



SJHS Offers Virtual Encounters with Alfred Uhry and Julius Rosenwald

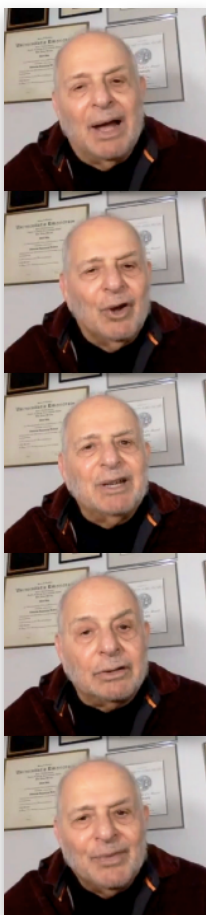
After the pandemic struck last year, the SJHS leadership stepped into the world of original online programming. Here are highlights from two recent programs.

In a revealing, introspective, and at times personal discussion about his life, his career, and his memories of growing up Jewish in the South, acclaimed playwright Alfred Uhry spoke in December to more than 900 viewers worldwide via Zoom as the inaugural speaker for the Janice Rothschild Blumberg Lecture on Culture, Arts and Southern Jewish History, co-sponsored by SJHS, the Breman Museum, and The Temple in Atlanta. SJHS board member Adam Meyer (Vanderbilt University) served as moderator.

The annual lecture honors Janice Rothschild Blumberg, former SJHS president, author, and lifelong advocate for the study and preservation of southern Jewish history. (To learn more about the lecture series, please visit bit.ly/37HWswm.)

Uhry noted that he wrote his trilogy of the Jewish South, *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Parade*, and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, based on vivid memories of his youth in Atlanta. “I was a very impressionable boy and was given to drama,” he said. “Everything that happened in Atlanta when I was a little boy seemed like high drama to me. I thought about it a lot and it came out when I was able to write about it.”

He pointedly related stories about the impact of the Leo Frank case on the Jewish community and how his memories shaped his writing of *Parade*, which addresses Frank’s lynching. He also discussed the



Alfred Uhry via Zoom.

push-pull of Black-Jewish relations during his youth and currently, as well as Jewish efforts to assimilate into the larger society of Atlanta—both of which became central themes in his award-winning work.

After his remarks, Uhry and Blumberg shared their memories of Jewish Atlanta and discussed their longtime friendship. Blumberg also talked of her life at the center of some of the most significant events in southern Jewish, if not American, history. About the lecture series named in her honor, she observed that it “serves others, not me alone. The lectures are an ongoing mitzvah for those who attend as well for those who enrich their learning by preparing and delivering them.” The Breman Museum, The Temple, and SJHS have begun planning the second annual lecture, tentatively set to be held in person at the 2021 SJHS conference in Charleston next fall.

In January, the SJHS hosted a two-part program about philanthropist Julius Rosenwald and his early-20th-century partnership with African American communities in the South, which resulted in the building of some 5,300 schools for Black children. Attendees viewed the documentary *Rosenwald* online via a special link, and some 85 people gathered on Zoom to hear a panel discussion featuring *Rosenwald* filmmaker Aviva Kempner, George Mason University history professor Charles Chavis, Temple University Jewish studies professor Lila Corwin Berman, and Rosenwald’s great-granddaughter, Anne Hess. SJHS vice-president Josh Parshall (Institute of Southern Jewish Life) moderated the event.

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SJHS 2021 Conference Update

Plans are moving forward for the 2021 SJHS conference, “Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History,” co-hosted by the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. We hope to gather in Charleston in the late fall, but given the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are keeping all options open in terms of both timing and format. We will keep you apprised via email and future issues of the *Rambler* about conference planning and offer previews of the exciting content we’ll be presenting, whether in person or online—or some combination of both!

We encourage you to share your thoughts on the meeting format by emailing SJHS president Jay Silverberg at jbsilverberg@gmail.com.



