Texas Tech University Archives to do research on the Jewish community of Lubbock, I came upon a small binder in a box of unprocessed records. Inside were the complete minutes of a short-lived Zionist society in Lubbock. In addition to these minutes, the Southwest Collection contains records from Shaareth Israel, the city's only Jewish congregation.*

**T**oo little has been written about the impact of Zionism on Jewish communities in the South. In one sense, this is not surprising as, by and large, the central narrative of the Zionist movement unfolded in Europe and Palestine, with the Jewish community of the United States as a relatively marginal player. Because southern Jews have long been on the periphery of American Jewish life, Jews who lived in the former Confederacy had even less direct impact on the effort to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. And yet, many southern Jews were

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drawn to the cause of Zionism. As early as 1897, just after the first Zionist congress in Basel, Switzerland, southern Jews established clubs and societies that advocated for the creation of a Jewish homeland.<sup>1</sup>

Most of these early Zionists were immigrants who had decided to come to America rather than go to Palestine. For them, a Jewish state would be a refuge for the oppressed Jews of Europe, not for themselves. Usually, these Zionist groups flourished because of what they provided their members: a strong sense of Jewish identity during a time when they were otherwise working to fit into the larger culture. In the South, where Jews were a tiny percentage of the population, this process of assimilation was quicker and more extreme. Thus, the sense of Jewish community engendered by these often small Zionist organizations was especially important in the South, where they helped to create a Jewish world that could resist or at least relieve the pressures of assimilation.

The nature of the Zionist movement in America and in the South changed during the first half of the twentieth century. After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the seemingly remote dream of recreating a Jewish state in Palestine became a realistic goal as American Zionists began to focus on raising money to support the growing Jewish settlement there. After the United Nations vote in favor of partition on November 29, 1947, and the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, American Zionism narrowed to focus primarily on providing financial and political support for the Jewish state. It was during the hopeful period between the United Nations vote and Israel's declaration of statehood, that Jews in Lubbock, Texas, founded the city's first Zionist organization. While the group would not last more than four years, its brief history reflects the social needs of Jews living on the plains of West Texas, their strong attachment to the newly formed Jewish state, and their significant connection to a larger Jewish community that belied the notion that they were isolated or remote.<sup>2</sup>

*Jewish Life on the Texas Plains*

Staying connected to a larger Jewish world could be a challenge in a place like Lubbock, Texas. Located over three hundred miles west of Dallas at the southern edge of the Great Plains, Lubbock was a small thriving city of over 71,000 people in 1950. A regional center for the area's cotton farming, Lubbock became a market and processing hub for the cash crop. The creation of Texas Technological College in 1926 (later renamed Texas Tech University) brought additional economic energy and a cosmopolitanism that differentiated Lubbock from other West Texas towns. Although it was a cotton town, Lubbock was more southwestern than southern in its culture, with no history of plantations, slavery, or support for the Confederacy. Indeed, the town was not founded until after the Civil War.

As Lubbock grew in the early twentieth century, so did its Jewish population. Its first Jews settled in the West Texas town in 1916, and by the 1920s, a number of Jewish merchants had moved to Lubbock. Most were immigrants from Russia or Poland. When they first met together for the high holidays in 1929, the services were Orthodox. In 1934, these Jews established the city's first and only Jewish congregation, Shaareth Israel, which also drew members from small towns in West Texas and New Mexico. The congregants bought a house in 1937 that they remodeled into a small synagogue. In 1938, the congregation hired its first full-time rabbi, Isadore Garsek, who was trained at an Orthodox seminary in Chicago. In 1943, the small but growing congregation built a new synagogue on Avenue Q. Although the congregation was originally Orthodox, it had moved toward Reform during the 1940s, and it hired a Hebrew Union College graduate to replace Garsek in 1947.

On January 14, 1948, thirty-two Jews gathered at the synagogue to establish a formal Zionist organization, which they named the Lubbock Zionist District. At the time, the Lubbock Jewish community was in the midst of a growth spurt, increasing from approximately sixty Jews in 1937 to 212 by 1948. Most Jewish families in Lubbock at the time were involved in retail businesses, though a growing number of Jewish professionals,

many affiliated with Texas Tech, would soon move to town and eventually transform the local Jewish community.<sup>3</sup>

The impetus for the creation of the Lubbock Zionist District was the arrival of Rabbi Julius Kerman, who came to Shaareth Israel in the summer of 1947 to lead the small congregation. A native of Pinsk, Belarus, Kerman had immigrated to the United States in 1913. Perhaps it was his first-hand experience with tsarist oppression that motivated Kerman to support the idea of a Jewish state. He attended the University of Missouri School of Agriculture with the intention of moving to Palestine after graduation. While at the university, he organized a chapter of Poale Zion, the labor Zionist organization, and even volunteered to fight with Great Britain's Jewish Legion during World War I. He came back to Missouri after the war to finish his education and became the principal of a large Hebrew school in St. Louis. With the encouragement of local rabbi Samuel Sale, Kerman applied to and was accepted at Hebrew Union College, where many of his classmates remained opposed to the idea of Zionism. Ordained in 1928, Kerman served small congregations in Pennsylvania and Ohio and on Long Island before coming to Lubbock. Throughout his career, Kerman was an outspoken Zionist. When Hebrew Union College president Julian Morgenstern made negative comments about Zionism in 1943, Kerman joined with forty-four other Reform rabbis in issuing a statement condemning the remarks.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Supporting the Jewish State*

