

Notes & Queries

• *The Forward* of March 17 describes the rebuilding of Biloxi's Beth Israel synagogue after Hurricane Katrina. Peter Beller reports that the 60-member synagogue suffered roof and water damage although its Torah scrolls were safe. The only Gulf Coast synagogue between Mobile and New Orleans and the only Conservative congregation in Mississippi, Beth Israel has been visited by delegations from national Jewish agencies from New York to Los Angeles including Hillel, B'nai B'rith, and United Jewish Communities. Rabbi Debra Kassoff of Jackson's ISJL led a recent bat mitzvah at a Methodist church.

• Katrina's Jewish Voices, an oral history project of the Jewish Women's Archives, is now accessible online at <http://katrina.jwa.org>. The website enables members of the Jewish community to contribute their own Katrina experiences to the online archive. Jayne K. Guberman, with Stuart Rockoff and Marcie

Cohen Ferris, introduced a proposal for the "Hurricane Katrina Oral History & Digital Collection Project" at an ad hoc meeting at the SJHS Conference in Baltimore this past November. Guberman, director of Oral History at JWA, emphasizes the project is interested in all aspects of the experience including evacuation, resettlement and rebuilding. Appropriate items to contribute include emails, letters, photos, sermons, blogs and web pages. The JWA is partnering with the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, MS, to conduct 100 digital video interviews.

• Springhill Avenue Temple, Congregation Sha'ari Shomayim, in Mobile, AL, has appointed Robert J. Zietz as Archivist Emeritus. Zietz chronicled the congregation's history in his book, *The Gates of Heaven: The First 150 Years*.

Business as Unusual in Asheville

Asheville, NC, is hosting a unique project, "The Family Store: A History of Jewish Businesses in Downtown Asheville, 1800-1990," to commemorate 110 years of Jewish mercantilism. Large exhibition panels are being placed at downtown sites to mark the location of Jewish stores, which flourished from the 1880s until the 1970s when malls and generational changes put an end to them.

The project is the work of two folklorists, Sharon Fahrer and Jan Schochet, who spent four years conducting research and oral histories. Schochet's

own family dates its downtown presence to 1889. "The Jewish businessmen, and in some cases, businesswomen, were accepted into the business and civic community," said Schochet, whose own family had ten enterprises.

"The Family Store" will open in September. Some panels will appear in store and gallery windows. Others will be placed in parking lots or on sidewalks near the sites. Each panel will map the entire exhibit to direct people to each of the twelve panels. Narrated walking tours will also be avail-

able featuring Schochet and Fahrer relating the colorful stories that they have heard or gleaned from newspaper archives.

Fahrer and Schochet previously collaborated on *The Man Who Lived on Main Street: Stories by and about Sol Schulman*, a folkloric biography of a colorful merchant in Sylva, NC. For information, call 828-777-1014 or email historyathand@charter.net.

THE RAMBLER
SJHS NEWSLETTER
329 Burlage Circle, Chapel Hill, NC 27514-2703
www.jewishsouth.org

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THE RAMBLER

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Register online for
Little Rock
www.jewishsouth.org

FALL 2006 Volume XI, Issue 2

SJHS Convenes in Little Rock A Presidential Gathering

The 31st Conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society has a distinctly White House theme: "It's Presidential and More!" The gala Saturday-night event will be a visit to the Clinton Presidential Library, reserved exclusively for the SJHS. There we will hear Stuart Eizenstat, advisor to two presidents. Earlier in the day Eli Evans, a former White House speechwriter, will appear on a panel.

Convention headquarters at the Peabody Hotel will be more regal than presidential: its fabled ducks march daily to Sousa's *King Cotton March* from their Duck Palace to the lobby wading pool. The luxury hotel is located in the center of Little Rock's River Market District, which includes a park, shops, and food court.

