

Join Us in  
*Memphis!*

# THE RAMBLER

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Fall 2003

www.jewishsouth.org

Volume VI, Issue 3

## One SJHS, Many Societies

### Local Southern Jewish Groups Grow

Is the South one place or many? What do the Alsatian cotton broker in the Mississippi Delta and the Russian storekeeper in Appalachia have in common as Southern Jews?

The search for ethnic and regional identity has engaged many scholars. It's also inspired growing numbers of subregional Jewish societies dedicated to preserving and presenting local Jewish history and culture.

Our Southern Jewish Historical Society speaks to one South. The subregional societies speak to our differences as well as our commonalities.

Now the SJHS is exploring ways to strengthen relationships with these groups to our mutual benefit.

SJHS member Sherry Zander has compiled a roster of local Southern Jewish organizations that lists some 21 archives, museums, and societies. They include Jewish heritage museums, synagogue archives, and local and state Jewish historical societies. They range from professionally staffed institutions with major facilities

and collections to volunteer groups with few more assets than a mailing list. The 1980s and 1990s appear to be the eras of the greatest growth. Many organizations are currently engaged in capital or fundraising campaigns.

Statewide Jewish heritage or historical societies can be found in Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. The Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS) has 750 members, and the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC) counts over 500. Each has a university affiliation that provides archival resources and sometimes staff or administrative help. Local societies also exist in Annapolis, Charlotte, Dallas, Washington, Memphis and the Mid-South, the Peninsula (VA), and South Florida.

Jewish museums are situated in Atlanta, Baltimore, Jackson (MS), Miami, and Richmond. In Baltimore and Miami the facilities incorporate old

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## Blues and Jews

### Bus Tour of Memphis

Memphis visitors will have an opportunity to view local history from a Jewish perspective on the Friday, October 31, bus and lunch tour.

Perre Magness, who writes a local history column in the *Commercial Appeal*, will conduct the tour. An author of several works on Memphis civil leaders and the city's architecture, Magness is a gifted raconteur.

She'll show us where and how Memphis grew from an Indian trading post to the cotton capital of the South. The bus will pass the University of Memphis, the Pink Palace Museum, 19th century Jewish-owned mansions, and Overton Park's Zoo. It will continue through the Victorian Village, along

the Mississippi River, past the Pyramid, and down famous Beale Street. The first stop will be the National Civil Rights Museum where Mrs. James (Helen) Wax, widow of Temple Israel's beloved rabbi who famously confronted the city's leadership in support of civil rights, will speak. A program on the strong Orthodox presence in Memphis will follow the audio tour of the Museum.

Native Memphian Judy Peiser, who co-founded the Center for Southern Folklore with Bill Ferris, will serve as the luncheon host. After leading a tour of the Center's collection, she will take the group to the famous Pinch district, Memphis' answer to the Lower East Side, and then to the thriving Jewish institutions of today. Another highlight will be Marilyn and Jack Belz's vast, exciting Judaica collection,

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# 'The Work of Archivists is Eternal'



Attending the Third Biennial Conference on Synagogue Archiving was an afterthought, not the primary purpose of my eight-day trip to Cincinnati. I had planned to visit the city's Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) to research a fellowship paper. The archivists' seminar, with most of its sessions scheduled for a Sunday, seemed a good way to combat the usual boredom of the weekend.

You see, whenever I visit the AJA, located at Hebrew Union College, I room in the rabbinic students' dormitory, a landmark constructed in the 1920s. The advantages of staying in the dormitory are cost and convenience. The disadvantage is the dearth of companionship. Few people live in the 75-bedroom, four-story dormitory (because today's rabbinic students are often married and live off campus). On weekends, when classes recess and the archives close, the campus empties. The dormitory feels like a tomb. No matter how much writing I have to do or how large a stack of books to read, the haunted feeling in the dorm makes it difficult to accomplish a thing.