By the end of 1947, the dream that Zionists like Kerman had long envisioned was finally coming to fruition. The United Nations vote to partition Palestine into two states, including a Jewish one, was met by tremendous celebration in the Jewish world. It is no coincidence that only six weeks after this historic vote, the rabbi sought to get the members of his congregation active in the effort to create and support a Jewish state. Kerman followed the Palestine question closely and was quoted in the local newspaper in Lubbock as an expert on the subject. When the founding members of the Lubbock Zionist District selected



the group's first president, they chose Rabbi Kerman unanimously. All of the members belonged to Shaareth Israel, the city's only Jewish congregation, so it was not surprising that Kerman attracted such strong support.<sup>5</sup>

*Rabbi Julius Kerman.*

*Spiritual leader of Shaareth Israel, Lubbock, Texas, 1947–1952.*

*(Courtesy of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute  
of Southern Jewish Life, Jackson, Mississippi.)*

In its early years, most of the society's monthly meetings followed a set pattern. After a report about the group's finances and membership dues, there was discussion about various state and national Zionist meetings. Lubbock members, usually Kerman, would represent the society at these conventions. Members then usually discussed local fundraising efforts. Each meeting culminated with a program designed to educate members about the situation in Israel. Guest speakers, documentary films, and even discussions of books or articles made up the substantive program of the meetings. Each meeting concluded with the singing of "Hatikvah," the Zionist national anthem. Finally, each meeting was followed by a social hour in which members visited, played games, and enjoyed refreshments.

The Lubbock Zionist District's typical meeting reflected the three central functions of the organization: raising money for Israel; educating Lubbock Jews about the Jewish state; and

socializing amongst its members. The social element was present from the very beginning. The minutes of the first meeting on January 14, 1948, indicate:

Mr. Langsam moved that meetings be held the first Tuesday night of the month—motion seconded and following a brief discussion was passed by majority vote. Mrs. Kessel moved that a social hour follow each meeting with refreshments being served—motion seconded and discussion followed and it was passed by unanimous vote. . . . Mr. Miller of Dallas who was present at the meeting gave the organization several chess and checker games and cards. With the singing of Hatikvah the meeting was adjourned and a social period followed—hosts being Mr. and Mrs. Abe Kessel, Mr. & Mrs. A. Bender, and Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman.

The group also held a series of dinners and banquets including a “cafeteria supper” held only a month after the group formed. Such Jewish social events were especially appealing to members since Lubbock’s culture was heavily dominated by evangelical Christianity. Southern Baptists predominated in the city, which for many years banned alcohol; by the 1960s, it was the largest “dry” city in the country. While in their everyday lives Lubbock Jews were somewhat integrated within the larger community, such social events helped them create an exclusively Jewish environment free from the pressures of fitting into a Christian culture. Indeed during this era, Lubbock Jews tended to socialize with each other, gathering together on the weekends for card games.<sup>6</sup>

While these dinners had an important social element in such a small Jewish community, their ostensible purpose was to raise money. The first cafeteria supper raised almost one hundred dollars, which the group used to bring in guest speakers and pay for member expenses to attend state and national Zionist conventions. Later, the society held Sunday socials that raised money for the group and for specific causes in Israel. Harry Lipshy and Phil Rosen headed a committee that raised eighty-seven dollars for the Food for Israel project in November 1948. In 1951, they aimed to raise one thousand dollars from

Lubbock Jews to purchase food and equipment for Israel. Archie Skibell, a prominent merchant in town, pledged one hundred dollars toward the fund-raising goal. By 1951, most meetings included some kind of direct fund-raising appeal. Two representatives from the southwest region of the Zionist Organization of America spoke to the group in November 1951, asking for donations to purchase food and ice-making equipment for Israel. They raised \$1500 for this cause in just one day of canvassing Lubbock's Jews. Lubbock also had a Jewish National Fund campaign overseen by members of the Zionist District.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, a Jewish community as small as Lubbock was unable to raise a substantial amount of money for Israel. While collecting money was an important purpose of the Lubbock Zionist District, perhaps its central function was to educate and inform its members about Zionism and the fledgling State of Israel. Sometimes this took the form of discussing books or articles about the movement. In August 1948, Ethel Kerman, the rabbi's wife, summarized a recent article in the *Jewish Day* newspaper about the growing interest in Israel among Jews in Russia. According to the minutes from the following month's meeting:

Rabbi Kerman read several communications regarding the serious attempts being made by the government to reverse the UN decision recognizing Israel as a State. No doubt great pressure is being brought about along these lines by Great Britain and other factors. Discussion followed. A recording "The Story of Chaim Weizmann" was played and was enjoyed by all. There being no further business or discussion, it was moved and seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. A social hour followed, with Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman serving as hosts.