New Year’s postcard from Mr. and Mrs. I.D. Rubin and family, Charleston, c. 1905. *Special Collections, College of Charleston Libraries.*



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Historical Society

President's Message By Jay Silverberg



My introduction to the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS) still gives me pause. I smile at the memory and wonder how many others are like me. Genealogy was my path to the Society, and it began in my childhood when my mother gave me a book of family stories compiled in the 1920s by her father's aunt, a member of the Mayer family from Natchez.

As I prepared for my retirement from nearly 40 years as a journalist and corporate consultant, I restarted the journey begun in the sixth grade with Clara Lowenburg's stories, linking my life that had its beginnings in Thibodaux, Louisiana, to people, places, and events that were and continue to be part of the southern Jewish history matrix.

My role as president has a direct link to a request I sent to the Society nearly ten years ago, seeking a grant to help pay for the cost of translating letters my German ancestors wrote in the mid-1800s to family members in south-central Louisiana. I stumbled upon the letters in a footnote in the book *The Business of Jews in Louisiana: 1840-1875*.

None of this—not SJHS, the conferences, befriending historians and people like me with an abiding interest in southern Jewish history—was in my scope of thought when I began the journey to learn about my family.

My association with SJHS has touched on every aspect of the Society's work: research, publishing, grants, preservation, and academic conferences. I think SJHS is unique among historical associations because of how the expertise of extraordinary academics intersects with the work of "interested participants"—one description I have taken from a Society colleague to describe members like me.

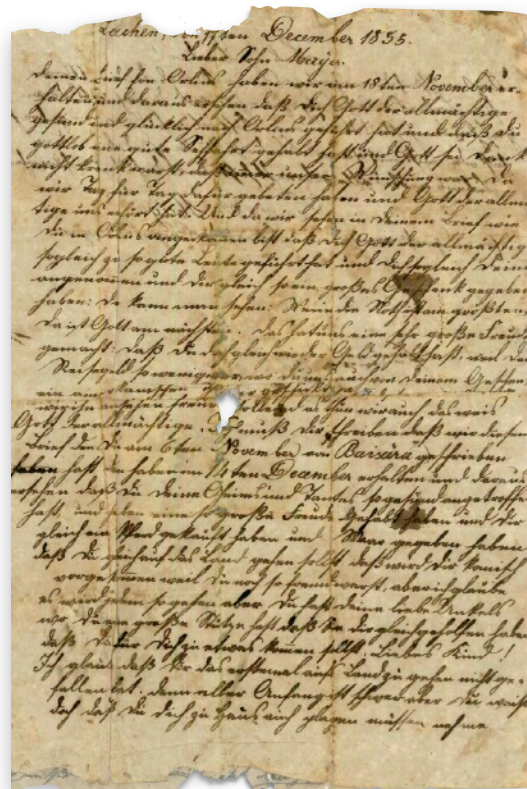
Indeed, the more I learned about my family, the more I wanted to know. My journalist's training pushed me to seek new sources of information, and eventually, to SJHS. Details from the translated letters unlocked a world previously unknown to me. I marvel at the good fortune to have access to—and now serve as president of—the organization that was one of the founders of what we know as southern Jewish history.

When last we met in person in Charlottesville, an SJHS colleague made a comment that resonated with me. She said, "southern Jewish history is a growth industry." The pandemic has shown it to be.

The proverbial silver lining over the past year has been the opportunity for so many more people to learn about us, to learn from us, and for us to learn with others. Our co-sponsorships of various virtual events have allowed SJHS to reach thousands of people, many of them non-members. We are continuing to plan more virtual presentations through 2021, with hopes to hold our conference in person in Charleston if the environment warrants.

With all that we do, I am always mindful that someone, somewhere, like me ten years ago, is ready to discover an organization and group of people willing to offer their knowledge about the history we share.

Jay Silverberg built a website for his ancestors' letters, translated with help from an SJHS grant, at meyerbrothersletters.com. Jay can be reached at jbsilverberg@gmail.com.