Therefore, the prospect of a weekend seminar for synagogue archivists—one of several hats I wear—would fill otherwise lonely hours. To my delight, the seminar turned into a bonus, a bonding experience with 43 energetic participants, some of them acquaintances from the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

The opening night of the archivists' conference featured a "Document Road Show." Archivists—including Richmond's Bonnie Eisenman, Nashville's Jean and Phil Roseman, and Louisville's Ann and Bob Friedman—had been instructed to bring one documentary treasure from their synagogue collections so that professionals might evaluate its historical and market value. I brought the minutes from a 1902 synagogue meeting scribbled in pencil on the back of a courthouse circular.

Lois England, from Washington Hebrew Congregation, displayed a Congressional resolution, signed by President Franklin Pierce in 1856, granting her synagogue the same rights as Christian churches in the District of Columbia. Besides being

worth a pretty penny on the open market, the charter bespoke an era when D.C. was a fiefdom of Congress without an elected mayor or city council. The document also glimpsed into a time before typewriters when clerks wrote documents in beautiful penmanship.

From Little Rock, archivist Jim Pfeifer, an SJHS member, brought typewritten minutes from the "Round Table," a social and intellectual discussion club of sixteen Jewish men who met from 1914 to 1918. The detailed minutes, collected in a pocket-sized, two-ring notebook, featured irreverent jibes at women's suffrage, social commentary on race relations, discussions of intermarriage, and wry remarks about one another. Since none of the knights of this Little Rock Round Table was famous, this wartime notebook would not fetch much from an auction house. Historically, however, the Arkansas minute book is worthy of a thesis paper or a journal article. Each page reveals the thoughts and interactions of ordinary, articulate people candidly discussing literature and current events. As a primary-source document, it is invaluable.

Seemingly more pedestrian was a copy of a ledger page brought to our Document Road Show by Fran Hess, archivist from New York's Temple Emanu-El. Recently, a stranger had written her, hoping to verify that an ancestor had belonged to the congregation during Emanu-El's earliest era. In a dusty, 1850s accounting book, Fran found a page with the ancestor's name, showing two payments of \$37.50 on his \$75 annual dues. Connecting a 21<sup>st</sup> century stranger with an ancestor from yesteryear felt electric. The incident demonstrated the value of ordinary records, said Fran, who had selected this routine document in consultation with her congregation's founding archivist and museum curator, Reva Kirschberg.

Reva had died the day before, on the eve of the archives conference, suffering a stroke while attending a Mozart concert in New York. Fran elected to attend the Cincinnati seminar in memory of her friend and colleague, then return to New York for the funeral. She wanted to convey to others the vitality Reva Kirschberg attached to her work preserving documents and artifacts from our Jewish past.

Thanking Fran Hess for her presence and her

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## Book Review

*We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland's Small Towns*, ed. by Karen Falk and Avi Y. Dector (Baltimore: Jewish Museum of Maryland, 2002)



Rarely is an exhibit catalog as worthwhile reading in its own right as is *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland's Small Towns*. Filled with clearly identified, fine illustrations, this volume takes the exhibit beyond cutesy photos glorifying local ancestors to a level of thematic analysis that offers sophisticated insight to interested laypeople as well as scholars.

Lee Shai Weissbach continues his pioneering work in small town Jewry with an essay placing the Maryland experience in national context. He intertwines factors in the European background and the chain migration phenomenon with conditions in the small towns that drew Jews and allowed them to flourish. Weissbach describes divisions between East European Orthodox and Reform settlers of German origin, but also explains how conditions frequently contributed to compromise.

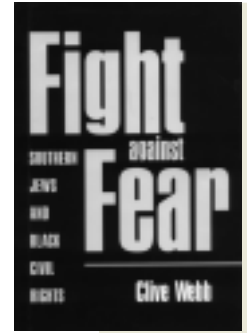
Eric Goldstein's must-read essay makes the story Maryland-specific and, in so doing, extrapolates the survival mechanism of networking among others. While Goldstein analyzes changes over time as he brings his narrative to the present, Karen Falk concentrates on today. Her chapter stresses the current environment and describes challenges but also opportunities. Although many communities are now imperiled, the movement of groups out of towns and small cities, only to have the remnant replenished by in-migration, has continued from generation to generation.

