Southern Jews and the Civil Rights Movement
Southern Jewish Historical Society • 38th Annual Conference
Birmingham, Alabama • November 1–3, 2013

In 1963, Birmingham, Alabama, was the site of a series of watershed events in the struggle for civil rights. After Martin Luther King Jr.’s letter from a Birmingham jail, the protesting children who were met with Bull Connor’s fire hoses and dogs, and the tragic murder of four little girls at the 16th Street Baptist Church, the city and the nation would never be the same. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of these seminal events, the Southern Jewish Historical Society will hold its annual conference in the “Magic City,” with a special focus on southern Jews and the Civil Rights Movement.

Julian Bond, noted scholar and leading civil rights activist, will deliver the keynote address at Friday night services at Temple Emanu-El and will take part in a roundtable discussion on Friday afternoon at the historic 16th Street Baptist Church. Bond co-founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee as a student at Morehouse College and later served 20 years in the Georgia legislature. He was the first president of the Southern Poverty Law Center and spent 12 years as the chairman of the NAACP. Mr. Bond’s keynote address is co-sponsored by Temple Emanu-El’s Steiner Interfaith Fund of the Rabbi Grafman Endowment Fund.

In addition to learning about the sometimes complicated relationship between southern Jews and civil rights, conference goers will discover the fascinating history of Jews in Birmingham and around the state. This year’s conference is co-sponsored by the Birmingham Jewish Federation and the University of Alabama at Birmingham History Department. SJHS board members Dan Puckett and Stuart Rockoff co-chair the conference program committee.

Our conference begins Friday morning, November 1, with a guided tour led by longtime leaders of Birmingham’s Jewish community. The tour will highlight the 131-year-old history of Jewish communal life in Birmingham. After lunch at the 16th Street Baptist Church, conference goers will walk across the street to tour the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, one of the nation’s leading civil rights museums. We then return to the church for a roundtable discussion moderated by scholar Dan Puckett about the role of the Birmingham Jewish community during the civil rights era. Julian Bond will serve as respondent on the panel, which will include scholars and local people who lived through the events.

For more detail, see the conference program in this issue. The conference registration form is on the back. Registration is by mail only, so please fill out the form and return it right away. Our conference hotel will be the Doubletree, in the city’s bustling “Little Five Points” neighborhood, just a short walk to UAB, Temple Emanu-El, and numerous restaurants and shops. See the registration form for information on special conference rates. And see you in Birmingham!
While we were not operating, at least not consciously, from a sense of Jewish values, it appeared to us a moral imperative to fight for civil rights, encouraged by our liberal parents and teachers, some of whom were motivated by memories of the Holocaust, and some who understood that Jews themselves could be secure only in a society that embraced democracy.

Way down south and outside our range of vision Jews who were in a clear minority themselves were naturally more conflicted. Having grown up in a segregated society that accepted them as “honorary white Protestants,” to quote Howard Sachar, they generally chose to keep a low profile in the historic struggle being waged in their backyards. Fear of the consequences of racial integration, and fear of a backlash by their white neighbors—it didn’t go unnoticed that many of the Freedom Riders were Jewish—made Jewish southerners leery of involvement. Some became expressively defensive of the white majority position. Some believed in the racial status quo. Others suffered in silence, recognizing the paradox in the post-Holocaust world of defending racial discrimination in any form. But there were others, some of whose names and stories have been

SJHS’s upcoming annual meeting in Birmingham, Alabama, on November 1–3, 2013, gives us an opportunity to recall events that broke the chains of segregation and shook the country half a century ago, to tour local sites, visit museums, and listen to keynoters Julian Bond and Mark Bauman. Take a look at the conference schedule in this issue and mark your calendars now!

Morris Abram and “One Person, One Vote”

By Cecily Abram

On January 17, 1963, the attorney general of the United States appeared before the Supreme Court. It was Robert F. Kennedy’s first ever argument in a court, his trial debut. The courtroom was abuzz with almost every family member, including his wife Ethel, three Kennedy sisters, even Jackie making an appearance to cheer him on.

The case was Gray v. Sanders. In question was the constitutionality of the County Unit System of Georgia. Established in 1917, the system gave each county a set number of “units” rather than count the total ballots cast in a primary election. This meant that sparsely populated, mostly white rural counties carried more weight than populous urban counties with larger minority populations. Georgia’s politically powerful Talmadge family kept the County Unit System entrenched, but in 1962 the Supreme Court opened the way to a legal challenge by ruling in Baker v. Carr that courts could have jurisdiction over legislative apportionment or voting rights.

