



## SJHS Houston Conference Pushed the Boundaries of Southern Jewish History

The SJHS 2023 conference in Houston on October 20–22, cohosted by Rice University’s Program in Jewish Studies, had something for everyone. From standard history panels to forays into photography, art and design, poetry, film, memoir, and country music, the stimulating event presented diverse ways to think about and research the southern Jewish experience.

This diversity was summed up by the titles of the first and last panels of the weekend: while Friday’s “Outside the Archival Boxes” showcased non-traditional approaches to exploring the Jewish South, Sunday’s roundtable, “Activating the Archives,” discussed how that most traditional (and indispensable) custodian of history, the archives, might be invigorated for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In between, topics ranged from childhood to architecture to social movements and more.

The gathering kicked off with a pre-conference trip to Galveston, where participants learned about the port city’s status as an immigrant entry point at the Ship to Shore museum and visited historic Congregation B’nai Israel, whose legendary rabbi Henry Cohen played a critical role in welcoming Jewish immigrants who arrived as part of the Galveston Movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other special events included a tour of conference cohost, the Joan and Stanford Alexander South Texas Jewish Archives on the Rice University campus, where attendees got up close and personal with historic artifacts from a variety of collections. On Saturday

night, after an enjoyable reception cosponsored by the Texas Jewish Historical Society, Jewish country artist Joe Buchanan offered a rousing musical performance and Havdalah, sponsored by the Beeber Family/Helen Stern Fund.

Two strong keynote presentations explored relations between Jews and other minorities in multicultural Texas. In the Dr. Lawrence J. Kanter Keynote Lecture, “On My Block: The Ethno-Racial Landscape of Jim Crow Houston,” Tyina Steptoe built on her award-winning work on racial complexities in the historically diverse city of Houston, showing how such complexities played out in interactions between Blacks and Jews. In “Very Small Histories in a Very Big State,” the Janice Rothschild Blumberg Keynote Lecture on Culture, Arts, and Southern Jewish History, Bryan Edward Stone discussed the impact of the state’s large Mexican American population on the Jewish experience in places such as the small border town of Eagle Pass.

The well-rounded program featured a mix of newcomers and SJHS veterans, with considerable

representation from younger scholars. Presenters from a variety of fields contributed layers of insight that resonated with the conference theme, “Space and Place in Southern Jewish History.” As conference co-chair Mark Goldberg aptly put it, “We succeeded in pushing the boundaries of what constitutes the history of the Jewish South.”

*continued on page 6...*



Top: (Left) SJHS president Josh Parshall, keynote speaker Tyina Steptoe, and conference co-chairs Joshua Furman and Mark Goldberg. (Right) Sarah Imhoff, Samuel Gruber, Anne Gessler, and Pearl Young discuss southern Jewish childhood experiences. Photos by Melissa Cohen-Nickels, South Texas Jewish Archives. Bottom: (Left) Touring Galveston’s Ship to Shore museum. Photo by Samuel Gruber. (Right) A visit to the South Texas Jewish Archives. Photo by Melissa Cohen-Nickels. For more conference photos, see page 6!



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## President's Message By Josh Parshall



A year ago, I wrote my first "President's Message" for the *Winter Rambler*. Since then, I've accomplished some (but not all) of the tasks I set for myself, encountered one or two unexpected challenges, and learned a few necessary lessons about organizational life. Overall, I'm pleased with our position going into 2024 and am excited for the work to come.

Our fall conference in Houston was a definite success, from the large group who joined our Galveston excursion to our Saturday night concert with Joe Buchanan and through Sunday morning. Bryan Stone's keynote address, "Very

Small Histories in a Very Big State," was a delightful deep dive by an important and longtime SJHS participant, while Tyina Steptoe's keynote, "On My Block: The Ethno-Racial Landscape of Jim Crow Houston," demonstrated the significance of southern Jewish history within broader stories of the U.S. South. Just as our keynotes highlighted the work of longtime and first-time SJHS presenters, our other sessions featured SJHS veterans and newcomers alike.