For early arrivals Thursday features an optional bus tour to Hot Springs

(see page 2). An afternoon program at the Little Rock Main Library will feature Arkansas native Marcie Cohen Ferris speaking on Southern cuisine, and Little Rock Jews will prepare recipes from her book, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo*. Carolyn LeMaster, the historian of Arkansas Jewry, has lent her collection for an exhibit on the state's community.

Friday morning features an optional bus tour of Little Rock. After welcoming remarks, we will be introduced to Arkansas Jewish family history. Little Rock played a critical role in the nation's civil-right's history, and Karla Goldman will host a panel to discuss women's role in the movement. Shabbat dinner and services will be held at Temple B'nai Israel, and the Jerome Gumenick Lecture will be delivered by Deborah Dash Moore, who will be drawing on her most recent book, *GI Jews: How*

— continued on page 3

Date	Event
Nov. 9-12	SJHS 31st Annual Conference, Little Rock, AR
current	"Minding the Store: Richmond's Jewish Merchants" "Answering the Call: Prayer, Patriotism, Service & Sacrifice" "Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia" Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, 1109 W. Franklin St., Richmond, VA 23220 (804.353.2668/ www.bethahabah.org)
current	"Of Passover and Pilgrimage: The Natchez Jewish Experience" Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience Exhibit, Temple B'nai Israel, Natchez, MS (601.445.5407)
current	"Alsace to America: Discovering a Southern Jewish Heritage" Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, Utica, MS (601.362.6357/ www.msje.org)
permanent	Creating Community: The Jews of Atlanta from 1845 to the Present" "The Legacy Project: Coming to America" William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30309 (404.870.7684/ www.atlantajewishmuseum.org)
permanent opens Sept. 12	"MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida" "Bonim: Jewish Developers Building Florida - Building Community" Jewish Museum of Florida, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139-6965 (305.672.5044/ www.jewishmuseum.com)
current opens July 16	"Cabin Fever: Jewish Camping and Jewish Commitment" "The Other Promised Land: Vacations, Identity, and the Jewish American Dream" The Jewish Museum of Maryland, 15 Lloyd St., Baltimore MD 21202 (410.732.6400/ www.jewishmuseummd.org)
permanent	"The Blum House Project" Old City Park, 1717 Gano St., Dallas, TX (214.421.5141/ oldcitypark.org)
thru Oct. 15 opens Sept. 15	"Jews in Washington: Scrapbook of an American Community" Centre Court, Level 1, White Flint, 11301 Rockville Pike, Kensington, MD "Through the Lens: Jeremy Goldberg's Washington" Adas Isarel Congregation, 2850 Quebec St., NW, Washington, DC Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington (202-789-0900/ info@jhsgw.org)
permanent	Shalom Y'all: A Road Trip through Jewish Alabama (Bill Aron photographs) Levite Jewish Community Center, 3960 Montclair Road, Birmingham, AL (205-879-0411)
thru Nov. 15	The Family Store: A History of Jewish Businesses in Downtown Asheville, 1800-1990 Downtown Asheville, NC (828-777-1014/ historyathand@charter.net)

Register Now! SJHS 31st Conference, Little Rock, Nov. 9-12, 2006 Registration includes sessions, meals as noted, and entry to the Clinton Presidential Center.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Email _____

Please specify if you want vegetarian or kosher: vegetarian kosher
For Saturday night only, please specify if you want: chicken fish vegetarian

Registration Deadline: Postmark Oct. 9

Member.....	\$195/person _____
New SJHS Member (Includes 2006/07 membership dues).....	\$215/person _____
Student Rate.....	\$145/person _____
Optional Thursday	
Hot Springs bus tour/lunch.....	\$ 25/person _____
Optional Friday	
Little Rock bus tour/lunch.....	\$ 35/person _____
Late registration fee (after Oct. 9).....	\$ 25/person _____
New or Renewing SJHS Annual Dues:	
General Member (individual/family).....	\$35
Corporate/Business Member.....	\$35
Patron (individual/family).....	\$50
Century Club (individual/family).....	\$100
Life Member (\$200 annual, 5 years).....	\$1,000
Student (individual only).....	\$15

To further the SJHS's mission, I wish to donate \$ _____ to the SJHS Endowment Fund in honor/memory of _____.