All three authors highlight religion, family, economics, identity, and ambivalent interaction with non-Jews, and bring their statistics to life with pertinent examples. Like Weissbach, Goldstein and Falk point to differences between living in small towns and industrial metropolises like Baltimore. They go further by making distinctions among small communities of varying sizes and between long-time and newer Jewish residents. One comes away from this catalog with a sense of amazement concerning how Jews and Judaism adjusted and survived in problematic circumstances. It is a story well told and worth reading.

Mark Bauman, Editor, *Southern Jewish History*

## SJHS Announces First Book Prize

The Book Prize Committee of the Southern Jewish Historical Society is pleased to announce the results of the SJHS's first Southern Jewish history book competition. The prize, which will be awarded every four years to the author whose work makes the most significant contribution to the field of



Southern Jewish history, goes this time to Clive Webb, a lecturer in American Studies at the University of Sussex in England, for his book *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights*. Webb's study, which examines the complex social factors that determined Southern Jews' involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, was published by the University of Georgia Press in 2001 and has recently come out in paperback edition. The committee also awarded an honorable mention to Leonard Rogoff, a research historian at the Rosezweig Museum and Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina, for his book *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*. Issued in 2001 by Alabama University Press, Rogoff's book details the way in which Jews in two small southern towns negotiated their identities as both Jews and Southerners. The Book Prize Committee received over twenty entries for the competition, and the submissions demonstrated not only the breadth of work on Southern Jewish history but also the very high level of scholarship in the field. The prizes will be awarded officially to Webb and Rogoff at the SJHS's annual conference in Memphis this Fall. The judging panel for the prize consisted of Dr. Eric L. Goldstein of Emory University (chair), Dr. Marc Lee Raphael of the College of William and Mary, and Dr. Stephen J. Whitfield of Brandeis University.

—President's Message continued from page 2

remarkable poise, the AJA's chief archivist Kevin Proffitt shared a tribute to Reva Kirschberg and observed that archivists provide a "conduit" from the present to the past: "The work of archivists is eternal."

Hollace Ava Weiner

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which has only recently opened to the public. The bus will arrive at the Park Vista shortly before 4:00 p.m., allowing delegates time for a brief R&R before Shabbat dinner at Temple Israel.



synagogues. The museums also have archives and libraries. Several synagogues maintain archives as semi-autonomous agencies with independent endowments. In Nashville and St. Louis, Jewish Community Centers hold regional archives.

The Goldring Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life has undertaken the very large mission not only to document and exhibit Judaica through its Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Jackson but also to provide religious and cultural services to local communities. The Museum has also reinvented the Natchez temple as a Jewish cultural and historical site.

The SJHS board is exploring ways to strengthen ties between the Society and local groups. SJHS President Hollace Weiner sees a role for the Society as a liaison or a mentor. She speculates on several possibilities: "We can run an informal speaker's bureau and help them locate someone nearby to speak at meetings. We can help with programming



ideas. We can exchange newsletters, provide information about archives, or help them set up synagogue archives."

The SJHS annual meeting creates a setting for networking. At last year's Shreveport meeting, Dale Rosengarten of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina offered her expertise as curator of "A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life." As an outgrowth of this contact, the JHSSC will hold a joint program with the newly formed Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina when "A Portion of the People" opens Sept. 12 at the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte. This meeting—which features such speakers as Emily Bingham, Eli Evans, Bill Ferris, and Louis Rubin, Jr.—will not only draw audiences to the South Carolina exhibit but will also provide a model for a future multimedia project, "Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina." The SJHS provided the common ground to establish the relationship.

## Notes & Queries

- The Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History has launched a new website: <http://www.350th.org>. The site contains articles, a timeline of American Jewish history, and links to online exhibits.

