

Meeting in Memphis
Oct. 31- Nov. 2

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THE RAMBLER

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2003

www.jewishsouth.org

Volume VI, Issue 1

Annual Books Issue

Reading the Jewish South

American Jewry is a success story that challenges conventional portrayals of Jewish history as unending tragedy, Jonathan Sarna observed recently. Southern Jewry, however, does add a note of lament to the American celebration. Jews settled in a region beset by lost causes. Even now, as Sunbelt Jewry grows to unprecedented numbers, Southern Jews bemoan dying communities. Self congratulation is tempered by loss.

The books reviewed this year include a biography of Louis Jaffé, the Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, who succeeded professionally but abandoned his Judaism. Bill Aron's *Shalom Y'All: Images of Jewish Life in the American South* celebrates the riches of Southern Jewry, but it also documents ways of life that are fragile if not broken. A study of the Seixas-Kursheedt family offers exceptional evidence of Jewish survival. Readers are reminded that books on Southern Jewry are available at the SJHS website, Jewishsouth.org.

Alexander S. Heidholdt, *Editor for Justice: The Life of Louis I. Jaffé*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002.

This well-wrought biography restores to public notice a Virginian who spoke out eloquently against intolerance and violations of civil rights during an era when all too few Southern newspaper editors did so—or would have been allowed to do it by their publishers.

Louis I. Jaffé—he pronounced it with the second syllable stressed—was editor of the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* from 1919 until 1950. His stand against the Ku Klux Klan and lynching earned him a Pulitzer Prize in 1929. When he died of a heart attack in 1950 he was engaged in a battle to block restrictions aimed at discouraging blacks from voting in Virginia.

Jaffé's parents were Lithuanian Jews who emigrated from Kovno to Detroit in the 1880s, then south to Durham, NC. Jaffé listed his place and

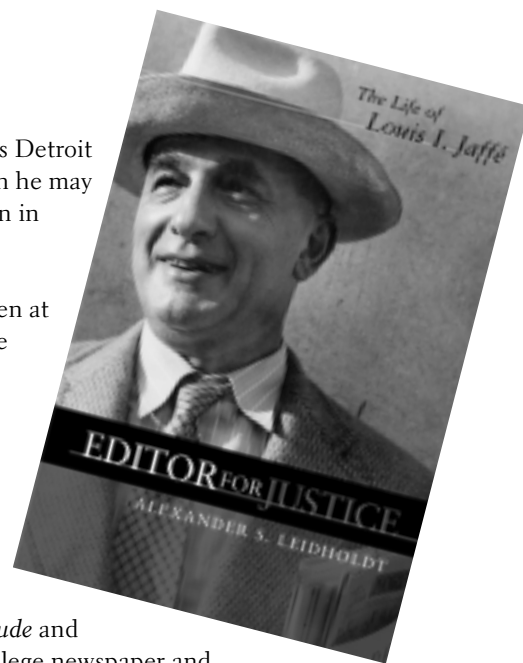
date of birth as Detroit in 1882, though he may have been born in Lithuania. At Durham High School and then at Trinity College (now Duke University) he was a prominent, highly successful student, graduating from Trinity *magna cum laude* and editing the college newspaper and literary magazine.

He worked on newspapers in Richmond for six years, served in the U.S. Army in France during the First World War, then with the American Red Cross in the Balkans and Paris, and while overseas was offered and accepted the editorship of the *Virginian-Pilot*. It was a remarkable appointment, and the publisher, Lucien Starke, Jr., and his several successors over the years firmly backed Jaffé's liberal political and social editorial stance, in disregard of considerable local opposition.

Jaffé's private life was less than satisfying. His marriage to the daughter of a prominent Norfolk Episcopalian family deteriorated after his wife began developing extreme neurotic symptoms, eventually diagnosed as schizophrenia. She spent much time and much of his money living away from him in hotels, grew increasingly anti-Semitic, and successfully alienated their only child's affections from him.

Jaffé had joined the Episcopal Church. His own Orthodox Jewish parents and brother, by then living in South Boston, VA, had not attended his wedding, nor is it clear that they were invited. For a time

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Minutes and Memory



Minutes are the official memory of an institution. They list those in attendance and those absent. They tally the money in the treasury and the votes on controversial issues. For future generations, minutes are important because they record precedents and highlight key issues of every era. Reading between the lines, a historian can tell much more.

