From Cairo to New Orleans: The Nashville Conference Program

By Mark K. Bauman, Program Chair

The 39th annual SJHS conference, “Jews and the Urban South,” will kick off with an optional tour on Thursday, October 29. We have the unique opportunity of visiting the Rosenwald School in Cairo, Tennessee, one of thousands of schools for black children funded by philanthropist businessman Julius Rosenwald in partnership with African American communities across the segregated South. An alumnus of the school will be our guide. We will also visit Nashville’s historic Fisk University, where the Rosenwald School papers are housed.

Friday morning, October 30, will begin with a tour of Nashville’s Jewish sites, followed by lunch and a presentation by Vanderbilt University Chancellor Nick Zeppos. At our first afternoon session, Forward columnist Paul Berger will present his research on the murder of Tennessee shopkeeper Samuel Bierfield, one of several Jews murdered in the South during Reconstruction. Was Bierfield killed because of his support for African American rights? Was antisemitism a factor?

The following session will highlight the connection between southern Jews and German-Jewish refugees from Nazism. Jean Roseman, the premier historian of Nashville Jewry, will discuss a local German-Jewish family who worked to save more than 200 Jews from the Holocaust. Some refugees who fled Nazi Germany did so through student visas, and the largest number found haven in southern colleges. Shira Kohn will discuss young women in sororities and how they became symbols of Americanization.

After a Vanderbilt campus tour we will have dinner in historic Congregation Ohabai Sholom and be treated to a presentation by Gary P. Zola, holder of an endowed chair at Hebrew Union College and executive director of the American Jewish Archives. Zola recently published a book on Lincoln and the Jews. While many people know that Lincoln rescinded General Grant’s order expelling Jews from Tennessee, Zola will go beyond that episode to add to our understanding of Lincoln’s relationship with Jews in the South.

Following morning services, the first Saturday, October 31, session will consider Nashville Rabbi William Silverman, who advocated civil rights for African Americans in an environment in which he felt called on to carry a pistol for protection. Stephen Krause will base his talk on a 1966 interview of Silverman conducted by his father, Rabbi Allen Krause. SJHS Vice President Dan Puckett will expand our knowledge of Jews and civil rights with a presentation on Gadsden, Alabama, where Jewish activists were shot and Temple Israel was bombed.

The mid-morning session will focus on women’s activism. Emily Katz will explore the changing social issues addressed by the National Council of Jewish Women, Atlanta Section, and Ellen Rafshoon will discuss how an Atlanta matriarch transitioned from Zionist social action through Hadassah to secular women’s reform.

Luncheon speaker Ira Sheskin is perhaps the premier Jewish demographer of this generation. Holder of an endowed chair at the University of Miami and editor of the American Jewish Yearbook, Sheskin has conducted numerous community studies and has been deeply involved in national demographic profiles. He will shed light on the changing demographics of southern Jewry from 1950 to the present.

In the first afternoon session, Janet Bordelon will discuss a biracial organization of women that attempted to foster peaceful desegregation in Jackson, Mississippi.

continued on page 4…
The recent death of Julian Bond—a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Southern Poverty Law Center, longtime member of the Georgia state legislature, NAACP board chairman (1998-2010), and professor at the University of Virginia and American University—led me to think of Bond’s enduring legacy not only to the civil rights movement but also to the long and productive collaboration between American Jews and blacks.

While some contemporary scholars question whether a true alliance ever existed, there was an interconnectedness between Jewish and African American interests that began during the early 20th century, when both groups shared marginal social status, and lasted through the 1960s, when a disproportionate number of Jews participated in the civil rights movement. While many factors since then have led to a relationship marred by conflict, Julian Bond continued to speak out against antisemitism, remained sympathetic towards Israel (although he thought that its policies did not always serve its interests or values), and firmly believed in the importance of strengthening the coalition between American blacks and Jews. When asked by historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. in a televised interview whether it was a good idea to reestablish a Jewish-black coalition, Bond responded in the affirmative, maintaining that “we’ve got to have allies, and Jews are natural allies.” Viewing Jews and blacks as “fellow victims of discrimination of different sorts . . . [who both] have an interest in making sure this discrimination is rolled back,” he nonetheless insisted that “you can’t build a coalition on the graves of [Andrew] Goodman, [Mickey] Schwerner, and [James] Chaney [and other civil rights icons of the 1960s]. You have to renew this coalition almost every day.” And Julian Bond sought to do so.

