

Washington Connections Conference Reports



JHSGW President Peggy Pearlstein
at Library of Congress

SJHS's 32nd Annual Conference, co-hosted with the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, was one of its most successful in both the quality of the programming and the professionalism of its administration. The sessions, organized by program chairs Mark Bauman and Stephen Whitfield, were provocative in presenting new perspectives and varieties of Jewish experience. Host committee chairs Janice Blumberg Rothschild and Maryann Kallison Friedman, ably assisted by the JHSGW's president Peggy Pearlstein, director Laura Cohen Apelbaum and the tireless conference coordinator Erin McCormally, oversaw a meeting that was notable for both its efficiency and cordiality. Les Bergen of JHSGW ensured that the books were balanced financially and, more literally, on the table for sale, and Cecily Abrams oversaw the meals and reception.



Laura Cohen Apelbaum at Sixth & I Synagogue

The Conference setting evoked the rootedness of Jews in the Washington community. The first sessions were held at the recently restored Sixth & I Historic Synagogue, dating to 1908. This nondenominational synagogue holds five sets of prayer books for alternating services which draw traditional worshippers as well as young, unaffiliated Jews who dance in the aisles.

JHSGW Executive Director Laura Cohen Apelbaum, a fourth-generation Washingtonian, dispelled stereotypes that the city's Jewish community is small, transient, and recent. Now the nation's sixth largest Jewish community, Washington claimed its first Jew, Isaac Pollack, shortly after the federal government mandated a capital in 1795. Washington Hebrew Congregation in 1852 became the nation's only Jewish congregation created by an act of Congress, and President Franklin Pierce attended the synagogue dedication in 1856. Orthodox Adas Israel formed in 1876, and President U. S. Grant sat through a three-hour service at its dedication.

Here are a few snapshots of other sessions:

Questioning Quotas

Marianne Sanua noted that southern colleges like the University of Alabama welcomed Jews even as northern colleges were imposing quotas. "Jewish migratory students" headed to the South and Midwest. Jewish Greek societies began with Pi Lambda Phi in 1895, and they increased to 17 for men and 6 for women by 1927. They involved as many as one quarter million students by 1968. Curiously, Christian men were more receptive to having Jews in their Greek organizations than were Christian women. By the 1950s, especially after racial integration, the Jewish system began breaking up. Sanua noted distinctive features of southern Jewish fraternities and sororities. They emphasized manners consonant with

Christian ideals of etiquette. Coats and ties ensured meal-time decorum. They were also important as centers of Jewish social life.

Sally Stokes observed discrimination in the creation in 1937 of the planned community of Greenbelt, Maryland. Greenbelt, inspired by the work of a Jewish urban designer, was to be 63 percent Protestant, 30 percent Catholic, and 7 percent Jewish. No African Americans were admitted. Greenbelt was to be a "utopia" for "carefully selected families." A multi-faith building housing Catholic, Mormon, Protestant, and Jewish chapels was planned, but never built. World War II put an end to quotas, and in 1955 a synagogue arose. Greenbelt native Richard Rosenzweig described a comfortable suburban life in the town where his father became a community pillar.

Happy Hanukkah

Prof. Diane Ashton in "Quick to the Party: Southern Jews and the Americanization of Hanukkah" traced how the holiday has evolved. Penina Moise's "Hanukkah Hymn" dates to 1842, a year after Charleston's Beth Elohim had dedicated its Temple; it focuses not on the national aspects of the holiday, but on personal virtue and forgiveness, a timely theme for a congregation that had just re-united after religious dissension. In 1874 Rabbi Max Lilienthal, borrowing from German Christmas customs, popularized children's candle-lighting, gift giving, and holiday singing. In 1926 Temple Sisterhoods began the custom of selling Hanukkah cards, the success of which inspired commercial manufacturers. In New Orleans Jews began decorating their front doors in 1978 with Jewish holiday themes. Hanukkah, Ashton noted, has become an American holiday. Judah Macabee serves as a model for the American revolutionaries of 1776.

Notes & Letters

John Baron's talk focused on Sigmund Schlesinger, a professional musician who arrived at Mobile's Sha'arai Shomayim in 1869. From the mid 1890s to early 1900s he composed liturgical musical settings for the new Union Prayer Book. Adopted by the entire Reform movement, his works were still appearing in new editions into the 1960s. Schlesinger's music, Baron noted, sounded "very Christian." Like many contemporary Jewish synagogue composers, he set Hebrew texts to popular music, and his *Ki Vayom Hazeh* for Yom Kippur paraphrases a Donizetti aria from *L'Elisir d'Amore*.