The most significant piece of business at our annual meeting was amending our membership structure and raising dues. We have reduced the number of membership types and will now suggest an additional amount for those who would like to join at a higher level. The base level dues are higher, in order to cover the Society's increased operating expenses and in the hope that we can avoid raising rates again in the next few years. For anyone who cannot afford the new dues, the "Student" membership has been renamed "Student/Reduced," and is available to whoever needs it. I appreciate everyone's input in this process, and I think the new structure will serve us well. See page 8 for more details.

As you'll see on page 3, plans for our upcoming Louisville conference are coming along well. We're excited to partner with the Filson Historical Society and grateful for the support of Louisville's Jewish Heritage Fund. Dana Herman, associate director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, has graciously agreed to chair the program committee, and Abby Glogower, curator of Jewish Collections and Jewish Community Archives at the Filson, heads up the host committee. I'm especially glad because we have never met in Kentucky before, and now we will have met in all of the core southern states (at least by my count).

Beyond updating our membership structure, most SJHS operations are business as usual right now, but I do have a note about the journal, *Southern Jewish History*. Our longtime printer informed us it would no longer be printing journals, so editor Mark Bauman and managing editor Bryan Stone have had the added responsibility of seeking out a new publishing arrangement. Fortunately, they have already begun talks with an academic press, and it looks like we will be able to announce a mutually beneficial partnership in the near future.

## Mark Bauman's New Vision Wins SJHS Book Prize

Mark K. Bauman's essay collection *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History* (University of Alabama Press, 2019) was the Awards Committee's unanimous choice for the quadrennial SJHS Book Prize, presented at the Houston conference. The committee noted that the book is both a "celebration of a prolific career and a reflection on the field itself." For more than 40 years, Bauman has advanced southern Jewish history as author, editor, and mentor. His "monumental" book is the "capstone of a career that has exhibited a formidable breadth."

The committee praised Bauman's command of "both primary sources and secondary literature in southern Jewish historiography," noting that *A New Vision* "ranges across the centuries, buttressed by almost 200 pages of endnotes."

Displaying "admirable balance," it is "disinterested in the best sense, characterized by an energetic effort to pursue the elusive ideal of objectivity." The book addresses "methodological and historiographical issues that are likely to continue to intrigue and inform students of the southern Jewish experience," the committee concluded. "By illuminating the past, *A New Vision* guides its readers to the future."



Mark and Sandy Bauman at the Houston conference. Photo by Emily Williams.

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### “Home and Belonging in the Jewish South”

#### 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

November 1–3, 2024    Louisville, Kentucky

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its 48<sup>th</sup> annual conference on November 1–3, 2024, in Louisville, Kentucky, hosted by the Filson Historical Society with sponsorship from the Jewish Heritage Fund.

Situated on the Falls of the Ohio River, Louisville is a gateway to both the West and the South, a historic connector of people, goods, and ideas.

The metropolitan hub of the commonwealth, the “Falls City” is also a border territory and intersection point of different regional identities, including the Ohio Valley, Midwest, and upper and deeper Souths. This will be the first time the SJHS has met in Kentucky. With the Filson Historical Society marking both its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the culmination of its seven-year effort to build a robust collection documenting local Jewish experience, this place and time present an exciting opportunity to explore “home and belonging” in the Jewish South in all its complexity.

Jews are long settled in the South, sharing with southerners a sense of home and belonging. Yet, Jews historically have also been a mobile people. With departures and new migrations, southern Jewish communities have been constantly transformed and reconstituted. Even as Jews planted southern roots as citizens and neighbors, they still identified with

their place of birth, national origins, and the global Jewish people. Commerce, religion, and family linked them to distant places—they were both provincials and cosmopolitans. The South that they have called home has also evolved and has many manifestations: rural and urban, agrarian and industrial, across a broad regional landscape.



Valini Borenstine, Barbara Koby, Julie Koff, Julie Linker, Rolla Gladstein representing Louisville as Kentucky Belles at the United Jewish Appeal (UJA) Conference, c. 1975. Jewish Community of Louisville, Photograph Collection, Filson Historical Society.

Popular representations of the South deploy the idea of home to emphasize regionally distinctive feelings of rootedness, tradition, and hospitality. Ongoing debates about the southern past reflect longstanding struggles over identity. Considering the two themes of rootedness and mobility opens a variety of inquiries about southern Jewish history, including but not limited to issues of gender and domesticity; institution and community building; language and culture; race and religion; ethnicity and nationality; business and economics; exclusion and acceptance; identity and representation.