Born in Nashville, the site of this year’s SJHS conference, Bond served as the keynote speaker at the SJHS conference in Birmingham two years ago. He also moderated a lively, and at times contentious, panel on Jewish participation in Birmingham’s civil rights movement. In his keynote address, Bond described the relationship between black and Jewish civil rights activists as a “coalition of conscience,” a coalition of which we’ll be reminded during several sessions at this year’s conference. Bond also cited such Jewish philanthropists as Julius Rosenwald, who spent $22 million supporting black education (including Fisk University in Nashville and schools for black children across the South, one of which we’ll visit on our optional October 29 tour). Bond’s father received a Rosenwald academic fellowship and later worked for the Rosenwald Fund, and Bond himself, during the last months of his life, devoted much time and passion helping documentarian Aviva Kempner finish her film on Rosenwald’s life and legacy. As Phyllis Leffler, retired University of Virginia professor and SJHS Secretary, who knew him well, wrote: “For the country and the world, the loss [of Julian Bond] is profound—a lifelong champion for human rights, a good and principled man, a leader of leaders is no more.”
Thursday, October 29

12:30–5 pm – Optional tour: Cairo School and Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection at Fisk University

5–6:30 pm – Conference check-in and registration at the hotel

6:30 pm – SJHS Board dinner and meeting, Amerigo

Friday, October 30

Lunch and afternoon sessions to be held at Gordon Jewish Community Center

8–9 am – Conference check-in and registration at the hotel

9 am – Bus tour of Nashville Jewish sites

Noon – Lunch and Address

› Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos, Vanderbilt University, “Vanderbilt and Outreach to Jewish Students and the Jewish Community”

› Introduction: Adam Meyer

1:15 pm – Murder in Middle Tennessee

› Paul Berger, “Samuel A. Bierfield: Innocent Victim or Radical Republican in Reconstruction Franklin, Tennessee”

› Introduction: Leonard Rogoff

2:15 pm – Immigrants during the First Half of the 20th Century (Chair: David Meola)

› Jean Roseman, “The May Family Miracle: German/Nashville Connections”

› Shira Kohn, “From German Jews to Jewish Greeks: Student Refugees in America’s Southern Universities, 1933-1945”

› Introduction: Leonard Rogoff

4:15 pm – Vanderbilt University Campus Tour

6 pm – Dinner and Erev Shabbat Service

Hosted by The Temple (Congregation Ohabai Sholom)

› Guest speaker: Professor Gary P. Zola, Hebrew Union College/American Jewish Archives, “Lincoln and the Jews of the South”

› Introduction: Rabbi Mark Schiftan

Saturday, October 31

Morning services and lunch at the Ben Schulman Center for Jewish Life/Vanderbilt Hillel; all sessions at the Student Life Center

7:45 am – Shabbat Service

Rabbi Stanley Garfein

9 am – Violent Confrontations and Civil Rights (Chair: Ronald Bayor)

› Steven Krause, “From the Mouth of Nashville’s ‘Pistol-Packing Rabbi’: Notes from a 1966 Interview with Rabbi William Silverman”

› Dan Puckett, “The Fire-Bombing of Gadsden’s Temple Beth Israel”

10:30 am – Atlanta Jewish Women and Social Justice during the 1960s (Chair: Nathan “Nick” Kotz)


› Ellen Raffshoon, “Esther Taylor: Hadassah Lady Turned Birth Control Advocate”

11:45 am – Lunch and Keynote Address


› Introduction: Lee Shai Weissbach

1 pm – Little Explored Roles of Jews and the Civil Rights Movement (Chair: Jarrod Tanny)

› Janet Bordelon, “Dialogue in Civil Rights Era Dixie: Jewish Women’s Involvement in the Panel of American Women in Jackson, Mississippi”

› Dina Weinstein, “Miami Civil Rights Attorney Tobias Simon”

2:30 pm – Civic Engagement and Jewish Mayors

(Chair: Karen Franklin)

› Scott M. Langston, “Contributions to Civic Development: The Isaac I. Moses Family and Girard/Phenix City, Alabama”

› Rosalind Benjet and Harriet Gross, “They Made It Big in Big D: Three Jewish Women Mayors”

4 pm – Reception

Hosted by Vanderbilt Jewish Studies Program, Buttrick Hall

8 pm – Havdalah, Concert and Reception

Hosted by Congregation Sherith Israel

Southern-style concert of Chassidic, Israeli, folk, jazz, and klezmer music performed by a five-piece band featuring the synagogue’s Rabbi Saul Strosberg on keyboard

This concert is the SJHS’s first Helen Stern Cultural Encounter.