Julian Levinson brought to life I. J. Schwartz, the author of the Yiddish epic poem, *Kentucky*. Schwartz identified with the Young Ones, a circle of neo-romantic Yiddish poets. In New York he had translated Shakespeare and Whitman into Yiddish. After relocating south, he published *Kentucky* serially from 1919 to 1922 in the newspaper *Zukunft*. Schwartz, Levinson noted, introduced the American South to the cosmopolitan world. For those trapped in the ghetto, he fed their fantasies with a bold naturalism that evoked Edenic views of America. At the same time he did not shun the darker aspects of race and violence. [Continued, p. 5](#)

Marianne Sanua recited several refrains of a popular Jewish Greek ditty, not all of which she felt were appropriate for a Jewish gathering in a synagogue. It began, "Oy, oy, oy Zeta Beta Toy, What have you done with my little Jewish boy?"

A Letter from Our President



Scott Langston, President

To say that we had an outstanding conference in Washington would be an understatement! The tours, accommodations, and food were wonderful, as were the many informal conversations that took place. One comment I heard repeatedly had to do with the excellent quality of the sessions. I have to agree. The presenters really did well, and we had many lively sessions. Being involved with this kind of meeting always re-energizes me for pursuing southern Jewish history. My thinking was stimulated, and I thought of many avenues I'd like to explore. I hope you had a similar experience.

We don't, however, have to wait until next year in Atlanta to continue our discussion of southern Jewish history. There are many tools to help keep this going. Our newly established online discussion forum—JewishSouth—is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week. On this email list, we can keep asking questions, debating, and seeking information about southern Jewish history. If you have not subscribed, it is free of charge. All you need to do is contact the list moderator, Adam Mendelsohn, at amend@brandeis.edu and ask him to put you on the list. If you are subscribed, then I encourage you to ask questions and participate in discussing any aspect of southern Jewish history. I greatly enjoyed our recent discussion of southern-Jewish identity. We also have the journal, *Southern Jewish History*. I just received the latest edition in the mail, and it looks great. The articles might raise some questions that could be discussed on JewishSouth. *The Rambler* also contains items of interest, especially information about exhibits and books on southern Jewish history. If you visit an exhibit or read

one of these books, it would be interesting to see your impressions posted on JewishSouth. The conference is the highlight of the year, but it doesn't have to be the only one.

Thanks to everyone who came to the conference and to those who worked so hard on making it something significant. I'm looking forward to what happens between now and next year's conference in Atlanta. We are set up for a good year!

Scott Langston

In the News

- The revival of Jewish life in New Orleans was the focus of two media reports: National Public Radio on November 1 reported on community efforts to lure more Jews to the city. It included an interview with former SJHS President Catherine Kahn. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/917736.html) described a "resurgence of Jewish life" in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, claiming that "about 30 percent of newcomers to New Orleans are Jewish." Michael Weil of the Jewish Federation divided them into "opportunists" motivated by profit and "idealists" inspired by tikkun olam. Both reports featured interviews with natives and newcomers who had responded to financial incentives to settle. New Orleans Jewry numbered 9500 before Katrina and now stands at 6700, although at least 400 new Jews have arrived in the past two years.
- Nancy Rousseau, the Jewish principal of Little Rock's Central High School who addressed the 2006 SJHS Conference, was interviewed in the Sept. 25, 2007, *New York Times* on the fiftieth anniversary of the integration crisis. Commenting on the recent documentary "Little Rock Central: 50 Years Later," Rousseau faulted the filmmakers for not probing deeper into the school's "unique character."

And the Winner Is.....

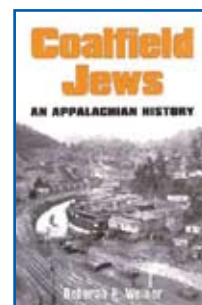


Deborah Weiner

The SJHS awards a Book Prize every four years for the "book that has made the most significant contribution to the field of Jewish history of the American South." SJHS President Scott Langston announced at the Conference that the Book Prize would be awarded to Deborah Weiner for *Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History* (2006). This groundbreaking work explores the social place and

economic role of Jewish immigrants as agents of change in a remote corner of a South that was rapidly industrializing.