Morris B. Abram, an Atlanta attorney and native of rural Fitzgerald, Georgia, personally felt the effect of the County Unit System. In 1954 he ran for Congress from the state’s fifth district, which included Fulton County (Atlanta). Though he won the popular vote on an integrationist platform, he lost the election because the votes of two small rural counties carried disproportionate weight. But Abram had been working to overthrow the County Unit System since 1949, and he continued to press his case through the lower courts. His client was James O’Hear Sanders, the Fulton County voter who filed suit against the system.

After moving to New York, Abram was called from his new law practice in 1963 to brief and assist Attorney General Kennedy, who had decided to take up Gray v. Sanders. As plaintiff’s counsel, Abram joined Kennedy and Solicitor General Archibald Cox to argue the case before the Supreme Court. Atlanta’s mayor emeritus William B. Hartsfield, who had guided the city through the early years of the civil rights struggle, sat with them in support. Hartsfield had helped the Jewish community after the bombing of The Temple in 1958, an incident captured in Alfred Uhry’s Driving Miss Daisy.

On March 18, 1963, the Supreme Court handed down its decision. Justice William O. Douglas wrote the majority opinion for the historic 8 to 1 ruling, finding that “the use of this election system in statewide election violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.” The decision, which established the principle of “one person, one vote,” led to other cases and to the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court’s landmark decision. Gray v. Sanders continues to be a cornerstone of the foundation that assures equal weight of all voices in our American democracy. The recent Supreme Court challenge to the Voting Rights Act calls us to remember those who, 50 years ago, fought so hard to ensure the fundamental right to vote.
News and Notes

♦ Historic Dedication at Hyde Park Farm
As a result of SJHS board member Bob Gillette’s book, The Virginia Plan: William B. Thalhimer and a Rescue from Nazi Germany (History Press, 2011), the Virginia Department of Historic Resources has erected a roadside marker at Hyde Park Farm in Burkeville, Virginia. The sign was unveiled on April 21, the 75th anniversary of the day Thalhimer took possession of the farm, where he sought to create a safe haven for 25 Jewish students of a German agricultural school. In his remarks at the unveiling ceremony, Gillette described Thalhimer’s lengthy battle with the State Department to win visas for the teens so they could leave Nazi Germany and begin new lives in America. Thalhimer’s story is also featured in the exhibition Against the Odds: America’s Jews and the Rescue of European Refugees, 1933-1941, which opened in May at the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City.

♦ Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South: Ambivalence and Adaptation
How far can Jewish life in the South during Reconstruction (1863-1877) be described as German in a period commonly referred to as “German Jewish” in American Jewish historiography? In his new book, author Anton Hieke discusses the experience of Jews in the Reconstruction South, focusing on Georgia and the Carolinas. The book explores the shifting identities of immigrant and American-born Jews, the position of Jews in southern society, the impact of German Jews on southern Reform Judaism, and Jews’ identity as “southerners.” The study challenges the existing view that German Jews set the standard for Jewish life in this period and were perceived as distinct from Jews of other backgrounds. Published by DeGruyter (2013).

♦ One Place: Paul Kwilecki and Four Decades of Photographs from Decatur County, Georgia
Paul Kwilecki was born into a Jewish family in Bainbridge, Georgia, in 1928 and died there in 2009. In between, he ran the family hardware store and taught himself how to use a camera. Over four decades he documented life in his community, making hundreds of masterful and intimate black-and-white prints. He also wrote about the people and places he depicted. “Decatur County is home,” he said, “and I know it from my special warp, having been both nourished and wound by it.” Kwilecki “ranks among the most important American documentary photographers of the twentieth century” albeit “one of the least well known,” according to the Duke University Center for Documentary Studies. This beautiful new book features more than 200 photos accompanied by Kwilecki’s unique prose, in what Roy Blount Jr. calls “an epic of ghostly ordinariness.” (University of North Carolina Press, 2013)

♦ New Course on Southern Jewish History
Sloane Drayson-Knigge of Drew University will teach “Bagels, Grits, ‘n Greens: A Journey through the Southern Jewish Experience.” The Jewish presence in the South challenges “mythical” views of both Jewish life and the South. The course will explore the intersection of Southern Jewish life with various communities, including those in West Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Texas. It will examine such topics as identity, livelihood, culinary traditions, immigration history, and the impact of topography. Drayson-Knigge would appreciate suggestions for general southern history, gender, and cultural texts as well material about the specific states mentioned. Please contact her at: kosherkatz@yahoo.com.

