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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Gathering Together! Join the SJHS in Charleston in October

Plans are underway for the 2021 SJHS annual conference to be held on the historic College of Charleston campus in beautiful Charleston, South Carolina, the weekend of October 22–24. We are keeping an eye on COVID-related developments but feel optimistic that we will be able to convene in person for an exciting weekend of southern Jewish history.

In addition to walking tours of the sites of Jewish Charleston, conference-goers will gather for Shabbat dinner and services at iconic Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim. The weekend will feature a full slate of panels under the theme of "Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History." Topics will range widely, including forays into southern Jewish history and creative arts, collecting Kentucky Jewish history, and refugee politics.













Top row left: Charleston today. Right: Arx Carolina, "the ancient fortified settlement at Charleston," 1901 rendering. *Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, New York Public Library.* Middle row left: Battery Park. Right: Broad Street. Bottom row: Two views of the College of Charleston. *Courtesy of College of Charleston.*

We are delighted to announce that we have secured Laura Arnold Leibman to present our second annual Janice Rothschild Blumberg Lecture on Culture, Arts and Southern Jewish History at the conference. Leibman is author of *The Art of* the Jewish Family: A History of Women in Early New York in Five Objects, which won 2020 National **Jewish Book Awards in three** categories (history, American Iewish studies, and women's studies). She is also the author of Messianism, Mysticism and Secrecy: A New Interpretation of Early American Tewish Life and the forthcoming Once We Were Slaves: The Extraordinary Journey of a Multi-Racial Jewish Family. Additional program details will be revealed as our plans evolve.

Compelled by the pandemic, the SJHS developed new resources over the past year that not only enabled us to offer a successful series of virtual programs, but also strengthened the Society in unanticipated ways. Now we are excited to meet together once again and share in-person learning and conversation. We look forward to seeing you in Charleston.

Note: Information on hotel accommodations will be provided in the near future.

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President's Message By Jay Silverberg



We hope by October to exchange our computer screens for in-person discussion. No more "you're muted," or "turn on your camera," or "you're nothing but a shadow ... please put some light on your face."

Our plans are to hold the Society's annual conference in Charleston from Friday, October 22, through Sunday, October 24. Our partners and co-hosts, the Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston and the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, are working through the logistics that will be familiar to our regular conference attendees—

tours, keynote lectures, Shabbat dinner and services, a Saturday reception, and a range of panel presentations.

We hope.

Our intent is genuine, but if circumstances dictate otherwise, we will be prepared to move in one of two directions—a conference that includes some in-person and some virtual presentations, or an all-virtual conference.

Before this past year, the virtual option likely would not have been considered. Indeed, many of us have experienced southern Jewish history in a manner we barely thought about before March 2020. Since those first tentative steps toward a virtual world of southern Jewish history—before the word "Zoom" became a noun or a verb—virtual presentations have become a part of our routine. SJHS has sponsored or co-sponsored more than 20 such programs with several others who share our mission to continually promote this important work. We have reached thousands of participants, many of them members, and many more learning about SJHS for the first time.

Here are just a few of those with whom we've shared the computer screen: the Breman Museum, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, Jewish Heritage North Carolina, Dallas Jewish Historical Society, Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and the Mid-South, Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, the Ciesla Foundation, Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, and the Center for Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston.



The Addlestone Library at the College of Charleston, where SJHS's own archival records reside as part of the Jewish Heritage Collection. *Courtesy of College of Charleston*.

My counterparts have agreed that few of these events, if any, would have been considered were it not for the unprecedented circumstances of the past 12 months. I think it likely that beyond our conference plans for this year, we will continue at some level with virtual presentations well into the future. Indeed, we expect to present three more virtual events in the coming months, one about Jewish genealogy and archival research, one exploring the impact of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, and a third about the 1964 arrest of 16 rabbis in St. Augustine, Florida, and the role they played in civil rights activism.

There is so much to learn, so many who want to teach. See you in Charleston in October. We also will likely see you virtually well into the future.