The Prize includes \$500 and registration and guest accommodations at the annual conference. The Book Prize Committee consists of Karla Goldman, Stuart Rockoff, and Stephen Whitfield. The previous winner was Clive Webb for *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (2001).



Coalfield Jews: An Appalachian History

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submissions on news
relevant to southern Jewry.
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Howyl-Broadfield

Georgia Landmark with Jewish Connections by Rabbi Saul Rubin, SJHS President, 1981-82



Hofwyl-Broadfield House

Hofwyl-Broadfield, one of the South's oldest rice plantations, marks the union of two nationally prominent families—one Jewish, the other Episcopalian. Established by South Carolina's elite William Brailsford in 1803, it became the property of James Troup Dent who married Miriam Cohen, daughter of Solomon and Belle Gratz Moses of Savannah.

In Hofwyl today one still sees evidence of Jewish ancestry. The portrait of Isaac Moses in the dining room compares to his famed portrait by Gilbert Stuart. Moses helped finance the American Revolution, partnered with Robert Morris to establish the first U.S. National Bank, co-founded the Bank of New York, purchased the site for Mikve Israel synagogue in Philadelphia, and even employed Alexander Hamilton.

The Gratz connection is evident in the living room where on display is a Malbone miniature of Rachel Gratz, who married Isaac Moses' son. When she died in her prime, leaving many children, Rachel's sister Rebecca assisted the eldest daughter Belle in rearing the family. Rebecca Gratz, founder of the Jewish Sunday School movement, was a friend of Washington Irving and inspired the character Rebecca in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. The plantation house displays a copy of Thomas Sully's portrait of her.

Hofwyl also holds artifacts belonging to Solomon Cohen. A leader of the Savannah Jewish community, he and his brother Octavus were responsible for the 1878 Gothic Temple, Mickve Israel, on Monterey Square. Following the Civil War Cohen was elected to the U. S. Congress although the Reconstructionists refused to seat him.

Hofwyl's owners are related to such prominent Jewish families as the Minises, Phillips, and Pembers. The last occupants—Gratz, Miriam, and Ophelia Troup Dent—developed it into a dairy farm. They supplied fresh milk daily to Brunswick and the Golden Isles, making personal deliveries to their millionaire friends on Jekyll Island.

In 1973, after the demise of Ophelia Troup Dent (whom the author buried), Hofwyl Broadfield passed to the State of Georgia as a historic site. The home, dairy farm and vestiges of the rice plantation are open to the public daily. A museum tells the site's story. Live Oaks and spacious grounds offer a panorama of exceptional beauty and tranquility.

Hofwyl-Broadfield is located off exit 42 of I-95; drive one half mile east to US 17 south towards Brunswick.

Let the Discussion Begin!

SJHS Listserv

The SJHS has now established a listserv—an email mailing list—for the discussion of southern Jewish history. Its name is JEWISHSOUTH.

To subscribe, email the list's moderator, Adam Mendelsohn, at amend@brandeis.edu or send a request to jewishsouth@shamash.org. Once you have joined, you will receive emails that explain in detail how to use the list. You do not have to be a member of SJHS to participate, and no cost is involved. So, please tell others who you think might be interested.

"This will help promote a stronger sense of community among those of us who are interested in the field," SJHS President Scott Langston

observes, "and it will provide a forum for us to discuss and ask questions about southern Jewish history virtually any time of day or night." Subscribers will have the opportunity to post their questions about Southern Jewish history and to answer inquiries. Subjects may range from where to look for sources to debates over interpretation. As moderator, Adam Mendelsohn will review the email for its relevance to southern Jewish history and then distribute it to the list. The first topic, which drew a vigorous response, was a query from President Langston himself on "Being Jewish in the South," which included a lively discussion on Jewish-Protestant relations.

Tenth Anniversary Volume

Southern Jewish History

The tenth anniversary volume of *Southern Jewish History*, the annual journal of SJHS, is now available. This issue includes a 100-page section on the Society's history, two articles on South Florida, one on the civil-rights career of Little Rock rabbi Ira Sanders, and an "unusual and bizarre" story of murder and madness in late 19th century Nashville. Rounding out the journal are two review essays and five book reviews.

