

Next year in Memphis!

SJHS Convention
Oct. 30-Nov. 2, 2003

THE RAMBLER

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Fighting for the Union

Sarna Delivers Jerome Gumenick Lecture



Jonathan Sarna

Jonathan Sarna's name on the program carried the promise of intellectual excitement. As Jerome Gumenick lecturer, he challenged an overflow audience Friday night at Temple B'nai Zion with "Union and Disunion in Mid-19th Century Judaism." Sarna, Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor of American Jewish History at Brandeis University, placed efforts to organize American Jewry in the context of larger national developments. The lecture offered a preview of his forthcoming history of American Judaism.

In response to waves of Central European immigration, which saw American Jewry grow from 3,000 in 1820 to 250,000 in 1877, the "Sephardic

synagogue-communities" that had prevailed since early colonial days yielded by mid-century to competing synagogues, Sarna explained. Much like immigrant Christians, Jews from Bavaria, Prussia, Posen, and Alsace created ethnic congregations. Moreover, a nascent Reform movement divided Jews into ideological camps. "What continued to hold American Jews together during this time?" Sarna asked. "And why did efforts aimed at promoting broader unity ultimately collapse?"

The new immigrants arrived in an America that was changing from a subsistence-based to a market-driven economy. A national distribution network of canals, turnpikes, and railroads created new choices in places to live. An entrepreneurial spirit led to new occupations and consumer products. "The values of competition and 'free choice' that are so critical to a market economy quickly became part of the Jewish 'religious economy,'" Sarna said. One immigrant wrote to his family in Bamberg, "The Israelites living here come from various countries. Everybody can choose freely where or in which synagogue he wants to be enrolled." That America was a competitive religious marketplace is reflected in the names of newly formed synagogues. Unlike the earlier Sephardic names which evoked Jewish redemption, the new ones stressed the need for harmony: Ohabei Shalom ("Lovers of Peace") or Beth Ahabah ("House of Love").

Sarna pointed out that the "significant communal debate over 'union'" in the Jewish community reflected the "critical national debate over 'The Union'" that preceded the Civil War. When Isaac Leeser advocated a plan for "establishing a religious union among Israelites of America" in 1841, a skeptical Charlestonian, Abraham Moise, saw a northern affront to the states' rights of "Jews south of the Potomac."

In Europe the English chief rabbinate, the French consistoire, and the German gemeente imposed unity and authority, but such a state-

—continued on page 3

Memories of Shreveport

The Shreveport convention will be remembered for the remarkably stimulating line up of speakers and panels. It will also be recalled for the hospitality of the Shreveport community, especially Temple B'nai Zion which hosted an overflow crowd for Shabbat dinner and Congregation Agudath Achim which served a memorable meal of kosher gumbo, dirty rice, and bourbon-soaked pecan bread pudding.



Shot Dead!

Shreveport in its early days was rough and ready, according to historian Gary Joiner, who led SJHS members on a Jewish cemetery tour. At a card table, a young Jewish immigrant, Nathan Goldkind, got into a fight with one Joe Morgan, who pulled a gun and shot him dead. The Morgans were big-time politicians who pretty much ran the town, so no one was surprised when Joe walked scot-free. That didn't sit so well with the Bodenheimers, the town's first Jewish family. They paid for young Goldkind's zinc tombstone, which Joiner showed us. On the front it read "Nathan Goldkind," but on the back, which faced the street for all to see, the Bodenheimers had engraved, "Shot dead by Joe Morgan."

From the President's Desk



“The Synagogue is the most enduring, most persistent, most resilient, most participatory and least studied Jewish institution. . . . Its history is left to amateurs.”
—Jack Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue, A Sanctuary Transformed*

When I sat down last June to begin writing my congregation's centennial history, few people understood why I was postponing out-of-town trips, dropping out of weekly tennis matches, and spending my summer vacation completing a 12-chapter, 120-page, footnoted, illustrated coffee-table book celebrating my temple's past.

Why knock yourself out to produce something as narrow and parochial as a synagogue history, a commemorative book that most people would skim for the pictures, not the text? Everyone knows that working on long-term synagogue projects leads to tsuris and grief. And what about the pay? All I would receive was a key to the synagogue so that I could burn the midnight oil while combing the temple archives.