Jay Silverberg can be reached at jbsilverberg@gmail.com. He maintains a website, meyerbrothersletters.com, with some of his research completed with the help of an SJHS grant five years ago.

Introducing the Beth El Civil Rights Experience By Margaret Norman

On Sunday March 14, 250 members of the greater Birmingham community lined up by car at Temple Beth El for the first annual "Nosh & Learn." Munching on roasted peanuts and *pareve* brownies, participants used a booklet, podcast-style audio, and downloadable map to explore events ranging from the 1938 Southern Conference for Human Welfare to the 1963

Birmingham Campaign to the 1965 Selma march in support of voting rights by the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama.

These participants were the first to take a "sneak peek" at the Beth El Civil Rights Experience, a multimedia project exploring the intersection of Jewish Birmingham and civil rights. The project will roll out materials through 2021 and 2022.

A team at Temple Beth El began developing the project last August, though the subject was hardly a new one of interest. The idea came from Jewish tour groups that visit Alabama and question how local Jews responded to the Civil

Rights Movement. Historian Melissa Young and Ph.D. student Margaret Norman comprised the original Civil Rights Experience team, which now includes lay leaders and numerous community collaborators.

When people think of Jews and civil rights, they mostly recall the northern activists who traveled South, for example, during Freedom Summer of 1964. The story of southern Jews and civil rights is often exaggerated one way or the other, completely diminished or overly congratulatory. The Beth El Civil Rights Experience has become a way of opening a larger conversation, one that tries to understand the myriad ways that people acted, and failed to act, during the struggle for Black civil rights.

The project seeks to understand Jewish Birmingham in relation to the larger story of the 1950s and 1960s, a pivotal moment in Birmingham history that remains a prominent part of public memory. What was it like to be a member of the Jewish community after the attempted bombing of Beth El in 1958? How do we understand the unequal reaction between that event and the bombing of Bethel Baptist Church, only a few months later? How could a local rabbi have advocated for integration

and taken a "moderate" stance on the 1963 demonstrations? How do we make sense of the small handful of Jewish women who marched in Selma the day before Bloody Sunday? The project aims to give participants in and beyond the Jewish community a chance to explore these questions fully.



Scenes from the March "Nosh & Learn," including volunteers and (bottom right) Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin. *Photos by Kim Erikkson*.

The result will be a visitor's site, a permanent place for learning and dialogue, to be located at Temple Beth El. The site will feature a small exhibit space and a short documentary film. Leading up to the grand opening, Beth El will release an audio tour in partnership with TravelStorys and the Alabama Humanities Alliance, which will include general Birmingham Jewish history as well. Though the visitor's site won't be complete until early 2022, Beth El will welcome visitors to engage in the audio tour as soon as this summer.

For the Beth El Civil Rights Experience, the process is as important

as the product. Since October 2020, the congregation has engaged in a public-facing programming series, *Tirdof*, focused on civil rights past and present, and has incorporated civil rights and oral history learning into the religious school curriculum. Research for the project includes original archival work, collaboration with community partners such as the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute—to whom Beth El donated a portion of the proceeds from the recent "Nosh & Learn"—and an oral history project with members of both the Jewish and Black communities, which religious school teenagers are assisting in.

The project has grown from a belief that only in understanding the past truly and fully can we understand who we are and where we are going. Beth El was delighted to welcome so many from the Birmingham community ready to engage in this subject matter at the first "sneak peek" event and welcomes any and all to sign up for updates and engage with materials at templebeth-el.net/beth-el-civil-rights-experience.

Margaret Norman is engagement and collaboration coordinator at Temple Beth El in Birmingham and a graduate student in American studies at UNC-Chapel Hill.

DJHS Founder's Records Come to Light By Jessica Schneider & Corynthia Dorgan

Ginger Chesnick Jacobs *z*"*l* gifted her expansive personal collection to the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, and it has proved to be a priceless addition to the history of the Dallas Jewish community and the organizations that make it unique.