A few months later, another member discussed an article from the *New York Herald Tribune* Sunday magazine about the potential for Jewish settlement in the Negev, the desert region that covers much of southern Israel. This led to a general

discussion of Israeli politics and the impact of immigration on the Jewish state.<sup>8</sup>

A number of national speakers stopped in Lubbock as part of their regional tours to address the group. Just a few weeks after the Lubbock Zionist District was organized, Joseph Goldberg, the national membership chairman of the Zionist Organization of America, informed the group about what was happening in Palestine and described the movement's efforts to ensure that the United Nations partition vote resulted in a Jewish state. Rabbi Morris Fishman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee spoke about his time in Israel and the positive impact the country had on Holocaust refugees. According to the minutes for March 1, 1949:

The guest speaker of the evening was introduced—Rabbi Morris Fishman, who recently served with the Joint Distribution Committee in Austria and Italy, and just prior to his return to America spent two months in the State of Israel, gave a vivid, informative report of his experiences and observations. He termed the efforts of European Jewry to regain a normal life as “A memorable and a remarkable achievement” and said he had seen the transformation of skeletonized caricatures of human beings into a sturdy people eager and ready to face the future with hope and promise in Israel. A question and answer period followed. There was a motion for adjournment. A social hour followed.

Zionist leaders from other Texas cities often came to the monthly meeting to talk about various issues. In several instances they gave first-hand accounts of their visits to Israel, often illustrated with slides.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes these speakers were not Jewish. In December 1948, a history professor from Texas Tech, Dr. O. A. Kinchen, gave a lecture about the biblical roots of the State of Israel. According to the minutes:

There being no further old, or new business, to come before the members, Rabbi Kerman introduced the guest speaker of the evening, Dr. O. A. Kinchen, Prof. of History at Texas Tech University, his subject being the “Problem of Palestine.” A question and answer period followed. Dr. Kinchen particular-

ly brought out the facts that the new State of Israel was a RECOVERY [emphasis in original] of the Jewish homeland, and was patterned themselves [*sic*] after a Democracy, like our own.

This support of Zionist ideology by someone outside the Jewish community must have been extremely gratifying to the members of the Lubbock Zionist District. Since the beginning of the Zionist movement, some American Jews worried that support for a Jewish homeland would bring charges of “dual loyalty” that questioned their patriotism. Here, Kinchen expressly linked Israel to America’s democratic political tradition, making it possible to be both pro-America and pro-Israel. At the time, few if any Jews taught at Texas Tech, so to have a strong Zionist voice on the history faculty was extremely significant for a Jewish community that had not been in Lubbock very long. Kinchen’s endorsement of the idea that twentieth-century Jews could lay claim to a land where their biblical forebears once lived anticipated the strong embrace of Israel by evangelical Christians later in the century.<sup>10</sup>

*Congregation Shaareth Israel, 23rd Street and Avenue Q, Lubbock.*

*Trudi Post, who took this photo in 1982, says this is how the building looked in 1957 when she moved to Lubbock.*

*(Courtesy of Trudi Post, Fort Worth, Texas.)*

*Connections to the Larger Jewish World*

The members of the Lubbock Zionist District were especially interested in viewing images of life in the Jewish state. On several occasions documentary films about Zionism and daily life in Israel were shown. Propagandistic in nature, films such as *Birth of a Prophecy*, *Israel Reborn*, and *The Song of the Negev* were usually produced by the United Palestine Appeal<sup>11</sup> to inspire American Jews to support the Jewish state, often depicting Israel as under threat from Arab forces. The films portrayed the State of Israel as the culmination of a centuries-long yearning of Jews to return to their homeland. The Jewish state was also presented as a necessary refuge for the Holocaust survivors mired in displaced persons camps in Europe after the war. The images in the films were quite compelling and often moving. Though these same films were viewed around the United States, for these Lubbock Jews, the striking images brought them into a larger Jewish world. Although they lived in an area far removed from the centers of American or even Texas Jewish life, the members of the Lubbock Zionist District were not isolated, but rather engaged in the international Jewish issues of the day.<sup>12</sup>

This connection to a larger Jewish world is crucial to understanding the short-lived history of the Lubbock Zionist District. Soon after forming, the group sought to make Lubbock a Zionist center for West Texas, reaching out to Jews in other towns. In June 1948, two members offered to visit Amarillo, Odessa, and San Angelo to enlist members. They were only successful in San Angelo, where nine Jews joined the Lubbock Zionist District by early 1949. While the organization was always concentrated in Lubbock, by 1950 almost a quarter of its members lived in other towns. Most of the out-of-towners lived in San Angelo, which had its own Jewish congregation, but others lived in small towns like La Mesa, Littlefield, and Plainview, which did not have any Jewish institutions. Although these out-of-town members helped to boost its membership roster, since San Angelo was over 180 miles away from Lubbock, it is unlikely that the members there were able to play an active role in the