As self-appointed Jewish historian for my home town, I have tried for several years to obtain the century-old Yiddish minutes of Fort Worth's oldest congregation. Since I am not a member at that synagogue, there was reluctance to share with me the proceedings. It took no small amount of behind-the-scenes manipulations to obtain a copy.

My quest had some urgency. The only person in Fort Worth capable of translating those minutes is Esther Winesanker, an 87-year-old colleague whose father was a Yiddish printer. Her mind is sharp, but her stamina is waning, and deciphering the handwritten script of yesteryear is a taxing endeavor.

In January, a copy of the minutes was finally turned over to us. The results were worth the effort. The minutes are full of clues about how the congregation's nineteenth-century board members thought and talked. Although written in Yiddish, these minutes are a polyglot with a great many English words transliterated into Hebrew characters. Based on the phonetic spellings, one can almost hear the men's accents: Motions are "moofed und seconded." Members are marked "apsent." The "meetin'" concludes in good order, and the board room is heated by a wood-burning "stoff."

The trustees are outraged at the arrival of Jewish

pimps and prostitutes to the city, so they pay a "persecutor" \$150 to run out of town all the "immoral Jewish men and women." The trustees also object to the burial of a shiksa at the only local Jewish cemetery (Mrs. Greenwall was her name), so they appoint a committee to purchase land for a strictly Orthodox cemetery. Thus, the impetus for starting the city's second Jewish cemetery at last comes to light.

Another longstanding puzzle has been this congregation's incomplete list of presidents. The minutes fill in the blanks. They disclose that the board of trustees tried to quash the formation of a rival synagogue. When congregants resigned, defecting to the second synagogue, the secretary would "strike the name" from the roll. That may have been the fate of David Brown, president of the Orthodox congregation from 1899-1901. In 1902, David Brown became a founding member of a Reform temple. For the next two years, his name was not mentioned in the shul minutes, nor does his picture appear in a present-day gallery of past-presidents. He was written out of all commemorative histories, but not from the earlier minutes.

What other riddles can be resolved from the minutes of an organization? Our recording secretary, Minette Cooper, has been reviewing this Society's minutes from bygone years. She, too, has discovered forgotten votes pertaining to reports and procedures. We are trying to move into conformance, for the minutes are the official memory of our organization as well.

Hollace Ava Weiner

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there was an estrangement, though he ended up supporting them financially. After a divorce, Jaffé was remarried in 1942. His second wife, a far more gracious and loving person, who had one Jewish grandparent, made a point of establishing his ties with this family.

As an editor Jaffé was not a proponent of racial integration; no white Southern newspaper editor in the 1920s and 1930s could possibly have held such

views. But as the editor of a leading black newspaper wrote, "it is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Jaffé pioneered in blazing the trail of true liberalism [among] his newspaper contemporaries in the South and never once wavered in his stand."

Within a few years after he died, his successor, Lenoir Chambers, would win a Pulitzer Prize for the *Virginian-Pilot's* uncompromising championing

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The Rambler
welcomes submissions on news relevant to Southern Jewry.
Summer issue deadline: May, 10.
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of full compliance with the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. "I wish Jaffé could have been alive to see you win it," the educator Stringfellow Barr wrote to Chambers. "But given the kind of guy Louis was, he probably does know."

Louis D. Rubin, Jr.
Chapel Hill, NC

Kenneth Libo and Abigail Kursheedt Hoffman, *The Seixas-Kursheedts and the Rise of Early American Jewry*. New York: Bloch Publishing with the American Jewish Historical Society, 2001.



Colonial and early national American Jewry was characterized by family and business connections that reflected national and international ties. These people made their marks in port cities from the Caribbean to New York, Newport, Philadelphia, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans and on to London and Amsterdam, and into inland trade depots like Richmond and Cincinnati.

Written by Kenneth Libo, with family member Abigail Kursheedt Hoffman providing substantial primary material, this short, 80-page monograph depicts the accomplishments of several members of one of the most illustrious of these linked families. Included are sketches of Gershom Mendes Seixas, the first American-born hazzan (minister) and a renowned patriot, and David Seixas, a pioneer educator of the deaf. Most important for the study of southern Jewry are the lives of Israel Baer Kursheedt and Gershom Kursheedt. These men were institution builders and bastions of tradition especially in Richmond and New Orleans, respectfully. With international ties and interests, both pioneered in philanthropy for the Holy Land and in defense of Jews overseas.