Conference Hotel

The Peabody Hotel is located in downtown Little Rock near the historic River Market. Please make reservations directly with the hotel by phone or through the hotel website. For the convention rate of \$99 / day (single or double), identify yourself as an SJHS Conference member. Disregard user name & password; enter 990400 under group number.

Peabody Hotel

3 Statehouse Plaza
Little Rock, AR 72201
501-906-4000 or 800-732-2639
www.peabodylittlerock.com

Please make checks to the SJHS – Little Rock 2006 and mail to SJHS Conference, attn: Jim Pfeifer Box 151 12911 Cantrell Road, Suite 7 Little Rock, AR 72223



Saul Viener, Founding President

Remembering Saul Viener

Saul Viener—friend, scholar, and mentor—passed away on July 25 at age 85. Saul, as he was known to friends both old and new, was present at the creation of today's Southern Jewish Historical in 1976 and served as its founding President. His firm but gentle guiding hand has touched every Society endeavor. The SJHS is planning a memorial service in Atlanta and will announce an award in his honor at Little Rock. The 31st Annual Conference as well as the forthcoming SJHS Journal will be dedicated in his name. The Journal will also publish a fuller appreciation. The SJHS extends its condolences to his wife Jacqueline and children Helene and Philip.

The Rambler has asked Sol Breitbart, another patriarch of Southern Jewish history, to recall his old friend.

I Remember Saul Viener

By Sol Breitbart

My memories of Saul Viener predate the rebirth of the Southern Jewish Historical Society. We met through a mutual friend, Thomas J. Tobias, who had come to know and admire Saul through his work with the American Jewish Historical Society. Thomas was as dedicated to the history of the Jews of Charleston and especially Congregation Beth Elohim as Saul was to the Jews of Richmond and his beloved Beth Ahabah. They were responsible for the development of archives at their respective synagogues. The few times that I saw Saul in those days, I was impressed by his enthusiasm for and his broad knowledge of American Jewish History.

Over the years, although we saw each other mostly at historical society meetings and conferences, we maintained a long-distance friendship. He was always interested in knowing in what project I was doing research, being encouraging and offering cogent suggestions. In our mutual exchanges, I felt that I was the greater beneficiary.

I shall always remember his gentle demeanor and enveloping charm which

he wore so naturally and which he used effectively, when necessary, to obtain goals which he had in mind, and which he exhibited in defusing strong controversies. Even when he was critical, he balanced this with constructive comments, and it was done so smoothly that no one could be offended by it.

Although in recent years, I had not seen him at the Society's conferences as frequently as before, we still exchanged occasional phone conversations, and each time it was as if no time had elapsed. In our last conversation, several weeks before he died, Saul spoke of his health problems as something aging people had to face and that he would make the best of it. He was even hopeful that he might be able to attend the Little Rock conference.

Unfortunately, the physical Saul Viener will not make it, but his spirit will surely permeate its atmosphere.

A Letter from Our President



Sumner I. Levine, President

I met Saul Viener at the first SJHS conference that I attended in Richmond in 1999 and found him to be one of the most gracious gentlemen I had ever met. Saul had a strong feeling toward all local Jewish historical societies. Since I was the president of the Memphis chapter, he did everything he could not only to make me feel welcome but to be recognized and honored. This was typical of my entire relationship with the man whom I considered not only my role model but my mentor. Saul was intensely interested in every phase of our societies, whether it be the American, the Southern, or the locals. There was never a time that I can recall when I sent correspondence to Saul or discussed things with him that he didn't have a suggestion as to how to accomplish uniquely his goal of spreading the word of the Society wherever possible. Saul was most instrumental in the success of our last conference in Baltimore. It was through his efforts that we persuaded the dynamic Peter Hoffberger to be host chairperson. He always wanted to be informed of our projects and repeatedly offered ideas to make them viable. Saul was able to involve his good friend Jerry Gumenick very early on, and because of the Gumenick Lectures we were able to take our first step in attracting major speakers at our conferences.