society or even attend its monthly meetings. This was likely the reason why the district was not more successful in attracting out-of-town members. It was just too hard for them to be active members or to enjoy the social benefits of the organization.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its remote location, the Lubbock Zionist District aspired to be a part of a national movement. From its founding, the local chapter sought to affiliate with the national Zionist Organization of America. The group worked to reach the fifty members required to become an officially chartered chapter of the ZOA, a goal it achieved by the third meeting in March 1948. From the group's beginning, members took an active part in regional and national Zionist organizations. At its first meeting, members voted to send a representative to a state Zionist conference in San Antonio. During the summer of 1948, Rabbi Kerman represented the society at the national convention of the ZOA held in Pittsburgh and later gave a detailed report about the proceedings. One member, Walter Cohen, even went to Palestine to fight for the Haganah during Israel's War of Independence. Cohen, a World War II veteran haunted by the Holocaust, fought in an armored brigade in the Galilee. Although West Texas was thousands of miles away from the Middle East, Lubbock Jews were tied to this international movement.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Role of Women in the Organization*

As the Lubbock Zionist District worked to be part of a larger international movement, it also had to fit into a small local Jewish community. While the number of Jews in Lubbock ballooned to 212 people in 1948, the Jewish community was much smaller than most other Texas cities with Zionist organizations. It was an open question whether Lubbock's small community could support such a group. In addition to Congregation Shaareth Israel, Lubbock had a B'nai B'rith lodge and a temple sisterhood in 1948. The Lubbock Zionist District struggled with these limitations right away. At their first meeting, members decided to hold a social event to raise money for the

society. Two days later, the officers of the society held an emergency board meeting:

A special Board meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Friday night, January 16, 1948 at the home of Mrs. Portnoff. Those present were Mrs. Portnoff, Rabbi Kerman and Mrs. Eskin. It was unanimously decided that since the Sisterhood had not given its monthly affair that the Lubbock Zionist District postpone its money-raising plans in the form of a social affair until a later date to be announced. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

The community was simply not big enough for two such events, and so the newly formed Zionist District deferred to the sisterhood.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, Lubbock women, through the leadership of Ida Ruth Svidlow, founded a chapter of Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization that supports health care and educational programs in Israel. There had been an effort to organize a Hadassah chapter earlier in the decade, but sisterhood members feared that the Jewish community was too small to support two women's organizations. By the end of the 1940s, the community was larger, while the success of the Lubbock Zionist District likely convinced female leaders that the city could support a Hadassah chapter. The two Zionist organizations had a close relationship, with overlapping memberships. The first two presidents of the Hadassah chapter, Ethel Freed and Ida Ruth Svidlow, also belonged to the Lubbock Zionist District. On two occasions the groups held joint meetings, sponsoring guest speakers. In December 1949, Rabbi William Malev of Houston told both groups about his recent trip to Israel and the beneficial work of both the ZOA and Hadassah. The Hadassah chapter would prove to be a much longer-lasting organization, remaining active until the 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

The creation of a Hadassah chapter was somewhat surprising since the Lubbock Zionist District had both male and female members. While women were given leadership positions with the Zionist District, they often conformed to traditional gender roles. At the group's founding meeting, Rose Portnoff was



elected secretary of the organization. During the four years of the organization's life, women always filled this position. Another woman replaced Portnoff when she left Lubbock later in 1948. The secretary's duties consisted mainly of taking minutes at the monthly meetings. When the group planned a cafeteria supper or other events to raise money, the event committee consisted entirely of women who cooked and served the food. Although they filled this traditional gender role, it also gave them a certain degree of power within the organization since they were in charge of the fundraising events. This is similar to the common phenomenon of temple sisterhoods exercising "power of the purse" within congregations since they were the ones who often raised the most money. The female members of the Lubbock Zionist District were able to use this "separate sphere" to move into positions of financial power within the organization. Tillie Lipsky was appointed chairwoman of the Jewish National Fund campaign for 1948 and 1949 while Rose Eskin served as treasurer of the Zionist District for its first two years.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The Demise of the Lubbock Zionist District*

Although the Lubbock Zionist District attracted both male and female members, the group still struggled to remain active. By September 1948, just eight months after forming, members were discussing the need for a membership drive and finding "ways and means of boosting attendance at meetings." In January 1949 no meeting was held "due to the absence of so many members." After a year of activity, the Lubbock Zionist District had not grown much. By April 1949, the group had forty-nine local members and nine in San Angelo. With an estimated 212 Jews living in Lubbock in 1948, about 23 percent belonged to the Zionist organization. Since a good number of Lubbock Jews were children, the percentage of Jewish adults who were members was likely much higher. Thus, there just may not have been much room for the group to grow. Some Lubbock Jews may have been opposed to Zionism, as was the case in larger Texas Jewish communities like Houston and Dallas.<sup>18</sup>

Attendance at monthly meetings continued to drop in 1950. In April, only sixteen of forty-two paid members of the society attended the meeting in which officers for the following year were elected. The following month President Archie Skibell addressed the issue directly:

The President asked for suggestions for bringing up the attendance at meetings. Several members expressed the opinion that a Program Committee was needed to plan stimulating programs and a Telephone Committee to rally the members. The President was to appoint such committees in time for the next meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Weiss, newcomers to Lubbock and active Zionists in their former home, Portland, Maine, were introduced to the members.