The determination to write a comprehensive centennial history of my home congregation, Beth-El in Fort Worth, stemmed partly from the paradoxical quote that introduces this column. Jack Wertheimer, former archives director at the Jewish Theological Seminary, writes about the importance of synagogues in the American Jewish landscape. He implores historians to pay more attention to this commonplace institution. “The synagogue's continuity is unmatched by other Jewish institutions,” he observes. “Yet . . . typically a synagogue's centennial history is slapped together in a yearbook filled with flattering articles, mug photographs of past presidents, lists of congregants who served in the military, and ads to cover the expense.”

How right he was. I have read synagogue histories galore that were “slapped” together. Yet, no matter how “amateur” or “flattering” they were, each synagogue history aided my research with dates, names, illustrations, and connections to larger events. The most disappointing centennial histories were those that regurgitated what had been

previously written for the 50th anniversary. The best narratives examined the breadth of a century, complete with controversies and perspective.

That was what I sought to do.

At my Texas congregation, there was plenty of material to pique interest in the past. Take the rabbi: our first representative of the faith was a “meddlesome” rev who lasted three months. Our second rabbi performed laudably in Fort Worth, but later in his career got hauled before the Reform movement's ethics committee for secretly taking a bride and denying that fact to his congregation. Our fourth rabbi rounded up Jewish prostitutes and gave them a morals lecture – in Yiddish – at the city jail. A Prohibition-era rabbi imbibed sacramental wine. The rabbi who made the most courageous stand for civil rights was also the most reluctant to lift gender barriers.

Women continually took one step forward and two steps back. They made gains, then lost them. In 1923, women were guaranteed up to three seats on the temple board. Nonetheless, the board gradually returned to being an all-male domain. In 1949 and again in the 1960s and 1970s, motions passed placing women on the board. Each time, the move was hailed as an innovation, rather than a puzzling example of institutional forgetfulness.

The lessons of a century show that Beth-El's women were not persistent enough to maintain their gains. A look back also shows that our rabbis were not necessarily role models. Yes, this centennial history includes the requisite “mug” shots of past presidents. Yes, it salutes those who served in the wars. The title page also salutes Jack Wertheimer whose words validated my focus on this “least studied” Jewish institution.

Hollace Ava Weiner

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recognized institution was “antithetical to American ideals,” Sarna said. In the absence of ecclesiastical authority, he argued, Jews were united by a “series of powerful unifying symbols and markers.” Rather than look for the founding date of a cemetery, benevolence society, or congregational charter, Sarna pointed to the “presence of the Torah scroll” as the “defining symbol of Jewish communal life and culture.” Placing tablets of the Ten Commandments on the synagogue ark also became almost universal. To distinguish themselves from Christians, Jews began displaying the Magen David, which came into common use early in 19th-century Germany. The Shema, as the “watchword of our faith,” united Jews across movements and differentiated their monotheism from the trinity of Christianity.

Beyond these unifying symbols, attempts to create an “overarching ecclesiastic assembly,” a “common liturgy,” or a universal educational

program all failed. When Isaac Mayer Wise, the reformist, and Isaac Leeser, the traditionalist, convened a “national conference” in Cleveland in 1855, their effort to create “Shalom Al Yisrael” (“peace unto Israel”) fell short. Sarna noted moderation was in retreat in all areas of national life, most notably on the slave issue. Protestant denominations also split regionally and doctrinally. Rabbi Maurice Mayer of Charleston, among others, spoke against a central synod that had a “right to decide upon some portions of our Divine service.”

When a relatively weak Board of Delegates of American Israelites formed in 1859, it enlisted no more than one fifth of America’s synagogues as conflicts over “sectionalism” and local rights led Reform congregations as well as several prominent Sephardic ones to absent themselves. “The internal battle within American Judaism,” Sarna concluded, “reflected and anticipated the central drama of mid-19th century American life: the American Civil War.”

Suddenly Not Jewish



*Paul
Gaston
Leaves
Audience
Aghast*

Paul Gaston, Professor of History Emeritus at the University of Virginia, borrowed the title of his talk, “Suddenly Not Jewish,” from the phenomenon of post-Holocaust European children who were raised as Christians, but now in their adult years have learned suddenly that their parents were Jews. Gaston’s story is set in Tennessee where a child adoption service run by a woman named Georgia Tann distributed babies nationwide. Thanks to a kindhearted Memphis lawyer, Abe Waldauer, of the 5,000 children so placed more than 30 percent landed in Jewish homes with papers marking them as having Jewish parentage. Herein lies the tale. The children’s birth parents weren’t Jews.

For Gaston, a self-described “lapsed agnostic,” the story was a personal odyssey. He knew and admired Abe Waldauer, whom he had known since his childhood on a utopian Henry George colony in Alabama. Waldauer was an active Zionist, a founder of Brandeis, and a lawyer of impeccable ethics. In a barn behind Waldauer’s house Gaston discovered an old filing cabinet with thousands of adoption documents and “scads” of letters from rabbis and others requesting Jewish children.

Georgia Tann and the Tennessee Children’s Home Service endured until 1950 when financial scandal finally closed the agency. Tann had taken thousands of babies from poor, often illiterate women, some of whom were drugged when they signed away their rights. A baby carried two sets of papers. One might identify the parents as illiterate sharecroppers. A second would list an unmarried college student and a musician. The paternity was

often “Jewish,” since maternity could be more easily traced.

A Tennessee Right to Know Society has formed to help these adopted children find their birth parents. The adoptees’ responses, Gaston noted, varied from those who remained secure in their Jewish identities to those who suffered trauma. “Jerry,” raised by Jews in New York, was a professional with both a MD and Ph.D. He learned that his birth father was in jail. A man who was “intellectually and emotionally a Jew,” an observant member of a synagogue, he suffered a breakdown. “Rhoda” was a happy and secure member of a Jewish family and congregation, but after a lifetime of Jewish living her rabbi informed her that neither she nor her children were Jewish. Others encountered rabbis who responded with understanding. Some adoptees chose not to inquire.

Did Abe Waldauer, a man of integrity, actually believe that these babies were Jewish? Surely he must have known that Tennessee could not have produced so many Jewish adoptees. Gaston finds the question compelling. Was Waldauer acting from altruistic motives, thinking that he was helping both parents and children to better lives? Could he have been an accessory to a crime? Tann was obviously corrupt. Gaston does not have an answer on Waldauer, but an enraptured SJHS audience certainly had many speculations. Jonathan Sarna noted that in New York, interreligious adoption was forbidden at the time, so there was a benevolent motive in listing a Jewish birth for a child sent to a Jewish home.

New SJHS Dissertation Grant

With its first Dissertation Research Grant, the SJHS will award \$750 to a Ph.D. candidate researching some aspect of Jewish history pertaining to the Southern United States. Applicants should submit a 750 to 1,000 word proposal along with a letter of support from their dissertation advisor by August 1, 2003. Send applications 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.

Requested and Granted

The SJHS Grants Committee, chaired by Dr. Scott Langston, has announced four grant recipients for 2002:

1. William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum of Atlanta for its statewide archival project to document Jewish life in small communities throughout Georgia (\$1,500).
2. Andrea Greenbaum, Assistant Professor of English at Barry University, Miami Shores, FL, to aid in covering permission for photographs for her book *Jews of South Florida* (Brandeis University Press) (\$1,500).
3. Beth-el Congregation of Ft. Worth, TX, to aid in publication of their centennial volume (\$1,000)
4. Julius Herscovici to aid in printing a book on the history of the Jewish community of Vicksburg, MS (\$500)

Documenting Georgia's Jews

The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum is putting its 2002 SJHS grant to immediate use. The award will assist the Museum in its ongoing survey and collections program to document Jewish life throughout Georgia.

Since settling in the colony in 1733, Jews have spread across the landscape. Today, few documents have survived to chronicle the Jewish presence in many towns. The Breman Museum is intent on surveying and accessioning this material before more vital information is lost.

The Breman Museum's goal is not to displace existing local efforts but to offer support. The city of Savannah, for example, is coordinating its own survey and collections program. Many other communities may have only one or two Jewish families remaining. Others with more sizable

—continued top of next column

populations may lack the resources to preserve either manuscripts or objects in a secure archive.

The Breman Museum is copying vital records and returning duplicates to the communities. The originals will be preserved in the Museum's archival environment. This approach benefits researchers who will be able to access documents on Georgia's Jewish life in one central location.

Oral history is also a key component of this project. The Breman Museum has begun to videotape residents across the state. The long-term goal is to add an interactive component that will highlight individual lives. It will be installed permanently in a gallery.

In the three years since the project's inception, the Breman Museum has accessioned more than 50 collections including material from small towns like Ocilla, Fitzgerald, and Talbotton. These collections include records from synagogues, benevolence societies, B'nai B'rith lodges, Sisterhoods, and private families. Among the papers are those from one of SJHS's most influential and important members, the Beryl Weine Family of Camilla.

Society Inaugurates Book Prize

The Southern Jewish Historical Society announces the establishment of a prize for the book, published in the past four years, that makes the most significant contribution to the field of Southern Jewish history. The winner will receive \$500 and be the Society's guest at its next conference, Oct. 30 – Nov. 2, in Memphis, TN.

A committee of scholars consisting of Eric L. Goldstein of Emory University, Steven J. Whitfield of Brandeis University, and Marc Lee Raphael of the College of William & Mary will judge submissions. Goldstein is the panel's chairman.

Eligible books must have been published between Jan. 1, 1999, and Dec. 31, 2002. They must deal with Jewish history within the southern United States, a region encompassing the former Confederacy and the border states. Works examining Southern Jews within the broader history of the South or within the history of American Jews will be considered. Submissions must be non-fiction and may include memoirs, biographies, and edited collections. Books must be original. Works outside the field of history as well as reprints, reissues, or updated versions of earlier works are ineligible.

Publishers or authors may nominate books by sending three copies to: SJHS Book Prize Committee, c/o Beryl H. Weiner, Esq., 1718 Peachtree Street NW, Suite 990, Atlanta, GA 30309-2409. Submissions must be received by March 31, 2003.

NEW SJHS MEMBERS FOR 2002

Membership chair Betsy Blumberg Teplis reports 61 new SJHS members for 2002.

Betsy Chernan - Nashville, TN
David E. Morewitz - New York, NY
Stanley M. Srochi - Atlanta, GA
Marc J. & Beverly Saltzman Lewyn - Atlanta, GA
Mr. & Mrs. William J. Newman - Jacksonville, FL
Dr. Ira & Karen Tina Sheskin - Cooper City, FL
Jack & Emily Benjamin - Metairie, LA
Adam Mendelsohn - Cape Town, South Africa
Jay & Ann Davis - Atlanta, GA
Dr. Aubrey A. & Joan S. Lurie - Shreveport, LA
Simon Shlenker III - New Orleans, LA
Louis & Elaine Saul - Augusta, GA
Esther Lewyn - Atlanta, GA
Dr. I. Norman & Patricia Sporn - Richmond, VA
Lionel & Shirley Eltis - Shreveport, LA
Laurette R. Rosenstrauch - Columbus, GA
Denise Stein - Smyrna, GA
Rosalind Aussenberg - Atlanta, GA
Howard Fagin - Atlanta, GA
Howard & Faith Levy - Atlanta, GA
Freida Orange - New York, NY
Judge Mathew & Madelyn Robins - Decatur, GA
Cornelia Wilhelm - Munich, Germany
Jack Horowitz - Atlanta, GA
Leonard & Sandy Schwartz - Austin, TX
Mark & Nora Baker - Austin, TX
James I. Martin, Sr. - Buies Creek, NC
Dr. Sloane Drayson-Knigge - Madison, NJ