An 1855 letter from Germany to one of Jay's immigrant ancestors expressing "very great joy" that he had arrived safely and had met up with relatives in Louisiana. *Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Special Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries.*

A New Memoir—But Still Making History

Even as Janice Blumberg completed her memoir, *What's Next?: Southern Dreams, Jewish Deeds and the Challenge of Looking Back while Moving Forward* (set for release this spring), her past became suddenly relevant on the national stage when Jon Ossoff took the oath of office as Georgia's first Jewish senator on January 20 by swearing on the *chumash* (printed Torah) that belonged to her late husband, Rabbi Jacob Rothschild.

Ossoff, who grew up in The Temple in Atlanta, borrowed the *chumash* from the family as his way of honoring the Black-Jewish alliance that Rothschild did so much to forge. The rabbi's leadership on civil rights famously led to the bombing of The Temple by white supremacists in 1958. "Jon Ossoff never met Jack Rothschild—Senator Ossoff was born 13 years after Jack's death—or, indeed, any member of our family," Janice noted in the *Jewish Forward*. His choice to honor her late husband exemplified "the concept,



Jon Ossoff taking the oath of office as Georgia's first Jewish senator.

central throughout Judaism, of teaching our values to each successive generation. . . . I couldn't be prouder."

Janice was far from a bystander in Atlanta's civil rights story, as her own activities and the couple's friendship with Martin Luther King and his wife Coretta attest. Her memoir traces her life from her Depression-era upbringing in the Atlanta Jewish community, to the turbulent mid-20th century, through her more-than-eventful past five decades as an author, Jewish leader, and world traveler.

As its title suggests, Janice's memoir not only addresses the past, but considers the way forward for American Jews and the nation as a whole. If Georgia's young senator is an example, it appears that her goal of using the past to build a better future is already being fulfilled. *What's Next* will be available in May at amazon.com and bookshop.org.

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Placing Rosenwald's activities in historical context, Chavis noted that the Freedmen's Bureau schools built after the Civil War served as a precursor for the Rosenwald schools, which similarly combined Black self-help with financial aid. Corwin Berman compared Rosenwald's philanthropy to that of previous philanthropic titans such as Carnegie and Rockefeller. Rather than set up a fund to exist in perpetuity, as they did, he chose to distribute as much money as he could during his lifetime.

Anne Hess discussed her great-grandfather's family legacy, observing that many descendants carried on his progressive tradition. She also described her emotional meeting with Congressman John Lewis, who told her how much the Rosenwald schools meant to him: both he and his mother attended them. Kempner emphasized that Rosenwald's legacy extended beyond the schools, as he funded an important fellowship program that supported Black artists, writers, and intellectuals—a subject that her film highlights.



Top: The Rosenwald school in Midway, Alabama, repurposed as a community center. [Wikicommons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rosenwald_School_in_Midway,_Alabama.jpg).

Left: Julius Rosenwald. [National Photo Company Collection, picryl.com](https://www.nationalphoto.com/collection/picryl.com).

The panelists reflected on why Rosenwald's philanthropy has been largely forgotten despite its enormous impact. Chavis pointed out that the Black freedom struggle of the early 20th century, to which Rosenwald contributed, has been overlooked as compared to the civil rights movement sparked by the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Moreover, local governments often took over the Rosenwald schools, thus obscuring their origins. Corwin Berman added that in American Jewish history, the universalist impulse represented by figures such as Rosenwald and his influential rabbi, Emil Hirsch, lost favor in the mid-20th century as Jews became captivated by Zionism. "His name was forgotten," stated Hess. "Aviva's film has brought his legacy back to life."

In keeping with Rosenwald's propensity for partnerships, SJHS partners for this virtual event included the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, Jewish Heritage North Carolina, and the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South.

A recordings of the Uhry event can be viewed here: vimeo.com/494456712 and the Rosenwald event here: tinyurl.com/sjhs-rosenwald.

Reconsidering the Field of Southern Jewish History in Response to Systemic Racism

On November 8, 2020, the Board of the Southern Jewish Historical Society adopted the following statement:

In October 2019, the Southern Jewish Historical Society convened its annual conference in Charlottesville, VA, where white supremacists had targeted both Jews and people of color in the violent 2017 Unite the Right rally. Our aim was to provide a scholarly framework for better understanding these events, and to grapple with how antisemitism and white nationalism have animated and informed one another, both historically and in our own times.