Sunday, November 1

All sessions at the Homewood Suites

7:45 am – Business meeting

9 am – Negotiating Identity in 19th-Century New Orleans (Chair: Caroline Light)

› Patricia Behre, “Finding Those Who Don’t Want To Be Found: The Artist as Guide to Networks of Sephardic Sociability in Early New Orleans”

› Marlene Trestman, “Anniversary Celebrations at the Jewish Orphans’ Home of New Orleans (1855-1946): Engaging and Elevating the Jewish Community”

10:30 am – Celebration of Synagogue Archives

(Chair: James Pleifer, Temple B’nai Israel Archive, Little Rock)

“How to Use History to Enhance the Jewish Experience in Our Communities,” followed by “The Great Southern Jewish Road Show”

› Dana Herman, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati

› Jeremy Katz, William Breman Jewish History Museum, Atlanta

› Bonnie Eisenman, Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond
This summer marked the 100th anniversary of the lynching of Leo Frank in Marietta, Georgia. The Southern Museum of Civil War & Locomotive History, located in nearby Kennesaw, is exploring the notorious incident by hosting a series of special programs and a three-month-long exhibition in partnership with the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University and the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum in Atlanta. Its initiative is part of a larger commemoration taking place throughout metro Atlanta.

Leo Frank, the Jewish superintendent of the National Pencil Company in Atlanta, was convicted in 1913 of murdering an employee, 13-year-old Mary Phagan. His conviction followed a controversial and highly sensationalized trial that highlighted antisemitic sentiment in the state at the time. Frank was sentenced to death, but Georgia Governor John M. Slaton, believing he might be innocent, commuted the sentence to life in prison. However, a mob abducted Frank and lynched him in the early morning hours of August 17, 1915, near where Interstate 75 today crosses State Route 120 in Marietta.

The exhibit, “Seeking Justice: The Leo Frank Case Revisited,” opened on the lynching’s anniversary date and will be on display until November 29. “The lynching of Leo Frank is a difficult moment in our state’s history and one that still resonates a century later,” notes Dr. Richard Banz, Southern Museum executive director. “While its memory and aftermath are painful to this day, we expect this exhibit to spark an exploration of how we can work together to eliminate bigotry from the public square.”

Our final session stems from a discussion held at last year’s conference during which Jim Pfeifer raised challenges he confronted as his synagogue’s archivist. This year we conclude with a panel organized and chaired by Pfeifer featuring professional archivists from outstanding institutions in Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Richmond, who will discuss such challenges. The session will conclude with the “Great Southern Jewish Road Show.” In a format borrowed from an American Jewish Archives seminar, panelists will discuss the origins and significance of items brought by conference participants.

Attend the conference; immerse yourself in historical and new Nashville; learn from and interact with the presenters and fellow attendees, old friends and new—and enjoy!
The Savannah Jewish Archives moved to the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum this past summer. The substantial collection, which contains around 175 linear feet of material, 6,000 photographs, and 150 oral histories, documents the Savannah and greater Chatham County Jewish community from the 1750s to the present.

The move came about when the Savannah Jewish Archives and Savannah Jewish Federation sought to increase access to their holdings. “After much deliberation we determined that the logical choice was the Breman Museum in Atlanta, which collects Jewish historical items from all over the state of Georgia,” states Kaye Kole, a founder of the Savannah Jewish Archives. “Thanks to the tireless work of many people in Savannah and Atlanta, the Archives will be more accessible than ever before.”

Notes Jeremy Katz, director of the Cuba Family Archives, “The Breman will provide Jewish oversight to the collection in a facility where it will be a major addition.” The collection increases the size of the Breman Museum archives by around 20 percent. The Museum expects to draw on the collection for in-house exhibitions, programs, and on-line exhibitions. The collection will also be made available to researchers, genealogists, scholars, historians, and students in Georgia and around the world.

Breman Museum Collections Committee Chair Judith Taylor and fellow board members Laura Dinerman and Jerry Rosenberg encouraged the partnership. “Savannah’s tremendous historical documents will gain a broader audience and the Breman will be able to tell a more comprehensive story of Jewish life in Georgia,” states Taylor. “There are so many families in Atlanta that have Savannah roots and vice versa. We’re proud and honored to have this collection as a jewel in our crown.”

A “team effort” led to the selection of the Breman, Kole says. “The Savannah committee met for hours to make this decision.” Committee members included Edwin Byck, Jeff Kole, and Susan Lieber-Lozada. Others who played a role included board members Marilyn Farley, Nancy Feldman, Sharon Galin, Jerald Gottlieb, Peggy Harris, Margie Levy, Bill Raffel, and Arlene Ratner as well as volunteers Carole Cohen, Marilyn Farley, Suzanne Kantzijper, Harriet Meyerhoff, Diane Kuhr, Bobbie Levy, Bill Raffel, Jane Rosenblum, and Sue Solomon.