Lubbock's growing Jewish community was certainly a help to the group, but clearly the content of the meeting programs was crucial in attracting people. While the April meeting had no program, the film *House in the Desert* was shown at the May meeting, which drew twenty-five people. As time went on, compelling films and Zionist speakers were sometimes hard to come by. In November 1950, the group brought in a local judge to discuss the issue of juvenile delinquency, a topic that had nothing to do with Zionism or Israel.

By 1951, meetings were becoming infrequent. The group only met three times combined in 1951 and 1952. In the minutes for the November 12, 1951, meeting, Secretary Ethel Kerman noted, "as the district has not been functioning for more than a year, no minutes were read." Kerman's comment was a bit overstated, as the group had hosted two visiting speakers from Houston in February 1951. But otherwise the group had largely become defunct by 1951.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, on July 16, 1952, the Lubbock Zionist District decided to disband. Minutes from the final meeting declared, "there having been no meetings of the Lubbock Zionist District for two years and since two of the officers are about to leave Lubbock, it was the consensus of the officers to liquidate the funds of the organization." Once again, the claim was exaggerated as the group had last met seven months earlier, yet

clearly it had become inactive. The crucial factor was the decision of Rabbi Kerman to leave Lubbock for a pulpit in Natchez, Mississippi, in the summer of 1952. Without the energy and leadership of Kerman, the group realized that it could not carry on. The group used its remaining funds to pay the postage for a shipment of canned food and used clothing to Israel and donated the rest, \$190, to the American Friends of the Hebrew University. With that, the minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District come to a close.<sup>20</sup>

There were several reasons why the group did not last longer than four years. Clearly, Rabbi Kerman was the central figure in the organization; he was its founder and two-term president. Once he left Lubbock, it was perhaps inevitable that the group would cease to function. Yet the group had become inactive over a year before the rabbi left. The relatively small size of the Lubbock Jewish community was a challenge that the group could never overcome. It was much easier to attract fifty members in a large Jewish community like Houston, Dallas, or San Antonio, which each had several thousand Jews at the time. In Lubbock, they needed to attract perhaps half of the affiliated Jewish adults in the city.

In addition, the failure of the Lubbock Zionist District stemmed from its moving away from its central appeal. One of the original purposes of the society was to offer social opportunities for Lubbock Jews who spent most of their days living and interacting with non-Jews. The social hour decreed by members during the founding meeting was stopped by 1950. While this change was never explicitly discussed in the minutes, members no longer stayed to socialize and enjoy refreshments once the monthly meetings were adjourned. Also, the educational programs became more infrequent and less related to the Zionist movement or Israel. For example, in March 1950, the Christian chaplain at Reese Air Force Base spoke to the members on the topic of "love and mercy." Later that year, members listened to a recorded reading of a Sholom Aleichem story. As the social and propaganda functions of the society faded away, all that remained was fundraising, to which members were still com-

mitted. But Lubbock Jews realized that they did not need a Zionist organization to raise money for the Jewish National Fund or other Zionist causes. Thus, while Lubbock Jews still supported Israel, they had little reason to attend monthly meetings or keep the Lubbock Zionist District alive.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, it was perhaps inevitable that the group would be unable to sustain its founding energy. The Lubbock Zionist District was established during the aftermath of the United Nations partition vote when interest and expectations were at a peak. During its first year, the district experienced the excitement of Israel's establishment as a Jewish state, the deep worry when the fledgling state was attacked by its Arab neighbors, and, finally, the elation of victory in Israel's war for independence. By the early 1950s, the Zionist cause was just not as compelling for Lubbock's small Jewish community. Indeed, this trend was national, as American Zionist organizations experienced a decline in activity and membership in the years after Israel's establishment. The story of the Lubbock Zionist District follows this national narrative, showing once again how this remote West Texas community was tied to the larger currents of American Jewish life.<sup>22</sup>

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**Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District:**

**January 14, 1948; November 3, 1948; March 1, 1949;  
December 6, 1949; May 2, 1950; November 12, 1951**

**Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, January 14, 1948**

The first meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Wednesday evening, Jan. 14, 1948 at the Shaareth Israel Synagogue.

Rabbi Julius Kerman, as acting chairman prior to election of officers, [made] several welcoming and introductory remarks. Thirty-two members were [present].

The following were unanimously elected to office:

Rabbi Kerman, President; Sidney Langsam, Vice-President; Mrs. Sam Portnoff, Secretary; and Mrs. Phil Eskin, Treasurer.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Langsam moved that meetings be held the first Tuesday night of the month – motion seconded and following brief discussion was passed by majority vote.

