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SOUTHERN LEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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"Sights, Sounds, and Stories"

Columbia, S.C. • October 27-30, 2011

By Bryan E. Stone



Composer Meira Warshauer. Photo by Gerald Katz, courtesy JHSSC

One of the highlights of the 36th Southern Jewish Historical Society Annual Conference in Columbia, South Carolina, came near the end of the three-day meeting. Pianist and composer Meira Warshauer, along with cellist Robert Jesselson and mezzo-soprano Janet Hopkins, performed and talked about selections of Warshauer's music. Her compositions, which blend Jewish and American motifs with a lyrical expressiveness, recalled

several themes that had been under discussion at the conference. The distinctive tone of southern Jewry, the dissonance of the personal and the universal, the harmony of the ancient and the modern, the counterpoint of sacred and secular—all of these were discernible in passages of works such as Tekeeyah, Concerto for Shofar, Trombone, and Orchestra, surely the only piece of its kind in existence.

The "Sounds of the Jewish South" session fulfilled one of the conference's primary objectives: to go beyond familiar historical narratives and explore the variety of forms of expression of Jewish southern identity. Program co-chairs Dale Rosengarten and Phyllis Leffler brought together an array of panels, guided tours, exhibits, and performances that captured a wide range of sights, sounds, stories, and even tastes of Jewish life in the South.



Phyllis Leffler, Dale Rosengarten, Stuart Rockoff, Rachel Barnett, and USC president Harris Pastides. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC



Ann Meddin Hellman, president of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina. Photo by Jeri Perlmutter, courtesy IHSSC

Co-sponsored with the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina (JHSSC) on the lush campus of the University of South Carolina, the conference was held in state-of-the-art meeting spaces at the new Ernest F. Hollings Special Collections Library and the recital hall at the School of Music. Attendees enjoyed luxurious accommodations in the Inn at USC. The local Jewish community provided extraordinary southern hospitality. Host committee chair Rachel Gordin Barnett, in particular, was tireless in planning and managing the complex event. Committee members Melanie Baker, Penny Blachman, and Lisa Levinson helped to welcome conference attendants and to staff the registration tables.

Enid Idelsohn, IHSSC's administrator extraordinaire, managed online registration, created mail lists, and designed the conference brochure and badges.

The program kicked off on Friday with a day trip to the nearby town of Sumter. At Temple Sinai, we marveled at the ten towering stained glass windows that enclose the sanctuary while Elizabeth Moses described the history of Jews in her hometown and recounted the Biblical stories depicted in glass. Eagle-eyed historian Lee Shai Weissbach spotted the attribution "Empire Glass, Atlanta, Georgia" on a high circular window over the entryway, providing a new clue to the origins of the decorative panes, which previously had been thought to come from Germany.



Viewing the windows at Temple Sinai. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC

County Museum where Director Rickie

Moses with the Ten From the temple we walked to the Sumter

Commandments, window at Temple Sinai, Sumter. Photo by Dale Rosengarten

Good and her staff introduced us to the property, originally owned by Andrew Jackson and Octavia Harby Moses. After a picnic lunch on the lawn, we proceeded by bus to the home of Dr. Wendell and Katie Levi, where our hosts had laid out on tables and sideboards eye-popping heirlooms and memorabilia from the Levi and D'Ancona families. Dr. Levi's twin sister, Patty L. Barnett, and her daughter and son-in-law, Trish and Phil Greenberg, served as docents, describing who was who in the portraits on the walls, and guiding visitors into one of South Carolina's renowned camellia gardens.



Picnic lunch on the lawn behind the Sumter County Museum. Photo by Dale Rosengarten



Katie Levi telling the history of the Dr Wendell and Katie Levi home. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy IHSSC

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President's Message By Stuart Rockoff



I am writing this in the days after our recent conference in Columbia, South Carolina. Partnering with the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, the SJHS hosted an outstanding meeting. Many people came up to me during the weekend to comment on how wonderful everything was, and I had to admit that I had very little to do with it. Thus, in this forum, I need to thank Rachel Barnett, who was in charge of all of the local arrangements, from the hotel, food, and receptions, to such details as the gift bags. Rachel is the incoming president of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, and if the conference was any indication, she will be a tremendous leader for the organization.