The deadline for panel and paper proposals is **April 1, 2024**. We are especially interested in roundtables and workshops in addition to traditional panels, and we encourage submissions from graduate students. Please send a proposal and CV, as well as any questions, to conference chair Dana Herman at [dherman@Huc.edu](mailto:dherman@Huc.edu).

## SJHS Board and Committee Chairs, 2024

At our annual meeting, Josh Parshall and Eric Goldstein were reelected as SJHS President and Vice-President. One 2023 board member is leaving the board; we thank **Karen Franklin** for her service to the Society. One new member was elected: former board member **Shari Rabin**, who is rejoining. A scholar of modern Judaism and American religions, Rabin is the

author of the award-winning *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America*. She is currently writing a history of Jews, religion, and race in the U.S. South.

Committee chairs for 2024 are: Cat. Eskin, Awards; Joshua Furman, Nominations; Ashley Walters, Grants; Josh Parshall, Membership; Jay Silverberg, Finance.

## Apply NOW for an SJHS Grant!

Applications for the 2024 grant cycle will be accepted from February 1 to March 15. This year, the Society has around \$7,500 to disburse; grants typically range from \$500 to \$2,000. Funds are generally available in July of the grant year. For details on what kinds of projects qualify and how to apply, see [jewishsouth.org/sjhs-grants-applications](http://jewishsouth.org/sjhs-grants-applications) or contact committee chair Ashley Walters, [waltersa1@cofc.edu](mailto:waltersa1@cofc.edu).



## Dallas Marker Tells a Tale of Two Immigrant Groups

By Beri Schwitzer

On November 3, Dallas community leaders gathered at Harry Hines Triangle Park to unveil the state's newest historical marker, which recognizes the former Alamo Street location of Anshe Sphard Synagogue and Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana (First Mexican Baptist Church) as a significant part of Texas history. The event capped a five-year collaboration between the Dallas Jewish Historical Society, the Dallas Mexican American Historical League, and Primera Iglesia Bautista.

The marker tells the story of Jews who fled Eastern Europe and arrived in Dallas starting in the late 1880s. They settled in a neighborhood north of downtown that became known as "Little Jerusalem" and founded Anshe Sphard in 1906. In 1913 the congregation acquired a house at 2211 Alamo Street and converted it into a synagogue. But when the epicenter of the Jewish community shifted to South Dallas, Anshe Sphard moved with it, creating an opportunity for another religious group.

In the 1910s, immigrants fleeing the turmoil of the Mexican Revolution began arriving in Dallas *en masse*, spurring the transition of "Little Jerusalem" to "Little Mexico." Most of the new residents were Roman Catholic but some were Protestant, and evangelical churches arose to serve them. In 1919, Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana purchased the Alamo Street building from Anshe Sphard—and now had a church featuring the Star of David in its windows. It stayed until 1926.



Above: Anshe Sphard became both a church and a bible school, whose teacher and pupils are pictured here.

Below: DJHS volunteers and staff unveil marker. Left to right: Rhonda Duchin, Susan Schackman, DJHS board president Jeanette Pincus, DJHS executive director Beri Kaplan Schwitzer, Jessica Adams, Melissa Prycer, Jo Reingold.

*Courtesy of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society.*

A century later, Primera Iglesia Bautista is located on Royal Lane in northwestern Dallas (its previous building on Walnut Hill was destroyed by the tornado of 2019). Anshe Sphard merged with Shearith Israel in 1956. The Alamo Street building no longer exists; it was located between today's Perot Museum of Nature and Science and El Fenix Restaurant. However, its history is symbolic of the early multiculturalism of Dallas and a tribute to those willing to respect the faiths of others.

The new marker is "a tool that will increase public awareness," noted Mark Wolfe, executive director of the Texas Historical Commission, at the unveiling. Such awareness is "among the best ways to guarantee the preservation of our state's history." A place qualifies for a historical marker if two basic criteria are met: historical significance and age. The Alamo Street site "represents the multicultural history significant to both Texas and Dallas," stated Elizabeth Gunby, Dallas County Historical Commission chair. The Commission "is thrilled to be a part of this unique marker that represents the merging of the history of the Mexican American, Jewish, and Christian communities. Congratulations on leaving another mark on history."