Saul and I had many conversations about our forthcoming conference in Little Rock. He was extremely proud of the efforts of all those associated with the planning and development of the program. He spoke glowingly of Stuart Rockoff, who has carried on the efforts of those program chairmen before him. Saul was very happy to return to an area of the country he looked back upon with wonderful memories. I am happy to say that he was thrilled that Jim Pfeifer was able to create a presidential (Clintonesque) theme for the conference. Because of all this, we are dedicating the Little Rock conference to Saul, who will always be with us because of his indomitable spirit and his never ending quest to advance the goals of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

To honor Saul's memory the SJHS is establishing the Saul Viener Memorial Fund, the funds from which will be used to create an annual award in his memory. Please send your contribution, made to the SJHS, to Bernie Wax, Treasurer, 21 Blake Road, Brookline, MA 02445. You will see that the next Journal will be dedicated to Saul while others in this issue of the Rambler will note Saul's intellect and pioneering spirit in the creation and development of the society. I will always remember him for his guidance and advice.

Best regards,

Sumner Levine, President

Take the Bus Leave the Driving to SJHS



At this year's meeting the SJHS is offering two optional bus tours.

Early arrivals on Thursday will enjoy hot times in Hot Springs. The Hot Springs Jewish Community is hosting a day trip to the tourist mecca under the rubric, "Ca-pona and Ca-filte Fish...an Old Jewish Spa with a History." Among the first Jewish communities west of the Mississippi, Hot Springs was the original "Spa City," whose healing waters drew Al Capone, not to mention a thriving number of Jews.

A Friday morning tour of Little Rock features the civil-rights monument Central High School, which is now a National Park. Bus goers will visit an 1870s restored Jewish home, still in the family, with prayer books on the shelves. One highlight of the Jewish cemetery visit will be "Tales of the Jewish Crypt....," a costumed enactment of prominent Jewish Arkansans. Actors will portray a debate between Rabbi Ira Sanders and Clarence Darrow. The tour concludes with a box lunch and tour of the Historic Arkansas Museum.

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The Rambler welcomes submissions on news relevant to Southern Jewry. Deadline for the winter issue is December 1.

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SJHS Convenes in Little Rock continued from page 1

World War II Changed a Generation, co-winner of the Saul Viener Book Award. In her talk "Ours to Fight For: GI Jews" the University of Michigan professor will explain how American Jewish soldiers were fighting more than Germans and Japanese on their battlefields.



Deborah Dash Moore

Early risers on Saturday will have a choice of the 1st Annual SJHS Run/Walk or Shabbat services. The morning begins with a panel on "Fact & Fiction," focusing on Jewish writing on Texas and on the Civil War. Convention goers will have something to write home about with the second panel, "Hello Muddah, Hello Faddah": Jewish Camping in the South." The keynote luncheon speaker will be Cheryl Greenberg, whose talk is titled, "But Is It Good for the Jews: The Early Years of the Southern Civil Rights Movement." Greenberg's recently published *Jews and African-Americans in the Twentieth Century* has received outstanding reviews.

Program Chair Stuart Rockoff will moderate an afternoon session on "The SJHS at 30: Envisioning the Future of Southern Jewish History." This panel will feature three experienced hands in the field: Eli Evans, Dale Rosengarten, and Dana Greene. The afternoon will conclude with a second panel "He Said, She Said": Rabbinic Pioneers Ira Sanders and Paula Ackerman." The Little Rock activist-rabbi and the Mississippi woman, the first American woman to lead a congregation, confound stereotypes about the South.