♦ A Jewish Life on Three Continents
Stanford University Press has just published A Jewish Life on Three Continents: The Memoir of Menachem Mendel Frieden, translated, edited, annotated, and with an introduction and afterword by Lee Shai Weissbach. The publication was assisted by a grant from the Southern Jewish Historical Society. Frieden was born in Lithuania in 1878 and immigrated to the U.S. in 1904. He peddled in North Carolina but soon settled in Norfolk, where he started in business and joined in Jewish and Zionist affairs. He and his family moved to Palestine in 1921. A major portion of the memoir covers Frieden’s experience in the South. He recounts his time as a peddler, his business activities, marriage to a fellow immigrant, involvement in local Zionist activities, and interaction with what became a deeply-rooted southern Jewish family whose members can still be found in the South. Frieden maintained strong ties to Norfolk after moving to Palestine, hosting guests from the city and returning to visit three times. As an in-depth account of a Jewish immigrant to the South, A Jewish Life on Three Continents makes a significant contribution to southern Jewish history, shedding light on topics such as southern Zionism and the way southern connections could be maintained by those who moved to the Land of Israel. To purchase or find out more, see http://www.sup.org/book.cgl?id=21532.

♦ Jewish Genealogy Looks to the Future
“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” – William Faulkner
Faulkner’s words were the inspiration for the spring meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina, held May 18-19 in Charleston. The weekend featured a rich exchange of information and ideas. Guest speakers Karen Franklin, exhibit researcher for the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and Steven M. Cohen, Hebrew Union College professor, talked about “where we left off” and “where we are headed,” and Ms. Franklin led a hands-on genealogy workshop. On Saturday, a panel of 12 representatives from families showcased in Family History Roadshow, an exhibit created by the staff of Special Collections at the College of Charleston’s Marlene and Nathan Addlestone Library, presented commentary to a packed house. The highlight of the weekend was the exhibition itself—an astonishing array of portraits, photographs, letters, and artifacts recently donated to Addlestone’s Jewish Heritage Collection. A virtual version of the Roadshow soon will be online at lowcountrydigital.library.cofc.edu.

♦ A New Era for the Jewish Archives of Chattanooga
For decades, Joy Effron Abelson Adams busied herself collecting Chattanooga’s Jewish past and present in the form of articles, bulletins, letters, events, photographs, family histories, and other items dating from 1866 to the present. Having personally funded the preservation of these valuable materials, in 1999 she asked Mizpah Congregation (Julius and Bertha Ochs Memorial Temple) to house the collection. The congregation agreed, and also committed to care for the new named Jewish Archives of Chattanooga after Joy is no longer able to do so.

Approaching her 90th birthday, Joy formed a committee in the fall of 2012 to digitize the archives and continue the work of collecting to preserve Chattanooga’s Jewish heritage. In addition to digitizing this monumental collection, the committee has embarked upon a new and exciting project: to date they have made six biographical video interviews featuring six of Chattanooga’s older Jewish citizens. Interest in this new venture is growing in the community, and the aim is to produce two interviews every month. To view excerpts from the first two videos, put the following in your browser: youtube zience colvard.

And so this labor of love by an amazing woman has put on a new face and stepped over the threshold of a new century! We celebrate Joy’s entrance into her 10th decade by continuing to look ahead as we preserve the past that she so carefully collected for posterity. – Louis Spector, Chattanooga
Southern Jewish History Awards

The SJHS is pleased to announce that the Sam Proctor Award for Outstanding Career Scholarship is being given to Janice Rothschild Blumberg, and the Saul Viener Outstanding Career Service Award is going to Catherine Kahn. Both are former presidents and devoted longtime members of the SJHS. The awards will be given at the annual meeting in Birmingham.

Janice has contributed to the field of southern Jewish history for over 35 years. She has authored As but a Day, The First Hundred Years (a history of the Temple in Atlanta), One Voice: Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South, and Prophet in a Time of Priests: Rabbi “Alphabet” Browne, 1845-1929. Her articles have appeared in American Jewish History, Atlanta History Bulletin, Reform Judaism, and Southern Jewish History, among other journals, as well as in The Quiet Voices and Encyclopaedia Judaica. She has also been a columnist and/ or frequent contributor to The Southern Israelite, The Atlanta Constitution Sunday Magazine, and Jewish Georgian.