The journal also announces its first price increase for institutions and libraries, \$40 as of January 1. Individual prices remain at \$15 for the new volume and \$10 for back issues for members. Non-members pay \$5 more. To order, contact Rachel Heimovics Braun, Managing Editor, at 954 Stonewood Lane, Maitland FL 32751 or email journal@jewishsouth.org.

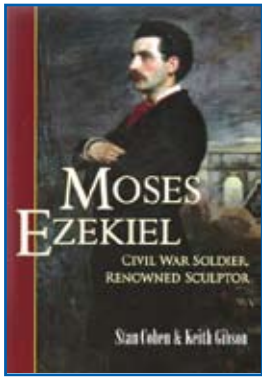
Next Stop, Atlanta

New Conference Format for 2008

The 34rd Annual SJHS Conference, to be held in Atlanta on November 1-3, 2008, will introduce a new format, Emory Professor Eric Goldstein, host chair, has announced. With SJHS Board approval, the meeting will begin Saturday night and end Monday afternoon. Headquartered on campus at the Emory Conference Center and Hotel, the meeting will also convene at The Temple and the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum. The 2008 host institution is Emory University's Tam Center for Jewish Studies.

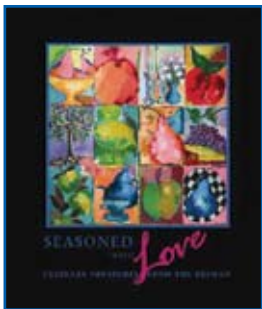
Book News

Moses Ezekiel: Civil War Soldier, Renowned Sculptor



Stan Cohen and Keith Gibson have co-authored *Moses Ezekiel: Civil War Soldier, Renowned Sculptor* (Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 2007). As a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, Ezekiel fought at the battle of New Market in 1864. Robert E. Lee advised him, "I hope you will be an artist." Studying in Europe, he became the first American to win the Prix de Rome. Establishing a studio in Rome, he won numerous commissions, including the Arlington Monument. This richly illustrated volume contains many plates illustrating Ezekiel's life and work. The book serves both as a biography and an assessment of his art. Copies may be purchased through the Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives at bama@bethahabah.org or 804.353.2668.

Seasoned with Love: Culinary Treasures from the Breman



Seasoned with Love: Culinary Treasures from the Breman includes over 300 kosher recipes that embrace "southern and multicultural Jewish traditions." The Atlanta Jewish museum has illustrated the cookbook with archival photos from its collection and spiced the recipes with "notable quotes and food memories." The Breman Museum recommends the book for "Foodies and Noshers, History Fressers and Friends." To obtain a copy, check the Breman Museum website www.thebreman.org/progevents/cookbook.htm or call 678.222.3700.

A History of Temple Emanu-El: An Extended Family



The Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina has published *A History of Temple Emanu-El, Weldon, North Carolina: An Extended Family*. Authored by Leonard Rogoff, Rambler editor, the 100-page book traces the congregation's evolution from its birth in 1912 to its closing in the early 2000s. The congregation, founded by East European immigrants, served a half-dozen small communities in southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. To obtain a copy, contact the JHFNC at info@jhfn.org.

Notes & Queries

- Dr. Dianne Ashton of Rowan University is writing a book on Hanukkah celebrations in America, the subject of her talk at the SJHS Conference in Washington. To further her research, she is seeking volunteers to answer a questionnaire informing her of their own Hanukkah customs. Your reply may be used in the book. Dr. Ashton will honor any request to keep your identity anonymous and confidential. If you are interested in participating in this research, please contact ashtond@rowan.edu.
- The Institute for Southern Jewish Life Digital History Archive has added Arkansas to its online database, ISJL historian Stuart Rockoff has announced. Alabama and Louisiana are next. The ISJL History Department also oversaw the removal of artifacts from Temple B'nai Jeshurun of Demopolis, AL. The congregation, organized in 1858, had built an ornate temple in 1893, but moved into a smaller building in 1956 as the community dwindled. It closed in 1989.
- The Jewish Museum of Florida is collecting photos and artifacts for two forthcoming exhibitions. The Museum has issued a "last call" for "Florida Jews in Sports," scheduled to open on June 17, 2008. That will be followed by "Jews in the Military." The Museum is seeking uniforms, medals, photos, and documents. Contact the Museum at 305.672.5044.
- Moses E. Levy's Pilgrimage Plantation (1822-1835)—the first Jewish communitarian settlement in the United States—has been located and registered with the state of Florida, according to Chris Monaco, author of *Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer*. The site is located in a rural area 12 miles south of Gainesville between Levy Lake and Lake Wauburg (a variant of Warburg, a leading colonist). Bordering the site is Levy Prairie, a pristine wildlife corridor and bald eagle preserve, which is the focus of a conservation initiative. National Historic Landmark designation is now a possibility. This unique social, religious, and agrarian endeavor was destroyed during the Second Seminole War.