Margery Kerstine - Memphis, TN
Richard & Lana Krebs - Atlanta, GA
Mr. & Mrs. Maurice Raphael - Bastrop, LA
Stanley & Laurel Schwartz - San Diego, CA
Rabbi Kenneth Segel - Montgomery, AL
Edward A. Stein - Chesapeake, VA
Ellis & Reva Hart - Madison, MS
Mr. & Mrs. David Rothschild II - Columbus, GA
Richard & Esther Shifrin - Oklahoma City, OK
Two Rivers Consultants - Nashville, TN
Lee Goldfarb - Newport News, VA
Harriet Keyserling - Beaufort, SC
Judith Shanks - Washington, DC
Betty Weil - New Orleans, LA
Rosalind Benjet - Dallas, TX
Marni Davis - Atlanta, GA
Irwin Kaufman - Memphis, TN
Irwin Lachoff - Metairie, LA
Caroline Masur - Lafayette, LA
Sara C. Zangwill - Memphis, TN
Mr. & Mrs. Joe M. Schendle - Bastrop, LA
Dr. Canter Brown, Jr. - Tallahassee, FL
Bennett & Harriette Oxman - Atlanta, GA
George Wilkes - Cambridge, UK
James R. Alexander - Dallas, TX
Robert Beer - Dallas, TX
Vicki Reikes Fox - Los Angeles, TX
Cheryl Greenberg - Hartford, CT
Ben & Charlene Hertz - McAllen, TX
Joan Vitner - Atlanta, GA
Betty Goldstein - Annapolis, MD
Rose Mark - Beaufort, SC
Ben & Barbara Rosenberg - Sugar Land, TX
Jeffrey & Vona Weiss - Shreveport, LA

Notes and Queries



Charles Hart,
President, Texas
Jewish Historical
Society

- Betsy Blumberg Teplis, SJHS membership chair, has been appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Historic Oakland Foundation. Oakland Cemetery contains the oldest Jewish burial grounds in Atlanta. Other SJHS members on the board are Ann Uhry Abrams and Bennett “Buster” Oxman. Norman Elsas Asher serves on the Advisory Board. “A Guide to the Jewish Sections,” written and designed by Eric Goldstein, is available to all visitors. The brochure was made possible by a grant from the Atlanta Jewish Federation.
- The Texas Jewish Historical Society (TJHS) invites SJHS members to attend its annual gathering in Dallas, April 25-27. In a letter to SJHS president Hollace Weiner, TJHS president Charles B. Hart, welcomed the “new relations between the two organizations.” He saw an opportunity to build on the “hospitality and friendliness” of the “outstanding” joint event in Shreveport.

Book News

- *Norfolk, Virginia: A Jewish History of the 20th Century.* Irwin M. Berent’s 250-page book includes more than 100 photographs and an index of more than 2,000 names. It is the only comprehensive history of Jewish Norfolk. Copies are available by VISA MasterCard, check, or money order for \$19.95 per book (plus \$3 shipping for first book, \$1 per book thereafter) from Irwin Berent, 560 Roland Drive, Norfolk, VA 23509
- *Milton County, Georgia Cemeteries. (Present Day Northern Fulton County.)* This book documents 13,132 inscriptions dating from the county’s creation in 1857 to its merger into Fulton County 1932. Its author, Phillip B. Anglin, was the recipient of a 2001 SJHS grant. It is available for \$35. For information, contact P.O. Box 13772, Atlanta GA 30324 (ph. 404.685.9111).
- *We Call This Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns.* This richly illustrated, 106 page anthology, has been published by the Jewish Museum of Maryland to accompany the exhibit of the same name. The book, edited by Karen Falk and Avi Decter, includes essays by SJHS stalwarts Eric Goldstein (“Beyond Lombard Street: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns”) and Lee Shai Weissbach (“The Jewish History of Small-Town America”). For information, check the Museum’s website

CALENDAR

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	“MOSAIC: Jewish Life in Florida” Jewish Museum of Florida, 301 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139-6965 (305.672.5044/www.jewishmuseum.com)
current thru Jan. 26, 2003	“We Call this Place Home: Jewish Life in Maryland’s Small Towns” “Enterprising Emporiums: The Jewish Department Stores of Downtown Baltimore” The Jewish Museum of Maryland, 15 Lloyd St., Baltimore MD 21202 (410.732.6400/www.jhsm.org)
April 25-27, 2003	Annual Meeting of the Texas Jewish Historical Society, Dallas TJHS, P.O. Box 10193, Austin, TX 78766-0193
Oct 30-Nov 2, 2003	Southern Jewish Historical Society Annual Meeting, Memphis, TN Adams Mark Hotel