Eli Evans

Saturday evening the Conference will move to the architecturally stunning Clinton Presidential Library. Local Jews who have worked in the White House will guide a private tour of the exhibits, Oval Office, Cabinet Room, and adjoining School of Public Service. We will enjoy a "down home" dinner at the Center's Great Hall. Our speaker for the Bornblum Institute of Judaic Studies Program will be Stuart Eizenstat, who served as a high-level domestic and international-relations advisor to both Presidents Carter and Clinton. Most recently, Ambassador Eizenstat negotiated agreements with the Swiss, French, Germans, and Austrians on Holocaust-era claims. His talk will be, "Imperfect Justice: U.S. Negotiations and Holocaust Restitution." He is the author of *Imperfect Justice: Looted Assets, Slave Labor, and the Unfinished Business of World War II*.



Stuart Eizenstat

The Conference will conclude Sunday morning with the annual SJHS Membership Meeting and two panels. Jayne Guberman will lead a discussion on "Hurricane Katrina as History" which will feature three survivors: Catherine Kahn, a past SJHS president; Irwin Lachoff, an archivist; and Barry Stiefel, Tulane University. A final brunch panel will be the setting for one of the meeting's most popular events, meet the authors with three SJHS stalwarts: Eric Goldstein, Deborah Weiner, and C. S. Monaco.

And conventioners can enjoy staying to the end—the airport is but a fifteen minute ride from the Peabody.

Shhhh! SJHS Silent Auction

The SJHS is holding its first silent auction, where visitors can benefit the SJHS' educational programs by bidding on memorabilia and out-of-print books. Some unique Arkansas Judaica will also be available.

The Society's first annual silent auction-featuring Southern Jewish memorabilia-is slated for Nov. 11 during the Little Rock conference. Items up for bid include vintage postcards of Southern synagogues, a law review article signed by Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and a rare poster and playbill from Alfred Uhry's Broadway musical about the lynching of Leo Frank.

Silent auction co-chairs Sherry Zander and Hollace Weiner are also gathering vintage sheet music and out-of-print books related to Southern Jewish history. If you are a published writer or editor, please donate an autographed copy of your works.

To donate items, contact Hollace Weiner at hollacew@charter.net or 817-731-3685. If you plan to attend the conference, bring the item with you, mark it for Hollace and Sherry, and leave it at the Peabody Hotel's reception desk by Nov. 10. If you cannot attend the conference and plan to submit an item, please mail it to the SJHS, c/o Jim Pfeifer, 12911 Cantrell Road Suite 7, Little Rock, Arkansas 72223. The SJHS will send each contributor a note of thanks for these tax-deductible gifts.

Southern Jewish History Lives in Little Rock

Arkansas travelers will visit a state where Jews have made contributions far beyond their small numbers. Carolyn Gray LeMaster, whose *A Corner of the Tapestry: A History of the Jewish Experience in Arkansas, 1820s-1990s* is the definitive study, dates the first Jewish settlers to the 1820s. Bohemian-born Abraham Block and his wife Fannie Isaacs left her native Richmond to join the pioneers trekking to what was then the western frontier. When the territorial capital was established in Little Rock in 1821, the town claimed but a dozen houses.

Pioneering Jews in Arkansas repeated the classic pattern of Jewish mobility as they rose from peddling to become prosperous mercantilists and industrialists. Around 1830 three immigrant brothers from Galicia-Jacob, Hyman, and Levi Mitchell—headed westward in search of cheap, arable land. The brothers prospered, and Jacob launched a stagecoach line from Little Rock. By 1864 Jews were sufficiently numerous for an "elite" group to form the Little Rock Club, later known as the Concordia. During the war two Little Rock jewelers served the Confederacy. Albert Cohen used his mineral knowledge to process sulfur for gunpowder while Michael Stiff, a Mexican War veteran, fabricated swords. In 1874 Little Rock experienced its own civil war after a disputed gubernatorial election, which saw nearly 200 die. At the battle of New Gascony, Jewish farmers Jim and William Levy and L. Rosenberg were wounded. Concordia Hall became a hospital.