In 1971, Ginger and Ruth Brown Kahn *z*"*l* saw that Jewish history was being erased in Dallas and wanted to see as much preserved as possible. Starting as a committee of the Jewish Community Center, they established the Dallas Jewish Archives, which eventually evolved into the Dallas Jewish Historical Society. As founder and first president, Ginger led by example to shape the Society's collection and reputation. She remained involved until her death in 2016 at age 86.

Ginger actively participated in the Jewish community from childhood, particularly with organizations focused on women and children. Her collection contains her historical research on Jewish Dallas, manuscripts of her publications, and a rich collection of social history of





Top: Hebrew School of Dallas, 1942. Ginger Jacobs is in the top row, second from left. Bottom: "The Gang" at Camp Bonim, 1945. Ginger is fourth from the right in the third row. Courtesy of Dallas Jewish Historical Society.

the community's schools, congregations, and organizations from the 1930s through the mid-2010s, including memos, event flyers, newsletters, yearbooks, and correspondence. It also documents the beginnings of the Archives.

Ginger understood that the history of a place needs to include not only the who, but the how and why. The collection contains oral histories and documents that tell the stories of Dallas's Jewish residents, neighborhoods, and businesses, as well as photos and talking points for Ginger's tours of Jewish Dallas.

After Ginger married Mike Jacobs *z*"l, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, she helped him write a book about his story. He went on to lead the creation of the Dallas Memorial Center for Holocaust Studies (now the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum) to continue telling that story. The collection includes material about Mike, his book, the founding of the Center, and the authentic box car obtained for the museum.

continued on page 6...

Newly Acquired Artifact Illuminates Religious History of Texas Jews

Working with Dan Wyman Books in New York, the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University recently purchased a

rare copy of what is believed to be the first Hebrew book published in Texas: a prayerbook written and compiled by Rabbi Benjamin Cohen of Congregation B'nai Zion in El Paso in 1920. The book offers "a precious window into Jewish ritual and practice in early-20thcentury Texas," asserts Dr. Joshua Furman, curator of the archive.

Cohen came to El Paso in 1919 from a congregation in Bellingham, Washington. His arrival was apparently propitious; as the *El Paso Herald* noted in September 1920, "all orthodox Jews of El Paso, who have been divided for some time because of religious differences, have compromised on their variances in belief and have united" under the banner of Congregation B'nai Zion, with Rabbi Cohen at the helm.

Cohen assembled his original prayerbook, *Rinah U'Tefilah* ("Joyous Song and Prayer"), at least

partly to attract a younger generation of congregants—and perhaps also to smooth over divisions among his newly unified

members. In a fascinating Yiddish-language introduction addressed to "Brothers Orthodox," he bemoans how the American-born children of his congregation have become alienated from Judaism, and argues that the liturgy must accommodate them by including some English prayers. Besides English hymns and readings, Cohen also inserted a timeline of key dates in biblical history and a chart for the prayerbook owner to write down the death anniversaries of loved ones.

"We are excited to study this prayerbook and to make it available to researchers in the near future," says Furman. "Scholars of American Judaism will want to examine this unique effort to modernize the liturgy for an 'orthodox' congregation in the Southwest."

For more about the Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University, please contact Furman at jf36@rice.edu or 713.348.3418.



Courtesy of Houston Jewish History Archive at Rice University.

Rambler, Spring 2021 4

The "Archival Turn," Or, Why Sources Matter By Shari Rabin

How is our view of the past shaped by the sources we use? This year's SJHS conference in Charleston will address this vital question.

The conference theme, "Expanding the Archive(s) of Southern Jewish History," is rooted in what has come to be known as the "archival turn" in historical scholarship. Emerging from the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida, this approach encourages us to ask: what kinds of sources do we use in investigating our history? How have they come to be collected and organized? And how do these sources and collections influence our historical understanding?

As southern Jewish archives and southern Jewish history continue to expand and flourish, recent books and articles offer important insights into our own project of preserving, interpreting, writing, and remembering the past. Here is a list of some of these fascinating works, drawn from Jewish history, southern history, and beyond.

Lisa Leff, The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust.