*Beri Kaplan Schwitzer is executive director of the Dallas Jewish Historical Society.*

## Rabbi Kessler Fund Honors TJHS Founder

Early in his career, Rabbi Jimmy Kessler lamented the absence of a significant record of the Texas Jewish experience in local, state, and university libraries. His frustration turned to action in 1980, when he organized a meeting for like-minded Texans in San Antonio of what would become the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

Rabbi Kessler succumbed to cancer in 2022. The TJHS has established the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund to honor his memory and continue his legacy of promoting and preserving the history of Jews and Jewish communities in Texas.

Rabbi Kessler, who served Congregation B'nai Israel in Galveston for 32 years, was the TJHS founding president. His leadership and vision not only advanced Society programs, but led to the establishment of the TJHS Collection at the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin. More than four decades after its founding,

TJHS continues to expand and enhance the knowledge and understanding of the Jewish presence in Texas through education and outreach. With continued incidences of antisemitism today in the U.S. and Texas, this mission becomes even more important.



Rabbi Jimmy Kessler (1945-2022).  
*Courtesy of TJHS.*

In developing projects to support with the Kessler Fund, TJHS will keep in mind the many facets of Jimmy Kessler. He was a great storyteller, a civil rights advocate, an interfaith leader, and an educator who believed that learning about Jewish history, particularly by young students, was a deterrent to antisemitism. With an eye to the Fund's long-term impact, TJHS will propose initiatives that broaden outreach efforts, increase membership, and share the incredible history of Jews in Texas with a broader community.

More information about TJHS and donating to the Rabbi Jimmy Kessler Educational Outreach Fund is available at [txjhs.org](https://txjhs.org).

# Black and Jewish Ancestry in the South—A Personal Story

By Morris Lewis

Because the Jewish population of the South was historically very small, Jews contributed very little to African Americans' European ancestry through the slavery and Jim Crow eras. But there are known instances of this occurring. One example may have been captured in the 1845 drawing "Asher Moses Nathan and Son," by New Orleans portraitist Jules Lion. This portrait, still being studied by historians, seems to show a wealthy Jewish landowner with his mixed-race "adopted" and likely biological son.



"Asher Moses Nathan and Son," 1845. *The Historic New Orleans Collection*, 2021.0264.

In 2015, I began my genealogical journey with a DNA test. The results confirmed my 100 percent Ashkenazi Jewish ancestry while enabling me to identify many known and previously unknown relatives. As other people test themselves, new matches to my DNA results appear on a regular basis, most of whom I can tie to a branch of my family tree.

In 2022, an unusual new match appeared: an African American woman with 29 percent Ashkenazi Jewish DNA. This woman lived in Michigan but listed her birthplace as Mississippi, which is home to six generations of my father's family. Soon thereafter, she sent me a direct message reading, "My name is Andora, and I am currently doing research on my family's history. I believe we share some of the same past relatives (Herrman from Mississippi). If possible, I would love to speak with you."

As it turns out, Andora's father, Jessie Herman Wade, was born in 1912 in Lexington, Mississippi, the son of my great-grandmother's brother, 27-year-old Jake Herrman, and Ida Stokes, a Black 16-year-old who may have been a housekeeper in the Herrman home. Jessie's heritage was public knowledge in the Black community, where he picked up the monicker "Jessie Jew." On the other hand, according to Jessie's older children, his heritage was not publicly spoken of in the white community, though they mention that he had better relations than other Blacks with Lexington's many Jewish merchants. Also, they report that members of Jake's family occasionally reached out to Jessie in the years following Jake's death in the mid-1920s.

At the time we connected, Andora, the youngest of Jessie's eight children, was writing a biography of her father, exploring how the biracial son of a young, poor Black housekeeper and a white Jewish man could find success despite the challenges of growing up in the Jim Crow South. Jessie, who was raised by his step-grandfather Henry Wade, began his work life as a sharecropper. He would go on to organize and lead crews that harvested sugar cane and cotton. After a stint working in a Chicago factory, he bought and farmed his own land near Lexington, land that is still owned by his family.

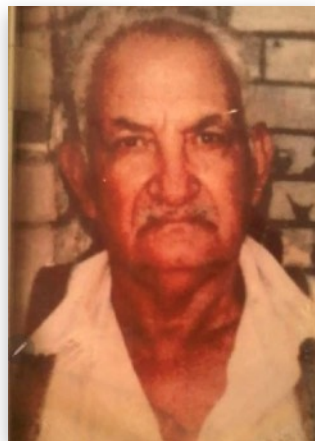
Our introduction via email was followed by several long phone calls and, eventually, a joint trip to Lexington, where we shared our perspectives as minorities in a small southern town. I showed her the Lexington of my grandfather, Jake's nephew Morris Lewis Jr., who was less than a year older than his first cousin Jessie. It was a community where Jews were well accepted and carried the privilege of whiteness while maintaining their distinct culture. She showed me a completely different view of the same town, where Blacks operated in a parallel universe of disadvantage.

We discussed the different experiences of Jessie and Morris. Though they shared a set of grandparents and the same community, the cousins may have never met and certainly led very different lives. But when comparing stories, Andora and I found that they did share an intelligence and drive that saw Jessie overcome the disadvantages of racism, poverty, and undereducation to achieve success as a farmer, while Morris used an Ivy League education to become one of the first Jewish CEOs of a Fortune 500 company.

Our relationship culminated with her request for me to contribute to her father's biography by authoring a chapter on his Ashkenazi Jewish genealogy dating back to 17<sup>th</sup>-century Bavaria, along with an overview of Ashkenazi history and culture. This offered me the privilege of sharing a piece of my history with an audience eager to learn more about this unknown part of their own roots. It also offered me an

incredible experience in looking at southern Jewish history through the eyes of an African American.

*Morris Lewis, a native of Indianola, Mississippi, serves on the boards of the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience and the Institute of Southern Jewish Life.*



Top: First cousins Jessie Herman Wade and Morris Lewis Jr. *Courtesy of Andora Wade Campbell and Morris Lewis.* Bottom: Second cousins once-removed Andora and Morris at the Wade Family Cemetery; the Lewis family at Lexington's former Temple Beth El. *Courtesy of Andora Wade Campbell.*



## Scenes from the SJHS Houston Conference

continued from page 1...



These photos capture just some of the many activities that took place at our Houston conference. Clockwise from top left:

Gathering in Galveston at B'nai Israel's Rabbi Henry Cohen Memorial Temple. *Photo by Melissa Cohen-Nickels, South Texas Jewish Archives.*

A Texas Table: Enjoying Shabat dinner at Congregation Emanu El are (standing): David Beer, former TJHS president; Jan Hart; Charles Hart, former TJHS president; Beri Schwitzer, new DJHS director; and (seated): Barbara Stone, Edward Stone, and Kathy Hart. *Photo by Emily Williams.*

A Friday night memorial program honored six key figures in the field of southern Jewish history who passed away recently. *Photo by Samuel Gruber.*

The College of Charleston's Ashley Walters commemorates her late colleague Marty Perlmutter at the memorial program. *Photo by Emily Williams.*

Joe Buchanan entertains the crowd on Saturday night. *Photo by Samuel Gruber.*

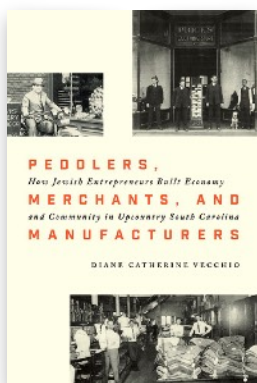
Bryan Stone focused on small Texas towns in his keynote address. *Photo by Samuel Gruber.*

Friday morning panelists Emily Williams, Gabrielle Lyle, and Jillian Glantz with Hollace Weiner (second from right). All three panelists received grants from the TJHS and/or SJHS for their respective photography, oral history, and film projects. *Photo by Bruce Weiner, DDS.*



## NEWS AND NOTES

### New Book Explores Jewish Business in South Carolina



In *Peddlers, Merchants, and Manufacturers: How Jewish Entrepreneurs Built Economy and Community in Upcountry South Carolina*, Furman University professor emerita Diane Vecchio examines the diverse economic experiences of Jews who settled in Upcountry (now Upstate) South Carolina, a center of textile manufacturing and business opportunity that attracted entrepreneurial energy to the so-called New South.