Cathy is the archivist emeritus of Touro Infirmary, the oldest private hospital in New Orleans. Before setting up Touro’s archives in 1990, she held positions from registrar to curator at the Historic New Orleans Collection. She is a longtime leader in the preservation and presentation of New Orleans Jewish community history. Recent publications include The Jewish Community of New Orleans (with Irwin Lachoff) and Legacy, the history of the New Orleans Community Chest and Greater New Orleans Foundation. She served as project chair of Jews of New Orleans: An Archival Guide for Greater New Orleans Archivists and is past-president of that organization. Recent awards include the Judah Touro Society Award and the Helen A. Mervis Jewish Community Professional Award of the Jewish Endowment Foundation of Louisiana. Cathy has served and led many SJHS committees and has hosted or planned several conferences. She has assisted countless archivists and researchers with her expertise and hospitality.

The awards committee is composed of Mark Bauman (chair), Bruce Beeber, May Lynn Mansbach, Stephen Whitfield, and Bernie Wax.

A Tour of Jewish Huntsville

By Janice Blumberg

A little known treasure of southern Jewish history awaits visitors in Huntsville, Alabama. For decades families have flocked to the city’s Space Center to learn about the history of space flight—but Huntsville also has much to teach about the history of American Jews.

Temple B’na Sholom, built in 1899 and renovated in time for its 1999 centennial celebration, is a gem of late 19th-century architecture. Its unique sanctuary alone is worth a trip to Huntsville.

But don’t stop there. It’s only a short distance (and a beautiful drive past historic homes) to Maple Hill cemetery, with a Jewish section dating from 1874. I’m not often excited by cemeteries, but this one contains some of the most unusual monuments I’ve ever seen. Like the synagogue, it testifies to the vibrant, caring, affluent, and observant Jewish community that has been an integral part of Huntsville for almost two centuries.

The first known Jews came in 1829 from Mobile, the five Andrews brothers. They returned to Mobile but others arrived to settle permanently in the 1850s. First of these were Morris Bernstein and Robert Herstein, soon joined by the Schiffman brothers, all forebears of Margaret Anne Goldsmith, who lovingly maintains the graves in the historic Jewish section of the cemetery. She recently added a small garden with a bench on the edge of her family’s plot, an inviting place for visitors to rest and contemplate.

The third site not to be missed is the Schiffman building, built in 1845 in Federal style and renovated in Romanesque Revival in 1895. Isaac Schiffman bought it in 1905 as headquarters of I. Schiffman and Company, for which it still serves. While its lower floors accommodated a bank and business offices, the upper floors were rented as residential apartments, one of which was the birthplace of world famous actress Tallulah Bankhead.

Many of the Schiffman Building’s movable treasures now reside at the National Museum of American Jewish History, part of the more than 2,000-item Goldsmith family collection (see sidebar). Those that remain provide delightful detail to the story of Jewish enterprise that unfolded there more than a century ago.

Margaret Anne Goldsmith did me the enormous favor of hosting me on my recent, first-time visit to Huntsville. She is a walking encyclopedia of its Jewish history, not altogether surprising since it represents the history of her own family. This made the experience come alive in ways impossible to duplicate, but seeing my enthusiasm she agreed to guide small groups whenever possible. She expressed hope that members attending this year’s SJHS conference in Birmingham will visit Huntsville before or after the meeting, an idea which I heartily recommend. It’s an easy 90-minute drive and well worth the detour.

Huntsville Heirlooms Travel to Philly

Claire Pingel, associate curator at the National Museum of American Jewish History in Philadelphia, is kvelling about a recent acquisition. “We are so excited that Margaret Anne Goldsmith chose to donate a large collection of family heirlooms,” she posted on the NMAJH website. “This family’s Southern experience improves our holdings by providing a meaningful counterpoint to the more well-known stories of Jewish communities in big cities, especially those on the East Coast.” She notes that family members have figured in every phase of Huntsville’s history, from the agrarian 19th century through its growth into “Rocket City” after World War II.

The collection includes letters, photos, books, business ephemera, and personal artifacts from clothing and candlesticks to shaving mugs and poker sets. “The Goldsmith family is to be commended for their careful stewardship of these artifacts over the years, and we can’t thank them enough for making the decision to donate them to the NMAJH!”
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Dan Puckett and Stuart Rockoff, Conference Program Co-Chairs

THURSDAY, October 31
6:00 pm Board of Trustees meeting

FRIDAY, November 1
8:00 am Registration/Coffee
9:00 am Tour of Jewish Birmingham
Noon Lunch at 16th Street Baptist Church
1:00 pm Tour of Birmingham Civil Rights Museum
2:30 pm Roundtable Discussion: Jewish Participation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Struggle
(at 16th Street Baptist Church)
Chair: Dan Puckett
Respondent: Julian Bond
5:40 pm Services at Temple Emanu-El
Keynote Speaker Julian Bond
7:30 pm Dinner and Q & A with Julian Bond

SATURDAY, November 2
Sessions will be held in Heritage Hall at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB)
8:00 am Registration/Coffee
9:00 am Panel: Alabama’s Jewish Communities
Chair: Adam Mendelsohn
Robert Adler, “The Muscle Shoals Jewish Community”
Susan Thomas, “Building Bridges in Turn-of-the-Century Mobile: The Life and Legacy of Leon Schwarz”
10:30 am Break
10:45 am Panel: Building Classical Reform Judaism in the South
Chair: Ellen Umansky
Anton Heike, “Maurice Mayer: Charleston’s Revolutionary Rabbi, 1852–59”
Samuel Gruber, “Classic Reform, Classical Synagogues, and the American South”
Noon Lunch
1:00 pm Panel: Jews and Southern Civil Rights
Chair: Bryan Edward Stone
Raymond Mohl, “The AJC and the Community Relations Board in Dade County, Florida”
Rosalind Benjet and Harriet Gross, “The Dallas Jewish Community during the Civil Rights Struggles”
Dina Weinstein, “Melvin Meyer: A University of Alabama Student Journalist during the Civil Rights Struggle”
2:30 pm Break/Optional Tour of Samuel Ullman Museum
4:00 pm Bus leaves hotel for Birmingham Public Library
4:30 pm Plenary: Mark K. Bauman, “Listening to the Quiet Voices: Allen Krause’s Conversations with Southern Rabbis during the Civil Rights Era”
Comments: Rabbi Irving Bloom
6:00 pm Reception featuring the Jewish collections of the Birmingham Public Library

SUNDAY, November 3
All sessions will be held at UAB
8:15 am General Membership Meeting/Breakfast
9:15 am Panel: The Charleston Diaspora: A Web of Cosmopolitan Connections
Chair: Mark K. Bauman
Scott M. Langston, “Cincinnati Meets Charleston: The Moses and Jonas Families in Alabama”
Comments: Mark K. Bauman
10:30 am Break
10:45 am Meet the Authors
Chair: Marni Davis
Barbara G. Bonfield, Knesseth Israel, Over 123 Years of Orthodoxy (Birmingham, 2013)
Dan J. Puckett, In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama’s Jews, the Second World War, and the Holocaust (University of Alabama Press, 2013)
12:30 pm Conference adjourns

Hotel Information: Rooms have been reserved at the Doubletree Hotel, 808 South 20th Street, Birmingham. Call 1-800-222-8733 and mention SJHS to reserve your room at the special rate of $119/night. Deadline for rooms is October 10.

Thank You, Littauer Foundation and Gale Foundation

When the SJHS discussed starting an academic journal in the 1990s, secretary-treasurer Bud Whitehead expressed misgivings about funding. Shortly after Southern Jewish History launched as a peer-reviewed journal in 1998, two foundations came forward to allay Bud’s fears. In 2000, the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation of New York under Bill Frost undertook funding that has increased over the years and continues today under his son and successor Robert D. Frost in an amount that covers almost one third of the cost, according to current treasurer Les Bergen. The Gale Foundation of Beaumont, Texas, began contributing in 2001. The two foundations fund almost 42 percent of production and mailing costs of the journal with contributions unprecedented in SJHS history. The generous and thoughtful support of these foundations is truly appreciated.
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Name

Spouse/Companion

Mailing Address

City_________________________ State__________________________ Zip___________________

Phone_________________________ Email_________________________

Registration for full program, including Friday tour:* $125 per person $________

OR

Register for individual events:

Friday tour and lunch: $50 per person $________

Friday dinner and keynote: $40 per person $________

Saturday program: $25 per person $________

Sunday program: $25 per person $________

*Full conference registrants must be members of the SJHS.

If you are not already a member, include your membership dues: $________

TOTAL PAYMENT $________

Deadline for registration is October 16, 2013.

Cancellation Policy: Registration must be cancelled by October 16 to receive a full refund.

Hotel accommodations at the Doubletree, 808 South 20th Street, must be made separately. Call (800) 222-8733 or (205) 933-9000 and ask for the special conference rate of $119/night. Your reservation must be received on or before Tuesday, October 10, 2013. Room fee does not include breakfast buffet ($11/person) or parking ($10/day).

New or renewing SJHS annual dues:

- Student (individual only) $15
- Individual or Family membership:
  - General member $36
  - Patron $50
  - Century $100
  - Cedar $500
  - Sycamore $1,000
  - Magnolia $2,500

Please make checks payable to Birmingham Jewish Federation and return with this form to:
Birmingham Jewish Federation
P.O. Box 130219, Birmingham, AL 35213.