Mrs. Kessel moved that a social hour follow each meeting with refreshments being served – motion seconded and discussion followed and it was passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Harris made a motion that the organization be called the Lubbock Zionist Club – motion seconded and discussion followed and Mr. Harris withdrew motion in favor of Mr. Langsam's motion that the organization be known as the Lubbock Zionist District – motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Mr. Houstman made a motion that the organization send a representative to the San Antonio State Zionist Conference – motion was seconded and discussion followed and carried by majority vote.

Mr. Harris made a motion that Rabbi Kerman be the representative and motion was seconded and carried.

Mrs. Portnoff made a motion that money should be raised to finance our representative's trip by a money-raising social affair. Other suggestions were offered and Mrs. Portnoff's motion was restated, seconded and carried.

Mr. Miller of Dallas who was present at the meeting gave the organization several chess and checker games and cards.

With the singing of Hatikvah the meeting was adjourned and a social [hour] followed – hostes [sic] being Mr. and Mrs. Abe Kessel, Mr. and Mrs. A. Berger, and Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rose Portnoff  
Secretary

### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, November 3, 1948**

A regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1948, at the Shaareth Israel Congre-

gation. The meeting was called to order by the President and the minutes of the September meeting were read and approved. There was no meeting held in October, due to the fact that the High Holidays came at that time.

Mrs. Eskin gave the Treasurer's report, which showed a balance of \$230.59 in the treasury as of November 1, 1948. It was moved, seconded and unanimously carried, that the following bills be paid out of the treasury: (\*) \$1.50 for Zionist pins; \$50.00 to the Zionist Organization for our share of the traveling expenses incurred in bringing Mr. Jos. Goldberg<sup>24</sup> here on a lecture engagement February 3, 1948; \$50.00 to Mr. Meyer Harris, the same being the balance due him on the money advanced by him in sending our delegate, Rabbi Kerman, to the National Zionist Convention held in Pittsburg, Pa. last July.

Mrs. Kerman gave a report on the social held Sunday evening, October 31st, at the Temple, with Mrs. Sam Kelisky, Chairman. Proceeds were \$142.05. Special recognition was given Mrs. Kessel, Mrs. Kelisky, and the other ladies who had given donations of cakes, prizes, etc. and had worked to make this affair the financial and social success that it proved to be.

It was announced that dues for the year 1949 are now due and payable. Re-enrollment of members was urged, and it was suggested that the membership campaign for new members be put off until after January 1st.

Mrs. Houstman was presented with a Zionist pin for bringing in two or more new members into the organization.

Rabbi Kerman called our attention to the fact that one of our Lubbock members, Mr. Walter Cohen, is now in Palestine with the Haganah.

Mr. Phil Rosen gave a report on the Southwest Regional Convention held in Dallas on Sept. 19th, at which time Pierre Van Paassen<sup>25</sup> was guest speaker. Mr. Rosen urged that as many members as possible attend these various conventions, as then do you have full realization as to the wonderful work being done by members of the various districts, for such a worthwhile cause.

Mr. Phil Rosen was appointed Chairman of the "Aid to Isreal [*sic*]" project.

There being no further old, or new business, Rabbi Kerman introduced the fine guest speaker of the evening, Mr. Wolfe Shaw, of Littlefield. His subject "Things We Have Not Forgotten" was certainly enjoyed by all.

There was a motion for adjournment—it was seconded and the meeting closed with the singing of Hatikvah.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ruth Shaw  
Secretary

(\*) \$2.00 to Secretary for postal cards  
\$.72 to Mrs. Kerman for Refreshments  
\$20.00 to Z.O.A. for Membership Dues

#### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, March 1, 1949**

The regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Tuesday evening, March 1 at the Shaareth Israel Congregation. The meeting was called to order by the President, Rabbi Kerman. The minutes of the February meeting were ready [sic] by the secretary, Mrs. Shaw and were approved as read. A thank you note received from Mr. Harry Lipshy for flowers sent was also read. It was moved and seconded that the Lubbock Zionist District pay one-third of the cost of these flowers.

Mrs. Eskin read the treasury report which showed a balance of \$217.37.

Rabbi Kerman reported the membership of several Z.O.A. members who live in San Angelo. It was moved and seconded that San Angelo Z.O.A. members be included in the Lubbock District.

It was announced that there are 31 paid 1949 Z.O.A. members in this District. Mr. Rosen presented the slate of officers for the 1949-1950 terms. The President asked for nominations from the floor. The following officers were elected:

Rabbi Kerman - President  
Meyer Harris - Vice-President  
Mrs. S. Portnoff - Secy.  
Mrs. M.J. Shaw - Treasurer

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District,  
March 1, 1949.*

*(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)*



The guest speaker of the evening was introduced—Rabbi Morris Fishman, who recently served with the Joint Distribution Committee in Austria and Italy, and just prior to his return to America spent two months in the State of Israel, gave a vivid, informative report of his experiences and observations. He termed the efforts of European Jewry to regain a normal life as “A memorable and a remarkable achievement” and said he had seen the transformation of skeletonized caricatures of human beings into a sturdy people eager and ready to face the future with hope and promise in Israel. A question and answer period followed.