The outstanding program was put together by two officers of the Southern Jewish Historical Society: Vice-President Dale Rosengarten and Secretary Phyllis Leffler. In addition to the many fine papers, what was most compelling about the program was its innovation and willingness to break convention. Instead of bringing in a big-name historian as keynote speaker, Dale and Phyllis put together a musical program featuring southern Jewish composer Meira Warshauer. I've heard from many participants that this program was the highlight of the entire conference. This is not to say that we've permanently moved away from bringing in leading scholars as featured speakers, but it's refreshing to have the program chairs rethink the annual conference structure, which helps to prevent it from becoming stale.

I think there is a lesson in this for the entire organization. The SJHS has been going strong for 34 years, and has amassed a tremendous record of fostering and supporting the field of Southern Jewish history. But for too long, we have been stuck in the old ways of doing things. "The way things have always been" can prevent an organization from moving forward and remaining relevant in the 21st century.

Every historical society I've been involved with has lamented about its graying membership and the need to attract younger members. This issue does not just affect the SJHS. Luckily, we have been able to attract young scholars who have agreed to play leadership roles in the society. We need to empower and encourage them to "think outside the box" and consider how we can reach a new audience. It is time for the SJHS to break out of its mold, and begin to rethink what it has to offer. There are several larger questions that we need to address: How can we expand our programs and activities to better achieve our mission? How can we modernize the society to ensure our future viability? How can we better use technology to achieve our goals?

I think our new website is a good start. I want www.jewishsouth.org to become the destination for those seeking to do research on the history of southern Jews. With a comprehensive bibliography now available on the site, along with a state-by-state guide to archival resources, the SJHS website will become an essential resource for scholars. I also want to use the website to bring greater scholarly attention to the fine work published in our journal, Southern Jewish History. For now, people can download articles from the first three volumes of the journal for free, and purchase articles from subsequent volumes. In addition to the new website, we have created a Facebook page to modernize our communications and to reach a new audience.

Over the past year, we have made progress, but we still have further to go. Our exact route is not yet determined, and I am looking for ideas and input from our members. If you have a program idea or would like to be involved in determining the future direction of the society, please contact me at rockoff@isjl.org. As an all-volunteer organization, we may move slowly, but we must move forward. I look forward to your suggestions about how to strengthen the SJHS.

SJHS Unveils New Website

After several months of planning, the SJHS has finally unveiled its new and improved website. The address is the same, www.jewishsouth.org, but the look and content are all new. For the first time in the society's history, people can join the SJHS online. They can also purchase back issues of our outstanding journal Southern Jewish History, as well as individual articles from past volumes. Articles from the first three volumes of the journal can be downloaded for free. Putting the journal online will help gain a wider audience for the important scholarship published in its pages.

Most notably, the new website contains a detailed bibliography of published work in the field of southern Jewish history. Organized by state and by theme, this bibliography, originally developed by Eric Goldstein and Marni Davis, will certainly become an essential resource for anyone doing research on southern Jewish history.

In the first three weeks the site was live, we had 800 visitors - not bad for an organization with about 400 members! Our hope is that the new website will attract new members in addition to furthering the central mission of the society: to foster and support research into southern Jewish history.



Screenshot from the new SJHS website

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Back in Columbia, a gracious dinner was provided by the Tree of Life congregation, followed by Shabbat services led by guitar-strumming Rabbi Daniel Sherman. The meal was planned and organized by Sandra Poliakoff with decor assistance from Marcie Baker and Beryl Jaffe. After services congregants and guests returned to the social hall for an elaborate Oneg that featured delicious baked goods made by Temple members.

On Saturday, conferees gathered at the Hollings Library for a morning of panel discussions. The first, "Tolerance and Tensions," examined various ways southern Jews have interacted with their gentile neighbors. Panelist Allen Krause found inspiration in a rare book in his possession, tracking down the complex relationships among Rabbi Isaac Leeser, who wrote the volume, Charleston merchant Nathan Hart, who in 1834 inscribed it as a gift, and the Reverend John Bailey Adger, a Presbyterian missionary who was its recipient. Hyman Rubin III investigated a number of Jewish Republicans in Reconstruction South Carolina and speculated on what forces led them into this unpopular political allegiance. Marni Davis examined a violent incident in Blackville, South Carolina, between Simon Brown, a Jew from Eastern Europe, and Irish-born John Gribben, the county official responsible for enforcing the state's new liquor monopoly, revealing the role that nativism played in fomenting interethnic violence. And Rachel Bergstein's paper on Atlanta rabbis David Marx and Tobias Geffen exposed a generation gap between an older Jewish community leader promoting acculturation and patriotism in an effort to win gentile approval and a younger one for whom Jewish identity and tradition were more important than Christian good will.



"Tolerance and Tensions": Hyman Rubin III, Rachel Bergstein, Marni Davis, and Ellen Umansky. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC



Rabbi Allen Krause. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC

In the second panel, "The Topography of Exclusion," Robert Gillette presented an inspiring account of William Thalhimer's purchase of a Virginia farm to serve as a refuge for Jews fleeing Nazism in the 1930s. Theodore Rosengarten looked at a different angle of the 1930s refugee crisis, the experience of German Jewish scholars who took up residence at African-American colleges in the South, which initiated profoundly meaningful friendships between black students and Jewish faculty. Catherine Eskin added still another perspective, showing how synagogue architecture in Lakeland, Florida, revealed the changing self-identity and communal needs of an expanding Jewish population in unfriendly territory.



"The Topography of Exclusion": Robert Gillette, Lauren Sklaroff, Catherine Eskin, and Theodore Rosengarten. *Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC*



Joseph Butwin. Photo by Jeri Perlmutter, courtesy JHSSC

After a brief break for lunch, Dale Rosengarten moderated a panel on "History and Memory," a thought-provoking pair of presentations on the uses of memory, creativity, fact, and fiction in describing Jewish life in America. Joseph Butwin observed that immigrant Jews and African Americans both used the expression "Old Country" to refer to their places of origin: Europe and the South. The overlap suggests a common sense of place and rootlessness in the

two cultures that is apparent in memoirs and literary works. Writer Ellen Solomon beautifully described her preparation for a novel based on the life of her grandmother, Ruchel. She has some facts to work with but also her father's recollections of his mother, passed on to his children in a form shaped by his own personality and emotional needs. Solomon's talk was a fascinating and provocative meditation on the creative process and how it affects the retelling of history.



Richard and Belinda Gergel addressing the tour group at "The Big Apple" in Columbia.

Ellen Solomon.
Photo by Jeri Perlmutter, courtesy JHSSC



The "Horseshoe," on the USC campus



Holocaust monument at Columbia's Memorial Park. Photo by Max Hellman

The afternoon was spent seeing the sights of Columbia on a bus tour guided by local hosts Richard and Belinda Gergel. The first stop was "The Big Apple," Beth Shalom's second synagogue originally situated on Park Street, later home to a black night club where the famous "Big Apple" dance was invented. From there the buses drove to the Hebrew Benevolent Society cemetery, Columbia's first Jewish burial ground, and then to Memorial Park, where an impressive monument to Holocaust survivors and liberators shares sacred space with memorials to the dead of other wars.

McKissick Museum on the USC campus opened its doors to conferees for a look at its current exhibitions, including an installation of Bill Aron's evocative photo essay, *Palmetto Jews*, a millennial portrait shot in the year 2000, documenting Jewish life across the state. Here again, the conference program emphasized multimedia, interdisciplinary approaches to the recounting of southern Jewish history.



Reception at the Hollings Library. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC

Saturday evening Library hosted bountiful reception, sponsored by the law firm Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough, at which conference attendees were cordially welcomed by Dean Tom McNally and USC President Harris Pastides. Docents offered "behind the scenes" tours of the library, and guests were free to browse special exhibits mounted by South Carolina Political Collections, the South Caroliniana Library, the

Irvin Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, and Furman University's Special Collections and Archives. Continuing the program's multimedia approach, conferees were also treated to an advance screening of selections from *Carvalho's Journey*, a PBS documentary by filmmaker Steve Rivo about the life of Solomon Nunes Carvalho, a nineteenth-century Jewish painter and photographer from Charleston, South Carolina.

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"Sights, Sounds, and Stories" continued from page 3...

After SJHS and JHSSC's concurrent board meetings on Sunday morning, the venue shifted to the USC School of Music, where Phyllis Leffler introduced the compelling performance and led a discussion with composer Meira Warshauer and friends. In answer to the question of whether there is such a thing as southern Jewish music, evidently, there is.

The final panel, moderated by Eli N. Evans, brought the conference to a rousing conclusion with two presentations on humor in and about the Jewish South. Bryan Edward Stone showed a video of members of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, performing a bluegrass version of "Hava Nagila." Stone described the Cornerstone Church's emphatic support for the Jewish people and the State of Israel and questioned how southern Jews should interpret the overwhelming goodwill of modern evangelicals. Jarrod Tanny offered a series of video and audio segments ranging from Woody Allen to Kinky Friedman to "King of the Hill" to Sacha Baron Cohen that highlighted the South's place in Jewish humor and the Jews' place in southern humor. Tanny explained the power that humor has to mediate between Jews of different regions and between Jews and gentiles in southern communities not always known for their tolerance. True to the old show business adage, they left 'em laughing.



Bryan E. Stone and Jarrod Tanney. Photo by Max Hellman, courtesy JHSSC



Filmmaker Steve Rivo. Photo by Dale Rosengarten

Each year, the SJHS annual conference program seems to raise the bar, providing ever broader and richer views on the southern Jewish experience. This year's meeting opened our eyes to the variety of literary, visual, musical, and cinematic expressions through which southern Jewry has been defined.

Next year's conference will be held October 19–22, 2012, in Asheville, North Carolina. Save the date now for what will surely be another enlightening and memorable meeting.

Thanks to Dale Rosengarten, Phyllis Leffler, and Rachel Barnett for help with this article.

News and Notes

Last Chance to see "Forgotten Gateway"



Forgotten Gateway: Coming to America through Galveston, a three-year-old exhibit that explores the immigration history of one of the nation's top ten ports of entry, will make its final stop at the Fort Worth Museum of Science & History from Dec. 17 to April 1. The exhibit chronicles the slave trade, beginning in 1845, migration of refugees from Mexico,

Central and South America, and also focuses on the Galveston Plan, which brought 10,000 East European Jews to America between 1907 and 1914. Through film footage, artifacts, and narratives, the exhibit highlights such themes as navigating bureaucracy, confronting discrimination, and becoming American. Organized in 2009 by Austin's Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, Forgotten Gateway has traveled to Galveston's Moody Gardens, Houston's Museum of Natural History, and New York's Ellis Island Immigration Museum. To coincide with the exhibit's closing weekend, the Texas Jewish Historical Society is hosting its annual gathering in Fort Worth, March 30-April 1, 2012. The weekend will include a Saturday morning tour of the exhibit, led by its curator, Austin anthropologist Dr. Suzanne Seriff. Afterward, the museum will host a panel, "Still Forgotten?" featuring Seriff and filmmaker Cynthia Mondell, who co-produced the 1983 docudrama West of Hester Street, one of the first pieces of research on the Galveston Plan.

Holocaust Refugees in Georgia and Alabama

The Breman Museum in Atlanta has posted an online exhibition of materials related to Jewish Holocaust survivors who made their homes in Georgia and Alabama. "New Lives: Coming to America" can be accessed from the

Museum's home page, www.thebreman.org. It features the stories of more than 400 survivors, told through video testimony, family photographs, and other historical documentation. Maps and narrative histories provide background and context on the Holocaust, the history of European ghettos, and the home countries of the survivors. New materials are added daily.

• Wooden Synagogues of Poland

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Polish Jews constructed elegant wooden synagogues, many of which were destroyed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Englishman Peter Maurice studied surviving specimens of the synagogues and constructed wooden models of ten of them. Before his death, he donated the collection to the lewish Museum of Florida in Miami Beach, where they are currently on display. Museum's exhibit emphasizes the Florida connection, using artifacts and photographs from Florida Jews whose origins are in the Polish shtetls.



Model of a wooden synagogue in Gombin, Poland, built in 1710

Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia

The Beth Ahabah Museum & Archives in Richmond is currently showing "Commonwealth and Community: The Jewish Experience in Virginia." This exhibition traces the 400-year history of Jewish presence in Virginia, and includes a copy of George Washington's letter to the Hebrew congregations of Philadelphia, New York, Charleston and Richmond; magnificent silver ceremonial objects; and historical photographs and documents. This exhibition was originally organized by the Virginia Historical Society and the Jewish Community Federation of Richmond.

Call for Papers

SJHS 37th Annual Conference, Asheville, N.C. October 18-21, 2012

The Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its annual conference in Asheville, North Carolina, from October 18-21, 2012. The conference's theme will be "Mountain Jews: Creating Community in Appalachia." The SJHS Conference Program Committee is now soliciting papers. The deadline is February 15, 2012. Suggested topics include Jewish involvement with peddling, mercantile experiences, arts and artisan communities, commercial networks, religious developments, summer camping, cultural accommodation, Black Mountain College, Zebulon Vance, Thomas Wolfe, or other topics of regional interest. Please send a brief proposal to Jay Jacoby (jbjacoby@uncc.edu) or Leonard Rogoff (Irogoff@nc.rr.com).

····· SJHS News ·····



The SJHS is now on Facebook! Get the latest news and updates about the society's programs, conferences, and grants. Search for "Southern Jewish Historical Society" and click the 'Like' button to add the SJHS to your newsfeed.

♦ SJHS Grants Awarded

The SJHS is happy to announce successful grant recipients for the 2011 year cycle. A Project Completion grant went to the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington to create an online version of the exhibition Jewish Life in Mr. Lincoln's City. The SJHS grant will complete the funding for JHSGW to build a website of their successful exhibit. In 2008, SJHS also provided a more significant grant to help create the original exhibit, which explores the stories of Jewish life in Civil War Washington and in Alexandria, Virginia. This rich exhibit will be accessible to a much broader audience through the on-line materials. For more information about this dynamic Jewish historical society, see www.jhsgw.org.

In addition, SJHS awarded a Research/Travel grant to Adam Wolkoff for his project "A Manifest Anomaly: Blacks, Jews, and the Forgotten Trails of the First African American Lawyer." Mr. Wolkoff is a Ph.D student at Rutgers University. The grant provided by SJHS will be supplemental to his Mellon Grant and will allow Mr. Wolkoff to carry out research in archives in Savannah, Columbia, and Morrow, Georgia. His focus will be the life of Moses Simons, the son of a Jewish immigrant to Savannah in the 1780s and an enslaved woman. Simons was the first Jew and the first African American to attend Yale College in 1805.

A hearty congratulations to our winners!

Grants are available for 2012 for individual new research, for archival projects, and for a variety of project completion goals. We seek innovative and thoughtfully developed proposals about all aspects of southern Jewish history and culture. Applications are due on August 1, 2012, and should be sent to the Chair of the Grants Committee, Dr. Phyllis Leffler, at pleffler@virginia.edu. For detailed guidelines on proposal submission, please see www.jewishsouth.org/sjhs-grants-applications.

♦ From the SJHS summer intern, Garrett Wilkerson



I had a great summer as a Southern Jewish Historical Society intern. Among many different projects, I updated a comprehensive bibliography of journal articles and sources on Southern Jewish history, helped with a membership drive mailing, and contacted professors and university libraries across the country to get them to subscribe to the SJHS journal. Among the most ambitious project I helped with was to document and record the location of all congregation minutes and records across the South. By the end of the summer, we had received responses from at least half of the congregations contacted. I was very fortunate to work with Dr. Rockoff, and I wish the SJHS all the best in its future endeavors.

♦ SIHS Welcomes Board Members and Officers

A high-tech video entrepreneur, a Yale graduate student, and a lawyer who has knitted her way through a half-dozen board memberships are among the new SJHS officers elected at the membership meeting in Columbia. In selecting candidates, the Nominations Committee sought to achieve balance by geography, age, skill sets, and lay or academic experience. Several new trustees have served the SJHS almost since its inception; others are relative newcomers. Their hometowns stretch from Santa Clara to Washington, Montgomery to New Haven.

The Nominations Committee — Leonard Rogoff (chair), Janice Blumberg, Sumner Levine, and Scott Langston — confronted the formidable task of replacing six board members, five leaving with expired terms and one through resignation. The SJHS thanks Marni Davis, Adam Mendelsohn, Jean Roseman, Sandra Berman, Harriet Stern, and Margaret Anne Goldsmith for their service.

Welcome to the new members:

Rachel Bergstein, a frequent Conference presenter, is completing her dissertation, "From Leo Frank to Civil Rights: Jews in the New South City, 1915-1968," at Yale. With her husband and two-year-old daughter, she lives in the Washington, D.C., area where she teaches and lectures on modern Jewish history.

Gil Halpern, a native of Memphis, is an engineering graduate of Georgia Tech. As the SJHS moves into cyberspace, we will welcome his expertise as owner of Halpern Audio/Visual, film, video, and audio services. Gil has served as Gabbai at Beth Sholom Synagogue and president of the Jewish Historical Society of Memphis & The Mid-South. Gil and Betty have three children and four grandchildren.

Allen Krause has been a scholar of southern Jewry for 45 years. He has done pioneering research in civil rights and has published on Judah P. Benjamin, Burton Padoll, and Benjamin Schultz. He received his BA from UCLA and a BAHL, MAHL, and rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Since 1969 he has taught at the University of Santa Clara and California State University, San Jose, then Fullerton. In 2008 he retired after more than 40 years as rabbi of Temple Beth El of South Orange County and is now Rabbi Emeritus.

Beth Orlansky, a Memphis native, has lived in Jackson, Mississippi, since 1981. She has a BA from Stanford and a JD from Tennessee. Advocacy Director at the Mississippi Center for Justice, Beth serves on the boards of Beth Israel Congregation and its Sisterhood, Southwest Council of the Union for Reform Judaism, Jacobs Camp, Community Stewpot, Friends of the International Ballet Competition, and various PTAs. An avid knitter, she reads the newspapers for the sight-impaired and tutors children in reading. Beth and Steve, who met as counselors at Jacobs Camp, have three grown sons.

Dr. Dan Puckett has been a popular presenter at our conferences. Associate professor of history at Troy University's Montgomery campus, Dan earned his BS and MAT degrees from the University of West Alabama and his PhD from Mississippi State. After teaching in California, he returned to Alabama in 2005 to teach history at Troy. He has led student tours to France and to Eastern Europe on the History of the Holocaust. His publications include articles on Birmingham's Jewish community, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Rosa Parks and the Scottsboro case. Dan is finishing *The Jim Crow of All the Ages: Adolf Hitler, Race, and Civil Rights in the Heart of Dixie, 1933-1948.* Dan lives in Wetumpka with his wife, Heather, and daughter, Mae.

Dr. Ellen Umansky, Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Judaic Studies at Fairfield University in Connecticut, rejoins the board. In the early 1980s, a book project led her to Mobile (where "Jewish Science" was first promulgated), and a meeting in Atlanta led to friendship with and research on Paula Ackerman, spiritual leader of Beth Israel in Meridian, Mississippi. Ellen currently chairs our Membership Committee. She holds a BA from Wellesley, MA from the Yale Divinity School, and an MPhil and PhD in religion from Columbia. Her books include Lily Montagu and the Advancement of Liberal Judaism: From Vision to Vocation; Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality: A Sourcebook; and From Christian Science to Jewish Science: Spiritual Healing and American Jews.

Re-elected for their second one-year terms were **President Stuart Rockoff** and Vice-President and President-Elect **Dale Rosengarten**. Treasurer **Les Bergen** and Secretary **Phyllis Leffler** are each serving the second year of two-year terms. **Jean Roseman** continues as corresponding secretary.

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