Power to the People

Maury Wiseman and Wendy Bergoffen drew portraits of contrasting southern Jews. Wiseman focused on the political careers of David Levy Yulee and Judah Benjamin. Like Benjamin D’Israeli, they were “social Christians” who were Jews neither by religion nor by association. Their “blood,” in nineteenth-century terms, identified them as “racial Jews.” Both were subject to anti-Semitic attacks although both were land-owning Southern aristocrats—Benjamin as a Whig and Yulee as a Democrat.

Rabbi Henry Cohen of Galveston, by contrast, in his advocacy of a civil religion sought to transcend any contradiction between being both a Jew and an American, Bergoffen observed. Working with the thousands of immigrant Jews arriving in the Texas port under the auspices of Jacob Schiff’s Galveston Plan, Cohen sought to create “pioneers,” who would be a “resource” and not a “problem.” The Industrial Removal Office, which relocated immigrants to small towns, wanted Jews to assimilate and integrate. The immigrants, however, were resistant to being re-made.

Daniel Puckett explored the reaction of Alabamans, white and black, to the rise of Hitler. Jews were able to enlist politicians in support of opening the doors of Palestine to European-Jewish immigration. Displaying editorial cartoons, he noted how the African-American press saw Nazi anti-Semitism in the context of white anti-Black racism.

Schocket and Saddle Maker

The theme of contrasting identities played out vividly in the panel on Texas Jews. Bryan Edward Stone traced the career of the schocket and Yiddishist Alexander Ziskind Gurwitz, who was a memoirist, talmudic commentator, and biblical translator. Gurwitz, who arrived through the Galveston Plan,

made a “seamless” transition from Russia to Texas since he never moved beyond the Orthodox, Yiddish-speaking community. In contrast, journalist Nick Kotz noted that his Russian ancestors became acculturated Texans, starting out as harness makers but becoming ranchers who hunted, rode horses, and served in the military. Although the first generation had “put the Old World aside,” the family has remained strongly affiliated Reform Jews now in their fifth generation.



Karla Goldman

Hurricane History

Karla Goldman reprised the Jewish Women’s Archive’s Voices of Katrina project, illustrating her talk with video histories. No Jews saw Katrina as a specifically Jewish catastrophe although many of them drew strength from their sense of themselves as Jews whose parents and grandparents had survived pogrom and Holocaust. The dislocations also connected them to the larger Jewish community, which stood ready to provide shelter and support.

Double Duty

Peggy Pearlstein, doing double duty as JHSGW President and head of the Library of Congress’ Hebraic Section, gave an insider’s look at the Library and its Judaica collection. On display were an array of historic documents that had appeared in the Library’s exhibit “Haven to Home: 350 Years of Jewish Life in America.” The exhibit can be seen on the Library’s website www.loc.gov (where Pearlstein’s lecture will also be posted). The JHSGW is now preparing an exhibition “Jewish Life in Mr. Lincoln’s City” for the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth in 2009.



C a l e n d a r	
Date	Event
Nov. 1-3, 2008	33rd SJHS Annual Conference Emory University, Atlanta, GA
current	“Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia” “Minding the Store: Richmond’s Jewish Merchants” “Answering the Call: Prayer, Patriots, Service, and Sacrifice” Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives 1109 W. Franklin St., Richmond VA 23220 (804.353.2668/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/msje.org)
permanent	“Creating Community: The Jews of Atlanta from 1845 to the Present” “The Legacy Project: Coming to America”
opening Feb. 10	“Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited” 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	“Voices of Lombard: A Century of Change in East Baltimore” 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)



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Your membership will help support the SJHS in its efforts to study, preserve, and present the Jewish experience in the American South. The SJHS awards prizes and research grants, publishes scholarship, supports exhibitions, and holds an annual conference. Members receive *The Rambler*, *Southern Jewish History* journal, and special conference rates.



General Member	\$35
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