Tragically, the year since the conference has seen the murder of George Floyd and many other acts of racist violence. These events have challenged us to further consider the historical contexts that have fostered such violence in the United States and especially in the U.S. South. Like Charlottesville, they have propelled our thinking about how a deeper consideration of the history of American and southern racism can reshape the way we understand the history of American and southern Jews.

“The events of 2020 have thrown a spotlight on racism as a deep systemic problem that has played a central role in structuring American social relations and institutions.”

The events of 2020 have made clear that racism is not simply an ideology expressed by a fringe group of torch-carrying extremists. Because these acts of racist violence were perpetrated in many cases by law enforcement officers, they have thrown a spotlight on racism as a deep systemic problem that has played a central role in structuring American social relations and institutions. These insights demand that historians move beyond viewing racism and white supremacy as discrete themes in U.S. and Southern history and more consistently foreground how they have shaped and informed the full range of human experiences, relationships, and worldviews.

The implications of this approach for research, writing, and study in the field of Southern Jewish history are manifold. Although scholars in our field have long produced important studies of African American-Jewish relations, Jewish involvement in civil rights causes, and the ways in which southern Jews grappled with segregation and Jim Crow, we believe there is much more we can do as a scholarly community to situate Jewish history within a framework that acknowledges the endemic nature of racism in the South.

For example, we might ask more explicitly how native-born whites viewed Jews within a larger racial landscape, and how the politics of racial hierarchy and white supremacy shaped the terms of Jewish integration and acceptance. Similarly, our studies of how Jews “became southern” could include greater consideration of how they “became white,” since becoming a part of the dominant culture meant, at least to some extent, absorbing and accepting the norms of a segregated society. The study of antisemitism in the South might yield new and helpful insights if we considered it more fully against the broader backdrop of segregation, lynching, and racist violence in the region, and explored the extent to which different forms of racism overlapped and informed one another.

We know that there have been Jews of color in the South for centuries, yet they rarely appear on our historical docket. What new insights might we gain if we moved beyond the assumption that Jewish experiences were white experiences? Similarly, while people of diverse backgrounds already participate in SJHS activities, we are conscious of the need to create an even more welcoming environment for people of color, in order to help bring new and different perspectives to bear on the writing and interpretation of Southern Jewish history.

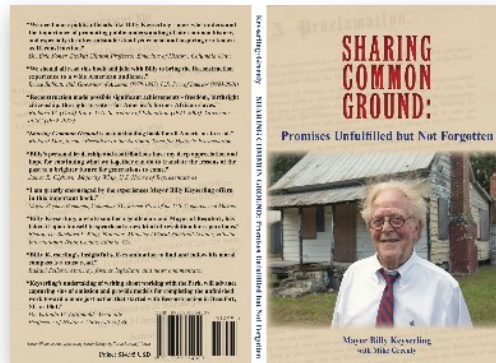
While the type of scholarly reorientation described here is unlikely to happen overnight, we are committed as a community to the ongoing discussion and consideration of these issues in the planning of our conferences; the editing and publishing of our journal, *Southern Jewish History*; and the making of grants to researchers and institutions. We invite the active participation of our members and the broader public in this effort.

Sharing Common Ground Uncovers Stories of Reconstruction

Billy Keyserling, the recently retired Jewish mayor of Beaufort, South Carolina, has an unusual plan for his retirement years: addressing “racism, inequality, social injustice, and divisiveness” through The Second Founding of America (secondfoundingofamerica.org), an educational initiative that teaches students about the accomplishments of formerly enslaved citizens after the Civil War.

Keyserling’s project is described in his new memoir, *Sharing Common Ground: Promises Unfulfilled but Not Forgotten*. The book, states noted historian Eric Foner, “interweaves Keyserling’s own family and personal history with the history of the Beaufort area, ground zero for Reconstruction in the South, where recently freed slaves achieved a remarkable degree of political power and economic progress.”

The project is centered around the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, designated an historic site during the Obama Administration at the urging of Keyserling, Rep. James Clyburn, and other South Carolinians. The park incorporates four sites in Beaufort County that tell the story of an era that was largely forgotten after the reestablishment of white supremacy in the late 19th century. The project aims to create a national network



An unveiling at the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park, 2018. National Park Service/J. Cadoff.

of educators who will mentor middle school students as they learn the untold stories of Reconstruction through experiential, project-based education. Also, an early advocacy initiative is to encourage the new Administration to push forward with the stalled (for the past four years) printing and circulation of the Harriet Tubman \$20 bill; to sign and share the petition go to: secondfoundingofamerica.org/sign-our-petition.

To Keyserling, The Second Founding of America is nothing less than an attempt to engage others to “take a fresh and deeper look at how we can begin to heal the damaged soul of our Nation.” He attributes his “moral compass” to his parents and grandparents. While his paternal grandfather was a Lithuanian Jewish immigrant who arrived in Beaufort in 1888, in his political career Keyserling followed in the footsteps of his mother, a transplanted New York Jew who served many terms in the South Carolina legislature—in fact, he

won her old seat in 1992 before going on to serve on the Beaufort City Council and, for the past 12 years, as mayor.

Net proceeds from the sale of *Sharing Common Ground* go to funding the project. The book is available at amazon.com and sharingcommonground.com.

Southern Jewish History Needs Your Support

For most of its history since 1988, *Southern Jewish History* has depended on grants to help support its production. Two foundations provided generous support for decades, but this support ended several years ago as their missions changed. At that stage, the two grants together provided \$8,500 annually. Since then, the Society has received a few individual grants at lesser amounts, but these have been sporadic or temporary. Beginning with 2019, the Helen Marie Stern Memorial Fund generously committed to a \$3,500 grant each year for five years, helping to reduce the annual \$15,000 cost of producing the journal.

If you value the journal and recognize its importance for the Society and profession, we are asking that you consider a one-time gift of \$1,000 or more, or ideally a longer-term commitment. We can easily accommodate gifts to our endowment, managed by the Richmond Jewish Foundation. All contributions to the Society are tax deductible.

Contributions can be made by visiting the Society’s website at jewishsouth.org/store/make-donation. Please indicate that your contribution is for the journal. Your consideration and help are greatly appreciated. For any questions, please contact editor Mark K. Bauman (markkbauman@aol.com or 678.828.7484).

Praise for Southern Jewish History

Southern Jewish History is the premier journal of the southern Jewish experience. It is must reading for those who research and/or teach in this field. — Ronald H. Bayor, Georgia Tech

The journal provides a place where deep and serious work on the history of the Jews in the American South is showcased. Its articles show that history matters and Jewish history in particular. — Hasia R. Diner, New York University

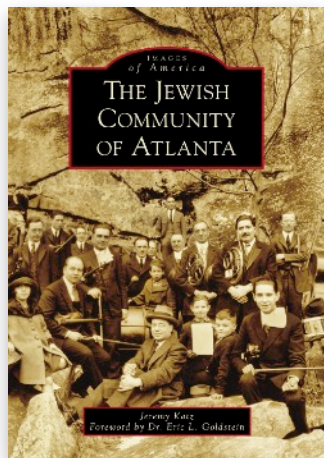
Southern Jewish History has taken its place as one of the three pre-eminent journals in the American Jewish history field. — Jonathan D. Sarna, Brandeis University

The leading scholarly periodical on Jews in the American South, *Southern Jewish History* has also found an audience among a public interested in the Southern Jewish heritage. — Lee Shai Weissbach, University of Louisville

Southern Jewish History is not merely indispensable; it is a showcase for the best in scholarship. — Stephen J. Whitfield, Brandeis University

NEWS AND NOTES

New Book on Atlanta Jewish History



The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum is proud to announce the publication of *Images of America: The Jewish Community of Atlanta*, authored by the museum's senior director of archives, Jeremy Katz.

Drawing on the rich collection of images at the Breman's Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives for Southern Jewish History, the book illustrates through 200 images the Jewish community and its visionary leaders who helped Atlanta evolve from a sleepy, backwater, 19th-

century frontier railroad town into the 21st-century international metropolis we know today. It also chronicles the dark episodes of blatant antisemitism that traumatized the community and had national implications, such as the lynching of Leo M. Frank, The Temple bombing, and the deliberate expulsion of Jewish students from Emory University Dental School.

Published in January 2021, the book is available online at arcadiapublishing.com or wherever books are sold. All authorship royalties support the Breman Museum.

Tulane Jewish Studies Department Receives Major Gift

Tulane University in New Orleans has received a \$1 million gift and an additional matching challenge grant of up to \$1 million from the Tawani Foundation, led by philanthropist Jennifer N. Pritzker, to establish the Audrey G. Ratner Excellence Endowed Fund for American Jewry and Jewish Culture. Named in honor of Pritzker's mother, the fund will support programming, student engagement activities, and research, primarily through the Audrey G. Ratner Jewish Leadership Course and the Audrey G. Ratner Speaker Series.

Tulane President Michael Fitts stated that the gift will "allow us to engage in a deeper and broader study of the Jewish experience and how it has shaped the history of our nation and world." It will combine academic coursework with experiential learning opportunities and community service projects, while bringing scholars, artists, and Jewish leaders to campus to lead robust conversations about American Jewish culture, history, and ideas. Michael Cohen, chair of the Jewish studies department and longtime SJHS member, noted that the gift will move the department "significantly closer to its goal of creating a world-class hub of Jewish learning dedicated to the innovative and holistic study of American Jews."

Website on New Orleans Jewish Women Is Launched

L'dor v'dor: From Generation to Generation: Jewish Women and Their Impact on New Orleans first opened as an exhibition during the city's tricentennial celebrations in 2018 to highlight the contributions of Jewish women to New Orleans. This fall, the exhibition expanded into an online resource and community archive, nolajewishwomen.tulane.edu.

From generation to generation, Jewish women have worked to make New Orleans a more vibrant, hospitable, and just city. The website documents their stories, tracing their contributions in the areas of Arts, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Enrichment. For example, in the 1960s, Margery Stich helped the National Council of Jewish Women develop a seven-state strategy for desegregation in the South as head of the Southern Interstate Regional Conference of NCJW. In the early 2000s, Jackie Gothard served as the first woman president of Congregation Beth Israel and spearheaded the congregation's rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

You can subscribe to the project's monthly newsletter to stay up to date on its continued growth at nolajewishwomen.tulane.edu/about/newsletter. Those who have their own story to tell can do so at nolajewishwomen.tulane.edu/tell-a-story. Drs. Rosalind Hinton and Susan Tucker created and maintain the website with the help of communications co-directors Gwen Dilworth and R.E. Natowicz.

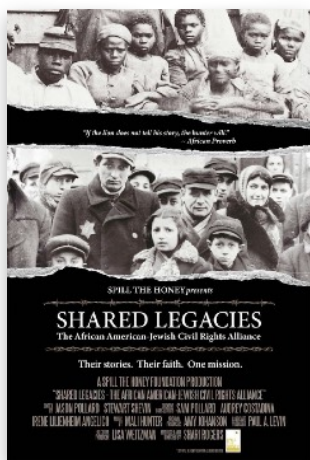


Margery Stich (right) with Gladys Cahn, c. 1955. *National Council of Jewish Women, Greater New Orleans Section records, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University.*



Jackie Gothard at Congregation Beth Israel Yom Kippur services following Hurricane Katrina, 2005. *Courtesy of Eddie Gothard.*

CSJC Springs Forward with Compelling Programs



In January, Ashley Walters, College of Charleston assistant professor of Jewish studies, stepped into the role of director of the College's Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture. She takes over from Dale Rosengarten, who stewarded the Center since its inception in 2014 and helped to make the College an engine of research on southern Jewish history and culture.

To launch its online exhibit *Mapping Jewish Charleston 2020*, the Center presented Marni Davis (Georgia State

University) and Harlan Greene (College of Charleston) in a January Zoom dialog exploring how digital mapping projects reveal hidden histories. Greene is a principal author of *Mapping Jewish Charleston* and several other digital mapping ventures, while Davis created the digital project *Atlanta's Old Jewish Neighborhood*.

The Center is holding two public Zoom events in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. On February 11, former South Carolina legislator Bakari Sellers will discuss his new memoir, *My Vanishing Country*. Son of activist Cleveland Sellers, Bakari has written a poetic portrait of his childhood in Denmark, South Carolina, and the South's dwindling rural black working class. On March 9, the Center and Charleston Jewish Filmfest will co-sponsor a screening and talkback of the acclaimed documentary *Shared Legacies: The African American-Jewish Civil Rights Alliance*. On April 6, Bruce Haynes (University of California, Davis) will introduce his recent book, *The Soul of Judaism: Jews of African Descent in America* via Zoom. Haynes will be joined by students from a College of Charleston class on American Jewish history and a Citadel class on inclusion and diversity at work. For more information or to register to attend Center events, visit jewish-south.cofc.edu.

JHSSC Hosts Wide-Ranging Conversations

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina continues its successful pivot to digital programming. In a series of "Sunday Conversations," Judge Richard Gergel and attorney Robert Rosen have hosted several special guests. American Jewish Archives director Gary Zola and architectural historian Samuel Gruber explored South Carolina synagogues, while artist Jonathan Green and Charleston City Council member Peter Shahid discussed Charleston at 350 and the state's remarkable record of religious tolerance. In January, Gergel and Rosen talked to Jonathan Sarna about Jewish involvement in the Civil War, North and South.

As for upcoming events, a conversation with Hyman Rubin III will consider South Carolina Jews and Reconstruction. In March the JHSSC will help celebrate the 100th anniversary of Aiken's Adath Yeshurun with Steve Silver and Stephen Surasky. For details on programming and to register go to jhssc.org.

The Jewish Merchant Project (merchants.jhssc.org) continues to gather family histories. Among the newest contributions are two histories from Alan Banov, "Alexander Banov: A Country Merchant in Red Top" and "I. Morris Monash: Charleston's First Pawn Shop."

Apart from sending us all into Zoom rooms, how has the pandemic impacted Jewish life in the Palmetto State? In JHSSC's Spring 2021 magazine, physicians, educators, rabbis, b'nai mitzvah

candidates, and families who have lost loved ones will reflect on their experiences during this strange and scary time. The publication will be online and in the mail in April.



The Banov family gathered at Leon's house on Mill Street in Charleston in honor of Sonia and Alexander's 50th wedding anniversary, 1923. Courtesy of Alan Banov.

Museum of Southern Jewish Experience to Feature Photographs by Bill Aron

The Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience is finalizing plans for its grand opening in New Orleans in 2021, including preparing for the inaugural exhibition in its Special Exhibition Gallery. Its first temporary exhibition will feature the work of Bill Aron and Vicki Reikes Fox. In 2002, the duo published *Shalom Y'All: Images of Jewish Life in the American South*, exploring southern Jewish life from Cary, Mississippi, to Birmingham, Alabama.

Photographer Bill Aron recalled, "When Vicki Reikes Fox and Macy B. Hart, the founding director of the MSJE in Jackson, Mississippi, first approached me about photographing the Jewish



Courtesy of Bill Aron.

communities of the Deep South, I thought to myself 'How hard could this be? A few trips, perhaps one per state, ought to do it.' That was in 1988. Fourteen years and many excursions later, we finally had our book."

The exhibition explores themes from the duo's groundbreaking work and includes never-before-exhibited photography by Aron, whose work can be found in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Jewish Museum, and the Museum of Modern Art. The core exhibition will also feature a permanent interactive display of Aron's work, sponsored by Rabbi Steven Fox and Vicki Reikes Fox.



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Our major source of funding is membership dues. To join online or to send a check by mail, visit jewishsouth.org/store/annual-membership for details. Please join us today!