Libo attempts to balance a genealogical study with sound historical analysis. He explains "La Nacion," the early elites with roots in Spain and Portugal who joined together in business and family, the gradual integration of some central European ("German") Jews into this group, the impact of Americanization, and how Jews forged a stake in America. One would have hoped for a conclusion focusing on such themes as an ever-changing Jewish American identity, the lack of regional or even international distinctiveness and boundaries, and the roles of the nineteenth century traditionalists in relation to the growing force of reform, as well as more discussion of the roles of women.

This felicitously written volume, alongside Kaye Kole's study of the Minis family of Savannah and Myron Berman's *Last of the Jews?* on the Mordecais of Virginia and elsewhere, explicates the difficulty of finding Jewish mates within the small Jewish population of America into the Jacksonian era. The problem resulted in substantial interfamilial relationships. Siblings of one family would marry

siblings of another, and widows married brothers of deceased husbands. Other individuals chose to remain single. While many of the third generation families married outside the faith, the Seixas-Kursheedts offer a case in which adherence to tradition dramatically minimized this trend.

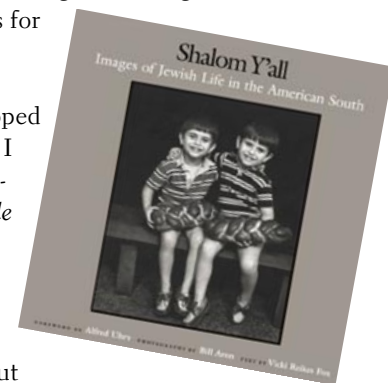
Mark K. Bauman
Ellenwood, GA

Bill Aron, *Shalom Y'all: Images of Jewish Life in the American South*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2002.

Every photograph in *Shalom Y'all: Images of Jewish Life in the American South* is a technical masterpiece — crystal clear, perfectly framed, rich with detail (and remarkably well reproduced). And many of the pictures will bring a smile or a tear, or make you think. For instance, there is Bob Cahllman of the Mardi Gras Masquerade Company in New Orleans, whose wild smile emulates the sea of masks behind him. Or the young Dorfman girls of Long Beach, MS, making matzo balls for Passover.

Unfortunately, many of the photos lack the punch I had hoped for when I picked up the book. I had first seen Bill Aron's photographs at *A Portion of the People* — the exhibit of 300 years of South Carolina Jewish history now showing at the Yeshiva University Museum in New York. Each picture there is about two feet square, and they are set side by side, covering much of one wall. The effect is at once breathtaking and intriguing — breathtaking for the sheer volume of the display, and intriguing because the large format of each photograph allows the viewer to see all the detail. Some of the pictures in *Shalom Y'All* lose their punch because of their size. There is a wonderfully composed shot of Ben and Betty Lee Lamensdorf in their cotton field in Cary, MS, for example. At three feet square, this would be an overwhelming photograph. At six inches by eight inches, though, the Lamensdorfs disappear and seem to be only props.

The second issue I have with the pictures is that many of them are what my nephew the photographer calls "just people with their stuff." Nowhere is this more true than in the series of store shots; it's hard to tell one store from another, and the proprietors lose their personalities. On the other hand, after you have been lulled by six consecutive store shots, you are confronted with a truly great photograph: Harold and Lucille Hart, in their liquor store in Eudora, AK, are laughing so hard that Lucille has buried her head in Harold's shoulder. It has all the



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Meeting in Memphis

SJHS board member Sumner Levine and Dr. Jacob Rosensweig, co-chairs of the Host Committee for the SJHS annual conference, are preparing a program that promises to both educate and entertain. This year's conference, scheduled for October 31 to November 2, will be headquartered at the Adam's Mark hotel in Memphis. The SJHS meeting will coincide with the fall board meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

Mark Greenberg, chair of the Program Committee, has engaged a stellar list of speakers. Of special interest will be a Saturday morning panel on Southern Jewish Foodways, moderated by Judy Peiser of the Center for Southern Folklore, and featuring folklorist Marcie Cohen Ferris and cookbook maven Joan Nathan. The Jerome Gumenick lecturer for this year will be a popular SJHS speaker, cultural commentator and author Stephen Whitfield of Brandeis University, who will put into scholarly perspective, "Cues, Blues, and Jews: Southern Music and Southern Jews." Other panels will explore Southern Jewish Women and "Growing Up Jewish and Black in Mississippi." Dr. Cornelia Wilhelm of the University of Berlin will cross the Atlantic to discuss a diary kept during the Memphis yellow fever epidemic of 1873.