- On Sunday, September 21 at 2 p.m., The Temple Congregation Adath Israel Brith Sholom in Louisville dedicated the Esther and Sam Fishman Library and the Leonard H. Devine Judaica Center, which includes museum and archives rooms. Dr. Gary Zola, Executive Director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives was the guest speaker.

The center is built specifically for the preservation of the congregation's history. The Fishman Library contains more than 3,000 books, and the Frances Shapiro-Weitzenhoffer Archives Room displays fascinating exhibits of documents, books and artifacts not only from The Temple's past but also from the early years of Reform Judaism, of which the congregation was a founder. The exhibit includes an 1854 handwritten memorial to the Jewish philanthropist Judah Touro, who had left a

bequest to Adath Israel. Also noteworthy is a collection of letters, dating from 1934 to 1941, from Justice Louis D. Brandeis to a cousin in Jerusalem.

The Library and

Judaica Center are open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Archival research may be done by appointment. For information, please call Rabbi Joe Rooks Rapport at 502.423.1818 or Marcia Hertzman at 502.429.9454.

- Governor Jeb Bush has signed a bill designating January as an annual Florida Jewish History Month. The Jewish Museum of Florida conceived the idea, and Museum director Marcia Zerivitz enlisted bipartisan political support. "Jews have actively participated in shaping the destiny of Florida," Zerivitz observed, noting that the museum documents a presence dating to 1763. Florida, the nation's third largest Jewish community with 16 per cent of American Jewry, is the first state to have a Jewish History Month.

- The Louisville Jewish Community Center produced a play, "General Order No. 11" by Nancy Gall-Clayton. It dramatizes the infamous 1862 military order by General U. S. Grant, which expelled Jews from areas of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi under Union control.

- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has established a new interdisciplinary research and teaching center to explore Jewish history, culture, and religion in the United States and abroad. "The Carolina Center for Jewish Studies will provide a scholarly understanding of the historic Jewish experience," said Chancellor James Moeser. Professor Jonathan Hess, who has a joint appointment in German and Religious Studies, will direct the center. The center's curriculum includes a course, "Shalom Y'All: The Jewish Experience in the American South," which is taught by SJHS member and convention speaker, Dr. Marcie Cohen Ferris.

### Call For Papers

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its annual conference, co-sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, in Charleston, SC, Oct. 28-31, 2004. The title is "Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: Commemorating 350 Years of Jewish Settlement in America." Proposals for sessions or papers (1-1/2 page abstracts and short bios) on any aspect of Southern Jewish history are welcome. Although Feb. 1, 2004, is the target deadline, sessions will be evaluated as they are received, and individual proposals will be considered as they can be paired with other papers. For program information or to submit proposals, please contact Dr. Mark K. Bauman, SJHS 2004 Program Chair, 2517 Hartford Drive, Ellenwood, GA 30294 ([markkbauman@aol.com](mailto:markkbauman@aol.com)).

# Meet Your New SJHS Board

Nominating Committee Co-chairs Catherine C. Kahn and Dr. Bruce Beeber announce a slate of officers for 2003-04. Minette Cooper of Norfolk will rise to the presidency, and Sumner Levine of Memphis will serve as president-elect. Scott Langston of Bolivar, MO, will be secretary, and Bernie Wax of Brookline, MA, continues his tenure as treasurer. Remaining on the board are Robert Rosen of Charleston, SC; Betsy Teplis of Atlanta; and Irwin Lachoff of New Orleans.

The Board welcomes three new members:

Stuart Rockoff, a Houston native, received a B.A. from Wesleyan University and an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin with a special emphasis on immigration and American-Jewish history. He is now preparing a study of Jewish assimilation and racial identity in Atlanta and Pittsburgh. In June 2002, he moved to Jackson, MS, with his wife and daughter to become director of the history department at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life and the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience.