The Breman has established the Savannah Jewish Archives Fund to cover expenses related to the preservation, processing, digitization, promotion, and growth of the collection. Kole encourages supporters in Savannah to continue to support the Archives by maintaining their memberships and making donations.

Gottlieb’s Kosher Delicatessen was one of several locally-owned Jewish delis. Savannah Jewish Archives General Photograph Collection, Item 2123

Former Georgia Governor Roy Barnes led the committee that organized the commemoration. “Conversations about events such as the lynching of Leo Frank are never easy, but they will lead to a better understanding of one another,” Barnes states. “When we shy away from tackling controversial and complex topics, we allow misunderstandings to fester. But, by having an ongoing dialogue about sensitive issues, we can understand not just what makes us different, but how our shared experiences have helped shape and define our cultures.”

The Southern Museum is located at 2829 Cherokee Street in downtown Kennesaw. For more information, visit southernmuseum.org.

Left: The lynching of Leo Frank. Courtesy of Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum
Right: Image courtesy of Southern Museum of Civil War & Locomotive History

Rambler, Fall 2015
SJHS Awards Grants to Five Projects

The SJHS Grants Committee received nine grant requests in 2015, many with a public history focus. The committee awarded grants to five projects.

We are excited to support the work of the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington. As the society continually expands its offerings, it will be creating a walking tour and self-guiding tour brochure of historic sites of Jewish interest in the H Street, NE, neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Since the H Street neighborhood is fast losing its ethnic character, this will be a great addition to the history of D.C.

We are also supporting the work of filmmaker Steve Rivo, who is releasing his film Carvalho’s Journey and requested assistance for finishing costs. The film traces the adventurous life of Solomon Carvalho, a Jew of Portuguese descent who was born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1815. His father helped found the Reformed Society of Israelites, predecessor to Congregation KK Beth Elohim, and he too became active in Jewish community activities. An artist and daguerreotype photographer, in 1853 Carvalho served as official photographer on John Charles Fremont’s 1853 expedition west in search of a route for a transcontinental railroad.

Also in the area of public history, we are pleased to support the Columbia Jewish History Initiative, a collaborative partnership of the College of Charleston Jewish Heritage Collection; the Jewish Community Center and Jewish Federation of Columbia, South Carolina; the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina; and the University of South Carolina’s Jewish Studies Program. The initiative will document, provide access to, and raise awareness of Columbia’s Jewish history. SJHS funding will support transcription and digitization of 15 oral interviews.

Other successful grant recipients include Catherine Eskin and David Markus. Professor Eskin is carrying out an oral history project with the Jews of Lakeland, Florida, and funds will be used for transcriptions. David Markus is a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Florida, and received a research grant to access records that will help analyze the Block Family Farmstead in Arkansas.

Congratulations to all.

— Phyllis Leffler, Grants Committee Chair, along with committee members: Marci Davis, Catherine Kahn, Peggy Pearlstein, and Hollace Weiner

The Rag Race Garners SJHS Book Award

Adam Mendelsohn has won the Southern Jewish Historical Society book prize for his work, The Rag Race: How Jews Sewed Their Way to Success in America and the British Empire. The prize honors the book making the most significant contribution to the field of southern Jewish history over the past four years.

The Rag Race represents exhaustive research into a topic that spans three continents and explains Jewish involvement in the garment industry during the 19th century and beyond. Mendelsohn develops a well-written analysis of the dual role that culture and economic niche played in the advancement of Jewish immigrants. The book’s comparative aspect offers a new understanding of different economic trajectories in various locales, including the American South. While most studies of Jewish success in the garment trades start with New York’s Eastern European Jewish immigrants, Mendelsohn provides the usually neglected background to that story, adding immeasurably to our understanding of how upward mobility functions for immigrant groups.

The author’s attention to the American South incisively traces how the connection with the cotton trade, peddling plantations, the Civil War, and the development of southern Jewish entrepreneurship led to the dominance of Jews in the New York market. Mendelsohn’s book cuts across many topics and will be welcomed by those interested in southern, social, ethnic, immigrant, economic, and business history.

— SJHS Book Award Committee members Ronald Bayor, Janet Bordelon, and Jeffrey Gurock
New Book on Blacks and Jews

With a foreword by Pulitzer Prize-winning history David Brion Davis and an afterword by the Wiesenthal Center's Rabbi Abraham Cooper, From Abraham to Obama: A History of Jews, Africans, and African Americans presents a “deep history” of black-Jewish relations.