The last SJHS meeting in Memphis in 1988 inspired the forming of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, which now counts 350 members.

Dissertation Grants Announced

Researching the Jewish South

The Southern Jewish Historical Society is inaugurating an annual dissertation research grant. The SJHS will award \$750 to a Ph.D. candidate researching any aspect of southern Jewish history. The grant is to be used to fund dissertation research.

Applicants should submit a 750 to 1,000 word proposal and a letter of support from their dissertation advisors by June 15, 2003 to

SJHS Dissertation Research Grant Committee
c/o Dr. Stuart Rockoff, chair
Institute of Southern Jewish Life
P.O. Box 16528
Jackson, MS 39236-0528

Entries will be judged by an independent committee.

The Southern Jewish Historical announces, with gratitude, that Jerome Gumenick has agreed to continue his sponsorship of an annual lecture at the SJHS annual meeting for the next five years. The Jerome Gumenick Lectureship has endowed talks by such notables as Eli Evans, Alfred Uhry, Stephen Whitfield, and Jonathan Sarna. The Society also thanks our past president Saul Wiener for his dedication in helping to create the lectureship.

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warmth and texture that was lacking in the preceding pages. Indeed, there are several such stunning photos in this book, and when they are added up, they redeem any artistic shortcomings elsewhere.

Some of the pictures in *Shalom Ya'll* cry out for more information about the people, the place, the circumstance. And sometimes you get it in the text by Vicki Reikes Fox, a museum curator and educator. To wit, the caption for the priceless picture of a young gap-toothed girl in Jackson, MS, holding a bagel: "The influence of Jewish culture in the South takes shape in the bagel, once a rare delicacy in Mississippi. Melissa Samuels likes hers plain, but bagels with lox and a side of grits are a regional favorite." At times, the added information comes in well-chosen quotes. "You don't have to know a whole lot about tradition to get to heaven," says Harold Hart on the page facing the picture of him hugging and laughing with his wife at the liquor store. "Just live right."

Unfortunately, too many of the captions tell too little about the photograph. There is a spectacular picture of the elders of a Pine Bluff, AK, church

that used to be a synagogue. The stained glass is clearly Jewish, the African-American elders are clearly not. But I want to know what these elders think about having their church in a former synagogue, what happened to the Jewish congregation, and whether there is any interaction between the two today.

In short, while I love many of Bill Aron's photos and respect all of them, and while the text is at times elucidating, I sorely miss a sense of narrative. Are southern Jews different from other Jews? How? Are they the same? In what ways? Are they dying out, or are they a healthy lot? It is hard to tell from this book. I don't need the definitive work on southern Jews, but I would have liked the photographer and author to have taken a stab at it. In his introduction, Alfred Uhry says that *Shalom Ya'll* is a "detailed and evocative record" that we should be happy to have "before we [southerners] get completely homogenized." It is worth having this book for that reason. I just wish it were more.

Marcus Rosenbaum
Washington, DC

Notes & Queries



“The Blum House, Old city Park, Dallas”

- “The Southern Jewish Store,” a documentary film by Donna Schatz, has won a prize at the River Film Festival in Richmond. The film portrays the last Jewish store in downtown Winston-Salem, NC. “The Southern Jewish Store” was the recipient of a grant from the SJHS and will be screened at the annual meeting in Memphis.
- Sherry Zander, who chairs the SJHS Liaison Committee, is seeking to convene a meeting at the Memphis annual conference with representatives of local Jewish historical societies. Please contact Sherry at sherryzander@juno.com or 6022 Joyce Way, Dallas, TX 75225-1913.
- A historical marker in Richmond now commemorates the original location of America’s sixth oldest Jewish congregation, Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome, founded in 1789. The original synagogue stood near 14th and Franklin Streets from 1822 until its demolition in 1931. Beth Shalome merged with

Beth Ahabah in 1898. The marker represents a collaboration of the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation and the Virginia Department of Historic Resources’ Historical Highway Marker Program. SJHS stalwarts Saul Viener and Herb Heltzer assisted with the planning.

- Old City Park, a living history museum in Dallas, takes a foray into Jewish life with an interactive project at the 1901 Blum House. The house was home to Leah Meyer Blum, an Orthodox Jew of Austro-Hungarian origin who had moved to Dallas after her family suffered the Great Galveston Storm of 1900. Blum family actors, consisting of composite characters based on demographic research, will perform household chores, such as baking challah, that will give visitors an insight into Jewish life and culture. The park comprises 32 structures that document city life from 1840-1910. For information, contact 214.421.5141 or visit the website www.oldcitypark.org.

A Tribute to Judge H. Sol Clark

Retired Georgia Court of Appeals Judge H. Sol Clark, 96, a longtime supporter of the SJHS, died January 17 in Savannah. Admitted to the bar in 1929, Judge Clark was the oldest active lawyer in Savannah. A graduate of Cornell University, Judge Clark served as an attorney for more than 73 years. Active in Jewish causes, Judge Clark once defined chutzpah in a legal opinion, attorney Beryl Weiner recalled.

In 1972 Governor Jimmy Carter appointed Clark to the state Court of Appeals, the first Jew to serve as an appellate judge in Georgia history. A President of the Savannah Bar Association in 1952, he was a charter member of the American Bar Foundation and served as dean of the International Academy of Trial Lawyers. On three occasions, the State Bar of Georgia honored Judge Clark with its Distinguished Service Award. The State Bar also created the H. Sol Clark Award, given annually for outstanding service in Legal Aid. Judge Clark established the Savannah Legal Aid Society, served as its president, and chaired its committee for 25 years. The Harvard Law School Association of Georgia honored him as “The Father of State Legal Aid in Georgia.” In 1999, the Supreme Court of Georgia designated Judge Clark “Amicus Curiae” for his distinguished service to improving the administration of justice.

At 27, Judge Clark served as president of the Jewish Educational Alliance and also chaired the United Jewish Appeal. He was a member of Congregation Bnai Brith Jacob Synagogue. Judge Clark is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, Fred and Nancie Clark, and three grandchildren.

GUMENICK PROPERTIES
Executive Offices
6600 West Broad Street, Suite 100
Richmond, Virginia 23230

Jerome Gumenick
President

January 29, 2003

Dear Friends:

It was Saul Viener who introduced me to the Southern Jewish Historical Society, and it is Saul Viener who continues to remind me of the obligation to share our good fortune with others.

On the news of Jackie and Saul’s planned departure from Richmond to Atlanta, a group of friends established the *Saul Viener Fund for the Study of the American Jewish Experience*. Our aim is to perpetuate his passion: the scholarly pursuit as to how Jews have come to be where we are. Our purpose is to stimulate conversations both about our heritage and our hopes for the future.

You will be pleased to learn that Bernie Wax, one of Saul’s closest friends, has agreed to serve as an academic advisor to the Fund.

I urge you to join in the support of this effort to advance the story of our participation in the American saga.

Please forward your contributions to the
Saul Viener Fund
c/o Mr. Jerome Gumenick
Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives
1109 W. Franklin Street
Richmond, VA 23220

Each contribution will be acknowledged; each contribution is fully tax deductible, and each contribution will be most appreciated.

I thank you for your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Jerome Gumenick

CALENDAR

Date	Event
current	“With this Ring: History of the Jewish Wedding Ceremony”; “Treasures of the Collection” Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, 1109 W. Franklin St., Richmond VA 23220 (804.353.2668)
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/msje.org)
permanent	“Jewish Experience in Georgia” William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring St. NW, Atlanta GA 30309 (404.870.7684/atlantajewishmuseum.org)
permanent June 10-Nov. 2	“MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida” Jews of Broward County: Their Lives, their Contributions, their Impact on Florida” Jewish Museum of Florida, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139-6965 (305.672.5044/jewishmuseum.com)
current	“We Call this Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns” The Jewish Museum of Maryland, 15 Lloyd St., Baltimore MD 21202 (410.732.6400/jhsm.org)
April 25-27	Annual Meeting of the Texas Jewish Historical Society Park Cities Hilton Hotel, Dallas, TX (214-368-0400)
permanent	The Blum House Project Old City Park, 1717 Gano Street, Dallas (214.421.5141/oldcitypark.org)
Feb. 6-July 20	“A Portion of the People: Three Hundred years of Southern Jewish Life” Yeshiva University Museum, 15 W16th St., NY, NY 10011 (212.294.8330/ yumuseum.org)