Working with a rich set of oral histories, memoirs, and historical documents, Vecchio provides a corrective to the history of manufacturing in South Carolina. She explores Jewish community development and describes how Jewish business leaders became civic leaders who influenced the social, political, and cultural scene. The Jewish community's impact on all facets of life across the Upcountry is vital to understanding the growth of today's Spartanburg-Greenville corridor, Vecchio contends. Published by **University of South Carolina Press**, the book is available on amazon.

### Photo Exhibit to Feature Southern Jewish Communities

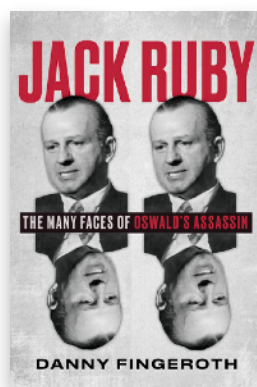
Emily Rena Williams's MFA thesis show *Infinite Poem* will run March 19–28 at Glassell Gallery in Baton Rouge. The solo exhibition will present part of her ongoing body of work, *We had to know who we were; We had to know who we weren't*, which documents rural and small-town Jewish communities in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia through photography and oral history interviews. *Infinite Poem* will focus on images of synagogues accompanied by audio excerpts from these interviews. The gallery is free and



open to the public. A closing reception will be held on March 28 at 6 pm.

Agudas Achim,  
Laredo, Texas,  
2023. Courtesy of  
Emily Williams.

### Biography Probes the Life of Jack Ruby



Sixty years after the assassination of JFK, cultural historian Danny Fingeroth illuminates the life and times of the Dallas Jewish nightclub owner who killed Lee Harvey Oswald in *Jack Ruby: The Many Faces of Oswald's Assassin*. The mentally troubled Ruby, born Jacob Leon Rubenstein in Chicago in 1911, moved to Dallas in 1947, where he became a mainstay in the shady world of hustlers, strip clubs, and gamblers—as well as a member of the

venerable Conservative congregation Shearith Israel. Fingeroth's research includes a new, in-depth interview with Rabbi Hillel Silverman, who visited Ruby regularly in prison.

“Cultural sleuth Danny Fingeroth's fascinating biography . . . offers a lens into America's low-level underworld, its multi-tiered Jewish community, and a Baby Boom generation robbed of its hero-worshiped president,” says author Larry Tye. Published by **Chicago Review Press**, the book is available on amazon.

### AJA Fellowship Program Invites Applications

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) is pleased to invite applications for its 2024–2025 Fellowship Program. Established in 1977 by AJA founder Jacob Rader Marcus (1896–1995), the fellowship program has brought more than 600 scholars from over 20 countries to conduct research in the AJA's unparalleled collections, located on the historic Cincinnati campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

The deadline to apply is February 20. Full information and an application form can be found at

[americanjewisharchives.org/about/fellowship-program/](https://americanjewisharchives.org/about/fellowship-program/). Inquiries and completed applications should be sent to Dr. Dana Herman, Director of Fellowship Program, 3101 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45220, [dherman@huc.edu](mailto:dherman@huc.edu).



The beautiful Barrows-Loebelson Reading Room at the AJA. American Jewish Archives.

## SJHS Changes Membership Structure, Dues Rates



At our 2023 annual meeting, the membership passed a bylaws amendment to simplify the membership structure and raised dues for the first time in many years.

Here are the new membership categories and rates:

- ▶ Student/Reduced—\$36 (available to anyone who indicates need)
- ▶ Individual—\$72
- ▶ Household—\$100
- ▶ Institutional—\$100



The amendment also created new membership levels for those who would like to contribute additional funds:

- ▶ Standard: + \$0
- ▶ Patron: + \$50
- ▶ Cedar: + \$250
- ▶ Sycamore: + \$1,000

We are working with our membership data management contractor to update our online registration system. The new rates will go into effect when that process is complete, as early as this spring. In the meantime, you can join or renew your membership at [jewishsouth.org/membership-donations](http://jewishsouth.org/membership-donations).