Authors Harold Brackman and Ephraim Isaac look back to the half-century of African American-Jewish tensions after the post-1965 rise of “Black Power,” to the prior half century’s forging of the African American-Jewish civil rights alliance, to earlier encounters of Jews with Africans and African Americans in diverse contexts—from the ancient and medieval world to slave societies in Brazil and the Caribbean as well as the British colonies which became the United States.

Copies for review or purchase are available from Africa World Press at 541 W. Ingham Avenue, Suite B, Trenton, N.J. 08638, (609) 695-3200, fax (609) 695-6466.

A Tale of Two Cities: JHSSC Fall Meeting

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina travels to the midlands this fall with a program titled “A Tale of Two Cities—and a few small towns.” On Saturday, November 7, the Society will join with Historic Columbia to explore Columbia’s Jewish past, including a discussion by former and present merchants, followed by a walking tour of their stores downtown. On Sunday, November 8, activities will move to nearby Orangeburg to unveil a historical marker in the business district, visit the Jewish cemetery, and listen to panelists describe the region’s network of Jewish families, who looked to Orangeburg’s Temple Sinai as a hub. We also will learn about local notables, such as Nobel Prize winner Robert F. Furchgott, whose parents ran a clothing store and who discovered his passion for biochemistry while a student at Orangeburg High School. For more information and to register, please go to jhssc.org.

Holocaust Speakers Bureau Seeks Descendants

The Holocaust Speakers Bureau (a component of the Center for Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education of North Carolina, Inc.) seeks children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors and concentration camp liberators. The HSB visits schools, houses of worship, and organizations to share the experiences of the Holocaust through eyewitness testimony. Since 2010, the organization has made presentations before thousands of students in the Chapel Hill, Durham, Raleigh, Cary, Pittsboro, and Hillsborough communities.

Because it is becoming increasingly difficult for survivors and liberators to participate, we are seeking to expand our speaking network to include the younger generation. Please contact Sharon Halperin at 919-933-9089 or sharonhalperin88@gmail.com if you are interested or would like more information.

New Jewish Museum Planned in Washington, D.C.

Saved from demolition and relocated from its original site in 1969, the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington’s 1876 synagogue building—the oldest purpose-built synagogue in Washington, D.C.—will move again.

As part of Capitol Crossing, a $1.3 billion mixed-use development, the historic synagogue will be relocated one block south to Third and F Streets, NW. There, it will become the focal point of a new state-of-the-art Jewish museum. The facility will enable the Society to showcase the Washington region’s Jewish life and heritage and reinterpret the synagogue in engaging ways. New spaces will include galleries, classrooms, an archival reading room, and an oral history studio.

Development of the core exhibition began last year with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The planning team includes Society staff and leaders, scholars, community members, and technical advisors. To test exhibition themes and storylines, staff has conducted 16 focus group workshops with participants from a range of demographic groups. Completion of the new facility is projected for 2020.

For more information visit jhsgw.org/blog/tag/making+a+museum.
Conference Registration Form

Jews in the Urban South
40th Southern Jewish Historical Society Annual Conference
Nashville, Tennessee. October 29—November 1, 2015

Name__________________________________________ Spouse/Companion________________________________________

Mailing Address________________________________ City/State___________ Zip________

Phone_________________________ Cell_________________________ Email_________________________

Registration for full program:* Regular Rate: $125/person $______
Includes lunch/dinner Fri., lunch Sat., transport to all events (Thurs. tour NOT included)

*Full conference registrants must be members of SJHS. If you are not a member or wish to renew, include membership dues. $______

Optional Tour to Cairo Rosenwald School and Fisk University (Thurs.): Includes transport. $25/person $______

Daily registration for local residents:
Friday tour, lunch, afternoon sessions: $50/person $______
Friday dinner and keynote: $40/person $______
Saturday program (includes lunch): $25/person $______
Sunday program: $25/person $______

Total Payment $______

Please indicate how many guests will: Attend optional Thurs. tour $______
Ride bus to concert Sat. night $______
Ride bus on Fri. Nashville tour $______
Need vegetarian meals $______

Register online at jewishsouth.org. Or, make check payable to SJHS and mail with this form to: Beth Orlansky, SJHS Conference Treasurer, 12 Oakleigh Place, Jackson, MS 39211.
Registration deadline is October 18. A $25 fee per person will be added after that date. Registration must be cancelled by October 18 to receive a refund.

HOTEL MUST BE RESERVED SEPARATELY.
See page 2 for information.

SJHS dues: (circle appropriate level)
Student (individual only) $15
General member (individual or family) $36
Patron $50
Century $100
Cedar $500
Sycamore $1,000
Magnolia $2,500