There was a motion for adjournment. A social hour followed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rose Portnoff, Secretary

#### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, December 6, 1949**

Tuesday evening, December 6, [1949] the Lubbock Zionist District met jointly with the Lubbock Chapter of Hadassah at the Shaareth Israel Congregation.

Mrs. Louis Freed called the meeting to order. Mrs. Julius Kerman read the opening prayer, calling to mind the sacred memory of the Jewish children who perished in a plane crash on a flight sponsored by Hadassah.

The meeting was turned over to Rabbi Kerman who introduced the guest speaker, Rabbi William Malev of Houston. Rabbi Malev and Rabbi Kerman were in the same group when they visited Israel last summer, at which time they met.

Rabbi Malev told of his experiences on the flight to Israel, during which time he stopped in France and Switzerland, too, and he related his observations of these countries, as well. Rabbi Malev discussed the great strides Israel has made in its short life as a nation, despite the large and continued influx of homeless Jews from Europe and other countries. Mrs. Malev accompanied Rabbi Malev on the trip and she visited numerous Hadassah agencies and projects. He spoke of the life-giving work that Hadassah is doing in Israel. Lastly, Rabbi Malev stressed the continued efforts

of American Jewry, through Z.O.A. and Hadassah, which is still needed.

The meeting was closed with the singing of Hatikvah.

A social hour followed—hostesses were Mrs. Julius Kerman, Mrs. Sam Kelsiky, Mrs. Louis Freed, Mrs. Louis Wilk, Mrs. Sam Portnoff, Mrs. Phil Rosen, Mrs. M. Zukav, & Mrs. H. Lipsky.<sup>26</sup>

### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Tuesday, May 2, 1950**

With the President, Mr. Archie Skibell, in the chair, the regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District, was held on Tuesday evening, May 2nd, at 8 o'clock.<sup>27</sup>

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and accepted.

The following officers were present: President, Mr. Archie Skibell, Vice-President, Mr. Phil Rosen, and the Secretary, Mrs. Julius Kerman. The Treasurer, Mr. Sidney Langsam, was absent. There were 25 people present.

In the absence of the Treasurer, no financial report could be had, but it was reported by the President that \$50 had been deposited for membership dues since the April meeting.

The President asked for suggestions for bringing up attendance at meetings. Several members expressed the opinion that a Program Committee was needed to plan stimulating programs and a Telephone Committee to rally the members. The President was to appoint such committees in time for the next meeting.

Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Weiss, newcomers to Lubbock and active Zionists in their former home, Portland, Maine, were introduced to the members.

A recess was now taken for the viewing of the film, "House in the Desert". This picture showed the triumph of stubborn faith and hope over the known scientific facts. The persistent efforts of a watchman at the Potash Works at the Dead Sea led to the conversion of salt-laden desert land, neglected for 4,000 years, into a thriving, fruitful settlement called Beit Ha-Arava or House in the Desert. It was inspiring to watch this miraculous change from arid waste to green fields, houses and hosts of beautiful children. Mr.

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District, May 2, 1950, page 1.*  
(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District, May 2, 1950, page 2.*

*(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)*

Harold Markman who operated the B'nai B'rith projector, was warmly applauded for his kindness in having run off the picture.

When the meeting was resumed dues of \$8 were collected for Mr. and Mrs. I. Silverman and another \$8 for Mr. and Mrs. Harold Alschuler.

The President then called on Mr. Rappaport, field representative of the United Jewish Appeal, who spoke briefly on the needs and scope of UJA work during the current year.

On motion of Mr. Mitchell Shaw, seconded by Mr. Phil Rosen, the meeting adjourned with the singing of "Hatikvah".

Respectfully submitted,  
Ethel M. Kerman, Sec'y

**Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Monday, November 12, 1951**

Mr. Archie Skibell, with the co-operation of Mrs. William Svidlow, president of Hadassah, called the community list for the purpose of hearing Rabbi [Abraham] Herson of Waco<sup>28</sup> who accompanied Mr. Julius Israel of the Southwest Region of the ZOA. A small number of men and women appeared at the synagogue on Monday evening, Nov. 12th, at 8 P.M.

Mr. Skibell presided and introduced the two visitors; at the same time he explained that no solicitation of funds had been intended. However, Rabbi Herson made such an appeal for funds for food and ice-making equipment for Israel. Since not enough was raised, several people volunteered to solicit contributions from those who were not present; they promised to go out the following morning.

Mr. Israel brought a new color film from Israel, but it was so badly in reverse that even the valiant efforts of our faithful Bill Kuhn, plus advice and encouragement from the sidelines, failed to accomplish any good; the picture was not shown.

As the district has not been functioning for more than a year, no minutes were read.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ethel M. Kerman  
Secretary.

P.S. The collection of the following day (Nov. 13th) netted \$1,500, according to reports.

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## NOTES

I would like to thank Monte Monroe, Archivist of the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock, for allowing me to read through the unprocessed records and for permitting *Southern Jewish History* to reproduce the images and transcriptions of the Lubbock Zionist District Minutes in this volume.

<sup>1</sup> Jews in San Antonio, Texas, established the Mevasereth Zion society in 1897. Stuart Rockoff, "Deep in the Heart of Palestine: Zionism in Early Texas," in *Lone Stars of David: The*

*Jews of Texas*, ed. Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman (Waltham, MA, 2007), 94. No one has yet written a general study of southern Zionism. At best, local studies have sometimes touched on the subject. See, for example, Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860–1929* (Tuscaloosa, 1997); Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, 2001); Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s–1960s* (Macon, GA, 1998); Wendy Lowe Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville, TN, 2001); Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Rockoff, “Jewish Racial Identity in Pittsburgh and Atlanta, 1890–1930,” (Ph.D. diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2000), chap. 3.

<sup>3</sup> “Lubbock, Texas,” Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, accessed February 17, 2012. <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/tx/lubbock.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 56 (1946): 388; 57 (1947): 530. Julius C. Kerman, “Adventures in America and the Holy Land,” *American Jewish Archives* 28 (November, 1976): 126–134; “Forty-five Reform Rabbis Jointly Repudiate Dr. Morgenstern’s Views on Palestine,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 3, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, January 18, 1948; Lubbock Zionist District Minutes (hereafter cited as Meeting Minutes), January 14, 1948, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock (hereafter cited as Southwest Collection).

<sup>6</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; Lawrence L. Graves, “Lubbock, TX,” Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association, accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdl04>; Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station, TX, 1999), 149.

<sup>7</sup> Meeting Minutes, December 7, 1948; February 26, 1951; November 12, 1951.

<sup>8</sup> Meeting Minutes, August 2, 1948; September 14, 1948; February 8, 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Meeting Minutes, February 3, 1948; April 6, 1948; March 1, 1949.

<sup>10</sup> Meeting Minutes, December 7, 1948.

<sup>11</sup> In 1939 the United Palestine Appeal and the American Joint Distribution Committee formed the UJA, with both agencies remaining independent beneficiaries of it. By 1952, the UPA was renamed the United Israel Appeal. In 1999 the UIA joined the UJA and Federations to form the United Jewish Communities.

<sup>12</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 4, 1948; May 2, 1950. Several of these films may be viewed at the Stephen Spielberg Jewish Film Archive’s Virtual Cinema Project, accessed July 25, 2012, [ssjfa.huji.ac.il](http://ssjfa.huji.ac.il).

<sup>13</sup> Meeting Minutes, June 8, 1948; August 2, 1948; April 5, 1949; List of Lubbock Zionist District members, October 9, 1950, Meeting Minutes, Southwest Collection.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; August 2, 1948; November 3, 1948; Stone, *Chosen Folks*, 188.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (Lanham, MD, 1990), 215; Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1948; “Lubbock, Texas,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*. Zionist organizations were not uncommon in Texas. By the 1930s, Zionist societies existed in large communities like Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Galveston, as well as smaller towns like Corpus Christi, Tyler, Laredo, Kilgore, Corsicana, and Breckenridge. In addition, during the 1930s, Jews in eighty-five different communities donated money to the Jewish National Fund. Rockoff, “Deep in the Heart of Palestine,” 99.

<sup>16</sup> Lee Bradley Inselberg, “Changing Worlds: Jewish Women in Lubbock, Texas” (master’s thesis, Texas Tech University, 1982), 36; List of Lubbock Zionist District members, October 9, 1950; Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1949; Jane Winer interview by author, November 30, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; November 3, 1948; December 7, 1948; March 1, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> Meeting Minutes., September 14, 1948; February 8, 1949; Rockoff, “Deep in the Heart of Palestine,” 103–107.

<sup>19</sup> Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1950; May 2, 1950; November 21, 1950; February 26, 1951; November 12, 1951.

<sup>20</sup> Lubbock Zionist District, Final Report, July 16, 1952.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1950; October 11, 1950.

<sup>22</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky, “A Cause in Search of Itself: American Zionism after the State,” *American Jewish History* 69 (September 1979): 79–91; Zohar Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel after Statehood: From Involved Partners to Outside Supporters,” *American Jewish History* 93 (September 2007): 279.

<sup>23</sup> While it is not surprising that a woman would serve as secretary, it is somewhat unusual that a woman would be in charge of the organization’s finances as treasurer.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Goldberg was the national chairman of the membership committee of the Zionist Organization of America at the time. From Worcester, Massachusetts, Goldberg was the honorary president of the New England Zionist region. *Lubbock Evening Journal*, February 3, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Van Paassen was a non-Jewish journalist and author who covered the Middle East, Palestine, and the Zionist movement for many years, and who became a staunch Zionist supporter.

<sup>26</sup> The page with the secretary’s signature is missing from the December 6, 1949, minutes.

<sup>27</sup> Although Rabbi Kerman relinquished the presidency to someone new, both he and his wife were still very active in the organization while they remained in Lubbock.

<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Abraham Herson led Agudath Jacob, Waco’s Orthodox congregation.