Oxford University Press, 2015.

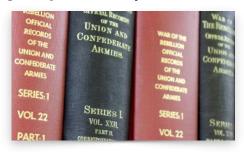


Winner of the Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature, this book tells the story of Zosa Szajkowski, a Jewish historian who stole tens of thousands of Jewish historical documents from French archives after the Holocaust, eventually selling them to Jewish archives in Israel and the United States. "Archives are themselves historical artifacts," Leff argues, and her compelling narrative explores the ramifications of Szajkowski's thefts. Her story raises essential ethical questions about the ownership and

presentation of Jewish history. Should the Jewish past be considered primarily on its own terms, or as part of broader national histories?

Yael Sternhell, "The Afterlives of the Confederate Archive: Civil War Documents and the Making of Sectional Reconciliation."

Journal of American History, March 2016.



In this important article, Yael Sternhell traces the history behind *The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (known as the *OR*), one of the most

important research tools for Civil War history. She shows that in the immediate aftermath of the war, Confederate records were collected as evidence for a possible criminal trial of rebel leaders. Instead, they were incorporated into the *OR* and played a key role in the postwar reconciliation between North and South. Tracing how this vital archive came to be assembled and published, Sternhell illuminates the fundamental relationship between nationalism and archival collecting.

Jason Lustig, "Building a Home for the Past: Archives and the Geography of American Jewish History."

American Jewish History, July 2018.



Jacob Rader Marcus, 1939.
Courtesy of The Jacob Rader
Marcus Center of the American
Jewish Archives.

Jason Lustig, a presenter at the 2017 SJHS conference in Cincinnati, traces mid-20th-century debates about how—and where—the American Jewish past should be preserved. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, figures like Jacob Rader Marcus, Salo Baron, and Oscar Handlin sought to create a more robust field of American Jewish history, though they followed "different institutional and geographic imperatives" and brought "their own memories, identities, and historical narratives to the field they hoped to build." Collecting historical documents was central to this project, and there

were vigorous (and sometimes vicious) debates about where archival materials should be located and whether to create a centralized archive. Archives, Lustig asserts, not only preserve records, but also hold deep symbolic meaning.

Marisa Fuentes, Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive.

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.





How do you study people for whom little documentation exists, either because they did not produce written sources or because their histories were not considered worthy of preservation? Black feminist scholarship has grappled with this problem in exciting and creative ways. In this landmark book, Fuentes recovers the experiences of enslaved women in Barbados by combining their fleeting appearances in archival documents with a deep and sensitive exploration of the worlds in which they lived. She

reminds us that archives are products of history and of power, which means that they are often "partial, incomplete, and structured by privileges of class, race, and gender."

Shari Rabin, assistant professor of Jewish studies and religion at Oberlin College, is co-chair of the 2021 SJHS conference.

Rambler, Spring 2021 5

Digitized Records Solve a Texas Cemetery Mystery By Hollace Ava Weiner

Among the most puzzling graves at Emanuel Hebrew Rest in Fort Worth is a tombstone chiseled with the epitaph, "Mrs. Roy McCormack, Died Jan. 25, 1915." Her first name is a mystery. So is her age. Her last name sounds Scots/Presbyterian, not Jewish. Who was Mrs. Roy McCormack, who died 106 years ago and seemingly took her identity to the

grave?

With the digitization of death certificates and small-town newspapers, her story can now be told. Her full name was Viola Kurniker McCormick—the last name is misspelled on her tombstone. She was born in 1879 in Columbus, Georgia. Her father, Edward Kurniker, was a Jewish saloonkeeper and Confederate veteran who fought with the Georgia Sharp Shooters. Her mother Annie, a native New Yorker, was the daughter of Jewish immigrants.

Viola was the second of five sisters who went to Sabbath School at Temple B'nai Israel in Columbus, where Annie was in the Ladies Aid Society. Annie died when Viola was eight. Five years later, Edward had a fatal stroke. The orphaned sisters moved in with their grandmother and became honor roll students at Columbus High.