Professor Phyllis Leffler is director of the Institute for Public History at The University of Virginia. Her

duties include managing internship programs at museums and historic sites and oversight of an oral-history project, Explorations in Black Leadership. Her research centers on the experiences of women prior to full coeducation. She has also taught a course on southern Jewish history in the Jewish Studies Program. During 2002-2003, she was a senior research fellow at the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford University where she explored the relationship between museum culture and issues of national identity.

Professor Eric Goldstein holds a joint appointment in History and Jewish Studies at Emory University. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He has published in the journals *American Jewish History*, *American Jewish Archives*, and the *William and Mary Quarterly* and the anthologies *Women and American Judaism*; *Jewishness and the American World of "Difference"*; and *Henrietta Szold and American Jewish Womanhood*. He also contributed to *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland's Small Towns* (see p.3). He is completing a book about the ways American Jewish identity was shaped by notions of race between 1875 and World War II. He lives in Atlanta with his wife, Cheryl Haas-Goldstein, an attorney, and their son, Max.

## SJHS First Dissertation Grant

### Jews and Booze Subject of Research

Marni Davis, a graduate student in American Jewish History at Emory University, has been awarded the SJHS's first-ever dissertation grant. This \$750 award will be used to fund research for her dissertation, "The Homebrew and the Hebrew: Jewish Americans as Purveyors of Alcohol, 1870-1936." Davis' work compares the experience of northern and southern Jews in the liquor trade. Using the lenses of racial politics and identity, Davis explores how popular notions of Jewish involvement in the liquor trade shaped their assimilation and community status. For example, Davis examines how the Atlanta Race Riot of 1906 was justified by many in the white community by charges of drunken African-American males attacking white women. Some blamed Jewish saloon owners for selling alcohol to Atlanta blacks. These claims of endangering white women called into question the racial status of Jews, since white southern men were charged with protecting the purity of white women. In addition to analyzing these racial discourses, Davis plans to document the scale and scope of Jewish involvement in the liquor trade in Atlanta. Her work promises to make a substantial contribution to the field of American history, and the SJHS is pleased to be able to support her project.

### In the Media

- "Push, Pluck, & Perseverance: The Story of Judaism in Charlotte" has earned WTVI, Charlotte's public television channel, a 2002 Aegis Award for video production. Much of the research and archival material for the video came from the archives of the Charlotte Jewish Historical Society.
- The Valentine Richmond History Center organized the first guided tour of the city's Jewish sites, according to a July 21 report in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. The three-hour bus tour visited a historic marker denoting the site of Beth Shalom, founded in 1789; the old 1908 Kenesseth Israel synagogue; Jewish cemeteries, including one for the Confederate dead; the Virginia Holocaust Museum; and the Beth Ahabah temple and museum.
- *The Forward* reported on its front page (August 29) on the efforts of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life to revive Jewish education in the small-town Deep South. The article featured Greenville, MS, where Lauren Angler, a New Yorker sent to the area by Teach for America, volunteered to conduct a Sunday school at Hebrew Union Temple for eight children. The report included an interview with the Institute's rabbinic director, Debra Kassoff, who is training lay teachers to serve small towns. It recently drew regional participants to a conference, "Teaching Teachers and Those Who Want to Be." Sandra Liverman of Wesson, MS, said, "I've been waiting for something like this for so long."

# Memphis

## CALENDAR

Date	Event
Oct. 31-Nov.2	SJHS Annual Meeting Memphis TN
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 Jan. 2004	“Creating Community: The Jews of Atlanta from 1845 to the Present” “The Legacy Project: Coming to America” “Shalom Y’All: Images of Jewish Life in the American South” (Bill Aron photographs) William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring St. NW, Atlanta GA 30309 (404.870.7684/atlantajewishmuseum.org)
permanent thru 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/www.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/www.jhsm.org)
permanent	“The Blum House Project” Old City Park, 1717 Gano St., Dallas TX, (214.421.5141/oldcitypark.org)
Sept. 13-Nov. 30	“A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life” Levine Museum of the New South, 200 E. Seventh St., Charlotte, NC 28202 (704.333.1887/www.museumofthenewsouth.org)