The Jewish population grew after the war, and some fifteen towns bear the names of Jewish pioneers. Among these pioneers were the Pfeifer brothers, ancestors of SJHS host chairman Jim Pfeifer. His great-grandfather Philip opened a "boat store" on the Arkansas River that was a gathering place for river men. Little Rock department stores bore the names of Jewish entrepreneurs. Herman Kahn, a German immigrant who came to Little Rock in the early 1870s, began as a clerk and ended as the city's largest builder and a bank president. The Marion Hotel, named for Kahn's wife, was the state's civic and social center. Several Jews, most notably Charles Abeles, were also instrumental in developing the state's lumber and woodworking industries.



Temple B'nai Israel, 1897

Keeping the Faith

Little Rock Jews had gathered informally for services during the Civil War, and a year after hostilities ended, ninety families organized the state's first congregation, B'nai Israel. That fall, several Jews entrusted \$300 to a Scottish immigrant, Gabriel McGowan, to purchase a shofar and Sefer Torah for the High Holidays. When an elaborate Romanesque temple was dedicated in 1897, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise presided. B'nai Israel was notable for its rabbinic leadership. Rabbi Ira Sanders, who

arrived in 1926, was a social progressive who served as founding dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Arkansas. Congregation B'nai Israel's current sanctuary, dedicated in 1975, includes architectural elements from the older temple.

Orthodox Jews had splintered from B'nai Israel in 1879 as the congregation evolved toward Reform. Their numbers were supplemented by a growing East European immigration. After first meeting informally in Rabbi Samuel Katzenellenbogen's store, they formed Agudath Achim by 1904, and three years later they remodeled a former Baptist church into a synagogue. It was supplanted by a new synagogue in 1952 and later

by its current sanctuary, which was dedicated in 1976.

In 1902 a YMHA was organized, and a United Jewish Charities Association formed in 1911. The state was notable for the Arkansas Jewish Assembly that endured from 1932 to 1950. At its last convention the keynote speaker was Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus.

Civil Rights

Little Rock was a critical battlefield in the civil-rights era when President Eisenhower sent federal troops in 1957 to enforce the desegregation of Central High School. Notable in support of integration and improved race relations were local Jewish women as well as Rabbi Sanders and his successor Rabbi Elijah Palnick. Clive Webb in *A Fight Against Fear* writes that in the years before the Supreme Court decision, "No southern rabbi had campaigned more rigorously against segregation than Ira Sanders of Little Rock." Rabbi Palnick forged personal bonds with African-American leaders and invited his black friends to services at B'nai Israel.

Today, Little Rock is the hub of the state's Jewish activity. The Little Rock Jewish Federation has evolved into the statewide Jewish Federation of Arkansas. Little Rock supports chapters of Hadassah, B'nai B'rith, and Jewish War Veterans as well as the Ati' (Our Future) Day School. In 1992 Lubavitch Hasidim opened a Chabad House. One popular event is the annual Jewish Food Festival, which draws as many as 10,000 to the downtown River Market Pavilions.

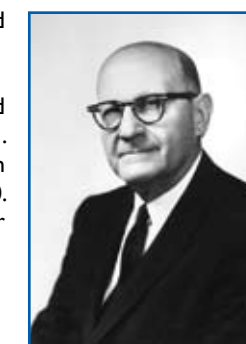


River Market, Little Rock

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its 32nd annual conference, co-sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of Washington, DC, in Washington on Nov. 2-4, 2007. Proposals for sessions or individual papers on any aspect of the Southern Jewish experience are welcome. The deadline is Jan. 5, 2007, but sessions will be evaluated as they are received. Individual proposals will be considered as they can be paired with other papers. Please send a 1-1½ page abstract and short bio.

To submit proposals or to serve as a panel chair or commentator, please contact Dr. Stephen J. Whitfield (stevewhitfield@juno.com/781.736.3035) and/or Dr. Mark K. Bauman (markkbauman@aol.com/404.366.3306), SJHS 2007 Program Co-Chairs.



Rabbi Ira Sanders