In 1901, Viola married Roy McCormick at St. Luke Church. The match "created much interest in Hebrew circles," reported the Atlanta Journal, because of "the groom not being a Hebrew."

The couple moved to Denver where Roy worked in the saloon industry. Viola gave birth to two children, Anise in 1902 and Roy Jr. in 1904. The family moved back and forth between

Georgia and Colorado. They were in Fort Worth in 1915, possibly visiting relatives, when Viola died at age 35. Her Texas death certificate states the cause as tuberculosis. Her dying wish was apparently to be laid to rest among her ancestral people. She was buried at Emanuel Hebrew Rest, the pioneer cemetery

hidden beneath a bower of trees at 1400 South Main Street.

In the 1920s, Viola's daughter Anise was visiting Georgia when she met George Farkas, a congregant at Albany's B'nai Israel. They married and had two sons and a daughter, whom they named Viola in memory of the grandmother buried in Fort Worth. When that daughter grew up, she served as Sisterhood president at B'nai Israel. Her husband, Jimmy Wigzell, was temple treasurer. Viola, now 85 and widowed, lives in Albany and delights in her four children, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Viola always knew her grandmother and namesake was buried in Fort Worth, but until she was reached about this article, she did not know that the picturesque cemetery has a Texas Historic Marker. Founded in 1879 for "the Israelites of the city," Hebrew

Rest (now maintained by Beth-El Congregation) has always provided plots for Jews who could not afford a burial. Viola's family plans to make a donation for its upkeep.

Hollace Ava Weiner, author of Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work and Jewish "Junior League," is a past president of the S7HS.



Courtesy of Fort Worth Jewish Archives.



DJHS Founder's Records Come to Light ...continued from page 4

Although the collection was largely donated to DJHS prior to 2012, much of it has sat in our climate-controlled vault to await processing—until now. "Processing" describes the actions taken to prepare a collection for access and research. Each item is recorded and assessed for value to the overall collection. Does it fit with our mission and scope? Do we already have this or a similar item? Is it in good enough condition to keep? Then, we organize and store the items in archival materials, such as acid-free folders and boxes or acetate sleeves, to preserve them for future use.

When you have more than 30 boxes and thousands of items, processing becomes both an endurance race and a labor of love. It requires patience, focus, and most important, time. Over the past year-and-a-half, DJHS archives assistant Corynthia Dorgan has worked diligently to record the contents of Ginger's



Mike and Ginger Jacobs. Courtesy of Dallas Jewish Historical Society

collection and mold it into a useful and informative resource. While we are not quite finished with this phase (after which comes the creation of a finding aid), we are making incredible progress, partly because closing to the public due to COVID allowed us to spread out

and work with the collection as a

Our work in processing the Ginger Jacobs collection is especially significant at the start of our 50th anniversary. We are thrilled to bring our founder's

collection to light—a true testament to

the love she held for her community and her commitment to keep Dallas Jewish history alive.

whole.

Jessica Schneider is archivist and Corynthia Dorgan is archives assistant at the Dallas Jewish Historical Society.

NEWS AND NOTES



CSJC Makes Plans to Return to "In Person"

The Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston concluded a busy academic year of virtual events in April. Over the past two semesters, the Center dove deep into historical connections between southern Jews and African Americans. We can't wait until next fall when we will resume in-person events, help host the SJHS conference, and welcome research fellows once again to the Jewish Heritage Collection at Addlestone Library. Led by architectural historian Samuel D. Gruber, we will complete our online exhibition Synagogues of the South and run workshops with the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina on how to document and photograph your synagogue.

Ashley Walters, assistant professor and CSJC director, will continue to teach courses on the Jewish South. "Southern Jewish History," a core course of the College's new southern studies program, will explore how Jews acclimated themselves to the rhythms of southern life; the limits they faced; and how race, gender, class, and religion intersected to shape a unique Jewish identity. Students will work alongside historians, archivists, and preservationists to contribute research, photographs, and documentation to the *Synagogues of the South* project.

For more information and to register for Center events (or watch recordings of past programs), visit jewishsouth.cofc.edu.



Professor Ashley Walters teaching a Jewish studies class. Courtesy of Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture.

Aiken Congregation Launches 100th Anniversary Celebration Online

The 2021 celebration of the 100^{th} anniversary of Adath Yeshurun in Aiken, South Carolina, successfully shifted from in-person to virtual with two online programs this spring.

The March program focused on the early history of the Aiken Jewish community from the 1850s to the peak of Jewish merchant activity around 1950. It also included reflections of community members who shared their family stories and personal experiences. An impressive 80-plus households attended. An April program focusing on the later history of the Aiken Jewish community highlighted the civic contributions made by Jews in Aiken and beyond.

The March session can be viewed at youtube.com/watch? v=qyyMy3mMiN0, and the April event will also be posted on youtube. Both videos are also available at the congregation's 100th anniversary website, asourceoflight.org, which offers a number of resources to learn about the history of the Aiken Jewish community.

In-person centennial events, including the opening of the exhibit *A Source of Light* at the Aiken County Historical Museum, have been postponed until March 2022.

The centennial project was underwritten by a grant from the SJHS. The congregation invites SJHS members to watch these virtual events and explore the 100th anniversary website to learn more about the history of the Aiken Jewish community—and consider a trip to Aiken next spring to see *A Source of Light*.



Adath Yeshurun's synagogue building was completed in 1925 Courtesy of Congregation of Adath Yeshurun.



Virtual Conversations Continue at JHSSC

The Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina is having a busy spring with monthly installments of the popular virtual program, "Conversations with Judge Richard Gergel and Robert Rosen."

At April's program, "Rebirth: South Carolina's Holocaust Families," children of Holocaust survivors who made their home in South Carolina talk about their families' memories and experiences. "Rosenwald Schools: The Beginning of the Jewish-African American Coalition" is the topic for discussion in May. South Carolina was home to more than 500 Rosenwald schools, built by philanthropist Julius Rosenwald with local community

support. The schools were the backbone of the educational system for African American children. Special guests Andrew Feiler and Alan Nussbaum will discuss how the Rosenwald schools laid the groundwork for a Black-Jewish coalition in evidence during the civil rights era of the 1960s. To register for all events, go to: jhssc.org/events.

We look forward to welcoming SJHS members this fall in Charleston for our first in-person meeting in two years. Charleston is beckoning and JHSSC is planning a wonderful Lowcountry weekend for our guests. More details to follow!



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Become an SJHS Member

The SJHS advances the study, preservation, and presentation of the Jewish experience in the American South. We award prizes and research grants, publish original scholarship, support exhibitions, hold a stimulating annual conference, and—in the age of COVID-19—sponsor creative virtual programming. Members receive the quarterly *Rambler* and our annual journal, *Southern Jewish History*.



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!

SJHS Grant Winners Announced

The SJHS awarded grants to a number of worthwhile projects in 2020.

- ▶ Project Completion Grants went to Congregation Adath Yeshurun of Aiken, South Carolina, to complete the exhibit A Source of Light: Celebrating Congregation, Commerce & Community, which will appear at the Aiken County Historical Museum in conjunction with the congregation's 100th anniversary; Janice Rothschild Blumberg, to complete her book, What's Next? Southern Dreams, Jewish Deeds and the Challenge of Looking Back while Moving Forward; and the Jewish Museum of Florida at Florida Atlantic University, to complete the exhibit Miami Master Architects, on the life and work of historically prominent Miami-based Jewish architects.
- A **Scott and Donna Langston Archival Grant** went to the Augusta Jewish Museum, to collect historical documents, photos, and other primary sources and present them in an online museum about the Jewish community of Augusta, Georgia, in conjunction with a larger project to restore the Augusta synagogue as a museum.
- A Helen Stern Fund Grant went to Gabrielle Leon Spatt, Jacob Ross, and Adam Hirsh, to complete a documentary film, The Jewish Atlanta Covid-19 Quarantine Story, to appear at the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival.